

# PERCEPTIONS



Comparative findings from a study of homeless service providers and LGBTI-focused organisations about LGBTIQ youth homelessness in Europe



### ILGA Europe

ILGA-Europe is an independent, international non-governmental umbrella organisation bringing together 650+ organisations and groups from 54 European and Central Asian countries. ILGA-Europe is a driving force for political, legal and social change in Europe and Central Asia. We advocate for human rights and equality for LGBTI people at the European level and work to strengthen the LGBTI movements in Europe and Central Asia by providing capacity enhancing opportunities, funding and by engaging with funders.



### True Colors United

True Colors United implements innovative solutions to youth homelessness that focus on the unique experiences of LGBTQ young people.



### SILBERMAN CENTER FOR SEXUALITY AND GENDER

The Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender (SCSG) at the Silberman School of Social Work, Hunter College supports groundbreaking research in sexuality and gender; facilitates education to enhance learning related to sexuality and gender for social workers; advocates for gender and sexual equity; and engages with local, national, and international communities, to increase understanding and exploration of sexuality and gender.



### FEANTSA

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. We are the only European NGO focusing exclusively on the fight against homelessness. Our ultimate goal is an end to homelessness in Europe.

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#### Citations

Ritosa, A., Shelton, J., Stakelum, R., Van Roozendaal, B., Hugendubel, K. & Dodd, S.J. (2021). Perceptions: Comparative findings from a study of homeless service providers and LGBTI-focused organisations about LGBTIQ youth homelessness in Europe. FEANTSA, ILGA-Europe, True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender at Hunter College.

LGBTIQ youth homelessness remains hidden in Europe. We lack the data and the research to fully understand the scale of the problem. In 2020 the Fundamental Rights Agency released a survey that estimates that 1 in 5 members of the LGBTIQ community experiences homelessness, rising to 1 in 3 for trans people and nearly 40% for intersex people.

While the work of FEANTSA, ILGA-Europe & True Colors United over the past three years has shone a light on LGBTIQ youth homelessness, seeking to raise awareness about this often-forgotten target group, our focus for 2021 and beyond has turned to action.

Our joint surveys and this comparative research maps for the first time the experiences of mainstream services and captures the challenges they face in working with LGBTIQ young people. If we want to improve homeless and LGBTIQ services, we first have to understand where they are at, and tailor resources and tools accordingly. While this series of surveys is a first step, it is one piece of the puzzle to prevent and end LGBTIQ youth homelessness in Europe.

Our hope is that we can build and collect research, practices and policies from across Europe and North America to protect vulnerable LGBTIQ youth.

The comparative research that follows highlights the challenges that both the LGBTI and the homeless sector face, and can be considered a starting point for the type of training and capacity building required to fight LGBTIQ youth homelessness.

In 2019, The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender issued a report summarizing findings from the 2019 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) Youth Homelessness in Europe Survey, a web-based survey conducted from May 2019 to July 2019. The survey was designed to explore the experiences of homeless service organisations in providing services to LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness.



The following is a comparative analysis of findings from the FEANTSA study and findings from the ILGA-Europe study. It is important to note that the survey items were not identical across the two studies. The research team used the FEANTSA survey as a starting point for the ILGA-Europe survey, and in consultation with ILGA-Europe staff, made edits to the items based on organisational needs and relevance. Taken together, these findings provide a holistic view of LGBTIQ youth homelessness in Europe - both from the perspective of homeless service organisations as well as from the perspective of LGBTI-serving organisations. Key findings are presented below, along with conclusions and recommendations for continuing the important work currently underway in addressing LGBTIQ youth homelessness in Europe.

TABLE 1

FEANTSA Response Rates by Country		ILGA Response Rates by Country	
Austria	4	Albania	2
Belgium	8	Armenia	1
Czech Republic	1	Austria	1
Denmark	2	Belgium	5
England	1	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2
Finland	2	Bulgaria	1
France	1	Denmark	4
Germany	4	Finland	2
Greece	2	France	2
Hungary	1	Georgia	2
Ireland	5	Germany	5
Italy	2	Greece	2
Luxembourg	2	Hungary	4
Netherlands	10	Iceland	1
Poland	1	Ireland	2
Portugal	1	Italy	4
Romania	1	Kyrgyzstan	1
Scotland	4	Latvia	1
Serbia	2	Malta	1
Spain	6	Montenegro	1
Wales	1	North Macedonia	1
No answer	2	Netherlands	1
		Poland	1
		Portugal	1
		Romania	5
		Serbia	3
		Slovenia	2
		Spain	5
		Sweden	3
		Switzerland	1
		Ukraine	1
		United Kingdom	3

## Participating Organisations

The response rate for both surveys was sufficiently low. 130 FEANTSA member organisations were invited to participate in the 2019 study of homeless services organisations. In total, 64 homeless serving organisations participated in the FEANTSA survey, representing 21 countries.

Requests were sent to over 650 LGBTIQ-focused organisations across Europe and Central Asia for the 2020 study of LGBTIQ-focused organisations. The ILGA-Europe survey included 71 LGBTIQ-focused organisations representing 32 European countries. See Table 1 for a list of responses by country. It is important to note that this survey was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely impacted response rates. However, we do not know this for certain. Multiple factors may

have impacted response rates in both studies, such as limited capacity, not thinking the survey was relevant to the work of the organisation, no knowledge about the topic, language barriers, among others.

When examined across surveys (one that took place pre-COVID and one that took place during COVID), response rates suggest that the issue of LGBTIQ youth homelessness is often still hidden or not consistently viewed as a valid issue.

We urge fuller participation by organisations in future studies to capture a more complete picture of LGBTIQ youth homelessness. Still, the data provide a critical baseline for further research and recommendations towards solving LGBTIQ youth homelessness around the globe.

## Defining “Youth”

A frequently reported barrier to systematically addressing youth homelessness is a lack of consensus regarding the definition of “youth.” Table 2 details the range of responses from European homeless service organisations and LGBTIQ-focused organisations. After “24 & under” (26.5%), the most common response for the definition of youth among homeless service organisations was “something else” (36%); this category included 23 separate responses reporting 13 different sets of age ranges from 12 to 35 years. Similarly, “something else” was reported by 20% (n=14) of LGBTIQ-

focused organisations and included 13 different age ranges from 15 to 31 years.-= The most common definition of youth among LGBTIQ-focused organisations was “under age 30” (34%). These differential definitions of youth have implications for developing a systematic response to youth homelessness across sectors.

## Definitions of “Youth”

TABLE 2

FEANTSA			ILGA-Europe		
	%	n		%	n
18 & Under	13%	8	18 & Under	10%	7
21 & Under	3%	2	21 & Under	7%	5
24 & Under	26.5%	17	24 & Under	17%	12
Under Age 30	14%	9	Under Age 30	34%	24
Unsure	3%	2	Unsure	5%	3
Something Else	36%	23	Something Else	20%	14
No Answer	3.5%	3	No Answer	7%	5

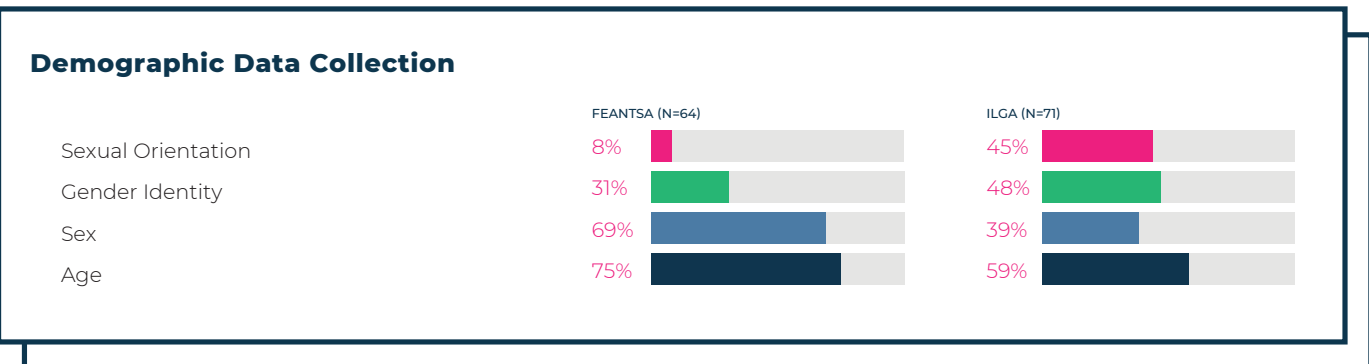
## Demographic Data Collection

Data is required in order to fully understand the scope of LGBTIQ youth homelessness. For homeless service organisations, this includes collecting data related to the sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, and gender identity of service users. It is imperative that this information be kept confidential, particularly in regions where LGBTIQ individuals are at increased risk for victimization and criminalization. LGBTIQ-focused organisations can collect the same data recommended for homeless service organisations, as well as data about housing status, housing stability, current and past experiences of homelessness, and poverty. Not all LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness will seek services at homeless service organisations, therefore LGBTIQ-focused organisations also have a key role to play in obtaining the data needed to accurately determine the scope of the problem, leading to policy and programmatic interventions to adequately address homelessness among LGBTIQ youth.

Findings from both the FEANTSA and ILGA-Europe studies indicate the absence of a systematic method for collecting demographic information about the individuals who access organisation-based services. Perhaps not surprisingly, LGBTIQ-focused organisations were more likely to report collecting information about sexual orientation and gender identity. A higher percentage of homeless service organisations reported collecting information about the sex of individuals. Neither survey inquired specifically about practices of collecting sex characteristics. Age was the most commonly reported information collected. See Figure 1 for details.



FIGURE 1

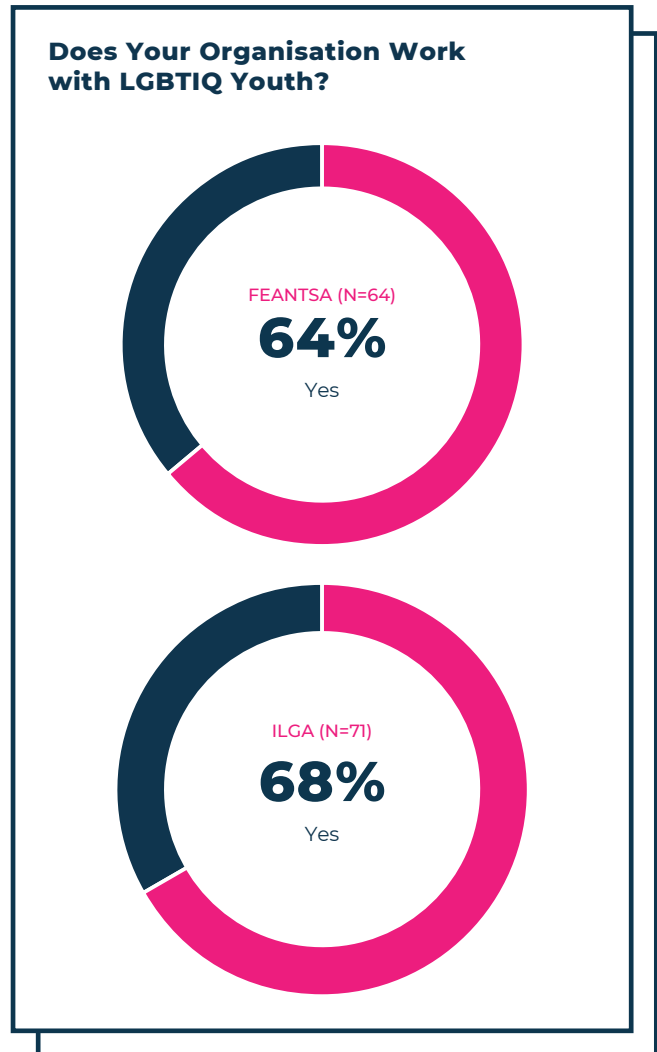


## LGBTIQ Youth Homelessness

Organisations across Europe are working with LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness. Of homeless services organisations, the majority (64%) of respondents reported working with LGBTIQ youth. Data from the ILGA-Europe study indicates that 68% of LGBTIQ-focused organisations work with LGBTIQ youth and 41% reported working with LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness. It is unclear if these estimates are accurate, given inconsistent data collection processes that would enable organisations to say with certainty how many LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness they are indeed working with. Additionally, it is possible that even with consistent data collection processes, young people may not disclose their LGBTIQ identities for fear of discrimination, harassment, violence, and/or criminalization. Those limitations aside, findings indicate that LGBTIQ youth homelessness is a prevalent issue among the organisations participating in these studies.

Estimated prevalence rates of LGBTIQ youth homelessness varied widely both among homeless services organisations and LGBTIQ-focused organisations, as well as between the two types of organisations. The response “I honestly have no idea” was the 2nd most popular response across surveys, with 30% of homeless services organisations and 22.5% of LGBTIQ-focused organisations selecting this option.

FIGURE 2



## Estimates of Youth Homelessness Population that are LGBTI

TABLE 3

ILGA (N=71)			FEANTSA (N=64)		
	%	n		%	n
Less than 10%	10%	7	Less than 10%	12.5%	8
10% - 20%	30%	21	10% - 20%	12.5%	8
20% - 30%	21%	15	20% - 30%	8%	5
30% - 40%	5.5%	4	30% - 40%	0%	0
40% - 50%	5.5%	4	40% - 50%	2%	1
I honestly have no idea	22.5%	16	50%+	3%	2
No response	5.5%	4	I honestly have no idea	30%	19
			No response	33%	21

Information about the reasons LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness is necessary for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Both surveys asked respondents to list the reasons, to the best of their understanding, that LGBTIQ youth experience homelessness. These questions were open-ended, and responses were grouped into 7 categories. Notably, a larger percentage of homeless service organisations cited poverty, mental health issues, substance abuse, and other family issues than LGBTIQ-

focused organisations. The most commonly cited reason among all organisations was identity related family conflict. The reasons documented by European homeless service organisations and LGBTIQ-focused organisations mirror those noted in the North American research literature, with the exception of migration, which is not commonly referred to in North American research about the causes of LGBTIQ youth homelessness.

### Reasons for Homelessness

	FEANTSA (N=40)	ILGA (N=71)
Identity related family conflict	53%	72%
Lack of institutional supports / social rejection	35%	44%
Poverty	35%	17%
Mental health issues	33%	13%
Substance abuse	20%	7%
Other family issues	8%	1%
Migration	8%	8%

### Organisational Challenges: LGBTIQ Youth Homelessness

Multiple challenges to addressing LGBTIQ youth homelessness were identified by both homeless service organisations and LGBTIQ-focused organisations. Response options differed between surveys, given the differing nature of the work regularly undertaken by each group of organisations. The most commonly reported challenges among homeless service organisations included:

- The organisation doesn't know how to approach the topic of LGBTIQ identities.
- It's not part of the organisation's mission to work with LGBTIQ youth.
- The organisation is not confident in its ability to speak about LGBTIQ issues.
- The organisation fears that some LGBTIQ young people will experience violence or abuse in the service setting if their sexual orientation or gender identity is made known.





The most commonly reported challenges among LGBTIQ-focused organisations included:

- Lack of research / data about LGBTI youth homelessness
- Lack of funding / not enough money to work on this issue
- Lack of political / governmental support
- Lack of infrastructure
- Lack of knowledge about the situation of LGBTI homeless youth

The FEANTSA survey also gave respondents the option to identify additional challenges that were not included as response options. Responses to this open-ended question indicated contextual challenges specific to the regions in which organisations are located. For instance, one respondent referenced a lack of understanding about LGBTIQ identities in their home country due to “old stereotypes.” Similarly, another respondent stated that they face challenges because LGBTIQ youth homelessness is not considered an “actual issue” as it remains hidden.

LGBTIQ-focused organisations were asked to identify the greatest organisational challenge, after indicating all of the challenges they face (reported above). LGBTIQ-focused organisations identified a lack of funding / not enough money to work on this issue as the greatest challenge.



## Organisational Challenges: Transgender Individuals and Communities

Transgender youth (including nonbinary, gender expansive, genderqueer, and additional terms an individual uses to referencing their gender) often face unique challenges in accessing homeless services and obtaining/maintaining stable housing. These challenges are the result of structural oppression and systematic discrimination. In the service sector, most programmes were designed for the cisgender service user - meaning that the needs and experiences of transgender service users were not considered in the programmes' development. When LGBTIQ-focused organisations and programmes do exist, they exist within

a dominant culture that is uninformed, at best, and vitriolic at worst. Consequently, LGBTIQ-focused organisations often lack the resources and infrastructure to scale their work. And, in the midst of anti-transgender legislation looming in cities around the globe, underresourced LGBTIQ-focused organisations must remain diligently focused on myriad human rights violations. It is for these reasons, among others, that respondents were asked to share the specific organisational challenges related to their work with transgender individuals and communities.

**Common themes across surveys included:**

- socio-cultural factors
- institutional barriers
- limited knowledge about and education on the lived realities of trans people
- limited resources
- stigma and discrimination

**Challenges unique to homeless services respondents:**

- minimal experience working with transgender individuals
- Programmatic challenges related to binary sex segregated facilities
- Limited resources related to emergency accommodations and discriminatory landlords
- homophobic and transphobic service users
- heteronormative programs
- religious stigma

Both studies reveal pervasive institutional and social discrimination against transgender people, as well as LGBTIQ people, that needs to be addressed and eliminated in local communities through legislation and social campaigns. Countries, governments, communities, homeless services organisations, and individuals could all benefit from more education and increased visibility of issues that face transgender individuals and communities, LGBTIQ youth and LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness. This education and visibility must be met with more funding, more research, and more direct services to advance solutions to LGBTIQ youth homelessness in all regions of the world, including within each local community.

Both surveys did not ask about organisational experiences working with intersex people and communities, therefore this information is not included in the comparative analysis. However, for more information about the experiences of LGBTIQ-focused organisations working with intersex people and communities, please see the complete report from the ILGA-Europe survey.

## Opportunities

Detailed recommendations about moving this important work forward are found in both the 2020 report from the FEANTSA study and the 2021 report from the ILGA-Europe study. When examining findings from each report together, an additional recommendation includes identifying and taking advantage of opportunities for cross sector collaboration. For instance, homeless service organisations identified a need for more knowledge/training in how to best serve LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness - something that LGBTIQ-focused organisations may be able to provide.

Likewise, many LGBTIQ-focused organisations indicated that they are unaware of places to refer LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness - an area of expertise that could be provided by homeless services organisations. Both sectors have unique expertise to offer and tackling LGBTIQ homelessness can only be done successfully when these sectors come together to address the needs of LGBTIQ homeless communities.

Organisations across sectors would benefit from gaining knowledge about best practices for safely collecting relevant demographic data, as well as how to ensure homeless programmes are inclusive of LGBTIQ youth and LGBTIQ-focused programmes are inclusive of LGBTIQ youth experiencing homelessness.

## Citations

Shelton, J., Ritosa, A., Van Roozendaal, B., Hugendubel, K. & Dodd, S.J. (2021). Perceptions: Addressing LGBTI Youth Homelessness in Europe and Central Asia - Findings from a Survey of LGBTI Organisations. ILGA-Europe, True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender at Hunter College.

Shelton, J., Stakelum, R., & Dodd, S.J. (2020). LGBTIQ Youth Homelessness in Europe: Findings from a Survey of FEANTSA Membership Organisations. FEANTSA, True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender at Hunter College.

Coverage image from Vice's Gender Spectrum Collection