Chapter 8

Housing and Accommodation

Lesbians shouldn't be taken to villages where they are not wanted. They should stay here in the town where they are wanted. (...) They can't express themselves in villages.

(Winifred, Germany)

We are here for freedom, but in this case almost two years I am in the camp, there is nothing like freedom still. Because I am caged like a chain, could not go out, could not go sleep out, could not go to a club, that is out of me.

(Mamaka, Italy)

The first night I had to go up and down with the night bus because I didn't know where I would sleep. So I would rather get this bus, from [location A] to [location B], drop off, wait for another one so that the driver would not see me.

(Meggs, UK)

8.1 Introduction

The SOGI claimants we interviewed were often more or as concerned about their living conditions in the host country than they were with the asylum process. This was especially the case in the interviews in Germany and Italy, where issues around housing and accommodation often dominated the discussion, both in interviews with SOGI claimants and with professionals. For instance, Elias, a lawyer in Germany, told us that his clients were often less concerned about the legal procedure and more about 'the problems around it. Less legally, less tangibly in relation to the procedure, but rather: "What about the accommodation situation?"; "How can I rebuild a life appropriate to my sexual orientation?"

In our European-wide online survey, most respondents (59%) were accommodated in reception or accommodation centres provided by the government or local authority, followed by privately rented accommodation (19%), and a small percentage of respondents (7%) were staying with friends and family. Forty-four per cent

of the respondents said they felt safe in their accommodation, while a staggering 41% did not feel safe (15% were not sure).

While there has been an increase in research on SOGI asylum claims in Europe and beyond – as the previous chapters have demonstrated – there has been less of a focus on the social experiences of LGBTIQ+ claimants and refugees. Some research on the experiences of SOGI asylum touches upon housing issues (Bennett and Thomas 2013; Dyck 2019; Jansen and Spijkerboer 2011), and other research has looked specifically at SOGI claimants' physical and mental health needs (Alessi et al. 2018; Allsopp et al. 2014; Namer and Razum 2018). In this chapter we aim to address this gap by offering an in-depth analysis of LGBTIQ+ asylum claimants' experiences with housing and accommodation in Germany, Italy and the UK.

As we explored in Chap. 5, arrival and reception are often not easy for SOGI claimants, who do not receive the support they need to deal with their trauma and feel safe. As we outlined, none of the three countries has specific policies in place with regard to the initial reception of SOGI claimants. This is not untypical for EU member states, as the EU Reception Directive also fails to refer to SOGI (Ferreira 2018). Reception conditions for SOGI claimants has now been recognised as an important issue by EU policy-makers. As Alfred, a European Parliament staff member, told us, members of the European Parliament are trying to bring in a reference to LGBTI asylum claimants so that their specific needs are taken into account, and 'there can be measures during the reception conditions provision, such as specific housing or perhaps protective measures'. If successful, this will be the first time such a provision has been mentioned in a legal instrument. As Terry, a member of the European Parliament, explained, 'just letting it go [homophobic and transphobic attacks in reception centres] is not the answer, so you have to have a proactive, preventive stance on how can you protect LGBTI people in such situations'.

Beyond EU law, all three countries are bound by human rights treaties that, directly or indirectly, protect a right to adequate housing. Besides what emerges from the ECtHR's jurisprudence in relation to reception of asylum claimants belonging to sexual minorities (Sect. 5.4.3, Chap. 5), universal human rights bodies have specified the scope of this right as well as how to implement it effectively. For instance, the 'Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing' by the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing specify that:

[T]he right to adequate housing should not be interpreted narrowly, as a right to mere physical shelter or to housing conceived as a commodity. Rather, the right to housing must be understood in relation to the inherent dignity of the human person (Human Rights Council 2019, p. 4).

This includes the right to be treated equally with regard to housing and not to be discriminated against on grounds of gender, 'race', sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, 'refugeeness', religion and/or intersectional discrimination (Human Rights Council 2019, pp. 10–12).

This chapter explores SOGI claimants' and refugees' experiences with housing by first outlining the asylum accommodation policies in Germany, Italy and the UK (Sect. 8.2) and discussing general issues that SOGI claimants have with housing

(Sect. 8.3), before looking at specific SOGI-related issues such as sharing accommodation, being in the closet and experiencing discrimination and hate crime (Sect. 8.4), rural vs. urban accommodation (Sect. 8.5), homelessness and destitution (Sect. 8.6), accommodation after the asylum process (Sect. 8.7), SOGI-specific accommodation (Sect. 8.8), and detention (Sect. 8.9).

8.2 Asylum Accommodation Policies

Different housing policies exist in Germany, Italy and the UK. In Germany, claimants are placed in one of the three main types of accommodation: initial reception centres, collective accommodation centres and decentralised accommodation. The federal states are required to establish and maintain the initial reception centres and there is at least one centre in every state. The branch offices of the BAMF are usually located in these centres, and some of these offices deal with particular nationalities.¹

In all of the interviews with professionals the ‘EASY-roulette’ (Frank S., legal advisor) was a major topic of conversation. Germany operates a distribution system called ‘EASY’ (‘Erstverteilung der Asylsuchenden – Initial Distribution of Asylum Seekers’), which allocates asylum claimants to reception centres in a certain federal state and then accommodation within certain municipalities within that state, according to the capacity of the reception facilities, nationality of the claimant and the ‘Königstein Key’ (‘Koenigsteiner Schluessel’), which determines the reception capacity of the 16 federal states.² Consequently, it is a ‘roulette’ where a claimant ends up. According to a 2019 parliamentary request (BMI 2019, p. 5), when claimants are distributed according to the EASY process, no criteria exist for considering sexual orientation or gender identity.

While the ‘allocation of the asylum seeker to a particular area is not a formal decision that can be legally challenged by the individual’ (ECRE, AIDA & Asyl und Migration 2018, p. 72), it is possible to request relocation on the basis of specific needs, but it has become increasingly difficult to have such requests approved (Kadir, NGO worker; Marlen, legal advisor; Matthias, social worker). When relocation requests to the federal state administration are made, the authorities often argue that it is the responsibility of the municipality to make sure that people feel safe, but as Matthias (social worker) explained, the situation puts an enormous strain on SOGI claimants’ mental health (Chap. 9). Some participants were positive about the regulations in Saxony, which was seen as a relatively good example of a federal state, where SOGI claimants are usually housed in one of the three big cities (Chemnitz, Dresden and Leipzig) after leaving the reception centre (Matthias, social worker). Here, NGOs work together to inform the authorities about vulnerable

¹For instance, the BAMF office in Munich deals with claimants from Uganda and Nigeria.

²Their capacity depends on the size and economic strength of the federal State in question.

persons, and then the Federal Directorate of Saxony ('Landesdirektion Sachsen') decides to which city the person is allocated. Local civil servants in Leipzig then also check with NGOs which claimants they can put together, and they offer flats specifically for SOGI claimants. Yet, this was not always effective and there had been cases where people were allocated to rural areas even though the authorities knew about their vulnerabilities. Two reasons why accommodation provision appears to work better in Saxony than in other federal states are that one of the Ministers of state ('Staatsministerin') is very supportive of SOGI refugees and that the housing market in general in cities such as Leipzig, is still not as stretched as in other urban areas (Sabrina, NGO worker).

Kadir (NGO worker), for instance, campaigns for smaller LGBTIQ+ decentralised accommodation in all of the cities in each federal state, not just the biggest. This would also make the whole process easier as claimants would not have to make a relocation request in the first place, if there is LGBTIQ+ accommodation in their municipality. For this to work, however, local authorities need to be supportive of such projects and have an understanding of why SOGI refugees may be vulnerable and in need of specific accommodation in urban areas. In Leon's (NGO worker) view, the Frankfurt am Main City Council, for instance, is supportive, while other city councils would argue that 'homosexuality is completely normal in our society, that's why we treat people totally normal'.

Once someone is allocated to a different municipality, it is difficult to relocate, not only during the asylum claim but also after (Sabrina, NGO worker). After receiving status, and if they rely on state benefits, claimants have to stay for 3 years in the federal state where their claim was processed, and in some federal states even within the municipality to which they were assigned, under the residence obligation legislation.³ On 13 May 2019, the German Parliament (Bundestag) decided to render this residence obligation ('Wohnsitzauflage') an indefinite policy (it was initially introduced in July 2016 for a period of 3 years). During the debate in the German parliament, it was argued that this policy has proven to be successful for integration (Deutscher Bundestag 2019). However, with this regulation the federal government is reducing the choices of refugees and further increasing their social isolation.

In general, policies vary considerably between the federal states, and there is no common standard for reception centres. The 'Federal Initiative for the Protection of Refugee People in Refugee Accommodation', founded jointly under the auspices of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has developed guidelines with minimum standards for the protection of refugees in refugee accommodation, including an annex on the implementation of minimum standards for SOGI refugees (BMFSFJ 2018). This includes the development of an internal protection concept and the sensitisation of all persons working in accommodation facilities to the needs of SOGI

³These specific regulations were introduced on 1 April 2018 in Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse, Saarland and Saxony (ECRE, AIDA & Asyl und Migration 2018, p. 102).

refugees. However, there is no monitoring of the extent to which these non-binding guidelines are applied. The government has confirmed it has no plans to establish an independent complaints office, which SOGI refugees could contact in case of accommodation problems (BMI 2019, pp. 6–7).

The distribution policies and new reforms that allow claimants to be kept in reception centres for up to 24 months (rather than 6 months, as before, Chap. 4) can exacerbate social isolation, as claimants often end up in ‘the middle of nowhere’ (Angel, Ibrahim, Trudy Ann). This is in particular difficult for SOGI claimants, as we explain in Sect. 8.6. For instance, Tina was only supposed to stay in the camp for 6 months, but then the law changed:

they said they made another law that said you have to stay two years in the camp before you leave. No school, no working, just stay (...) For somebody to be in this situation, you’re just in one place, one position, your life is on hold, you’re not allowed to do anything, school, work... in that aspect it’s frustrating, in that way.

In addition, there is a ‘residence obligation’ (*‘Residenzpflicht’*) in place that restricts the movement of claimants outside the area of the reception centre for a period of (usually) 3 months (ECRE, AIDA & Asyl und Migration 2019, p. 71). In most federal states, claimants need special permission to travel to other parts of the state or to other parts of Germany during that time.⁴

Similarly to Germany, Italy is bound by the EU recast Procedures and Reception Directives. Here, the Directive was implemented through the introduction of new legislation on reception conditions and procedures in 2015, which identifies SOGI claimants as vulnerable if they are victims of torture, rape or serious violence. This means that SOGI asylum claimants may now benefit more easily, always as individuals rather than as a group, from services addressing their specific needs.⁵ However, whether or not a person is considered in need of specific protection always depends on whether they receive a careful individual evaluation of their case on arrival, as SOGI claimants are not comprehensively identified and treated as a ‘vulnerable’ group (Chap. 5).

Italy has two distinct forms of reception, which are very different in terms of services provided to people claiming asylum. On the one hand, the CAS (*‘centri di accoglienza straordinaria’* – extraordinary reception centres) are basic and temporary reception centres, set to deal with the growing number of arrivals. CAS are established by agreements between the government and private bodies (through local authorities, the *‘prefettura’*), which can manage these centres with a considerable degree of liberty. Their size and services provided vary considerably, depending on the professionalism of the management. On the other hand, a more structured form of reception is provided through the SPRAR system (*‘Sistema di Protezione per i Rifugiati e i Richiedenti Asilo’* – System of Protection for Refugees and Asylum Claimants), which brings central authorities together with local entities and

⁴One SOGI claimant who lived in Bavaria and wanted to come to the SOGICA conference in Frankfurt in July 2019 was not able to come, as she did not obtain the permission in time.

⁵See Legislative Decree no. 142, 18 August 2015.

associations working in the field to provide asylum claimants with more than the basic material conditions provided in the CAS.⁶ The SPRAR aims to provide people in need of international protection with a wider range of social and life support services.⁷ Those hosted in such reception centres are indeed involved in a variety of activities associated with social inclusion and integration, for example, acquiring better language skills, and more easily accessing basic services, including health assistance. In parallel, they also provide assistance during the RSD process through the preparation for personal interviews before the territorial commissions (Chap. 6). However, because of the SPRAR's overall capacity, it should be noted that a very limited number of people are included in this kind of reception system (Anci et al. 2016, p. 71).

While SOGI minorities in the process of claiming asylum were potentially entitled to access these reception centres where they fell into one of the vulnerable groups mentioned above, the 2018 reform reserved SPRAR centres only for those already granted international protection, leaving asylum claimants with few options (Chap. 4).⁸ Even more worrying, the new system privileges large centres instead of the small-scale facilities that had previously existed. The implications of the new policy for people claiming asylum, including those who flee homophobia and transphobia, appear to be extremely negative (Ziniti 2018). As Vincenzo (LGBTIQ+ group volunteer) described:

So, these two last reforms, the one that has eliminated a degree of appeal and the one that has completely revised access for example to the SPRAR, all unfortunately have an important impact on people seeking international protection on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Because the SOGI factor in relation to the time factor is not considered in any way, as it is an aspect that is not self-evident, not easy to narrate, not easy to recognise, not easy to legitimise, can emerge belatedly, (...) can be hindered by the presence of an interpreter or translator, it can be distorted because the person was afraid to tell something else in a certain way compared to what was said previously.

As Daniele (decision-maker) explained, the reception system in Italy needs improving, but authorities are trying to deal with a large number of arrivals and it was positive that the government tried to avoid large-scale accommodation facilities by generally distributing only 12–15 refugees to each accommodation centre, thus it is easier to have close relationships with claimants and respond to their needs. One issue that was highlighted was that the people who run the receptions centres were often not interested in the well-being of refugees or in supporting their integration, rather 'there are many who open a reception centre to make money' (Antonella, LGBTIQ+ group volunteer). Owing to this profit-based approach, managers of centres would also try to save money on psychologists, lawyers, etc.:

⁶ See www.sprar.it.

⁷ Decree of the Minister of Internal Affairs, 10 August 2016, which contains guidelines for the functioning of SPRAR: www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/08/27/16A06366/sg.

⁸ Article 12 of Decree Law no. 113/2018 (converted into Law no. 132, 1 December 2018), so-called 'Decreto Salvini'.

All the reception system that was also given to private individuals, to people who were not in the social sector and who saw each other from day to day to do a social job that must be enormously prepared and instead they do it for profit, so they look to save on the psychologist, the mediator, the lawyer and therefore they are managing people who have a whole complexity of problems that are sometimes, because many structures are completely isolated from society, so how can we involve migrants, integrate them if in a year they are lost in the mountains (Susanna, social worker).

Moving to another area is also difficult in Italy: ‘relocation is difficult; if you are under the prefecture of Vicenza, I cannot send the person to Emilia-Romagna where perhaps there is a centre for LGBT claimants’ (Giulio, LGBTIQ+ group volunteer). Here, the support given by lawyers and NGOs is invaluable. For instance, Ken needed the intervention of his lawyer to be able to move out of the reception centre, where he faced discrimination by other residents (Chap. 6).

In the UK, ‘accommodation is a huge issue’ (Nath, lawyer) too and SOGI claimants can face abuse and harassment in their shared housing (David, official). Accommodation and subsistence support, known as ‘section 95 support’, is provided to claimants pending a first decision on their application (Home Affairs Committee 2018). In 1999, the UK government introduced the policy of ‘dispersal’, with the intention of relocating people seeking asylum who tended to go to London and the South East to areas of the country where accommodation was cheaper (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2017, p. 16). However, claimants with support networks in particular places may choose to stay with friends rather than taking the accommodation provided by the Home Office (Olivia, government official). Since 2012, under COMPASS (Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services), asylum accommodation has been contracted out to private companies, including Serco, which also runs detention centres such as Yarl’s Wood (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2017). In response to dissatisfaction with the operation of COMPASS on the basis of efficiency and quality of service, the system was replaced with new asylum contracts awarded in 2019 and renamed AASC (Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts).⁹ There is – theoretically – a ‘cluster limit’ of no more than one asylum claimant per 200 residents in an area (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2017, p. 16). However, distribution of claimants is unequal, with less than a third of local authorities ‘actively supporting dispersal’ (Home Affairs Committee 2018, p. 23).

The Scottish Refugee Council reported that, in 2018, there were 2859 asylum claimants in ‘dispersed accommodation’ in Scotland (Scottish Refugee Council 2019). Until 2001, relatively low numbers of asylum claimants and refugees settled in Wales compared to some parts of the UK. This changed in 2001, when Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham became official dispersal areas and, by 2016, it was estimated that Wales had provided sanctuary to 397 Syrian refugees and nearly 3000 asylum claimants from other countries (Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee 2017, p. 12). There are no official yearly figures for the number of people claiming asylum in Northern Ireland, but in the period of April to

⁹<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-asylum-accommodation-contracts-awarded>.

June 2015 there were 497 people living in asylum support accommodation, while in the same time period the figures were 24,791 for England and 2649 for Scotland (Fergus 2015).

SOGI-related issues are not taken into account when people are dispersed and accommodation is chosen for them, as:

essentially the Home Office policy is that when deciding on the dispersal of individuals to asylum accommodation who have declared as homosexual or whatever, it makes no difference to where to house them and so they will put someone who has declared, into a house with another male from perhaps a country where culturally this is going to be a really difficult thing. And then rely on the LGBTI individual to raise an issue about it, to say this isn't going to work. Which does seem to me to be rather risky and remarkably unnecessary. (...) I am not sure that there is, there is a recognition of issues around LGBTI (David, official).¹⁰

A Home Office Guide to Living in Asylum Accommodation was published in July 2019 in English and ten other languages.¹¹ It specifies that residents need to treat housemates with respect regardless of characteristics including sex, gender and gender identity, but does not mention sexual orientation (Home Office 2019, p. 19). There are specific concerns for SOGI minorities relating to failings in accommodation provision, as a report on asylum accommodation by the Independent Chief Inspector in 2018 demonstrated. It identified SOGI minorities as 'particularly vulnerable' and on that basis recommended that the government kept data on them and reviewed the appropriateness of providing no-choice accommodation and forced bedroom-sharing (ICIBI 2018, p. 14). The inspection team heard of LGBTIQ+ people being harassed and abused by other accommodation receivers (ICIBI 2018, p. 60). The Home Office was not able to provide the inspection team with figures for the number of LGBTIQ+ asylum claimants provided with accommodation on a 'no choice' basis.¹² In its response, the Home Office accepted all the ICIBI's recommendations (Home Office 2018, p. 6).

While policies on asylum accommodation differ between and within the three countries, so do the standards of accommodation, as we now explore.

¹⁰ However, as David described, one of the three main housing providers came up with an initiative to house SOGI claimants together in a 'Rainbow' house.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-in-asylum-accommodation>.

¹² '[A] Home Office senior manager explained that the Home Office's current position with regard to the allocation of asylum accommodation was that LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers should be "mainstreamed" (routed in the normal way), and if problems arose the individual should inform the Provider. This appeared to ignore the fact that the individual may not feel able to complain, and that the strong message from the Home Office was that asylum accommodation was provided on a "no choice basis"' (ICIBI 2018, pp. 60–61).

8.3 Standard of Asylum Accommodation

Many of the SOGI claimants we interviewed talked about general issues with regard to housing that affect all claimants, such as the quality of housing, hygiene and the food offered. Nonetheless, SOGI claimants experience these general issues together with more specific issues that relate to their SOGI. We briefly discuss the former as the basis for then exploring SOGI-specific experiences.

In Germany, as housing policies vary between the federal states, there is no common standard for reception centres. Generally, the initial reception centres have at least several hundred places, while some facilities can host large numbers of persons (one AnKER centre in Bavaria has a capacity of 3400 and has accommodated 1500 people at a time: ECRE, AIDA & Asyl und Migration 2018, p. 79). William, for instance, told us that he stayed in a reception centre that housed around 1100 people.

These centres are often (re-furnished) former army barracks, reported as sometimes being cockroach infested (Scott 2014). According to Komaromi (2016), security at reception centres is sub-contracted to private companies, usually on the basis of the cheapest bid, in all federal states other than Bavaria. This is highly problematic, as staff generally lack training in reception centres (Chap. 6). These companies can also attract neo-Nazi employees, and cases of racist abuse and violence against asylum claimants by these security guards are known, but not always taken seriously by the state and rarely penalised (Komaromi 2016). While the policies in place usually include housing single women and families in separate buildings or wings of buildings, this is not always the case. A shower can be shared by 10–12 people (sometimes more), and there is rarely shared kitchen space available (food is provided and served in canteens). Asylum claimants often have to report to security personnel when leaving and re-entering. In 2015 and 2016, Germany was overwhelmed and unprepared for the high number of asylum claimants, and people were often put in emergency shelters such as gyms, schools, containers, office buildings, warehouses and tents. This situation has changed considerably owing to the decreasing number of claimants reaching Germany and many reception centres have closed or have vacant places (ECRE, AIDA & Asyl und Migration 2018).

After the initial period in reception centres (which may now be up to 24 months), asylum claimants are sent to local accommodation centres, known as ‘collective accommodation’ (‘Gemeinschaftsunterkuenfte’), usually in the same federal state, where they stay for the rest of their claim (including appeal procedures, but this is handled differently in different municipalities). These accommodation centres are also often former barracks or (formerly empty) apartment blocks and are either managed by the responsible authorities themselves or by NGOs or private facility management companies. As AIDA reports: ‘Because different policies are pursued on regional and local level, it is impossible to make general statements on the standards of living in the follow-up accommodation facilities’ (ECRE, AIDA & Asyl und Migration 2018, p. 80). The living conditions in these accommodation centres differ significantly between regions and even between towns. These centres,

especially the larger ones, are often referred to as ‘camps’ by asylum claimants and refugees. Although conditions in these centres are often far from ideal, some claimants have to stay in them for several years (including asylum claimants who have ‘tolerated stay’/‘Duldung’). As Mariya (NGO worker) described, ‘from the initial reception facility to the accommodation centres, the conditions of refugee accommodation are still terrible’. Asylum claimants and refugees have actively campaigned against these conditions, especially in Berlin (Bhimji 2016).

In our interviews, most participants did not give positive reports of their accommodation. Angel’s experiences in different types of asylum accommodation led her to conclude that: ‘How I feel personally is like we refugees, and I’m not just saying Jamaicans or Black people, we refugees on a whole, we are treated less than human, to me. Based on my observation’. At the time of the interview, Angel had been living with her teenage daughter in asylum accommodation, a remote army barracks in the woods in deep Hessen (Sect. 8.6). She asked to be moved and a social worker from an LGBTIQ+ organisation, who visited her regularly, helped her with the application for transfer (‘Umverteilungsantrag’). However, it seemed unlikely that the application would be approved, as they had already offered her accommodation once in a nearby town that she had refused to take. Angel had gone there with a friend, who helped her and her daughter with the move. Angel described to us how she felt when she arrived in the accommodation centre:

As soon as I saw the room, I called the social worker and I was like, “no”, I burst into tears, I couldn’t control my emotions, I was like, “no”. I know I’m a refugee and I know I’m seeking protection from Germany, but I wouldn’t let my dog live in that room.

Instead, she took all her belongings and went back to her accommodation in the army camp, paying for the taxi herself. At the time of the interview she was still desperate to move out. She was told by the local authorities that she could rent private accommodation, but she struggled to find any owing to her refused asylum claim and limited residence permit. Her accommodation choices were also restricted because she needed to stay within the specific district (‘Landkreis’) which had only one or two reasonably large towns.

Trudy Ann described the reception centre where she and her partner had to stay for 10 days as ‘[t]hat place is like a prison there’. She said that the camp was smelly and dirty, and that women and men were mixed: ‘I hated it there (...) that place is not for human beings. It’s dirty. Very filthy. The people there are nasty, very nasty’. Trudy Ann described the beds in the reception and accommodation centre as ‘prison beds’. She found her living conditions distressing: ‘Sometimes I’m at school and my mind is not there. I’m like saying, I left my own country to come here, went through so much. Sleep here, sleep there, eat this, eat that’. At the time of the interview, she and her partner were sharing a room in an accommodation centre in Hessen, where they could cook for themselves, however, under rather unhygienic conditions. Also other participants talked about inadequate and unhygienic conditions. Rosette told us that the toilets in the reception centre were always blocked, so ‘you can stay for a week without visiting a toilet’ or go to the nearby McDonalds to use the toilet there. And yet, claimants are expected to take what they are offered

without complaining. As William described, when he went to the regional office for foreigners' affairs (Landesamt fuer Auslaenderangelegenheiten) to ask for a transfer, he was told: 'You came [here] thinking that Germany is heaven. Now you want a big house'.

As people do not have privacy in the reception and accommodation centres, there is also the risk of their belongings being stolen. This happened to Marhoon and Prince Emrah. Prince Emrah had their mobile phone and other items, including shoes, stolen. In the accommodation centre, Marhoon's roommate had a friend visiting; when he woke up in the morning, they were both gone and had stolen his rucksack, which he always kept under the bed, and new boots that he had just bought:

What else can I handle...you know? I was disowned by my family, I was threatened, I can't go back to my country, and all of this and now this. Treated like shit in the camp, nobody cares, and this asshole who had been preaching about [religion] (...) and then eventually steal from me and runs away.

As Marhoon's account demonstrates, some of the negative experiences SOGI claimants have in reception and accommodation centres (like their belongings being stolen) might affect all claimants, and are not related to claimants' SOGI. Yet, for SOGI claimants, such experiences can be particularly difficult, as they often cannot fall back on family support, and because of their SOGI they are often isolated in the accommodation centres.

Another issue is that specific SOGI-support is often not available, especially when claimants are accommodated in rural areas (Sect. 8.6). The women who participated in the focus groups no. 3 and no. 4 (both in Bavaria), and who lived in the South of Bavaria, felt that the system gave the owners of their hotels, which now functioned as asylum accommodation centres, too much power which could be abused. In their view, '[t]he housemasters are the problem' (Lynn, focus group no. 4). Jolly described the roles of their 'housemaster': 'At one point he was our security guard, he was the office messenger, he was the administrator, he was every[thing], the social, everything in one person'. There were no groups or NGOs, like Caritas, present in the hotel, such as was the case in other accommodation centres (for example, Hilda, focus group no. 4). Because there was no Caritas or social workers coming to the hotel, there was no one to go to, when the housemaster mistreated them, or for additional help (for example, in getting health insurance to see a doctor, as we heard from Winifred). One of the hotel owners harassed the residents by checking what they had bought, and forcing people to carry out cleaning when they were ill or had back problems (Jolly, focus group no. 3; Lynn, focus group no. 4). This harassment was possible due to the hotel owners' power to have residents' asylum support cut; they just had to tell the authorities that the residents were not fulfilling their house tasks or not respecting the house rules. Chidera talked about the relief she felt when she finally left the hotel and the housemaster she was afraid of. After what she had experienced in the hotel, she was overwhelmed by how welcome she felt in her new place: 'Like I've never felt such acceptance in my life before. I was given a separate room, self-contained, everything inside the room. They were treating me like a princess, like seriously. I was like "God..."'.

Women were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by the housemasters. Mayi (focus group no. 4) told us that the housemaster had made sexual advances towards her, which she rejected: 'This man has slept with all the women on the compound'. Women expressed their sense of powerlessness (Lynn, Hilda, focus group no. 4) as they felt unable to take any kind of action. We were told that, were they to call the police, they would not be able to communicate with them, and the housemaster would start talking to the police in German.

Others recounted positive experiences with their housemasters, and said of the ones who were more supportive, 'those ones are not racist' (Nana, focus group no. 3). The feeling of members of focus group no. 4 was also that the bad housemasters were racist (Ayeta), while other people were really caring and supportive (Ayeta, Mayi, Violet).

Also in Italy, asylum claimants are dispersed throughout the country, without being able to choose where to live (and they cannot appeal against the decision of being placed in a certain centre as this is not done through a formal decision). Claimants are dispersed depending on the availability of places, and according to the criteria to house 2.5 claimants per thousand inhabitants in each region (ECRE, AIDA & ASGI 2019, p. 90). Most asylum claimants are hosted in governmental initial reception centres and CAS accommodation, including SOGI claimants, in light of the lack of dedicated reception centres for people asking asylum on these grounds. As AIDA reports: 'In practice, reception conditions vary considerably among different reception centres and also between the same type of centres. While the services provided are the same, the quality can differ depending on the management bodies running the centres.' (ECRE, AIDA & ASGI 2019, p. 96). In the absence of widespread monitoring and consistency standards, life in these centres may vary considerably for SOGI claimants, who reported both highly positive experiences thanks to the presence of trained staff (Odosa), and extremely negative episodes of racism and a total lack of services (Mamaka).

As Daniele (decision-maker) described:

[T]here is a certain difference between those who go through the SPRAR and those who do not. Because those who go through the SPRAR, which has a reduced number of places, compared to this there is a more developed subsequent system made up of agreements with local authorities. (...) For others, it depends on the ability of the local authority to organise itself, say, on a large scale.

As only a small number of claimants overall are given SPRAR accommodation, it is no coincidence that only a few of our participants were hosted in these reception centres (Alain A., Nelo, Kamel, Silver, Kennedy).

Participants in Italy, as well as in Germany, struggled with not being able to cook for themselves in the reception centres. This was also difficult because of cultural differences: 'they serve you what they want, Italian and African food is very different' (Nelo, Italy; also Odosa and Buba). In Germany, participants mentioned that they were offered a lot of bread: 'in the morning it is bread, in the afternoon it is bread, in the evening it is bread' (Tina, focus group no. 4, Bavaria; also Trudy Ann

and Rosette). For Dev (Italy), not being able to decide what food he ate was one of the things that restricted his freedom:

Because already perhaps, you are not free, because already the food is essential, already for the fact that we are not fed as we want, consequently we do not eat food like meat, we are forced to eat cookies, pizzas, and it's not food, the body needs fats and all that, and we do not find them in cookies, so that's the first factor, and the second is the fact of feeling imprisoned, because we are in prison, we are adults we are not minors, a father of 36 years like me.

Nonetheless, the food schedule in reception centres can at least give some structure to the endless days where you just 'eat and sleep and wait for Monday, Saturday, this is how we live (...) anytime we wait for food, you wait for dinner, you wait for lunch, you know this is under control, you know' (Franco, Italy).

In the UK, a parliamentary committee report in 2017 found accommodation for asylum claimants was often sub-standard and unfit, with reports of vermin, asbestos risks, overcrowded conditions and insufficient food: 'Some of this accommodation is a disgrace and it is shameful that some very vulnerable people have been placed in such conditions' (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2017, p. 49). And yet, 2 years later, in August 2019 the Guardian still reported the inhumane conditions of asylum accommodation in London, where claimants lived in overcrowded housing that was infested with cockroaches, mice and rats (Taylor 2019). The Labour party has called for 'the return of responsibility for asylum accommodation, and the billions that come with it, to local authorities' (House of Commons 2018).

Claimants are expected to accept what is provided without complaint. Jayne's example is illustrative of that. When she was moved to Birmingham with her son (who was 14 at the time), a people carrier car was provided to transport them:

so we thought we are taken to somewhere where at least would be liveable. So, we go to an address in [town] and the driver said, "it is here, we have arrived", and this car was parked in the front garden (...) and flats that looked dilapidated, and my son started like shaking, refusing to get out of the car, he said "maybe you should take us back where you took us from, it is ok, I am not getting out of the car if this is where you are taking us". So, we went upstairs to the flat with the G4S man, and it was very, very bad. It looked like maybe the place was used by homeless people, with... smears on the walls, with what looked like, maybe to me, it looked like even bullet holes in the walls, it was quite scary.

Jayne told the G4S driver she was unhappy with the accommodation, so he called the area manager who then came and said it was 'OK' and asked her what was wrong with it.

So I remember I asked him, I said "can you live here yourself", he said "yes". At that point then he said, "you know, if you continue to refuse to stay here, I am going to call Home Office for you and you don't want that". I said, "you know what, if it was just me on my own, I really wouldn't have minded staying here, but as a parent I am not going to put up with my son in a place like this.

She insisted on obtaining another opinion:

So, he rang the Home Office guy, who came, very tall, well-built man, came and like stood in my face like this and said, "what do you expect?" At that time I just broke down, I just

started crying and I didn't know what to say, because I was thinking maybe this is the person coming to rescue me, so when I broke down crying (...) I couldn't get any word out of my mouth.

Eventually, Jayne and her son were taken to a hostel where they stayed for two nights and then went back to the flat, which was now in a more liveable condition. Even though it was not ideal, they did not mind as the hostel where they had had to stay 'was also worse': they had to use the toilet facilities at a nearby branch of McDonalds.

Not only the conditions of asylum accommodation but also the practice of forced bedroom-sharing in dispersal accommodation has been a concern for parliamentarians (House of Commons 2018). The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee report on asylum accommodation recommended that particularly vulnerable claimants (including expectant mothers, those living with mental health needs and victims of trafficking, rape and torture) should not have to share a room, and that room sharing in general should be phased out (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2017). The government responded that:

Room sharing allows the Providers to use their portfolio to meet the demands of asylum intake and ensure that destitute asylum seekers are housed safely and securely. There are strict criteria set out in the Statement of Requirements around when room sharing can take place and who can share a room (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2017, p. 14).

Some city councils have banned forced room sharing but accommodation providers do not necessarily comply with the ban (Bulman 2018). However, in the UK, forced bedroom sharing is not as problematic as in Germany and Italy, as we explore in the next Section.

8.4 Living in Shared Accommodation, Being 'in the Closet' and Experiencing Discrimination and Hate Crime

In all three countries, asylum claimants are mainly accommodated in shared housing, and often also have to share bedrooms. This is particularly true in Germany, where claimants usually need to share rooms with strangers over extended periods of time, which can be even more difficult for SOGI claimants. As Mariya (NGO worker, Germany) explained:

Generally I find the concept that people who have just gone through terrible things in their country of origin come here and somehow just want to have a rest and want a stable, somehow, new life, that they have to share a room for several months and sometimes years with unknown people and unfortunately this is not just the exception for queer people. And yes, because that's just such a sensitive topic, "how do I deal with my sexuality", and often they are super tight spaces – sometimes it's six-square-metre, eight-square-metre, where it is also a bit difficult to hide things from each other, what you look at on the laptop or on the phone, with whom you chat, and such spaces or situations force you to get in touch with each other and people ask each other: "Why are you here?" "What happened to you?" And if people do not want to come out, it's psychologically very difficult.

SOGI claimants' difficult experiences with asylum accommodation have been highlighted by NGOs and others (Awadalla and Rajanayagam 2016), and 'there are hundreds of newspaper articles about violent incidents' (Marlen, legal advisor). SOGI claimants may experience discrimination, verbal and physical violence, not only at the hands of other claimants, but also of security personnel, administrative staff and interpreters (Emanuel 2016). All the participants who supported LGBTIQ+ claimants provided examples of claimants facing difficulties in reception and accommodation centres, and many of the LGBTIQ+ claimant participants told us of such difficult experiences from a general fear to 'be out' in their shared accommodation to experiencing verbal and/or physical abuse. This fear of being out is often due to the heteronormative environments of the accommodation centres as well as their surroundings, as these two survey respondents described:

At my place of residence, I [live] with straight people and my roommates and the people around always talk evil things about gay people, and because of this reason I don't feel free to open up. But I always feel free when I am at [NGO] during our meetings. (C55, Germany)

It's not easy to open up about my sexual orientation because of the surrounding and the stigma. (C39, Germany)

When Emroy (focus group no. 1, Hesse) arrived in Germany, he first had to stay at Frankfurt airport's detention centre. There, he felt protected, as the staff looked out for him. Despite being in a detention centre, he felt safe, a feeling which changed in subsequent accommodation. When he was moved to the reception centre in Giessen, he feared homophobic fellow claimants:

And I feel threatened. And I am scared for my life because I am coming from a country where I've been through a lot (...) In Jamaica you have to hide, and I'm sick and I'm tired of hiding my sexuality (...) Germany is a good place, but it's not safe for gay people because you're mixing us up with people who are not gay, even people from Jamaica. They might not be the ones who attack us before, but as soon as they find out that we're gay, they're going to attack. Even if they don't attack, they will say things, and they will try to tell their friends that "oh, so you are gay", so that whenever they see you, they will try to attack you.

As William (Germany) explained: 'That is why when we're in the reception centres we try to hide. You live "in the closet". Because you don't know who is your neighbour'. Stephen (focus group no. 2, Bavaria, Germany) described how an incident in his accommodation centre made him fearful of 'coming out'. He was glad that other gay men lived in the accommodation centre and were, like him, part of the LGBTIQ+ support organisation Rainbow Refugees Munich. Together they put up some posters about the organisation, thinking there might be others in the accommodation centre who would like to join the group, but the next morning the posters were gone: 'so that gave me a lot of fear if that, if I'd come out' (Juliane, a public official, told us of a similar incident in a reception centre in Hannover).

Alphaeus talked about being threatened in his reception centre: 'They start discriminating against you, they start treating you like you're not a human being'. Gisela, a lawyer, thought that if you 'out' yourself or are 'outed', then 'life there is hell'. She had a gay client from Sierra Leone who experienced such a high degree of harassment from the people he lived with – including being spat at and prevented

from using the shared facilities – that he attempted suicide and was eventually sent to a psychiatric institution. An official of the Bavarian government suggested that it had been his own fault for being ‘out’. According to Gisela, the government tends to move the trouble-makers but not the victims, instead of providing accommodation for vulnerable people. Another one of Gisela’s clients was in a reception centre when the mass shooting in the gay club in Orlando happened in 2106 and found himself surrounded by people cheering and celebrating the event. When Gisela’s client spoke up and effectively ‘outed’ himself, he had to be transferred for his own protection. One survey respondent was particularly affected by an incident with her roommate: ‘My roommate told me face to face that he wished all gay people would be denied asylum and that he wished the worse for all of us, a statement that can never go off my mind’ (C38, Germany).

Even where SOGI claimants had managed to secure a place in an LGBTIQ+ accommodation centre, following experiences of bullying, violence, homo- and transphobia, and even death threats in ‘mainstream’ accommodation centres, their relocation claims were often rejected. They might even be dispersed to another district, disrupting any mental health (for instance, therapy sessions) or other kinds of support they were receiving. In the LGBTIQ+ accommodation centre in Berlin, for instance, some claimants were only able to stay a few days before dispersal to a rural area in another federal state (Frank S., legal advisor). The Bavarian government, in turn, does not even provide LGBTIQ+ accommodation and does not consider these individuals to be members of a vulnerable group. In this context, Thomas (NGO volunteer) was concerned that it would take a violent death in asylum accommodation to prompt authorities to act appropriately. Thomas told us of one member of his organisation who was violently assaulted in their accommodation and was removed by the authorities in the middle of the night. NGOs tried to raise awareness among accommodation staff by distributing posters, talking to them and offering them training (Thomas, NGO volunteer; Knud, NGO worker; Juliane, public official). Yet, as Thomas (NGO volunteer) said, this is likely to take a long time, particularly given that SOGI minorities are still not fully accepted in wider German society.

Participants told us that when they experienced harassment, they did not feel they received adequate support in reception and accommodation centres. For instance, Mahmoud experienced verbal and physical abuse by people in his accommodation centre, but when he told social workers about it, they said they could not do anything. Here, incidents escalated to the point of Mahmoud asking the police to intervene. Eventually an organisation helped him to move out. Similarly, Veronica and Julia (Germany), who lived in an eight square meter room with only two beds in their reception centre, which they shared with their children, experienced verbal abuse from other residents. When they reported it to a member of security staff and a social worker, both individuals merely advised them to be careful and not to disclose their sexual orientation to anyone. The security staff worker added that they should be glad that it was ‘just’ verbal abuse and that in other centres people experience sexual violence. The social worker, who was also from Russia, told them: ‘What do you want? In Germany 80% of people are against it as well. No one is

going to help you, so you better not say that you are lesbians'. The social worker suggested that they pretend to be sisters. Veronica and Julia were shocked by these responses:

It was really hard to hear, because you were trying to save yourself, to lead another, normal life. You are in another country and there people say almost the same as in Russia. "Everyone is against it"; "Be glad that there is no sexual violence". Where are we, Julia? (Veronica)

Because of the re-traumatising effects of the abuse she experienced in the accommodation centre, Julia saw a psychologist, who also told her that it would be better if she was not 'out' in the centre.

As we explore in Chap. 9, such experiences of housing put a strain on SOGI claimants' mental health and prevent them from thinking about their future, as William (Germany) explained: 'And when life is safe you can have a future to think about. We sit down and think about what next'. He argued that the large accommodation centres are counter-productive to fostering acceptance, as refugees are segregated from wider society and cannot familiarise themselves with German ways of life: they 'cannot accept it when you are still together like this'.

In Italy too, we heard of examples of verbal and physical violence experienced by SOGI claimants in reception and accommodation centres, and also of NGOs trying to raise awareness of these issues (Giulia, LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy). Here once again the major issue was the failure to consider the identities of individuals allocated shared housing. Some participants, for instance, found it problematic that people were housed in reception centres according to nationality (Silvana, judge). Similar to Germany, claimants have to share rooms, often with many people. Mamaka, for instance, told us she was housed in a room of four, where previously six claimants were, and that there were also rooms of eight in the accommodation centre. She found it very difficult to live there; the women in her room would be drinking and smoking and there were 'lots of fighting'. At the time of our interview, she had been waiting for 5 months for an answer to a transferral request. Gbona shared a room with six other men, he said it was 'not easy, but it's OK'. He had lived there for a year. Silver lived in a house in Florence for 7 months that accommodated 15 young men and spoke of the troubles he faced once they found out that he was gay. They normally cooked for each other and when it was his turn, they told him that they did not want to eat his food and that everything in the kitchen needed to be separated: 'they said it was an abomination for our culture and: "You can't cook for me to eat, but we have to separate everything. You take your pot, your glass, your spoon, your plate and you don't have to touch this." You don't have to cross this part or else they kill you'. He told a centre staff member, but she did not believe him and thought he was exaggerating. One day, when one of the other residents started a fight with him in the kitchen, the social worker intervened and finally agreed to move Silver to another accommodation facility. Although he went back 'into the closet' in the new accommodation, he again suffered discrimination from other asylum claimants when they found out he was gay, however here he felt supported by accommodation managers. Nicola and Giulio (LGBTIQ+ group volunteers) talked about one of their clients being discriminated against in his housing and suffering

harassment. He then was transferred to SPRAR as a vulnerable person. Also Susanna (social worker) had a client who was beaten up in the reception centre and had to be transferred.

Some LGBTIQ+ claimants told us that ‘hiding’ their SOGI was their only coping strategy. For instance, Ken (Italy) had experienced problems in the first camp where he stayed, where other men harassed him verbally and physically started fights with him. Therefore, in his second accommodation he stayed ‘in the closet’ and the situation was better because he was:

pretending to be a “normal” young man. (...) because I have to live a fake life, I have to hide, I have to behave like a “normal” young man, I have to behave like others, so it is ok for now (...) It is difficult to live a life you are not, just because you don’t want people to start talking and I am coping, I am trying.

Also Alain A. (Italy) told us of his experience of being in the closet in the reception centre, where he had to stay for almost a year, and was afraid that the other African people in the camp would find out about his sexuality:

So I lived a quiet life there. I think... my identity was not exposed, nobody knew like I was gay so I was, I still lived like I was in Africa, still trying to hide a lot of things (...) I have a lot of my friends they don’t feel free in their camps, because the people maltreat them because they found out that they are LGBT.

Other claimant and refugee participants had similar experiences, and, in fact, did not discuss their SOGI in their reception and accommodation centres. For instance, Moses was living in a flat that accommodated six claimants, all from Nigeria, and he was sharing a room with another person. Nobody knew about his sexuality and he was careful that they should not find out: ‘It is not really easy, it is, it is not really easy’. Diarra lived in small camp of only four people in the countryside and was very careful that the other three men did not find out about his sexual orientation. For Fred, it would take time to find people with whom he could be open and tell his story: ‘that’s my own story, my story I’ve never told anyone, since I have not found a good person to listen to me yet. In any camp I went through, I did not find someone so open that I could tell him my story; so I always have my story in my heart’.

Participants struggled with their situation: they fled their country of origin because of facing SOGI-related discrimination and violence. Having had to live most of their lives ‘in the closet’, they then are often put in an environment similar to the one in the country of origin.

As Nice Guy (focus group no.1, northern Italy) explained:

LGBT life for we asylum seekers here in Italy is somewhat terrible, very, very, to an instance (...) because we left our country for the sole purpose of discrimination and persecution, and that is exactly what we find here, but in the camps that we are and even outside too. No, no, no, not from white people, from, but from the same, our fellow blacks, because we are everywhere. You see? It’s not easy for somebody, the country you are comfortable in, living your life, and one day you have one or two big problems and you leave, or you think that’s OK, after going through hell, you are going to somewhere you will be comfortable. Only getting there. There is no, there is no separation, we are still in the midst of the same people that criticise and crucify you. It’s impossible for you to release, OK, here I am in Europe, I’m free, no, you are not free. (...) So for me, I’m not finding it fun...

However, other participants acknowledged that the situation was still better than in their country of origin. For instance, Siri, who shared a room with one person and was not 'out' in the camp, but at the same time was not hiding as he was not afraid nor ashamed, told us that in Italy he knew he was free. Dev (focus group no. 5) told us that in the camp, he 'was stigmatized verbally because maybe they had an idea about my sexual orientation, they stigmatized me verbally but they did, it's not physically, verbally'. However, he said that in contrast to living in Africa, he knew he had rights and that such behaviour was not acceptable in Italy. At the same time, he cautioned that Italy was also not very progressive with regard to LGBTIQ+ issues: 'Homosexuality in Italy, I think it's still a taboo subject – even Italians are not 'out' [in town x]. It means that Italy is similar to Africa ... just on the paper legalised, so go *bene* [well], but at the mental level Africa and Italy *uguale* [the same]'. Also other participants thought that living in Italy as an LGBTIQ+ person was generally not easy. Kennedy told us that he also had Italian gay friends who did not come out and were afraid of him visiting their house, as they were afraid that their parents would find out about their sexuality, so they would also be hiding. One of the survey respondents explained that he was open about his sexual orientation, but that 'it's difficult here like it is in everywhere in the world to be a gay person' (C63, Italy).

Not everyone felt the need to be open about their SOGI in the accommodation centres. For instance, Gbona and Fido did not see any reason why they should be 'out' as 'everyone has his story' (Gbona, Italy). Others said that for them it was easy to be open about their sexuality (Cyrus and Patrick, focus group no.2, northern Italy). Cyrus felt confident about telling people in the reception centre that he was gay when they asked him, seeing that he went to gay Pride events: 'I'm proud to be gay'. In that respect, the importance of meeting other gay men for not feeling ashamed to be out (Fido, focus group no. 4, northern Italy) and connecting with NGOs to feel safer in accommodation centres and be able to talk about sexuality (Bakary, focus group no. 2, northern Italy) was also mentioned.

We also heard some positive examples of SOGI claimants living with non-SOGI claimants, indicating that 'people should always have the choice' about their accommodation (Jonathan, LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy). For instance, Junio (Italy), who arrived in Europe as a child, felt 'very looked after' by social services and shared 'very good accommodation' with another girl. Similarly, Momo lived in a hotel, along with two other gay friends; other residents knew they were gay, but '[t]here are no problems there. There everyone respects'.

In the UK, not only the report on asylum accommodation by the Independent Chief Inspector referred to LGBTIQ+ claimants being harassed and abused by other accommodation receivers (ICIBI 2018, p. 60; Sect. 8.2), but research conducted by Citizens Advice Liverpool also found that 9 of the 17 LGBTIQ+ claimants interviewed reported being abused, bullied or discriminated against in shared housing. The study found that especially initial accommodation was unsuitable for LGBTIQ+ claimants (Citizens Advice Liverpool 2018, p. 17). In the many years working with SOGI claimants, Melisa (NGO worker) witnessed how 'they were facing bullying, they were being beaten up, they were facing extreme homophobia'. When we asked

Amadin whether he felt safe and comfortable in his asylum accommodation, he responded: 'I do not really feel safe because I live with people who are not LGBT so I am scared to tell them what was my case and who I am, so I was scared and hide my life here.' At the time of his interview with us, Lutfor had problems with one of the men living in his house, and he had been physically assaulted by him, to the point of calling the police. However, the solution of SERCO, the accommodation provider, was to move Lutfor, rather than his persecutor and despite Lutfor's wish to stay because of his good relationship with the other residents.

Some of the participants did not experience verbal or physical abuse directly but were fearful because of what other people had told them. For instance, Selim (UK) was afraid to accept Home Office accommodation, as he had heard other asylum claimants talking about their experiences of being abused and raped by people from their own country with whom they had to share rooms in asylum accommodation:

Can you imagine putting, let's say, an Iraqi guy here because he is gay, escaping from straight people in Iraq, in the same room with another Iraqi who is here escaping the war? And he is straight. So there was a lot of abuse, there was a lot of stories about abuse and rape and threatening and all these things, so the last thing I wanted to do is to be in this accommodation with those asylum seekers, because I don't know what reason they are claiming asylum upon.

The housing providers might think that they are doing something positive when they put together people from the same country/community, but this can be problematic for SOGI claimants (Joseph, NGO volunteer, UK; Mariya, NGO worker, Germany).

Some participants talked about the consequences of 'coming out' or having their SOGI found out. When Meggs (UK) started to feel more comfortable about her sexuality after a few months living in the UK and 'outed' herself to the two women with whom she shared a house:

they also started to exclude themselves from me, like they were really, really against my sexuality I would say. Though they would not like say, when I say it they were kind of shocked like "wow, really, we have not seen any boyfriend coming here" (...) So we used to like, as girls we were just, if it is hot we would just go bra top naked and things like that, but everything started to change and you know when people look at you like you raped them or something, like that, yes. So, I started to feel like excluded as well, but I didn't know I had a right to complain about it with SERCO.

Yet, being 'out' or being 'in the closet' might not only be a problem in asylum accommodation. Sometimes, SOGI claimants stay with relatives or friends and they might have to move out once their SOGI is found out. For instance, Rosa (NGO, UK) said that during the transition period, during which claimants granted international protection only have 28 days to find accommodation, people might be 'forced back into the closet', if they are dependent on someone else for accommodation.

As shared bedrooms are less common in the UK, in contrast to Germany and Italy, SOGI claimants here may have better accommodation experiences. Participants in the North West of England we spoke to were positive about the support structures in place, especially from self-organised groups, and the social life that existed for SOGI refugees (Amelia, NGO worker; Meggs, focus group no. 1, Manchester). In

some instances, we heard that bisexual and lesbian women had been (purposefully?) put together by the accommodation providers and that despite the problems with housing that many people faced, there were some SERCO staff 'who are trying really hard, and who are on the side of, and who want these refugees to have a decent quality house and a safe house and kind of demonstrate kindness' (Chloe, NGO worker).

These accounts illustrate that most LGBTIQ+ asylum claimants experience their current 'home' as a heteronormative space, where they do not represent the 'sexual norm', and therefore any reference to their sexual identity will be experienced as a 'coming out'. We now look in a bit more detail at the intersectional dimension of accommodation and how these spaces are experienced by trans and non-binary claimants as well as couples.

8.4.1 Accommodation of Couples

Hiding SOGI is particularly difficult when having a partner. As Vincenzo (LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy) explained, one of the main issues here is that asylum claimants are:

de-sexualized in some way, or if sexuality emerges, it does so in forms considered more "problematic", such as pregnancy, like the person who has a sexually transmitted disease. In those cases it may emerge and there is an emergency taking charge, but the right to sexuality, the right to pleasure and affection and intimacy, no. So these things are problematic.

Fred and his boyfriend Dev (Italy) were living in the same accommodation centre but were not allowed to share a room with each other. Even though people had to share rooms, the manager of the camp argued that the accommodation was only for single people and not for couples. Luckily, Dev's roommates were understanding, and one of them knew they were a gay couple and was accepting, so they could spend time together in Dev's room.

We also heard from other LGBTIQ+ claimants who had difficulties being housed with partners (Damiano, lawyer, Italy; Stephen, focus group no. 2, Bavaria, Germany). Giulio (LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy) told us that individuals would need to prove that they were part of a couple, and even show a marriage certificate. As Jonathan (LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy) argued, being housed together might be difficult for an unmarried heterosexual couple too. However, one difference is that gay couples will not have had the chance to marry in their country of origin. Some of the couples we interviewed described feeling as if they were still back in their country of origin, as they were not able to openly show affection towards each other (Dev and Fred, Italy; Veronica and Julia, Germany): 'we still feel like in Africa' (Dev).

Because claimants have to share accommodation, couples lack privacy and being with a partner is extremely difficult, especially when that partner also lives in shared asylum accommodation (Tina, Germany). In addition, when they have met during

their asylum process, it is difficult for one person to be relocated so the couple can be together, as Liz (focus group no. 5, Bavaria, Germany) and her partner experienced. Each lived in remote areas far away from each other, and neither had the financial means to pay for costly public transport tickets. They asked to be relocated closer to one another, but this request was rejected: ‘We have tried everything and there is no way out’ (Liz, focus group no. 5, Bavaria, Germany).

It was also problematic for claimants to have partners outside their accommodation centres. Buba (Italy) talked about his difficulties in talking to his boyfriend in the Gambia, as no one in the camp (a hotel) knew about his sexuality and he shared a room with four people. Kennedy (Italy) also described being very careful so that the other men in his room would not find out about his sexuality; he was not able to talk to his boyfriend freely, and always had to watch out in case someone came into the bedroom. He was also afraid that someone would see messages from his boyfriend on his phone. As he described it: ‘It makes me feel bad, it makes me feel very, very bad, because sometimes I don’t have the, the freedom to chat with my loved one’.

Whether in an intimate relationship or not, SOGI claimants’ experiences in accommodation are shaped by the intersections of different social categories such as gender, sexuality, disability and religion, as we demonstrate in the following section.

8.4.2 Intersectional Dimensions of Accommodation

Owing to their intersecting experiences of exclusion and discrimination, SOGI claimants may feel unsafe for different reasons. For some participants, it was the intersection of gender and sexuality that shaped their experience. Tina (Germany) lived in a large camp where only around ten women were single like her (without a partner or children). Most of the people there were in families with children, pregnant women, or mothers with babies. She had to share a room with four heterosexual women and a baby, and had lots of problems with her roommates and faced discrimination: ‘I don’t feel comfortable at all’. She tried to stay out of the room until it was time to go to bed, because ‘there are times you want to relax, [but] you can’t, it’s really terrible’. As her asylum claim was refused, she was likely to stay in that camp for a long time, and although there seemed to be places available in a safe women’s house, she struggled to be accommodated there, as it was in a different district.

The heteronormative environment of reception and accommodation centres is difficult for non-heterosexual (cis-)women, who get ‘advances’ from men, and are often also pressured by the other women with whom they live to have a relationship with a man (Tina and Hilda, focus group no. 4, Bavaria, Germany). As Tina (focus group no. 4, Bavaria, Germany) described her situation:

And yeah, [laughs] I would stay [with] four people in the room and wherever I had... very many people had their boyfriends that they move on with, but for me I had no-one. So they

could force me, saying "why not have a man?" This kind of things. My roommate would be on me.

The often mixed-gendered accommodation centres can bring women into unsafe situations, as Julian's (focus group no. 5, Bavaria, Germany) example demonstrates. She was living 'in the closet' in the accommodation centre as she was told in her first interview to keep her sexuality as a secret, but men harassed her and were irritated when she did not respond to them, leading them to assume that she was a lesbian. For a few nights she was alone in her room as the woman with whom she shared her room and who was pregnant had gone to the hospital. One night she woke up to find in her room a man who lived in the room next door: 'We are not allowed to lock ourselves in. So I was sleeping. I woke up from a dream and the man was sitting in the room. So I felt "I am dreaming"'. When she told the staff in the office the next day, they did not take it seriously, did not want to give her a bedroom key and told her that if something were to happen, she should scream and then security would come:

The next time, I woke up, there were now two [men]. So I had to scream. So that security this time finds evidence for themselves. When security came, they said "but they are just seated, they are not touching you, they are not forcing you." I told them "yes, they are not touching me, but it's funny, if we are not friends, ask them do they know my name? They don't know my name, so how can you say we are friends? I just met them because in the camp we eat together. Please tell them not to come back here." So those security people never took it seriously (...) for them, they didn't think of me maybe in that angle, that I'm a lesbian. I have grounds why I'm scared.

Feeling desperate, Julian packed her belongings and went to speak with the woman in charge of the camp to tell her that:

"if I am to stay here give me a key to lock myself up when I'm sleeping, or else they could rape me, and the next time they will rape me, you will say the same thing, I'm being dramatic, I'm being chaotic, I'm being scared." (...) she refused [the request for a bedroom key]. So they called the police. Because now I was being dramatic. And when the police came, I told the police officer "I don't want to talk to a man, I'm kindly requesting if a policewoman [can talk to me]".

The policewoman helped Julian contact an organisation that hosted her for a week, before she was transferred to another place. Julian's account demonstrates how vulnerable women can be in mixed-gender camps. Julian was very outspoken and she felt for the women who were not: 'But imagine I had not insisted on fighting'.

Accommodation centres are not only heteronormative spaces but they are also spaces where the 'somatic norm' (Puwar 2004) is able-bodied, as Betty's (focus group no. 3, Bavaria, Germany) experiences demonstrate. At the time of the interview, she had been living in the asylum accommodation centre (a hotel) in a small village for 2 years and 3 months and felt 'like a prisoner' because of not being able to walk for long distances. In addition, it was difficult for her to walk with all her pots to the kitchen, which was far away from her room, and she had to use a crutch. When she asked to be relocated, they wanted to offer her a place in another village, where she would not have to cook, not understanding that her problem was not

having to cook but being expected to carry her kitchen utensils all the way to the kitchen. With the people living in the hotel, she experienced another layer of discrimination:

The problem is really how they put us with other people, people discriminate us. People, they do not want to stay with me, they think I am a curse and that they will have to help me every time, people think I am useless, they do not want to associate with us, most of the time. They just see that I move differently from them. And when you talk, they do not let you talk, as they think you have to be oppressed, that you be under that person. I think that Europeans and natives, they are different, they are happy to help you. And I do not get any support. If I tell the housemaster, he says that I need to share a room with somebody. He does not know what I am going through, he does not know what is happening inside the room, and he doesn't want to hear.

As a Black, disabled, lesbian refugee, she felt out of place everywhere: in the hotel, in the village, and even at the lesbian refugee organisation she attended, where she also felt like the other women did not treat her as equal but assumed that she belonged to 'another category of people'. Betty's account reminds us of how important it is to look at the intersectional experiences of SOGI refugees, not to treat them as a homogenous group, but like any other group based on identity, where membership is shaped by inclusions and exclusions (Butler 1991).

For some participants, it was the combination of their sexual and religious or non-religious identity that shaped their experience. When Marhoon (Germany) was moved from the reception centre to an accommodation centre, he told the Red Cross that he was gay and an atheist and asked whether he could share a room with like-minded people. Two days later, a room became vacant and they gave it to him. But then later two more people were put in the room: 'And then came a third roommate, from Iraq, and I was surprised they put us together because I'm atheist, the guy from Iran is Shia and then the guy from Iraq is Sunni. And as you know the Sunni and the Shia don't get on very well. So I was really confused, why have they put them in the same room?' Although there had been some tension between his two roommates because of their different religious backgrounds, they were both all right with him being gay and an atheist:

I told them because I wanted to see their reaction. If it was negative, I'd kick them out or force the camp to send someone else. Because the camp also told me not to talk about it. (...) They told me not to tell people that I'm gay or atheist, which apparently is illegal, or they don't have the right to tell me to say that. So I told them both, no problem whatsoever. I was impressed, ok, there is hope. So both had no issues with it.

Yet, Marhoon did have problems because of his atheist beliefs when another resident felt offended by a picture that Marhoon had painted in an art project. He perceived it to be an insult to God and Islam and came into Marhoon's bedroom and threatened him, leaving Marhoon shaking: 'It was terrible, but from that moment everyone in the building distanced themselves from me. "Oh, you are one of these atheists, because now you're an atheist you think now you can offend Islam"'.

When looking at the intersectional dimensions of accommodation, it is important to look not only at LGBTIQ+ claimants' experiences *within* accommodation centres but also *outside* of them. As Halim's (Germany) experience demonstrates, SOGI

claimants might feel unsafe in both situations, with different aspects of their identity, or a particular combination of identities making them targets of violence and abuse in different spaces (Chap. 3). Being housed in a refugee camp in an area in East Berlin known for increasing numbers of neo-Nazis, Halim felt unsafe in the accommodation because of his queer identity, while outside the accommodation centre he felt visible and threatened as a refugee. He talked about having split identities: 'it's all part of me but depending on where I am, I feel uncomfortable or unsafe because of certain things'. Halim did not 'out' himself in the camp: 'I had the privilege that maybe I can hide somehow, I'm not so visibly queer in that sense'. Yet, he struggled because of the hostile surroundings, and was 'always scared of going in and out'. As he had to share a room, he did not have any private sanctuary to which he could retreat: 'it was very bad for my mental health, I was very depressed at the time'. He was then moved to another refugee camp even further East, in Marzahn, an area which 'has since the 1990s had an image as a no-go area for foreigners' (Young 2017). There, an old school had been turned into refugee accommodation, and there had been anti-refugee protests against it (Spiegel online 2013). Halim described seeing German flags displayed on the balconies of local tower blocks. He was there for two and a half months, and had to share a room with five other people. Some of them were from the same country as him and this made it even more difficult as 'it felt even harder for me to hide who I am because they can read me better'.

Lesbian women who participated in focus groups no. 3 and no. 4 in Germany, who lived in rural areas in southern Bavaria (Sect. 8.5), told us of experiences with high levels of racism in the surroundings of the accommodation camps. People in the area would not even look at them when they greeted them and that '[s]uddenly, they keep their space. They don't want to come near you' (Hilda, focus group no.4, Bavaria, Germany). Sometimes, on public transport, people would not sit next to them, or they would move away once you sit next to them and we were told of occasions when fellow passengers pulled their nose to indicate that our participants smelled bad (focus group no. 4, Bavaria, Germany). In shops, our participants' bags would be checked to make sure they had not stolen anything (Hilda and Liz, focus group no. 4 Bavaria, Germany). Ayeta (focus group no. 4, Bavaria, Germany) described walking around in the town where she stayed and 'there was a lady coming towards me. When she saw (...) I was Black she held her nose, then she turned and spit. I just turned to her and told her "God bless you"'. In these focus groups there was a sense that Black refugees are treated differently to other refugees, and that there was what Haritaworn has called a specific 'anti-Black racism in Germany' (Haritaworn 2015, p. 14).

At times, they experienced a combination of homophobia and racism, as Jolly's, Betty's and Winifred's (focus group no. 3, Bavaria) account demonstrate. They were accommodated in a hotel in a small town in south Bavaria, more than 2 h away from Munich, surrounded by mountains. It had been a tourist area before the hotel closed down and reopened to accommodate asylum claimants. They described the town as mainly White and populated by older people: 'We are few Blacks there. And most of them are the natives around there, yeah. They are the natives, and actually not

really young natives. Elderly only. Then maybe their children come once in a while' (Jolly). They told us that within, as well as outside their accommodation, people would assume that the few single Black women housed there were all lesbians. As Jolly described:

Different reasons bring people to Europe, or in Germany. And whenever they get any suspicion about you that you're a lesbian, they tend to backbite, to push you away. There's a way they look at you, as someone who's... as if you're not a person, you get it, right. So discrimination is too high, yeah. And maybe not only from the Blacks, even from the Whites, yeah. Still even in the area where we are putting up right now, it's not easy. People around there, they think that we are contaminating their children, contaminating the area around where we are.

They felt a combination of racism and homophobia in their everyday lives. The women were upset by their experiences. As Winifred explained, they were already suffering from mental health problems, so:

When I find this person and he doesn't want to associate with me, or I'm seated somewhere, you don't want to sit with me, it hurts me. It's like I'm still in my country where I'm neglected for my status.

In shared accommodation, the intersectional dimension of experiences is problematic in particular because claimants do not have the choice of where to live and with whom. This is especially difficult when social identifiers are very visible, which increases the risk of experiencing harassment and violence, as is often the case for non-binary, trans and intersex claimants.

8.4.3 Accommodation of Non-binary, Trans and Intersex Claimants

While some LGBTQ people might be able to hide their SOGI, for non-binary, trans and intersex people this may be considerably harder. Trans claimants are often allocated accommodation according to the sex indicated in their legal documents, so they become very visible and vulnerable to physical, sexual and verbal abuse (Jules, staff member at ILGA-Europe; Kadir, NGO worker, Germany; TGEU 2016, p. 5). From Maryia's (NGO worker) experience, in Germany sometimes trans claimants' self-identification is accepted, but this is not always the case. However, Kadir (NGO worker, Germany) also cautioned that placing trans women in cis-women accommodation, for instance, might not always be the best solution, as it can be difficult for the cis-women (depending on their past experiences). Considering the small number of trans refugees and their vulnerability, Kadir advocated for decentralised housing for them, and reception centres in Lower Saxony, where he works, have increasingly dealt with these cases in more flexible ways, leading to trans claimants obtaining individual accommodation or being offered small flat shares (see also Matthias, social worker; Juliane, public official). At least trans refugees' need for a single room should thus be respected, as well as their wish to be in urban areas,

where support structures and health services for trans claimants are available, and where 'people do not hear for the first time of hormone treatment' (Louis, NGO volunteer, Germany).

As TGEU highlights: 'Using the toilets, showers or common areas can pose a daily risk' to trans claimants' (TGEU 2016, p. 5). As bathrooms are usually binary-gendered (in asylum accommodation as well as in public spaces in general, see Spade 2015, Chap. 3), if people are non-binary or in transition, this can become a topic for conversation and conflict, and claimants' gender may be questioned by staff and other residents (Mariya, NGO worker, Germany). This was the experience of Trudy Ann's partner, who was often challenged when she wanted to use the female bathroom for 'looking like a man'. Both Trudy Ann and her partner usually went to the bathroom together, as they did not feel safe otherwise, also because there were men around (as families were housed in the accommodation centre). Such experiences might be re-traumatising for people who have fled their country of origin because of abuse on grounds of their gender identity. Staff in the camps might also 'out' trans claimants, for instance, when they call out the wrong name/sex (Ibrahim, Germany; Jules, staff member at ILGA-Europe).

In Germany, the trans claimants we interviewed all had negative experiences with asylum accommodation because of being placed in the wrong gendered accommodation and/or because of being housed rurally (also Sect. 8.6). Diana was placed together with three men in accommodation, as her passport revealed her male birth sex. She later received her own room but had to share a kitchen and bathroom. She was so scared of transphobic violence that she went to a friend's house when she wished to have a shower. At night she would receive knocks at her door and people would threaten her. Similarly worrying, Bebars was put in a mixed-gender accommodation centre. He tried to explain with the help of an interpreter that he was not accepted by anyone in the accommodation centre. He also reported this to the welfare office, but was not taken seriously. He felt that the main problem in the accommodation centre was that there was 'no contact person for us [SOGI claimants]'. He tried to explain to staff why it was difficult for him to undress and change clothes in front of the (heterosexual) married couple, who were also from Syria, and with whom he had to share a room. This was especially difficult for him because he wore a bandage around his breasts, 'but they did not care'. He was then moved to a second accommodation facility that was completely for women. Despite putting pressure on the social services every few days to move to another accommodation, nothing happened for 4 months: 'they did not want to do it, I got on their nerves'. When he was finally moved, he was placed in accommodation in a small village, where he was incredibly isolated (Sect. 8.6). Trans claimant Rolla (focus group no. 6, Lower Saxony, Germany) was also accommodated in a small village for some time. The security there felt sorry for her as they saw how people treated her, so they gave her a cat to look after, which she loved. She was glad when she was moved to a big city but here then she experienced a very hurtful transphobic incident, when someone abused her verbally and spat at her on the street.

Also in Italy, shared accommodation is extremely difficult for trans claimants. Kamel lived in small apartment together with five (cis-)men and had to share a room

with one of them. He was scared of his roommate, had a panic attack and couldn't sleep. He told us: 'I spent a year and a half like a wolf. I slept with one eye open and the other one closed. Always with that feeling of risk'. He wore a bandage to tighten his breasts, which should only be used for a maximum of 6 h, but because he did not have any privacy and could not even lock the bathroom, he wore the bandage 24 h a day. He told the housing managers that '[i]n fact, you put me more at risk', as they did not allow locks on the bathroom. Because of wearing the bandage all day, he had developed serious health problems, including not being able to breathe well and feeling hot all the time (Bebars, in Germany, had similar problems). He also witnessed a fight where one of the residents was holding a knife to another resident saying "you're gay, that sucks!". He tried to call the housing manager, but no one answered. Like Bebars (Germany), Kamel did not receive any support in the accommodation centre but rather felt that the managers were 'too ignorant, they don't know what trans means', and were also unable to provide contacts to relevant organisations that could offer specialised support and advice to Kamel. While he did not feel safe inside the accommodation centre, he was also worried about his safety outside the accommodation centre, and feared racist attacks, especially after the general elections on 4 March 2018, which were won by a centre-right coalition led by Matteo Salvini's right-wing League:

That is on the 4th March, I felt sick. I felt again what I felt before in Libya, because I am afraid of going out into the street at night, alone, that someone is beating me. I'm afraid of those people. I mean, if anyone happens to wear a black shirt, I'm scared.

He told us that he also experienced racism at the Pride in Bologna in 2016, where he was on stage with a LGBTIQ+ migrant organisation (MigraBo) and heard two women shouting "first the Italians, go back to your home!" Someone shouted "Vive Salvini!", I felt bad.'

In the UK, the lack of choice was also patent. Christina, for example, was never asked what kind of accommodation they preferred. For almost 3 years they had to share a house with three men, which was 'very, very uncomfortable'. Christina thinks that mixed accommodation centres are not safe for SOGI claimants and that trans claimants should be placed in private accommodation:

It is not safe. I think if you identify as homosexual, you should be living with homosexuals. If you identify as lesbian, you should be living with lesbians. If you identify as trans, you should get your own space. Because you need to feel safe, and comfortable.

Similarly, Janelle was also not consulted about her accommodation preferences. She would have preferred trans or LGBTIQ+ accommodation, but was put in male accommodation because of the male name on her passport. She was housed with three men, 'they tried to like attack me within the house and they were like calling me names'. She reported it to the housing provider G4S, but they did not do anything about these incidents. As she did not feel safe in the house, she stayed mainly in her room.

Not neatly fitting the expected gender performances in cis-gendered accommodation can also be problematic for intersex clients. One of Melisa's (NGO worker, UK) intersex clients, whose passport stated male as their birth sex but presented as

a woman, was put in accommodation facilities with men on more than one occasion, and in each facility faced bullying and sexual harassment:

at some point they [client] had to leave the house in the night and take a walk in the night or try and find a friend who was available where they could stay on their sofa. In some instances they were forced to just stay in the kitchen, you know, to just sit there and wait until the other person slept, so it was a continual harassment and... they tried complaining to different departments within the housing provider, the COMPASS providers, and they were not supported or they didn't get the help that they needed.

Only when Melisa's organisation stepped in, did the Home Office act promptly, and the client was then moved to the organisation's safe accommodation: 'the first thing they said when I went to pick them up, they cried, so much'.

As this section has shown, shared accommodation can be extremely difficult for SOGI claimants, who often try to hide their SOGI because of fear of homophobic and transphobic verbal and physical violence. Hiding becomes more difficult when claimants have partners or when their gender expression does visibly not confirm to strict gender norms. We now want to look at experiences of discrimination and hate crime, not only within reception and accommodation centres, but also in the surrounding areas. It is important to explore these experiences to highlight the intersections of experienced sexism, homophobia, transphobia and racism.

As shown above, in Germany, Italy and the UK, many SOGI participants had difficult experiences of asylum accommodation. In Germany, for some participants these experiences were even more difficult where they were accommodated in extremely rural areas, as we now explain.

8.5 Rural/Urban

When we visited Angel (Germany), it was snowing heavily and we had to walk along a main road to get from the small village where the bus left us to the accommodation centre (the bus that stopped at the centre came only three times per day). Angel shared a flat there with a heterosexual couple and a baby, and with another gay man from Jamaica. Her room was small, containing a bunk bed, a wardrobe and a small table. When Angel's teenage daughter came back from school, she would do her homework and then go to bed as she had nothing else to do. Outside the barracks, there was a path that led into the woods with a sign 'trespassing forbidden, army shooting territory' (Figs. 10 and 11).

Angel told us that they regularly heard shooting, even at three in the morning. Both Angel and her daughter seemed to us to be depressed, and Angel said she felt hopeless. Her claim had been refused and she was waiting for her court hearing. Living so remotely, she could not attend any LGBTIQ+ group gatherings and events. Any visit to a bigger city involved a long and expensive journey with public transport but with no way to get back to the accommodation centre, as the bus only ran until early evening. To go shopping, Angel had to take the bus to the next town and then wait several hours for the bus to return:

Fig. 10 Signs outside accommodation

Fig. 11 ‘Trespassing forbidden, army shooting territory’

When [I arrived to this accommodation], to be honest... I was terrified before I reached here, because I noticed the more I drive, the more landscape I see and the less civilisation I see, you understand? And it's not something that I'm used to. I was born in the city, I was grown in the city, I don't know no other life than city life. (...) Even though I was isolated in Jamaica, it was by choice because I wanted to protect myself and my child. Here, I have no choice. (...) I am from a minority group that go through a lot of negativity, and I am not able to participate in any form of social groups because of my location.

Angel described her surroundings as somewhere even German people find too isolated:

The middle of nowhere. A wilderness, you know? It's like... I don't even know what to say [laughs], because, it's like, I don't even see animals here, you understand? So it's just like basically in the middle of – even Germans, when I give them my address they're like, “Oh you live in the middle of nowhere”, you understand? And they are born Germans.

As Marlen (legal advisor, Germany) put it, it is hard for German LGBTIQ+ people to live in a small village where they do not fit with the heteronormative lifestyles. Consequently, many LGBTIQ+ people who grow up in villages move to bigger cities: ‘and they can easily do that, there are no restrictions; you cannot say that about the refugees, they are very bound and cannot decide freely where they want to live’ (Matthias, social worker). Angel was not even housed in a village, but some miles distant from the closest village. She was the first person we interviewed in Germany who was accommodated so remotely, but during the course of our research we became aware that her situation was, in fact, quite common.

Germany consists of 16 federal states, of which three are city states. When people are allocated to one of the three city states, living remotely is not a significant issue (Kadir, NGO worker; Maryia, NGO worker; Barbara, lawyer), but when they are allocated to one of the 13 non-city states (‘Flächenländer’), they can end up in ‘the middle of nowhere’ (Angel). Submitting an application for a transfer (‘Umverteilungsantrag’) was one of the main support needs, as all NGO workers and some of the lawyers confirmed, however the success rate of such applications was variable. Elias (lawyer in Hessen), for instance, said that when he worked on a claim, if he demonstrated the claimant's family connections and particular vulnerabilities, then it would often be successful. In North Rhine-Westphalia, it was estimated that in about two thirds of the cases a request to be allocated to a bigger city was accepted (Joachim, NGO worker). In contrast, Leon (NGO worker), who worked in the same federal state, had only two claims accepted in 4 years, out of approximately 15–20 submitted. In Lower Saxony, it had also become increasingly difficult to get such requests accepted, and requests seem to take longer than in other federal states (Kadir, NGO worker; Matthias, social worker). One reason for refusals to such requests is likely to be that bigger municipalities are reluctant to take asylum claimants from smaller municipalities, yet at the same time, LGBTIQ+ people usually want to move to the bigger cities (Kadir, NGO worker). Claims for relocation in Bavaria also seemed to have an extremely low likelihood of success. Amis (focus group 2, Bavaria, Germany), for instance, had been offered a place for vocational training (‘Ausbildung’) in a care home in Munich (an area of work where people are very much needed), but was not allowed to move out of ‘the forest’ in

southern Bavaria. As he explained: ‘We people staying in Oberbayern [southern Bavaria], we are not allowed to do Ausbildung [training] in Munich. We have to do it there, but it’s a village. Where to do it from? So it’s a torture, a psychological torture’. Amis was housed in a small container (Fig. 12) together with only a few other asylum claimants. There were only fields around the containers (Fig. 13) and he had to walk for 40 minutes through the forest to get to a bus stop and felt extremely isolated: ‘you can’t even stay there for a week’. In addition, he felt extremely unsafe, as he had received death threats from one of the residents. Although Amis had lived there for one and a half years, he sometimes chose to sleep on the streets in Munich, as he felt safer there.

While NGOs have put pressure on the government and municipalities and some positive changes have been made in some federal states, in many cases, even if the person is experiencing abuse and harassment in rural accommodation, the Regional Administrative Council (‘Regierungspraesidium’) argues that the municipality needs to offer adequate support. So, the Council staff refuse to relocate the individual to a town or city where LGBTIQ+ support is available, on the basis that if they do, then everyone will make such claims (Noah, NGO social worker). As Leon (NGO worker) argued, the situation for SOGI claimants is very different from other

© Amis

Fig. 12 Accommodation in Bavaria – containers

© Amis

Fig. 13 Accommodation in Bavaria – field

refugees, as they usually do not have a connection to their ethnic community, and often even try to avoid members of their ethnic community:

Because of the break with the community of origin, what gays have been doing for centuries, or the queer community, LGBTIQ community for centuries, we've sort of built our structures. This is our family. And one must not separate people from this lifeline. Because the inner peace, the identity, the self-realisation, which one needs in order to provide the integration performance that is expected, depends on that. When I find myself in my environment, when I can be at peace with myself by being able to reflect myself in my environment, then I have a self-confident sexuality, then I protect myself, then I have access to information, then I am enlightened, then I exercise my rights, then I have the mind free to integrate, because the pressure from the outside is manageable. And that offers, so to speak, the connection to the community. And that's what people need to understand in social care. Social care must take this into account. It is not a privilege to enable an LGBTIQ refugee to access his community, but I don't, so to speak, cut the lifeblood.

How that 'lifeblood' was cut became obvious in many of our participants' accounts, who also described how the social isolation they experienced from living in rural areas impacted on their mental health. For instance, after the initial reception centre, Zouhair (focus group no. 6, Lower Saxony, Germany) was housed alone in a two-bedroom flat in a small village in Lower Saxony, about 16 km away from the next bigger town. Only 50–70 people lived there, and half of the houses were empty: 'Well, they are all empty. Houses are empty. Who wants to live there?

Nobody!’ His social isolation was striking: ‘And I just went crazy, because I did not have any contact with anyone. I had to sit at home all day’. Public transport was expensive but there was not even a supermarket in the village, so Zouhair had to take a bus or walk for 30–40 min to the next village. He stayed there for 11 months, without an internet connection or any way of learning German. He explained that LGBTIQ+ refugees’ social isolation is exacerbated by not fitting in:

because for Germans, we are refugees, we are refugees like the others or asylum seekers like the others, but for the others [refugees] we are ... we are [laughing] gays and lesbians and inter and trans, so we do not belong to the German society (...) for other refugees we are, we are not refugees. We also do not belong to this parallel society. So we are totally isolated. (...) As queer refugees, I think we are out of category, so we do not belong to one, or the other, it’s just, it’s difficult.

Zouhair’s expression of queer refugees being ‘out of category’ reminds us of Crenshaw’s (1989) description of Black women falling through the gaps. In her seminal 1989 article, where she coined the term intersectionality, she talked about anti-discrimination law not suiting Black women because they experience discrimination on grounds of being women *and* being Black (Chap. 3). We can see from Zouhair’s account that queer refugees’ experiences are shaped by being queer *and* being refugees, meaning they belong neither to the refugee community nor to the host community, and this is particularly evident in rural locations. For Zouhair, ‘we are victims in our countries, and we are victims here as well’. At the time of the interview, Zouhair was working for a queer refugee group and estimated that 70–80% of those who come for support bring up issues related to accommodation in isolated locations: ‘People are always isolated and far away from everything, they have no contact. They are alone’. He witnessed how people become depressed and unhappy without any support. One group member travelled for 4 h to attend group meetings simply to have some contact with people he could relate to: ‘And if you are in a small village and everyone knows that you are gay or lesbian or intersex or trans, that is, that’s really terrible, believe me’.

Living rurally, opportunities to learn German, work, or volunteer for an organisation and socialise with Germans were limited: ‘So it’s literally being dead there as you wait. Yeah. You can’t do anything’ (Lynn, focus group no. 4, Bavaria, Germany). More crucially, claimants who were refused needed to find legal representation for their appeal; it is far harder to find a lawyer with expertise in SOGI claims in rural areas. It is also difficult to find romantic or sexual partners. Trans claimant Rolla (focus group no. 6, Lower Saxony, Germany) was lucky to find a partner in her rural accommodation, but because of limited mobility, most SOGI claimants housed in rural areas find it impossible. Yet, during the asylum process they are often asked whether they have sexual relationships (Chap. 7). As Nana (focus group 3, Bavaria, Germany) described: ‘We can’t go to parties because like me, in the interview they say I have to look for a girlfriend. Every time I go to look for a girlfriend when I’m in the village, how am I going to do that?’

As Gisela (lawyer) and many other participants argued, when allocating people to accommodation centres, the importance of a protected environment and access to LGBTIQ+ support groups, etc., needs to be taken into consideration. As Ibrahim

explained, SOGI claimants have ‘already faced isolation because of their sexuality (...) they came here to have at least a social life’. Where people are housed also makes a difference if they experience difficulties *within* the accommodation centre. In a city, people can then, at least, be out all day and keep themselves busy, but in a small place:

you have to stay with those people, you have to always hear what they say, or their comments (...) It is easier for you, when you are connected in the city, you can escape the reality of the camp. You can go out, you can go to organisations, to groups. You can go anywhere. Just walk around. But if you are in the middle of nowhere, there is nothing to do (Ibrahim).

Veronica and Julia faced homophobic comments in the reception and accommodation centres where they were housed in a rural area, but when they were accommodated in Cologne they received support within the gay area: ‘you do not feel alone’ (Veronica and Julia). Similarly, Milad explained that, for the first one and a half years of his time in Germany, while he lived in a rural location, he did not see, let alone visit, a gay club:

I did not even know something like that exists in Berlin. After that, uuuuuhh! For example, [name of club]. There is a disco, cafe only for gay and lesbian people... Oh, awesome – I have something like that – so it was amazing for me. But after a while, I see half Berlin is gay-friendly or LGBT-friendly. You can see the flyer on the REWE [supermarket] entrance or the Lidl [supermarket] entrance. You feel better: “Oh, that’s nice, I’m happy about that” and so.

For SOGI claimants, being accommodated in rural areas is especially difficult due to their intersectional experiences of homophobia, racism and transphobia (Marlen, legal advisor; Mariya, NGO worker). However, being located in a town or city was no guarantee that claimants felt safe (Sect. 8.4). For instance, Lutfor (UK) experienced homophobia and racism in Manchester, hearing things like ‘go back to your country’ and ‘look at the ugly fags’. Janelle (UK) talked about her experiences of transphobia on the streets of Sheffield, which might not be separate from other forms of hate crime, as TGEU highlights:

While xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia are on the rise [in Europe], trans asylum seekers and refugees are even more vulnerable to discrimination or violence. (...) Trans asylum seekers and refugees often face intersectional discrimination on the basis of their gender identity and expression, gender, race or ethnicity, religious background, migrant status and perhaps other factors as well. (TGEU 2016, p. 8).

With regard to being accommodated in rural areas, we have focused on examples from Germany, as in Italy and the UK not many participants discussed this issue. In Italy, some NGO workers and lawyers mentioned the issue of SOGI claimants being accommodated in rural areas, like Anna (LGBTIQ+ group volunteer) who said that SOGI claimants ‘are scattered, lost in places that are not accessible by public transport’. Being housed rurally was seen as problematic especially because of the difficulties of accessing LGBTIQ+ support and attending events (Anna, Antonella, and Jonathan, all LGBTIQ+ group volunteers; Livio, lawyer). It was generally seen as counter-productive for integration to accommodate claimants in rural areas: ‘[B]ecause many structures are completely isolated from society, so how can we

involve migrants, integrate them if in a year they are dispersed in the mountains' (Susanna, social worker). A number of SOGI claimants told us that they were accommodated in small towns or villages (Diarra, Gbona, Ken, Kennedy, Odosa), and they briefly talked about issues such as not being able to access LGBTIQ+ events (Odosa, Italy) or organisations (Ken), and having poor mobile phone connections (Kennedy). However, they did not talk in depth about these experiences and some, like Diarra liked living in a small town.

In the UK, some claimants had been dispersed to smaller towns, but these generally had good transport links and therefore mobility and accessing LGBTIQ+ support and groups was not a significant issue. However, here we heard many accounts of homeless and destitution, to which we turn now.

8.6 Homelessness and Destitution

When we analysed our fieldwork data, it was shocking to see how many of our participants had experienced homelessness during or after their asylum claims in the UK, where destitution can happen at four points for claimants:

on arrival, before making a claim; when they claim asylum and there are administrative errors and S95 [section 95 subsistence support] doesn't come through; during the application, when problems arise including trying to live on a very small S95 sum; and after the decision – even if it's positive, when support ends, but especially for people who are Appeal Rights Exhausted, the majority of whom become destitute (Gareth, consultant, UK).

For those who are classified as Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) but remain in the UK, the risk of becoming destitute is high following the removal of section 4 support under the Immigration Act 2016. Research by the Refugee Council showed that a high number of those using their destitution services came from five countries: Sudan/South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Somalia and Zimbabwe. With the exception of DRC, homosexuality is illegal in all these countries (Ramón Mendos 2019; Refugee Council 2012). While issues of homelessness and exploitation are likely to be common to all asylum claimants, they take a specific form for SOGI claimants. SOGI claimants who do find themselves ARE but stay in the UK are more likely than others to find it difficult to seek support from families and community organisations, where they may experience discrimination. They may also be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation when they become destitute (Meggs, focus group no. 1, Manchester, UK; Melisa, NGO worker).

The participants who told us about their experiences with homelessness, stayed in different places over night. Selim slept a couple of nights in a cemetery; Mary and Zaro were homeless for 1 month and slept in a park in London; Meggs spent a night on a night bus, when she was evacuated from her accommodation. Lutfor was evicted from his house, after his claim was refused and before he submitted a fresh claim. He was homeless and slept in different parks; in 4 days he lost everything, including his papers. He talked about being out of place as an Asian person:

oh, I mean, it is a real experience when I was living in the street. I saw people around me who are homeless, nobody is Indian or Asian, and you know in homeless people they have a like, community like this, but I was outcast from this, so I was travelling on my own.

When he submitted his papers, he was allowed back into his old accommodation: 'Same house. When I was homeless my room was empty, but I don't know why they made me homeless. When I went to court appeal to London, they send me to the same home'.

Research on housing and homelessness experiences of LGBT people seeking asylum in 2009 found that SOGI asylum claimants were at a particular disadvantage, as 'most interviewees lived with people who would take them into their own accommodation on a rent-free basis, knowing their sexuality and often expecting sexual favours in return' (Bell and Hansen 2009, p. 16). Bell and Hansen's report (2009) demonstrates the importance of collecting data on homelessness from an intersectional perspective; however, there is no more recent research on LGBTIQ asylum claimants' and refugees' experiences of homelessness. A survey commissioned by The Guardian in 2017 found general high levels of destitution and homelessness among newly-recognised refugees, but did not discuss any SOGI-related experience (Refugee Council 2017). A report commissioned by the Metropolitan Community Church of North London (Dyck 2019, pp. 12, 48) touches upon housing issues, and especially SOGI claimants' fear of being 'outed' when staying with family or people who are not LGBTIQ+-affirming and potentially losing their accommodation.

As Melisa (NGO worker) explained, when SOGI claimants experience violence and harassment in asylum accommodation, they often prefer to leave their accommodation and be homeless, as they are afraid to report the abuse suffered and risk having to continue to live in the same accommodation if no action is taken to address the issues. People may also be afraid to report to the police because of their experiences in their country of origin (also Sabrina, NGO worker, Germany). Many of our participants were vulnerable to exploitation and abuse in order to keep a roof over their head:

not only are they homeless, but they also face sexual exploitation... you know, just for a roof over their head. In terms of women, we have seen a lot of domestic servitude, where LGBT women are looking after children, doing domestic chores, and just for a roof over their head. Sometimes they are given a little bit of money but sometimes they are not (Melisa, NGO worker).

SOGI claimants may be afraid to access general housing charities, where they would have to disclose their sexuality or be worried that they would have to share accommodation with people who are homophobic (Debbie, NGO worker). Trans claimant Amber was homeless for two-and-a-half months after falling out with their ex-boyfriend. They slept at friends, strangers, moved around, and sometimes did not even have a blanket: 'I did get involved with sex work and asked strangers for money to help me get by, it was one of the darkest time in my life if I'm honest'. Kamel (Italy) also risked being homeless because, as a trans claimant, accommodation centres based on a binary ratio were not able to fit them in.

Irma (UK) had to leave NASS accommodation and became homeless because her benefits had been cut and she received a letter ordering her to move out: 'I was crying. Nowhere to go. It was hard. And it is a journey'. Before becoming homeless, Lutfur lived in a houseshare without paying rent, and cooked and cleaned for his housemates in exchange for board and lodging, explaining that 'sometimes we can even offer our services for free, just so that we can get accommodation' (focus group 6, Manchester). Sadia (UK) lived in someone's garden house and did housework for them and looked after their children. Selim (UK) had to move around a lot, was homeless, stayed in hostels and people's houses and then met a 'gay guy' who 'was quite crazy but of course I had to swallow the [pride], you know, I had to, I needed a place to stay, so even if he is crazy I had nothing else to do'.

Meggs (focus group no. 1, Manchester, UK) talked to other young bisexual and lesbian women in preparation for a conference presentation she was giving on the topic and was shocked to hear about their experiences of destitution:

And in those cases, on the refusals the judge will have clearly said, "I believe she has been raped", "I believe she is HIV+", it is sensitive issues that they believe on, but still they kick that kind of a person out of the accommodation.

Women would often end up in abusive relationships 'because you have got nowhere to go, you just have to put your head down and just go along with everything they do' (Meggs, focus group no. 1, Manchester; see also Chap. 9). Many other participants in the UK would have ended up homeless, and in potentially exploitative situations, if they had not received help from friends and LGBTIQ+ or LGBTIQ+ friendly organisations (Diamond, Ibrahim A., Edith, Miria, Martin, Jayne, Ximena, Stephina).

One of the key triggers for destitution is the transition period, after people are granted international protection: 'So, on the Monday you get your letter from the Home Office saying you have been granted leave to remain. On the Tuesday you have a party, a month later you are homeless' (Oliver, NGO worker). In fact, for many of our participants, issues with accommodation and homelessness were not resolved once they received refugee status, but in some cases, were made worse, as we now discuss.

8.7 Housing After the Asylum Claim Process

Most research on SOGI asylum focuses on the time during the asylum process, but it is also important to look at what happens when SOGI claimants are finished with their asylum claims. In all three countries life is not necessarily becoming easier after the asylum claim.

In Germany, the social isolation that SOGI claimants face during the asylum process often continues after their claims have been successful due to the residence obligation legislation (Sect. 8.2). The requirement to stay in the same municipality where the claim was processed (as it is the case in some federal states) is especially

difficult for SOGI refugees (Marlen, legal advisor). As Noah (NGO social worker) described: 'I do not want to live in [town x] as a gay man. I would perish there. There is nothing there'. Again, under special circumstances, people can request permission to move to a different area. For instance, at the time of the interview, Bebars, a trans claimant with refugee status, had been waiting for 4 months to receive a response to his relocation request. He regularly had to travel almost 3 h to see his doctor (for hormone treatment, etc.), who was based in the city where he would like to move to. He had also signed up for a German language class where he lived, but had been waiting for almost a year and still had not been given a place.

The downside of living in larger cities however is that it is generally difficult for anyone to find affordable and acceptable housing, but SOGI refugees face multiple layers of discrimination in the housing market (Frank S., legal advisor; Diana, Ibrahim, Milad, Zouhair). They may have to stay in asylum accommodation for years (Ibrahim), if they do not find alternative accommodation, and there is often no social housing available (Finn, representative of a German municipality). In addition, council housing is tied to the legally established rental levels ('Mietspiegel'), but property owners often request more for their flats (Juliane, public official).

While all refugees are likely to face discrimination, for SOGI refugees there are often additional issues, for instance if they are visibly trans (Frank S., legal advisor), or when 'there is a mismatch' between their gender expression and their ID document, thus trans refugees face more challenges than other refugees, or other trans people, when trying to find housing because of the intersection of their gender, their legal status, their race, ethnicity or religion (TGEU 2016, p. 10).

Diana was looking for a flat in Berlin for about 7 months after being granted international protection. She said that there were always around 40 people at the flat viewings and 'obviously Germans were in front'. When she finally found a flat, she told us it was because she had an advantage, as the estate agent was a lesbian. In larger and more expensive German cities, the situation is particularly difficult, as 'the housing market looks very bad anyway and obviously refugees have no chance at all' (Thomas, NGO volunteer). As William described it:

we the people who are Black, it's very hard to get a house to stay. To the extent that when you get a house, an apartment up there, and the Markler [estate agent] tells the property owner that "you know what, the person who is coming to this house is a Black man, or a Black woman or a Black family", they say "eh, eh, eh, I don't have a house.

Mayi (focus group no. 4, Bavaria) also thought that once you have been granted international protection, 'you look for a room. They never give you [one] if you are Black, they say you are dirty, they don't want you dirtying their house. Then you can never get a house'. As Diana described, the situation is rendered more difficult because refugees have a blue (rather than red) passport and only 3-year residence permit, and property owners are ignorant and fearful of this type of documentation.

There is a dearth of organisations specifically tasked with helping (SOGI) refugees to find housing (Diana, Alphaeus, William), but the LGBTIQ+ community can sometimes help in this regard. Rainbow Refugees Munich have managed to get

some of their members into housing through private contacts (Thomas, NGO volunteer). Marhoon had to spend 8 months in the accommodation centre, then LSVD helped him to find a flat through a property owner who was an 'ally'. Marhoon was lucky that when he received refugee status and collected his papers, the public authorities asked him where he wanted to live in the federal state, and he chose the biggest city in the state: 'I think maybe they know in the document that I'm gay and atheist, so they will not send me to a village'.

Houseshares are very common in Germany (called 'Wohngemeinschaft'). Halim, Alphaeus, Fares, Zouhair, Ahmed and Rolla (focus group no. 6, Lower Saxony) all lived in this type of accommodation. Yet, when people are severely traumatised, it is more difficult for them to find a flat or a room in a houseshare, and they then need to stay in asylum accommodation, where they have to share rooms, for a long period, despite the likely negative impact on their mental health and recovery (Frank S., legal advisor).

In Italy, life after being granted international protection may be difficult too. Limited support is provided to refugees unless they are accommodated through SPRAR. Some kind of support is sometimes granted in CAS accommodation, but this depends on the specific CAS. Even when people are supported by SPRAR accommodation, it is not guaranteed that they will be able to find housing. For instance, Alain A. was moved to SPRAR after he was granted refugee status, but he was worried about finding a place where to live: 'And I have seen so many people in the project and they leave, they don't have a place to stay and they stay on the street. And now, I am thinking like, when I leave, where will I go to'. He explained that SPRAR would cover the costs for initial accommodation, but people need to obtain a housing contract. He was worried that because he was so young, he would not be able to obtain one.

Those not moving into SPRAR accommodation on receiving status risk eviction from the reception centre irrespective of the availability of alternative accommodation. Usually claimants have 6 months from being granted international protection to look for alternative accommodation, but we also heard of occasions where claimants had to leave earlier. For instance, Just Me (focus group no. 3, northern Italy) had to leave the reception centre very suddenly:

I wasn't even told I am going to leave, it was just early in the morning, they came with the letter from the Questura [police local headquarters] say that I have to leave today, now. I have to take my bag and things. So strange. Yes, I wasn't informed maybe in three days' time you are going to leave, or I should know what to do. It was so sudden. (...) to say you have to leave the camp, you are going to the city, into the community, without no work, without no place to stay, with nothing, without not even money to even get support yourself or your wellbeing. It is like they are telling you they are exposing you to crime.

In addition, nobody informed Just Me that he could apply for a place at SPRAR. He added that he was 'strong enough not to force myself into doing something, into committing crime or going against the law. But it is not easy'. Once homeless, he tried to survive with the help of friends and his supporting group, and then lived on a farm, where he worked (focus group no. 3, northern Italy). During the focus group, his dire situation and the pain that he felt recounting this experience

was evident. His eyes were empty and every word he pronounced was followed by silence. Everyone in the group was emotionally affected by his account.

Many claimants also thought that because of racism, it was more difficult for refugees to find housing. Silver said that he would like to find a job and a room in a houseshare, but thought that this would be difficult as a Black gay refugee:

I mean, if I were an Italian, when I see Blacks, maybe like they do things that are bad, maybe then I have to be afraid. I do the same. Whites think that Blacks are all the same, but it is not. There are Blacks who are better than others, but Italians think they are all the same.

Indeed, Giulia (LGBTIQ+ group volunteer) said that their organisation has witnessed ‘many young people who have obtained the documents to whom nobody rents, even if they have a job, because they are Black’. Kamel also described how some private property owners said ‘we rent to Italians’ and ‘only to Italians’. Cyrus (focus group no. 2, northern Italy) described accompanying a friend to rent housing, but the man who showed them the accommodation said to them ‘the owner of the house told me not to give the house to foreigners, to Blacks, not to give the house to Blacks’, which Cyrus promptly qualified as discriminatory and abnormal.

In the UK, housing problems are not necessarily resolved when SOGI claimants are granted international protection. The transition period can be especially difficult for claimants in the UK, who, as mentioned above, have only 28 days to leave their asylum accommodation. Debbie and Gary (NGO workers) explained that sometimes official documentation does not come through in time for the person to move to the general benefits system. There are other obstacles too, for instance, delays in issuing the UK identity card without which individuals cannot access housing and benefits. Refugees are likely to find it difficult to rent accommodation in the private sector following the extension of immigration responsibilities to private landlords (Home Office 2016). A survey by the Residential Landlords Association in 2018 found that ‘half of landlords are now less likely to consider renting to someone without a British passport because of the government’s Right to Rent policy’ (Smith 2017). In March 2019, the UK High Court ruled that this legislation was incompatible with Article 14 read with Article 8 of the ECHR.¹³

When their asylum support stops many claimants become homeless and have to turn to friends and family – something which may be harder for SOGI minorities, leaving them more dependent on food banks and charities (Basedow and Doyle 2016, p. 43). Research with 50 lesbian and gay refugees in London and Manchester found the majority living below the poverty line (Micro Rainbow International 2013). Most reported feeling discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation both in their country of origin and the UK. The isolation resulting from being member of a sexual minority can lead to low self-esteem, depression or other mental health problems (Micro Rainbow International 2013). For many individuals:

¹³ *R (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants) Claimant and Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2019] EWHC 452 (Admin). Appeal against this decision was allowed in *The Secretary of State for the Home Department v R (on the application of) Joint Council for The Welfare of Immigrants* [2020] EWCA Civ 542 (21 April 2020).

the land of opportunity merely represents a downward social mobility ladder. It emerged from the study that often the material circumstances and conditions to live a “dignified life” in the new country were far worse than those the refugee had in their country of origin (Micro Rainbow International 2013, p. 28).

The dispersal policy is also problematic here. SOGI claimants might have established social support networks and are then dispersed and moved away from that source of support: ‘So you could end up being quite isolated in a small town somewhere just because of the vagaries of the system’ (Gary, NGO worker). In addition, when applying for council housing in a particular area, people need to demonstrate ties to the community, but if they have only lived for 2 years in that area, they will not be eligible for council housing and will then need to find private accommodation (Melisa, NGO worker).

Thus, life does not necessarily become easier once SOGI claimants are granted international protection. Short timeframes to leave asylum accommodation makes life hard especially in Italy and the UK, while in all three countries they may face transphobia and racism on the housing market. Separate SOGI accommodation may help to make life a little easier for SOGI claimants, especially during, but also after the asylum process.

8.8 SOGI Accommodation

Because of the discrimination SOGI claimants experience in shared accommodation, most participants thought that ‘[t]o open centres for only LGBT community, it is one of the best ideas. Yes, it is one of the best ideas, because it is an environment where they will feel safe’ (Alain A., Italy). In our European-wide survey for people who support SOGI claimants, 65% of the respondents considered the provision of separate accommodation for LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum or who have been granted asylum to be a good idea (8% did not think so, and 27% were not sure). All three of our case countries have some LGBTIQ+ accommodation established, however limited, and some of our participants had experience of living in such type of accommodation (Michael, UK; Amber, UK; Mahmoud, Germany; Prince Emrah, Germany).

In Germany, since 2015 NGOs have put pressure on the federal governments to fund specific LGBTIQ+ accommodation projects and in many cities such projects have been established. The largest of these is an LGBTIQ+ accommodation centre in Berlin, run by the NGO Schwulenberatung (‘Gay Counselling’), which accommodates 122 SOGI claimants (Nina, legal advisor). Other significant LGBTIQ+ accommodation centres are located in Dresden and Leipzig, which each accommodate approximately 100 SOGI claimants, and in Chemnitz, which accommodates approximately 80 SOGI claimants (Thomas, NGO volunteer). In other cities, such as Frankfurt am Main, Cologne and Hannover, there are either ‘official’ accommodation centres or beds in flats for SOGI asylum claimants, and in some other cities there are unofficial arrangements to the same effect (Awadalla and Rajanayagam

2016; Benirschke 2016; Queer.de 2017; The Local 2016). In Cologne, SOGI claimants are seen as a vulnerable group and specific flats are offered, accommodating 20–25 people in total (Ibrahim). Hannover accommodates nine SOGI claimants in smaller flats (Kadir, NGO worker; Matthias, social worker; Juliane, public official), and Frankfurt am Main has an accommodation centre for SOGI claimants that accommodates 21 SOGI claimants and with social workers based there (one full-time equivalent, according to Knud, NGO worker). In some of these accommodation centres people need to share rooms (Berlin, Frankfurt am Main), and as participants argued, the aim should then be to move people on as quickly as possible into private accommodation, as shared accommodation, whoever one's room-mate, is 'just an extreme burden for all people and therefore also for LGBTI and maybe even in particular for LGBTI, having to share a room with people over such a long period of time' (Nina, legal advisor).

Specific LGBTIQ+ accommodation was not supported in all federal states. For instance, the Bavarian government did not provide it. In Nuremberg, there was only a small amount of LGBTIQ+ accommodation (20 places), and the city of Munich had agreed to create 19 places for LGBTIQ+ claimants (in smaller flats), but had only made eight available at the time of our fieldwork. This was a very small allocation in comparison to other federal states (Thomas, NGO volunteer).

However, claimants who had lived in SOGI accommodation facilities did not always have positive experiences. For instance, Prince Emrah (Germany) experienced physical violence in the SOGI accommodation centre in Berlin, and had their nose broken by another resident. They were critical of the LGBTIQ+ accommodation centre and said that while they had faced discrimination in the general accommodation centre, in the LGBTIQ+ centre it had been worse. Mahmoud had also lived in LGBTIQ+ accommodation for 18 months. He told us that he felt that not everyone there was a member of a SOGI minority, and that he had lots of problems with other residents (Awadalla and Rajanayagam 2016; Benirschke 2016; Queer.de 2017; The Local 2016).

Some participants favoured smaller LGBTIQ+-specific accommodation, for example, flats or houseshares (Frank S., legal advisor; Kadir, NGO worker). This was the approach taken in Hannover and Cologne, where the 'idea was to have separate flats in the city, so they [residents] feel integrated, they feel they are in a home place, but they have social workers who always check up on them' (Ibrahim). And although in Germany we learned of many more SOGI asylum accommodation projects than in Italy and the UK, participants still felt that the LGBTIQ+ accommodation that existed was insufficient.

In Italy, two reception projects specifically for SOGI minorities have been developed by the two main Italian LGBTIQ+ NGOs. A proposal by the transgender organisation MIT – Movimento Identità Transessuale ('Transsexual Identity Movement') has led to the opening of the first facility for transgender asylum claimants and refugees in Italy (QMagazine 2017). The project 'Raise the Difference – Accogli la differenza' was funded by local and central authorities, including the national anti-discrimination office (UNAR). MIT is in charge of the management of the centre and assists, together with the social cooperative Camelot, in hosting

asylum claimants during and after the RSD procedure. While it is the first European reception centre dedicated to people claiming asylum on grounds of their gender identity and is part of the SPRAR reception system, it does not seem to be permanent (its contract being regularly renewed on a temporary basis). Moreover, it can only host a few claimants and by no means meets the needs of trans claimants in the whole of Italy.¹⁴ The second SOGI accommodation project in Italy aims to open a reception facility based on collaboration between local authorities and the NGO Arcigay (national umbrella LGBTIQ+ rights platform). Apart from these two initiatives, there is a centre already open in the northern Italy, run by the social cooperative Kaleidoscop, but it caters only for gay men and is not reserved for those claiming international protection (it also hosts Italian gay men disowned by their families, for instance).¹⁵ Moreover, this centre too has limited capacity.

In the UK, in 2017 the NGO Micro Rainbow International opened its first safe house for SOGI claimants and refugees in London, with a second safe house subsequently established in the West Midlands.¹⁶ The demand for this accommodation exceeds availability, and there is a waiting list. After being homeless for 2 months, Amber was offered a space at one of the Micro Rainbow accommodation facilities, 'where it's all safe and for the first time in months I could inhale the air with a clear head, because it is with other LGBT asylum seekers and refugees and I don't have to worry about my safety anymore'. Melisa (NGO worker) talked about the importance of their accommodation for their clients. For instance, one of the clients who moved in told them that they 'can't believe I am in a space where I can finally be free to be myself'. They also said that 'I couldn't sleep when I was there [previous accommodation], because the other person had the bed opposite and they kept wondering if they are going to wake up and attack them'. Melisa (NGO worker) explained that the organisation first aimed for a larger accommodation facility, but smaller flats had the advantage that they were less visible.

In general, many of the asylum claimant and refugee participants were in favour of LGBTIQ+ specific accommodation to feel safe and not have to hide their SOGI (Ham and Stephen, focus group no. 2, Bavaria, Germany; Ken, Kennedy, Odosa, Gbona, Buba, Moses, Mamaka, all in Italy; Nice guy, focus group no. 1, Italy), and many of the NGO workers were supportive of such projects (Antonella, Diego, Riccardo and Giulia, all LGBTIQ+ group volunteers, Italy; Mara, lawyer, Italy). As one survey respondent argued:

LGBTQI asylum seekers need to have a place where they can feel safe and supported; this is often not the case where they are placed in NASS housing, with potentially homophobic housemates, a situation which contributes to further stress and sometimes mental health problems (S130, LGBTIQ+ organisation member, UK).

¹⁴No official information is, however, available, due to the choice of the MIT – the association that manages this centre – to ensure the privacy of the guests (especially in light of the new political context).

¹⁵This information has been collected during a conversation with Giorgio Dell'Amico, SOGICA Advisory Board member, who has been directly involved in these projects.

¹⁶<https://microrainbow.org/housing/>.

Some participants argued that accommodation specifically for trans claimants was also important (Celeste, social worker, Italy; Kamel, Italy). Kamel (Italy) felt that because of their heightened visibility, trans claimants are in particular need of separate accommodation:

It's something I often say – we trans people need a special structure for us. Not a male structure, not a feminine structure. I will not accept to fit into a feminine structure, but neither will I be in a male structure.

There was also some caution expressed that the visibility of larger LGBTIQ+ centres might increase the risk of violence, if homophobic or right-wing groups find out about their location (Maryia, NGO worker, Germany). In the focus group discussions we held, there were different opinions on LGBTIQ+ housing. While in some groups, participants cheered enthusiastically and applauded the idea (focus groups no. 3 and 4, Bavaria, Germany), or generally liked the idea (focus groups no. 2, 3 and 4, northern Italy), in others there was less consensus. For instance, in focus group no. 1 in Hesse, Germany, Emroy said that after having lived with three heterosexual men who would make homophobic comments, and worrying whether he would wake up the next day, he would be happy to live in LGBTIQ+ accommodation. For Sandy, in contrast, LGBTIQ+ housing was not so important; it was more important to be housed near LGBTIQ+ organisations, groups and people. In other focus groups, it was also argued that the visibility of LGBTIQ+ accommodation centres may make them unsafe (focus group no. 4, northern Italy; Nelo, Italy), and that it should not be mandatory for SOGI claimants to be separately housed (focus group no. 2, northern Italy).

As well as those who were undecided, there were also some voices against the creation of separate accommodation centres for SOGI claimants. For instance, for Siri (Italy) the need was not obvious, as in Italy, the same rules and regulations about how to behave apply to everyone. Giulio (LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy) also argued that when there are problems in a reception centre, more work needs to be done in that centre. In his view, segregating SOGI claimants would also give a wrong impression: 'an LGBT person does not relate all his life with LGBT people'. He agreed that there needed to be accommodation for particular vulnerable claimants, but that this should focus on an 'all-round vulnerability... not only linked to being [a member of a] SOGI [minority]'. Silvana (judge, Italy) was also against the idea as 'it would ghettoise them'. Instead, there should be 'cultural mediators' in the centres, who 'are indispensable to try to mediate the differences that are still huge', not only in terms of SOGI but also in terms of religion, politics and other differences that occur between any individuals forced to share living space. Others saw the main problem as simply that of shared asylum accommodation: 'I think people whenever possible should get out of camps as soon as possible, because it's not good for people, it's a solution but it's a temporary solution, and it doesn't help people feel like their safety and individuality' (Halim, Germany).

SOGI refugee housing is created on the basis of residents sharing a common SOGI, thus being a purposefully constructed sexualised space (Chap. 3). Yet, these spaces are not only sexualised but also gendered, racialised, classed, and so on, and

organisations providing SOGI housing often do not pay sufficient attention to the intersecting identities of the people living in these facilities. As Juliane (public official) described:

And then we realised that these are all gay men, but that's the only thing that connects them! These are also different people. Since we did not think about it in the beginning, that these are also different people from different countries of origin, what just connects them is that they are just gay, and they also handled it quite differently.

Some of the NGO workers we interviewed stressed the point that SOGI asylum claimants and refugees are not a homogenous group and that there are differences related to language, education, etc. Even having eight people living in a flat (like in Hannover) can be challenging, similarly to a student houseshare (Kadir, NGO worker). In other SOGI accommodation centres, it was also reported that people sometimes did not get on with each other. Louis (NGO volunteer) described potential tensions within the community of SOGI refugees – between gay men and trans people for instance, owing to preconceptions about gender roles. So, from an intersectional perspective, such differences between SOGI claimants need to be born in mind and duly considered. As in general, it '[d]epends on the situation; some feel safe[r] in separate housing some don't; it should be offered and then be up to the person' (S141, LGBTIQ+ organisation member, Germany).

Rather than establishing SOGI accommodation projects as akin to 'ghettos' (Chiara, NGO worker, Italy), some participants suggested establishing LGTIQ+-friendly, rather than LGBTIQ+ accommodation (Nicola, LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy). Some participants preferred mixed accommodation to help SOGI claimants integrate with wider society (Celeste, social worker, Italy; Marhoon, Germany; Nicola, LGBTIQ+ group volunteer, Italy; William, Germany), or suggested LGBTIQ+ accommodation as only a short-term or temporary measure (Alphaeus, Germany; Halim, Germany; Mariya, NGO worker, Germany). In fact, the LGBTIQ+ accommodation centre in Berlin was intended as just such a temporary solution for claimants in the asylum process, but became a longer-term solution for individuals unable to find move-on accommodation or needing continuing social and psychological support (Nina, legal advisor, Germany).

Focus group no. 5 in southern Italy began with members agreeing with the idea of LGBTIQ+ accommodation centres, but concerns developed, with some even arguing that such provision would constitute discrimination:

Alain B.: Well, for me, the idea is that it's a good idea, to design a reception centre for gays, but if we design a reception centre only for gays, it wants to say that the population does not agree that they accept you as you are, so it is not quite easy. For me it's not good.

Dev: Indeed! It means that the population is still homophobic! We cannot accept everything, we cannot force others to live together.

Alain B: It's not good.

Dev: It's discrimination.

Although not everyone was in favour of specific LGBTIQ+ accommodation, the majority of our participants felt that the current provisions that exist were not sufficient. Like any other LGBTIQ+ space, the construction of these spaces is on the basis of a shared sexual identity and can foster certain forms of homonormativity. We now look at very different kinds of spaces, namely spaces of incarceration, and how these were experienced by our participants.

8.9 Detention

As we have addressed in Chaps. 4 and 5, questions of vulnerability are paramount when looking at issues of detention. In our survey, 23% of SOGI claimants were detained; 15% for less than a month and 8% for more than 6 months. There were stark differences with regard to the experiences of detention in the three case countries. This is no surprise as Germany and Italy are both bound by the current Reception directive, which restricts the use of detention, while the UK is bound by the original Reception directive, which does not refer to detention (Chap. 4).

As discussed in Chap. 4, detention is not a significant issue in Italy except for the situation of ‘irregular migrants’ in centres of identification and expulsion. Similarly, in Germany, detention is not a widespread practice, only affecting a very limited number of asylum claimants. Amongst our participants in Germany, only a few people had had experiences of detention (Emroy, Junior and Sandy, focus group no. 1, Hesse; Angel; Shany; Trudy Ann), and in most cases they were detained only briefly at the time of their arrival. One of these participants was from Morocco, and the others were from Jamaica. The maximum time someone had spent in detention was 2 weeks. While most participants did not have positive experiences of accommodation overall, those participants who had been detained were positive about the conditions and the staff in detention centres. For instance, Angel was detained for a week at Frankfurt airport after she arrived, and astonishingly she described this experience as the best she had with regard to living conditions:

Since I’ve been here the best living condition was Frankfurt, even though that was the detention centre. And yet, still, that was the cleanest, the most, under the circumstances, the most comfortable, the most liveable, everything. Even though you couldn’t go out on the road and see people.

This was confirmed by other participants who had had similar experiences (focus group no. 1, Hesse). Junior – who stayed in the detention centre in Frankfurt airport for about 2 weeks (sharing a room with other gay men) – said that whereas he felt safe and ‘there were people there who protected me and everything’, this changed once he arrived at the reception centre, where ‘it was like, no-one cares about me’. The difference was that in the detention centre there was a church group, security officers and workers ‘that treat us or treat me how I’m suppose... as a human, how I feel I’m supposed to be treated. So yes, I felt like I was safe’. Junior also felt that staff in the detention centres ‘looked out’ for gay people and protected them.

Participants in the focus group agreed that they were well looked after in the detention centre, something that was not the case in subsequent accommodation facilities. Emroy told us he thought that if the security or police officials from his detention centre had made the decision on his claim, he would have been granted international protection. Sandy had wanted to take the interpreter she had in the detention centre with her to the main interview, because the interpreter spoke:

perfect English, she explained everything to me and let me understand that, you know, “this is what we’re going to do, this is what we want to know, you don’t have to go into details, leave that for your big interview, just tell us your main reason why...”. She was really nice.

Trudy Ann was in the same detention centre with her girlfriend for a week after they arrived: ‘It was kind of okay, but worrying. Feel like a prisoner. But then we have to go through that process anyway’. Some of the other people in the centre ‘would make up them faces’ when they saw them, but a security person told her not to ‘pay them any mind because [in] Germany [being LGBTIQ+] is not taboo’.

In the UK, detention is far more widespread than in Germany or Italy. Moreover, the treatment of immigration detainees in general has long been a concern, also gaining media attention.¹⁷ For instance, an undercover documentary in 2015 by Channel 4 News highlighted the mistreatment of women detainees at Yarl’s Wood and staff referring to them as ‘animals’, ‘beasties’ and ‘b**ches’ (Channel 4 News 2015). The UN special rapporteur on violence against women was refused entry to Yarl’s Wood in 2014.¹⁸ In 2018, a BBC Panorama programme revealed malpractice and abuse by staff at Brook House, a centre run by G4S (Shaw 2018). Crucially, in 2018, the High Court found that some conditions at Brook House did not comply with the Equality Act 2010 or the ECHR.¹⁹ The account of one of our survey respondents illustrates this mistreatment:

This was my worst nightmare. At first I was in [an] open dormitory with about 50 people. Just like beds in [a] hall. Then taken to another detention. To be honest I really don’t want to talk about it. I was told to take off my clothes to be checked. I remained totally naked (C59, UK).

There have been concerns about ‘vulnerable’ detainees in particular. In 2008, the Independent Asylum Commission expressed concern that ‘LGBT detainees are not adequately protected in detention’ (Independent Asylum Commission 2008, p. 84). The Shaw report on the welfare of vulnerable people in detention was commissioned by the then Home Secretary Theresa May and published in 2016. Replies to Freedom of Information requests in 2016 showed that a minimum of 76 SOGI asylum claimants were detained throughout the UK between 1 January and 18

¹⁷ In 2008, the Independent Asylum Commission expressed concern that ‘LGBT detainees are not adequately protected in detention’ (2008, p. 84).

¹⁸ See Parliamentary Question on 6 May 2014 by Lord Ramsbotham asking ‘why the United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women was refused access to Yarl’s Wood immigration detention centre while on an official visit to the United Kingdom.’ The Government’s answer was that the visit ‘was never agreed as part of this fact-finding mission’ (House of Lords 2014).

¹⁹ *Hussein v Secretary of State for the Home Department & Anor* [2018] EWHC 213.

November 2016 (UK Parliament 2017). Lesbian women and transgender people appear particularly vulnerable to mistreatment in detention. It has been estimated that 340 lesbian women are detained each year (House of Commons et al. 2015). Yet, while the Shaw report highlighted instances of bullying and harassment of LGBT detainees, it recommended only that ‘transsexual people should be presumed unsuitable for detention’ (Shaw 2016, p. 194). Moreover, as discussed in Chap. 4, there are acknowledged inconsistencies in the way the term vulnerability is understood and used.

Research by UKLGIG and Stonewall also found that ‘LGBT asylum seekers face discrimination and harassment in detention centres’ and that ‘[t]rans asylum seekers face particular threats of violence in detention’ (Stonewall and UKLGIG 2016, p. 8). This is the case in particular when they are placed in detention centres that do not relate to their gender identity but the sex on their passport. As Zadeh (2019) argues: ‘Detention centres are possibly the most dangerous places in the country for LGBT+ people’.

Allan, a lawyer, pointed out that SOGI claimants do not only face homophobic abuse in detention, but their vulnerability also makes it more difficult to work on their claim, for instance if they ‘are worried about a fax from UKLGIG coming in’. Preparation for their cases is also more difficult: phone and internet access is limited, many websites are blocked in detention centres, and the remote location of the centres means that detainees often cannot get support to retrieve the evidence that they may need (Singer 2019, p. 11; Stonewall and UKLGIG 2016, p. 25).

Often the lawyers assigned to SOGI claimants in detention (if they do not already have one) may not have experience with SOGI cases or have limited time available to prepare often complex cases (Stephina). While SGW (focus group no. 4, London) was in detention, her solicitor dropped her case. She said he told her that ‘he can’t do anything else’. She told us:

All that was going in my head was deportation, that was what I was thinking, because I think a few weeks after I got there, there was a charter flight and I just saw how many women were taken out and deported and I just thought that would be me. So, it was, it was, it was hard, it was very painful, and I had now realised that I was getting more depressed the way I got in, but what else can you do.

She was not able to find another solicitor, so she ‘ended up having to be in the detention centre sitting before a judge, with my little paperwork, you know’. She felt that this situation ‘has progressively gotten worse now with the strains with the legal aid. So that is a big problem’.

Nine of our asylum claimant and refugee participants in the UK spoke of their direct experiences with detention (Irma, Lubwa, Luc, Lutfor, Miria, Patti, SGW, Stephina, Wabz), and there may have been others who did not talk about it in our interviews with them. Several NGO participants also talked about their examples of clients being detained (Chloe; Amelia; Ashley; Oliver). We heard that people were detained for variable but often considerable periods, ranging from 1 week (Miria) to a shocking 32 months (Luc). The duration of detention is not surprising, as the UK is the only country in the EU that does not have a time limit on detention (Chap. 4).

Yet, as NGO worker Oliver told us, it is not always clear what the reasons are for detaining someone. He always assumed that the decision to detain somebody was based on the potential risk of absconding, but then witnessed examples of 'inappropriate use of detention', for instance, when one woman seemed to have been detained purely for the purpose of collecting proof of her nationality and issuing her with a travel document (even though she was released afterwards): 'I don't know what that was about'.

Lutfor thought that LGBTQ+ people should not be detained, as they have faced 'too much violence for their sexuality'. Because of the fears they have around their sexual orientation, and the difficulties of talking about it, they should instead be offered counselling. When Lutfor applied for asylum, he found that he 'was not welcome at all', but instead treated 'like a criminal' and put into detention. His lawyer made an application for bail on the basis that he was vulnerable and 'fortunately they accepted the bail and they released me on like the next day'.

Hearing participants' accounts of detention raises questions about the kinds of 'abuse of the system' and 'risks to the public' invoked by the Home Office to justify indefinite detention (Chap. 4). All nine UK participants who were detained were subsequently released with no explanation and proceeded with their asylum claims. Nor did the NGO workers we interviewed have any SOGI (or other) claimants who had been detained before being removed from the UK, though there were situations that came close: 'I have on a couple of occasions been on the phone to someone as they are boarding, being boarded on a plane, before the next injunction to get them off has come through' (Ashley, psychotherapist). Amelia (NGO worker) also had a similar experience:

I mean, certainly it has come very close sometimes, yes, there was quite a few members detained and a couple of members, you know, were very close to the plane... sort of booked on a flight and it has been right down to the wire a couple of times.

It is noticeable that most of the SOGI claimants we interviewed were supported by NGOs and, therefore, perhaps had a higher chance of being released from detention. Meggs told us that three women at the Lesbian Immigration Support Group (LISG) had been detained when they signed in with the authorities, as requested to do regularly and got support immediately:

So, unless the organisations that are out there know you are in there, then they will start to, to do the petition for you to fight for you, so that you can be released while you are waiting on your claim, then it helps a lot. But if no one knows anything about you, definitely you are gone.

Amelia (NGO worker) explained that many members of LISG had experiences of detention and that the impact on the women detained was 'devastating', having a huge impact on women's mental health. Usually women were detained when they went to report at the Home Office centre Dallas Court in Greater Manchester, which some were required to do every fortnight or every month and 'then the next time they go to Dallas Court to sign on and it is just, it just keeps that fear, all wrapped up'. This fear was described by Edith, who had not been detained, but said that she

was ‘afraid of being detained and because I have suffered even being in jail in Kenya, I don’t like even going to Home Office itself, it makes me sick’.

It is clear that the absence of a time limit for detention ‘adds to the already traumatising experience of the government taking away your liberty’ (Zadeh 2019). Even after their release, the experience of incarceration often continues to have a detrimental effect on claimants’ physical and mental wellbeing (Zadeh 2019). Miria, who was detained in Yarl’s Wood when she claimed asylum, does not remember much from her time in detention, only that she mostly stayed in her room and was comforted by a young woman who she met there. Even though she was detained for ‘only’ a week:

by that time when I got out of that detention, I was just touching the walls to walk, I couldn’t manage to stand on my own, I was very weak, very sick, because I was not eating. I was not sleeping, so it wasn’t, it was really, really bad time. It was really, really hard time for me.

As Meggs (focus group no. 1, Manchester), who had not been detained herself but had seen the effects on friends, explained:

So, they will be going through NHS counselling, maybe for the whole year or for two years and taking antidepressants, and all things like that, because of the tortures that they experienced back home. So, and then it becomes a process you slowly get to trust people (...). On First Wednesday [social support group in Manchester] sometimes, something about 80 or 60 of us were going to counselling. And then when you are up there, when you are trying to find your feet for your own health and benefit, then you get detained. You drop, you drop, you go back to zero. You know, and then when you come out there, you are even worse. (...) you are starting to have flashbacks, it becomes even worse. So that particular person has to start again, with the counselling, if she will ever recover, suicidal thoughts and all that.

Meggs also spoke about the irony of the government supporting SOGI claimants with their mental health by providing them free NHS counselling, while then destroying that mental health recovery work and worsening the trauma by detaining asylum claimants. As Lubwa (focus group no. 1, Manchester), who was detained for 2 months, explained:

I remember when I was in detention, like, I felt like I am being targeted for no reason and (...) my emotional state was so bad, like, and I wanted to like, you know, commit suicide and I said I wanted, I don’t want to live anymore, I just want to like kill myself, and get away from it.

Lubwa did not understand why he had to be detained. He told us that his solicitor was convinced that Lubwa did not need to be in detention, and wrote to the Home Office to say her client was vulnerable. Lubwa met all bail conditions (including a financial guarantor and accommodation), but officials argued that he was likely to abscond, and it was only when a judge intervened that he was freed from detention:

At the end they have to give me bail, so all I wonder is why would you waste my two months inside, why? Because now I still go for counselling, because it is, it wasn’t something good for me and, you know, you have got nightmares, you have got like, you know, it was bad experience over there and I feel like I was the one who faced torture and everything I faced, I faced like I was the victim of like torture back home as well, so as here, and why would you put me in prison. I wasn’t a criminal, I have not done any crime, I was the one who was at risk.

Lutfor said he felt lucky because he was detained for only 26 days (as other people in detention had told him that people usually stay for 3 or 4 months before they even obtain legal advice) and he thought that the ‘staff there who was working there, they were really nice (...) the detention, I don’t know, it affected me somehow’. However, he told us that he had ‘[t]raumatic distress, I didn’t want to go out, I don’t want to talk to anyone. Then, after therapy, I went for therapy, counselling, then I found LGBT Foundation, I start to come here, talk to them, then I start to do voluntary works’. Recovering from a period in detention is clearly a long and arduous journey, which is added to a usually already difficult set of mental and physical issues. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

8.10 Concluding Remarks

If we define the ‘right to adequate housing’ as including respecting the dignity of the person and ensuring equality and non-discrimination (UNHCR 2013, sec. 1), then we can say that this right is not respected or implemented in all its dimensions when it comes to asylum accommodation for SOGI claimants in Germany, Italy and the UK. There are often poor material conditions in reception and accommodation centres and SOGI claimants have to live in accommodation and in areas where they experience homophobia, transphobia, racism and disablism, and at times intersecting discrimination.

There are no specific policies relating to the accommodation of SOGI claimants in Germany, Italy or the UK. Yet all three countries have seen the establishment of LGBTIQ+ accommodation projects, however limited and whether managed by the state or NGOs or by a partnership of the two. Campaigns for LGBTIQ+ accommodation can be delicate and contentious, potentially reinforcing stereotypes that other (non-SOGI) asylum claimants are sexist and homophobic, feeding a homonationalist depiction of an LGBTIQ+-welcoming Europe (in contrast to homophobic countries of origin). This discourse risks homogenising both SOGI and non-SOGI claimants. Our theoretical and analytical frameworks, explored in Chap. 3, debunk such simplistic binaries, and many participants helped us gain a more sophisticated understanding of such complex realities.

While it is important to demonstrate the specific needs of SOGI claimants in accommodation centres, and perhaps campaign for SOGI housing, from an intersectional perspective these needs should be assessed on an individual basis. It is important to avoid homonationalist discourses that depict (White) Western nations and people as liberated and gay-friendly and (non-White) non-Western nations and people as homophobic and transphobic. There is a danger that the struggles of LGBTIQ+ refugees are instrumentalised for racist discourses (Awadalla and Rajanayagam 2016). As Maryia (NGO worker, Germany) pointed out, simplistic distinctions between LGBTIQ+ refugees on the one hand, and homo and transphobic refugees on the other, do not correspond to reality:

Because I think it's a lot more complex and there are a lot of differences within very different social groups and other things like "race", class, education, health, all sorts of things play a role too, so for sure it is very important to talk about what kind of discrimination people experience among each other in the accommodation, but it is more important to look at how the society receives them, how it treats them, and what opportunities there are, so to speak, to start a new life.

We therefore rather want to consider asylum accommodation centres to be like many other spaces, namely heteronormatively structured. As geographers of sexualities have shown, everyday spaces (such as the street, the home, the workplace) are constituted as heterosexual through repetitive heterosexual performances (Bell and Valentine 1995; Johnston and Longhurst 2009; Valentine 1996; Chap. 3).

SOGI claimants may also have specific needs because of other dimensions of their identity, such as religion (as in Marhoon's case, Germany) or disability (Betty, Germany). One claimant referred to 'being out of category' being LGBTIQ+ and also being a refugee (Zouhair, Germany). While SOGI claimants often experienced difficulties in their accommodation, they were also often lucky to have effective support structures in place (at least in urban areas). Many participants were helped by LGBTIQ+ organisations, for example, when they were homeless, or when they were harassed or victimised in their accommodation. Such practical and emotional support was indispensable to SOGI claimants' well-being. As has been highlighted, community support is invaluable to decrease isolation (TGEU 2016).

From our interviews, it also became clear that authorities (and housing providers) need greater awareness of and sensitivity to the housing needs of SOGI claimants, in particular the issues of where (and with whom) individuals are housed. Particularly in Germany, many of our participants experienced extreme social isolation, often accommodated in rural areas, where they encountered homophobia, transphobia and racism. The UNHCR 'Resettlement Assessment Tool' for LGBTI refugees describes that: 'In most cases, LGBTI refugees will gravitate towards major urban centers as they offer greater opportunities for social support networks, and more specific resources. However, LGBTI refugees can be successfully resettled to more rural communities' (UNHCR 2013, p. 12). Our research shows that this is often difficult, and all the LGBTIQ+ claimants and refugees we talked to, who were living in rural areas, were quite isolated and preferred to live in more urban areas. However, also cities can do more to 'foster cultures of diversity and inclusion', for instance through cultural festivals and neighbourhood gatherings (Ruckstuhl 2016, p. 5).

While NGOs campaign for LGBTIQ+ accommodation centres and generally smaller accommodation centres, some participants were concerned that the far right trends in Germany and Italy will not make things better, and reforms introduced in the meantime have indicated that such concerns are warranted. In Germany, as of January 2020, claimants have to stay for up to 24 months in 'arrival centres' in Bavaria, and this might become the case in other federal states. In Italy, support offered in accommodation during the asylum process is also likely to diminish with recent reforms only offering SPRAR accommodation to people who have been

recognised refugee status. In the UK, we will have to see what impact Brexit will generally have on asylum policies.

We now turn to an analysis of the range of physical and mental health issues SOGI claimants face, as well as challenges they deal with in relation to work and education.

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