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**RAINBO**

Raising the Digital Literacy of  
Professionals to Address Inequalities  
and Exclusion of LGBTQI Community

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# Covid-19 pandemic and LGBTQI+ people in Greece

## RAINBO's project report

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Edited by

**Thanasis  
Theofilopoulos**



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## Foreword

The “RAINBO - Raising the Digital Literacy of Professionals to Address Inequalities and Exclusion of LGBTQI+ Community” project’s objective is to equip professionals working in the field (support services providers) with the necessary skills and competencies in order to be able to work efficiently in an online environment during a time of crisis - like the Covid-19 pandemic - while responding properly to the needs of LGBTQI+ people. The Project is implemented in Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom with the financial support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Project partners in Greece are NGO Symplexis and Universal Training. The project is coordinated by CCW Training Academy Limited (UK).

In order to identify the challenges and inequalities LGBTQI+ people have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, assess the training needs of professionals/support services providers working in the field, collect best practices and initiatives and design a tailor-made training programme for them, project’s partners conducted desk and field research. In Greece, Symplexis (researcher Thanasis Theofilopoulos) conducted desk research and personal interviews and/or focus groups (field research) with adult LGBTQI+ people living in Greece during the Covid-19 pandemic, while Universal Training (researcher Victoria Topalidi) launched an online survey (field research) targeting again professionals/support services providers and LGBTQI+ people.

The present country report presents the main findings of our research in Greece, conducted between 2021-2022. We would like to thank all research participants for their time, trust and valuable insight and we hope that the new knowledge gained will contribute to the improvement of preparedness against future challenges while raising awareness regarding the multiple vulnerabilities of population groups during a crisis.

Thanasis Theofilopoulos & Victoria Topalidi

April 2022

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## Part A: Desk research results *Thanasis Theofilopoulos*





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## 1. Challenges and inequalities faced by LGBTQI+ people in the country, during the Covid-19 pandemic

In 2020 – 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Covid-19 pandemic in Greece - RVRN (2021:35) recorded 30 homo/trans/bi/interphobic incidents (out of which 12 on the grounds of gender identity, 14 on the grounds of sexual orientation and 4 on the grounds of both) - which are less than the ones recorded in 2019 (RVRN, 2020:20), that is to say before the outbreak of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> A possible - but not a unique – explanation, could be the much reduced interaction between people and the limited exposure of LGBTQI+ people in other potential hostile environments due to lockdown measures. Yet, during the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures implemented in the country, anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes continued to occur but “adapted” to the new pandemic reality.

According to the Racist Violence Recording Network’s (RVRN, 2021:37) annual report for 2020, “half of the [total number of] incidents [on the grounds of sexual orientation] take place inside the victims’ residence or online”. Regarding the homo/trans/bi/interphobic incidents coming from family members of the victims inside the house, these “usually take place when a child discloses his/her sexual orientation or gender identity to the parents” (RVRN, 2021:37).

As recent literature suggests (Theofilopoulos, 2022), lockdowns in Greece forced many LGBTQI+ people to live together with family members who are disrespectful and abusive towards them because of their SOGISC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Sex Characteristics) – this has particular negative impact on their mental health and well-being and, at the same time, many support services became unavailable during the lockdown measures or LGBTQI+ people could not make use of the ones provided remotely/online due to lack of privacy and/or fear of abuse. In some cases, LGBTQI+ people may have been even thrown out of their homes from other family members. For example, “a trans man who suffered intense physical violence multiple times, from members of his family, while he was kept locked up in his house against his will and he was finally thrown out

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<sup>1</sup> In 2019, Racist Violence Recording Network “recorded 44 incidents of attacks on LGBTQI+ individuals (25 on grounds of gender identity, 16 on grounds of sexual orientation and three incidents on grounds of sexual orientation/ gender identity)” (in Racist Violence Recording Network (2020). *Annual Report 2019*, p. 20. Retrieved from: <http://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ETHSIA-EKTHESH-2019-english.pdf>).



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from it, by his own family” (RVRN, 2021:38). In this way, “the family, instead of maintaining its supportive trait, becomes a condition of rejection and violence” (RVRN, 2021:37).

Online environments to which LGBTQI+ people - same as non LGBTQI+ people - are active many hours per day due to restrictive measures and/or for prevention reasons, also impose risks – even the ones which were expected to be safer. For example, “an intra-university [homo/biphobic] attack, by the victim’s fellow students” occurred “during distance learning”, as “the perpetrators switched off their web cameras and verbally attacked the victim, without giving the teacher the opportunity to identify which students were behind the attack” (RVRN, 2021:37).

Trans people – except for domestic transphobic incidents - have also been subjected to transphobic attacks and behaviors by colleagues at work, unknown people, employees of services (e.g., banks) and even public servants (RVRN, 2021:38-39). As I write these lines, the RVRN’s annual report for 2021 has not yet been published. Yet, there are reports from (Greek) Transgender Support Association that numerous transphobic incidents have occurred during 2021 and the first months of 2022 (see, for example, *t-zine.gr*, 2021 May 15; *t-zine.gr*, 2021 June 15; *t-zine.gr*, 2022 February 23; *GR Times*, 2022 April 26) while according to the General Director of (Greek) Transgender Support Association Anna Apergi, some of them have taken place during identification process in the framework of the restrictive measures (*GR Times*, 2021 November 26).

Finally, according to recent field research on the access of LGBTQI+ people in health services in Greece during Covid-19 pandemic (Theofilopoulos, 2022), LGBTQI+ people saw their health needs becoming deprioritized and/or hard to be covered: as a result, medical procedures such as the ones related to transition or sex characteristics were canceled or delayed for a great period of time.

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## 2. Good practices and initiatives at national level

Since the first restrictive measures and lockdowns began to be implemented in Greece due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020), it was the Civil Society that mainly developed good practices and initiatives aiming to support LGBTQI+ people in these challenging times. In few cases, the Greek Government, local governments (Municipalities), international institutions and/or other human rights organizations supported such initiatives. Moreover, the Greek Government responded positively to some of the advocacy actions by the LGBTQI+ members of the Greek civil society. Examples of these practices and initiatives include:

- **LGBTQI+ organizations adapt to the new reality by providing their support services remotely:** Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community use to organize - free of cost - empowerment groups for LGBTQI+ people. After the outbreak of Covid-19, these groups initially stopped but then were re-organized and delivered online (Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2020 June 30; Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2020 October 10). This adaptation not only allowed the organization to continue its activities but furthermore could allow more people across the country to benefit and join these groups.
- **Guidelines for LGBTQI+ (self)care during the Covid-19 pandemic:** Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community published online the – available for free – e-book *Young LGBTQI+ people and Pandemic: A Support Guide* aiming to provide young LGBTQI+ people with valuable tips and guidelines for self-care and support during the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures (Gennata et. al., 2020). Similarly, the NGO Orlando LGBT+ Mental health without stigma published – also online and available for free – guide *LGBTQI+ PERSONS AND CORONAVIRUS: A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THEM, THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS* (Orlando LGBT+ Mental health without stigma, 2020). This publication also includes tips and guidelines for self-care and support during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as guidelines to mental health professionals in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people.
- **LGBTQI+ visibility and advocacy activities are implemented online:** Athens Pride Festival - the oldest Pride festival in the country – was organized online, continuing to promote visibility of LGBTQI+ people and advocate their human rights in this time of crisis, while allowing people





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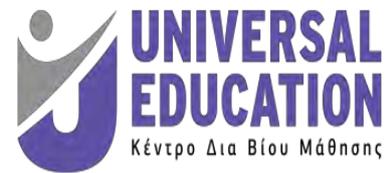
across the country to take part in the online events that replaced the festival (Athens Pride, 2020 July 7).

- **Distribution of basic goods (e.g., food) and self-protection measures (e.g., masks, sanitizers) to LGBTQI+ people in need:** Greek Transgender Support Association – with the support of the Municipality of Athens – delivered basic goods to LGBTQI+ people in need during the Covid-19 pandemic (Greek Transgender Support Association, 2020 May 29). Similarly, Positive Voice (“Thetiki Foni”) – an NGO supporting people living with HIV - also delivered meals and self-protection measures to members of vulnerable population groups that live or work in the streets – e.g., homeless, sex workers, drug addicts etc. – some of whom are also LGBTQI+ (Positive Voice, 2020 May 7a). The Greek Government’s General Secretariat for Social Solidarity & Fight Against Poverty, the Municipality of Chalandri, private companies, human rights organizations (Human Rights 360, Police Action) and individuals also backed the work of Positive Voice (Positive Voice, 2020 May 7a; Positive Voice, 2020 May 7b), (Positive Voice, 2020 May 7b).
- **Financial support for LGBTQI+ people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic:** Greek Transgender Support Association – with the support of AIDS Healthcare Foundation – provided financial aid to LGBTQI+ people in need who have also been affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Greek Transgender Support Association, 2020 August 21). Moreover, the organization – with the support of the Council of Europe – provided financial support to trans people who have been affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Greek Transgender Support Association, 2021 September 6).
- **Free Covid-19 tests for LGBTQI+ people:** Greek Transgender Support Association – with the support of Greek NGO Centre for Life (“Kentro Zois”) – an NGO also supporting people living with HIV - made available free of cost molecular tests for Covid-19 to LGBTQI+ people in need (Greek Transgender Support Association, 2020 June 21).
- **Covering operating costs of LGBTQI+ organizations:** Greek NGO Human Rights 360 provided – through the Global Whole Being Fund of RSF Social Finance – financial support to Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community in order to cover its major operating costs during the Covid-19





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pandemic, thus continuing providing support services to LGBTQI+ people during this challenging period (Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2020 June 2).

- **Ministry of Citizen Protection guides police officers in order to avoid transphobic mistreatment during the identification process in the framework of the Covid-19 restrictive measures:** The Greek government – after relevant advocacy action of the (Greek) Transgender Support Association – published official guidelines targeting police officers, in order to prevent any abusive or discriminatory (transphobic) behaviors towards trans people while checking their papers during the restrictive measures monitoring procedure (Greek Transgender Support Association, 2020 April 3).
- **Joint Ministerial Decision regarding measures against Covid-19, includes a clear reference to trans people:** According to a Joint Ministerial Decision on “Emergency measures to protect public health from the risk of further spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 in the whole Territory, for the period from Monday, 31 January 2022 and time 6:00 until Monday, 7 February 2022 and time 6:00” published in January 2022:

*During the application of the present, if the identification documents of the audited person have the gender and the name given at birth and do not have the data that attribute the gender identity based on par. 1 of article 2 of law 4491/2017 (A ‘152), the competent authorities and the audit bodies must fully accept the verbal confirmation of the person that is the same person identified with the document, regardless of whether the audited person has been subjected to the process of legal recognition of gender identity, according to article 4 of law 4491/2017 (Joint Ministerial Decision No Δ1α/Γ.Π.οικ. 4761).*

That was a major positive step forward, as auditing bodies and authorities must accept a simple verbal confirmation of trans people whose gender identity has not yet been legally recognized that they are the very same person with the person referred in the documents, without further delays, doubts or additional checks. Thus, trans people became far more protected from potential inconvenience and, moreover, transphobic mistreatment. Greek Transgender Support Association played an important role in this positive development through its relevant advocacy actions (Greek Transgender Support Association, 2022 February 1).

Finally, a practice targeting trans people during the Covid-19 pandemic in Greece caused controversy among different LGBTQI+ organizations. Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community





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distributed to trans people - whose gender identity has not been legally recognized – “certifications” as a “proof” that they are under transition (Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2020 April 8). The purpose of these “certifications” was to be used during a potential identification process carried out by police officers while monitoring the implementation of the Covid-19 restrictive measures (Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2020 April 8). Thus, trans people may avoid any mistreatment or abuse because of the difference between their gender identity and expression and the name used in their official papers. This practice caused controversy between LGBTQI+ organizations in Greece; one of the scientific supervisors of the Orlando LGBT+ Mental health without stigma NGO publicly embraced it while acknowledging its drawbacks (Christidi, E. O., 2020 November 11) – but the (then) President of the Greek Transgender Support Association Marina Galanou, rejected this practice as a way of “*medicalizing trans identities*”, “*cancellation of [trans people’s] demands*”, and “*violation of trans people’s personal data*” (*t-zine.gr*, 2020 November 8). International LGBTQI+ organizations seemed to have different opinions as well. While Transgender Europe presented this practice as a good one (Fedorko & Kurmanov, 2021:24), ILGA Europe recorded this practice in its Annual Report in a rather negative way (ILGA-Europe, 2021 February).

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### 3. Available support services and useful contacts

#### LGBTQI organizations:

- Athens Pride (Athens)

Tel: (+30) 6974 18 73 83

E-mail: [contact@athenspride.eu](mailto:contact@athenspride.eu)

Website: [www.athenspride.eu](http://www.athenspride.eu)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/athenspride](http://www.facebook.com/athenspride)

- Colour Youth –Athens LGBTQ Youth Community (Athens)

Tel: (+30) 6945 58 33 95

E-mail: [info@colouryouth.gr](mailto:info@colouryouth.gr)

Website: [www.colouryouth.gr](http://www.colouryouth.gr)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/ColourYouth](http://www.facebook.com/ColourYouth)

- HerPride (ex LGBTQI+ Crete Pride) (Heraklion, Crete)

E-mail: [herpride2019@gmail.com](mailto:herpride2019@gmail.com)

Website: [herpride2018.wordpress.com](http://herpride2018.wordpress.com)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/herpridefest](http://www.facebook.com/herpridefest)

- Intersex Greece

E-mail: [intersexgreece@gmail.com](mailto:intersexgreece@gmail.com)

Website: [www.intersexgreece.org.gr](http://www.intersexgreece.org.gr)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/IntersexGr/](http://www.facebook.com/IntersexGr/)

- G-All, Gender Alliance Initiative

E-mail: [g.all.initiative@gmail.com](mailto:g.all.initiative@gmail.com)

Facebook Page: [www.facebook.com/GenderAllianceInitiative](http://www.facebook.com/GenderAllianceInitiative)

- Greek LGBT PwD (Athens)

E-mail: [info@loatamea.gr](mailto:info@loatamea.gr) / [greeklgbtdisabled@gmail.com](mailto:greeklgbtdisabled@gmail.com)

Website: [www.loatamea.gr](http://www.loatamea.gr)

Facebook Page: [www.facebook.com/loatamea](http://www.facebook.com/loatamea)





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- Greek Transgender Support Association (Athens)

Tel: (+30) 210 92 10 697

E-mail: [contact@tgender.gr](mailto:contact@tgender.gr) / [transgender.support.association@gmail.com](mailto:transgender.support.association@gmail.com)

Website: [www.transgender-association.gr](http://www.transgender-association.gr) / [www.tgender.gr](http://www.tgender.gr)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/GreekTransgenderSupportAssociation](http://www.facebook.com/GreekTransgenderSupportAssociation)

- OLKE - Gay and Lesbian Community of Greece (Athens)

Tel: (+30) 6931 47 15 67

E-mail: [info.olke@gmail.com](mailto:info.olke@gmail.com)

Website: [www.olkegr.blogspot.gr](http://www.olkegr.blogspot.gr)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/OLKEorg](http://www.facebook.com/OLKEorg)

- Orlando LGBT: Mental Health beyond the Stigma (Athens)

E-mail: [contact@orlandolgbt.gr](mailto:contact@orlandolgbt.gr)

Website: [www.orlandolgbt.gr](http://www.orlandolgbt.gr)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/orlandolgbt.gr](http://www.facebook.com/orlandolgbt.gr)

- Patras Pride (Patras)

E-mail: [pridepatras@gmail.com](mailto:pridepatras@gmail.com)

Website: [www.patraspride.blogspot.gr](http://www.patraspride.blogspot.gr)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/patraspride](http://www.facebook.com/patraspride)

- Proud Parents (Athens)

Tel: (+30) 6977 83 90 37

E-mail: [proudparentsgreece@gmail.com](mailto:proudparentsgreece@gmail.com)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/proudparentsgreece](http://www.facebook.com/proudparentsgreece)

- Proud Seniors Greece

Tel: (+30) 6973355124

E-mail: [proudseniorsgreece@gmail.com](mailto:proudseniorsgreece@gmail.com)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/proudseniorsgreece](http://www.facebook.com/proudseniorsgreece)

- Rainbow Families (Athens)

E-mail: [ouraniotoksofamilies@gmail.com](mailto:ouraniotoksofamilies@gmail.com)

Website: [www.rainbowfamiliesgreece.com](http://www.rainbowfamiliesgreece.com)





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Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/ouraniotoksofamilies](http://www.facebook.com/ouraniotoksofamilies)

- Rainbow School (Athens)

Tel: (+30) 6931 47 15 67

E-mail: [info@rainbowschool.gr](mailto:info@rainbowschool.gr)

Website: [www.rainbowschool.gr](http://www.rainbowschool.gr)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/RainbowSchoolGR](http://www.facebook.com/RainbowSchoolGR)

- Thessaloniki Pride (Thessaloniki)

Tel: (+30) 231 1 289320

E-mail: [contact@thessalonikipride.com](mailto:contact@thessalonikipride.com)

Website: [www.thessalonikipride.com](http://www.thessalonikipride.com)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/ThessalonikiPride](http://www.facebook.com/ThessalonikiPride)

**Network of the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality for all women (regardless of their SOGISC) who have experienced / are experiencing discrimination or gender-based violence:**

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- 24hr Helpine: 15900

Counselling Centers of the Research Center for Gender Equality (KETHI)

- Athens Counselling Center (Polykentro)

Tel: (+30) 210 52 02 800

E-mail: [polykentro@isotita.gr](mailto:polykentro@isotita.gr)

- Athens Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 210 33 17 305-6

E-mail: [isotita4@otenet.gr](mailto:isotita4@otenet.gr)

- Corfu Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 26610 47396

E-mail: [kerkyra@isotita.gr](mailto:kerkyra@isotita.gr)

- Herakleion Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 2810 341387



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- Komotini Counselling Center

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E-mail: [komotini@isotita.gr](mailto:komotini@isotita.gr)

- Kozani Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 24610 49672

E-mail: [kozani@isotita.gr](mailto:kozani@isotita.gr)

- Lamia Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 22310 20059

E-mail: [lamia@isotita.gr](mailto:lamia@isotita.gr)

- Larisa Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 2410 535840

E-mail: [larisa@isotita.gr](mailto:larisa@isotita.gr)

- Mytiline Counselling Center

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- Patras Counselling Center

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- Piraeus Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 210 4828970, 4825372

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Tel: (+30) 2310 528984, 528988

E-mail: [thessaloniki@isotita.gr](mailto:thessaloniki@isotita.gr)

- Tripoli Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 2710 241814

E-mail: [tripoli@isotita.gr](mailto:tripoli@isotita.gr)

#### Municipal Counselling Centers

- Alexandroupoli Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 25510 25629

E-mail: [isotita@alexpolis.gr](mailto:isotita@alexpolis.gr)

Website: [www.isotitalexpolis.blogspot.com](http://www.isotitalexpolis.blogspot.com)

- Arta Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 26810 77400

E-mail: [skgarta@gmail.com](mailto:skgarta@gmail.com)

- Athens Center for Combating Gender-Based Violence and Multiple Discrimination

Tel: (+30) 210 8625355, 21086255858

E-mail: [kentroatapolemisisdiakriseon@athens.gr](mailto:kentroatapolemisisdiakriseon@athens.gr)

- Chalandri Counselling Center

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E-mail: [womenaidhalandri@gmail.com](mailto:womenaidhalandri@gmail.com)

Ιστοσελίδα: [www.womenaidhalandri.wordpress.com](http://www.womenaidhalandri.wordpress.com)

- Chalkida Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 2221 351826-7

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- Chios Counselling Center

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- Florina Counselling Center

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Website: [www.womenaidflorina.blogspot.gr](http://www.womenaidflorina.blogspot.gr)

- Fyli Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 210 2483360

E-mail: [ksfylis@fyli.gr](mailto:ksfylis@fyli.gr)

- Eleusis Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 213 160 1437

E-mail: [violence@1822.syzefxis.gov.gr](mailto:violence@1822.syzefxis.gov.gr)

- Kalamata Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 27210 99212, 99225

E-mail: [ksg@kalamata.gr](mailto:ksg@kalamata.gr)

- Karditsa Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 24410 71594, 24410 77122

E-mail: [info@wck.gr](mailto:info@wck.gr), [wckarditsa@gmail.com](mailto:wckarditsa@gmail.com)

Website: [www.wck.gr](http://www.wck.gr)

- Kastoria Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 24670 22122

E-mail: [counsellingwomenkastoria@gmail.com](mailto:counsellingwomenkastoria@gmail.com)

Website: [www.supportwomenkastoria.blogspot.gr](http://www.supportwomenkastoria.blogspot.gr)

- Katerini Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 23510 36678

E-mail: [womenaid@katerini.gr](mailto:womenaid@katerini.gr)

- Kavala Counselling Center

Tel: (+30) 2513 500440, 2513 500441, 2513 500442, 2513 500443

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### **National Social Support Service:**

- National Centre of Social Solidarity EKKA (emergency psychological and social support services to children, adolescents, adults, families and socially vulnerable groups in a state of emergency, social exclusion and crisis)

24hr Helpline: 197 (24hr)

Website: [www.ekka.org.gr](http://www.ekka.org.gr)





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### National Equality Body:

- The Greek Ombudsman

The Greek Ombudsman is the national equality body with a mandate to combat discrimination and promote the principle of equal treatment irrespective of sex (among others) characteristics. The Department of Equal Treatment is competent for handling cases of discrimination as they relate to access of employment, vocational training and promotion and working conditions, in both in the public and the private sector, including contractual employment, self-employment, work and pay.

Tel: (+30) 2131306600

Online Complaint Submission: [www.synigoros.gr/?i=submission-system.el](http://www.synigoros.gr/?i=submission-system.el)

Website: [www.synigoros.gr](http://www.synigoros.gr)

### Police Services:

- Cyber Crime Unit of the Hellenic Police

The Unit's responsibilities include the investigation of racist content on the internet.

Tel: 11188 (24hr)

E-mail: [ccu@cybercrimeunit.gov.gr](mailto:ccu@cybercrimeunit.gov.gr)

Website: [www.cyberkid.gr](http://www.cyberkid.gr) (for children and their parents)

[www.cyberalert.gr/feelsafe](http://www.cyberalert.gr/feelsafe) (for fraud in online environment)

- Police Service for Combating Racist Violence

Tel: 11414 (24hr)

Online Complaint Submission:

[http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo\\_content&&perform=view&id=18224&Itemid=0&lang=](http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&&perform=view&id=18224&Itemid=0&lang=)





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## Part B: Field research results *Thanasis Theofilopoulos & Victoria Topalidi*

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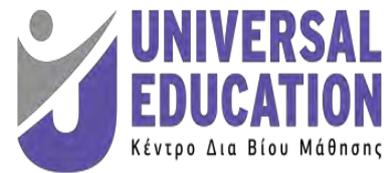


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## 1. Summary analysis of focus groups (and/or interviews) with LGBTQI+ people

Six LGBTQI+ people living in Greece took part in RAINBO's research in the country. Five of them took part in a focus group which was organized and coordinated by Symplexis (researcher: Thanasis Theofilopoulos) while another LGBTQI+ person gave a personal interview to Symplexis (researcher: Thanasis Theofilopoulos). The age of all LGBTQI+ research participants ranged between 25 and 52 years old. Half of them (three out of six) have a social sciences background, while two of them have studied acting, art and physical education/sports science. All of them are currently employed - some also have a voluntary activity as well. Four participants live with their same gender partner in the same house, while one research participant lives alone and the one with his/her/their family.

All research participants agreed with the aforementioned statement of the UN Independent Expert on SOGISC (see previous section). While some of the LGBTQI+ research participants stated that they were not particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures – or, at least, not as much as other LGBTQI+ people – they identified multiple challenges and inequalities that LGBTQI+ people in Greece faced during the pandemic and the implementation of restrictive measures:

- difficult to visit / get in personal touch with their partners in case they were living separately due to the lockdown measures
- police checks and the identification process coming with it during the lockdown measures could be quite a challenge for trans people whose gender identity has not yet been legally recognized and/or for couples of same gender (identity) who were out together
- Trans people also faced similar challenges when trying to enter stores etc. as they had to provide an ID and a vaccination certificate to staff members of these stores etc.
- close down of LGBTQI+ friendly and safe places (e.g., bars, clubs), thus LGBTQI+ people could no longer visit “*queer hangouts*” helping them to “*escape*” from the wider “*suppressive, heteronormative*”, go to places where they could feel “*safe*”, “*express themselves*”, “*self-identify*”, meet other people with whom they would feel “*familiar*” and/or like a “*family*”
- sex and social life were limited due to fear of Covid-19

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- lack of visibility of LGBTQI+ issues and people, including in all relevant public news and information regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

LGBTQI+ research participants were also asked to identify good practices, initiatives and/or central (government) policies aiming at supporting vulnerable people during the Covid-19 pandemic in the country and/or LGBTQI+ people in particular.

Some participants identified such practices and initiatives targeting people in need, including LGBTQI+ ones:

- Establishment of a helpline - operated by the Ministry of Health - supporting people whose mental health has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures.

But according to another participant, the Municipality of Athens which would host and support the restart of this helpline support was too late and thus, LGBTQI+ people were left without support during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Covid-19 crisis.

- Further enhancement/promotion of the already existing 24hr helpline 15900 for women who are GBV survivors.

But another participant argued that the national network against GBV - which includes counselling centres and shelters for women as well as the aforementioned helpline – is not yet “inclusive” towards LGBTQI+ people. According to the same participant, this network should support all gender-based violence survivors and not only women who have experienced violence. The same participant acknowledged that some centres of this network tried to “adapt to the new [covid-19] circumstances”, by providing their support services online or by phone. On the other hand, the same participants were not very sure how sufficient they were, adding that the numbers of femicides and violence incidents against women rose during the covid-19 pandemic, as women were lock down together with their “toxic” partners/husbands.

- Distribution of meals to members of vulnerable population groups by the Municipality of Athens.
- The Municipality of Athens organized a shelter for homeless people but the whole concept was actually a design of the former local authorities and not of the current one.

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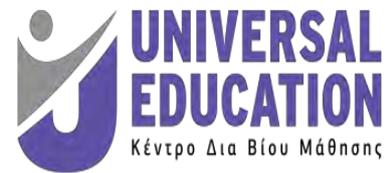


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- Formulation of informal groups who provided food to homeless people and/or tried to support people during lockdowns e.g., by responding to their practical needs such as shopping.
- “Shedia” NGO - which supports homeless people by offering them job positions as salesmen/saleswomen of the homonym magazine - enhanced its activities in order to support them, including psychosocial support.

LGBTQI+ research participants identified only very few good practices and initiatives targeting LGBTQI+ people, some of which were also identified during the desk research:

- Re-activation of the “11528 – Next to you” helpline for LGBTQI people as well as top trainings on LGBTQI+ issues delivered to staff members of the Municipality of Athens that would host and support this helpline.
- Distribution of medicine and food to trans people in need by the Greek Transgender Support Association.
- Advocacy actions carried out by the Greek Transgender Support Association targeting Greek Police – the organization advocated for trans-safe police checks of the implementation of the Covid-19 restrictive measures, thus transphobic behaviours from police officers would be avoided.

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Some participants also referred to the formulation of the country’s first national committee for LGBTQI equality - consisting of members of the academic community, representatives of LGBTQI+ organizations and relevant stakeholders – and the development of the country’s first national strategy for LGBTQI equality. On the other hand, this initiative is not directly related to Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on LGBTQI+ people while it follows a relevant recommendation included in the European Commission’s *LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*. Similarly, another LGBTQI+ research participant referred to a recent reform according to which LGB people can now become blood donors, while acknowledging that this reform has not benefited LGBTQI+ people with regards to Covid-19 pandemic and its impact.

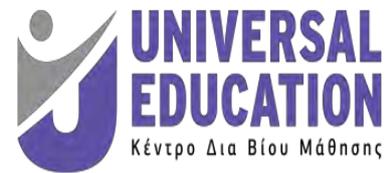


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Furthermore, an LGBTQI+ research participant also argued that a “*positive step*” was the introduction of online public services allowing citizens to make use of them from home. This initiative by the Greek State is not directly linked to support measures for vulnerable people in general and/or LGBTQI+ people in particular, during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the contrary, another participant suggested that these online public services were not accessible to vulnerable people e.g., the elderly or people who are less familiar with technology.

For at least half of the LGBTQI+ research participants the Greek State and/or the civil society were not - at least, initially - prepared to deal with the public health crisis and its consequences and/or their response was quite delayed. It was a “*general shock at all levels*” according to a research participant or – as another participant put it - the country was unprepared for the public health crisis and “*as always, there was no prevention at all in this country [Greece]*”. Similarly, another participant argued that both the Greek state and the CSOs, “*did not respond quickly and efficiently in order to ensure the provision of services to special social groups who faced problems due to their gender/sexual orientation, compensating the [effects of the] lockdowns and the restrictive policies*”. Finally, another LGBTQI+ research participant suggested that, in Greece and during the Covid-19 pandemic, no specific good practices and/or initiatives were actually implemented by either the State or CSOs - in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people - “*the situation remained the same [with the pro-covid period]*” as he/she/they said.

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LGBTQI+ research participants (who are also professionals working in the field) were also asked to assess the skills and competences that professionals working in the field (support services providers) should have in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people and/or when working during a time of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants were also asked to suggest training topics and modules in order to build the capacity of professionals / support services providers with the aim to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people and/or be able to work efficiently while in a crisis situation.



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According to their responses, professionals /support services providers working with LGBTQI+ people should have the following skills and competencies:

- Be able to communicate with a non-abusive, non-discriminatory way (e.g., proper use of pronouns).
- Be aware of the LGBTQI+ terminology.
- Be aware of *“what challenges LGBTQI+ community faces”*.
- Become familiar with *“feminist [Gender] theories”* in order to understand the *“diversity”* and the *“complexity”* of the *“existing identities”* and *“exit the heteronormative perception of the world”*, thus professionals *“can make a proper reception [of an LGBTQI+ person]”*,
- *“Ability of reflection”* e.g., *“what people have I met today, how was my behavior towards them”*.
- Knowledge of existing *“protocols”* e.g., regarding support
- *“Be open and recipient towards other people”*.
- *“Information regarding HIV and the stigma around it”* (especially, for health professionals).
- Understand the concepts of *“sexuality”* and *“gender identity”* (especially, for mental health professionals).

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Some of them also identified skills and competencies that professionals / support services providers should have in order to better adapt and respond under crisis situation like the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Disaster/risk/emergency management skills.
- Know how to *“make decisions on the spot”* - *“make quick decisions”*.
- Be aware of available support services - especially regarding the population groups you work with after/during a crisis/disaster - and how to access them.
- *“Be able to identify situations as they are and not be influenced by his/her personal opinions”*.

In order to enhance or acquire the aforementioned skills and competencies and more, LGBTQI+ research participants also suggested numerous training topics:

- LGBTQI+ terminology
- Disaster/risk/emergency management.
- Learn how to *“step back and do not assume the needs of other people”*.





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- Good practices/examples from professionals/organizations working in the field presented to the trainees e.g., through presentations from guest experts or thought study visits of the trainees.
- Available support services – *“know what each organization do”*.
- Learn to *“walk in someone else’s shoes”* through experiential training, thus *“stereotypes and prejudices are reduced”* – combat *“inner stereotypes”* via experiential training.
- Acquire a LGBTQI+ perspective and insight, thus trainers should also be LGBTQI+ themselves in order to speak from their “[personal] *experience*” as non LGBTQI+ trainers will still train from a *“privileged”* position.
- Training could be divided in two *“major sections”*: the first one is the *“otherness and diversity”* section - because it is a basic step before any other training on special issues - and the second one will be that of *“mental resilience vs mental vulnerability”* namely *“special social, psychological, financial, physical needs of special social groups”*.
- Identify the links between vulnerability due to LGBTQI+ identity and vulnerability due to a crisis e.g., a health crisis like Covid-19 pandemic and how these two vulnerabilities *“converge and coincide thus creating an increased burden on socially vulnerable groups”*. In this context, explore the impact of lockdowns for LGBTQI+ people: living in a hostile/abusive environment - staying hidden/in the closet because of the homo/trans/bi/interphobic family members and its impact at physical and psychological level.
- *“Networking”* – the training activity should be the starting point for professionals and organizations to *“meet each other”* and *“commit to cooperate”*.
- Multiple challenges sex workers face and their needs.

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## 2. Summary analysis of focus groups (and/or interviews) with professionals / support services providers

Ten professionals were personally interviewed by Symplexis (researcher Thanasis Theofilopoulos) for the purposes of the RAINBO's research in Greece. The vast majority of them – eight out of ten – work in humanistic/human rights NGOs as psychosocial support providers, coordinators of services, front desk staff etc. Regarding the other two participants, both have a private office and both work on a voluntary basis in different organizations- one of them at a helpline and the other one at a LGBTQI+ NGO. The majority of them - seven out of ten - have a social sciences educational background (e.g., psychologists, sociologists, social anthropologists etc.), while two of them have studied law and one has studied business administration.

All interviewed professionals agreed - more or less – with a statement of the UN Independent Expert on SOGISC presented to them, according to who, there are seven issues on which LGBTQI+ people experienced more challenges than before the Covid-19 epidemic: 1. stress and isolation, 2. political violence, 3. poverty, 4. health, 5. shelter, 6. employment, 7. asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Professionals interviewed identified multiple challenges that LGBTQI+ people have faced in Greece since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of restrictive measures:

- Increased levels of stress and feelings of isolation, as LGBTQI+ people had to stay at home – due to the restrictive measures – with members of their family that did not know about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Outbreak and/or rising of domestic homo/trans/bi/interphobic violence, as LGBTQI+ people were forced to stay under the same roof with non-supportive and disrespectful family members.
- LGBTQI+ people were left without “*escape exits*” e.g., LGBTQI+ friendly bars, clubs etc. from homo/trans/bi/interphobic domestic environments
- Forced lockdown together with unaware and/or unsupportive family members, also led to trans people to stop – for at least some time – their transition.

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- Already vulnerable population groups – that is to say people who had already suffered from violence, discrimination and social exclusion and required social support e.g., many LGBTQI+ people – were left without support, as many social services had to close for some time (at least at the beginning of the pandemic and before necessary adaptations to the new reality).
- LGBTQI+ refugees became even more vulnerable. First of all, they have already needed additional support in order to “open up themselves” and, now, due to the restrictive measures, these people find it even harder to speak up and trust support services providers as they cannot meet them in person. Furthermore, LGBTQI+ refugees who - as such - need safe housing, were left without safe shelters as these facilities remained closed during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, LGBTQI+ refugees became homeless or they had to live in dangerous/unwelcoming (homo/trans/bi/interphobic) environments. Access to asylum services was also limited for refugees - including LGBTQI+ ones. As an interviewed professional added, shutting down all support services and options due to the restrictive measures, “increases survival stress” of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers/refugees.
- Trans people who could not receive a “solidarity allowance” because they could not proceed to the legal recognition of their gender identity - which was necessary in order to receive the aforementioned allowance - during the pandemic.
- Because of the restriction measures, courthouses had also to close down: this development had a negative impact on open cases of vulnerable people, including LGBTQI+ ones e.g., Trans people who were under the process of changing their names in all public documents / records (legal gender recognition).

Interviewed professionals were asked to identify good practices, initiatives and/or central (government) policies aiming at supporting vulnerable people during the Covid-19 pandemic in the country and/or LGBTQI+ people in particular. Some participants identified such practices and initiatives targeting people in need, including LGBTQI+ ones:

- Counselling and psychology support helplines - already operating before the pandemic by civil society organizations and research centres.





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- Increased (due to the pandemic's impact) social solidarity allowance – provided by the state to all people in need
- Some humanistic NGOs adapted their working methods in order to conform to the new reality and continue to provide their services e.g., online
- “Initiatives” of (unnamed) CSOs targeting vulnerable people e.g., distribution of meals to vulnerable people - e.g., homeless – via scheduled appointments in specific places, provision of psychosocial support to vulnerable people, provision of basic info regarding self-protective measures in replacement to the unavailable public services due to restrictive measures etc. in multiple languages for migrants/refugees, provision of additional support for vulnerable people already living in shelters in order to deal with the new reality.

Some participants also identified some good practices and initiatives targeting particularly LGBTQI+ people:

- Distribution of basic goods to LGBTQI+ people in need by Greek Transgender Support Association.
- Greek Transgender Support Association paying the bills of LGBTQI+ people without an income or with a very low one

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But, more than half of the interviewed professionals could not identify any other good practices, initiatives and/or central (government) policies aiming at supporting people in need during the Covid-19 pandemic in the country and/or LGBTQI+ people in particular. Some even argued that such practices, initiatives and/or policies do not exist at all. As an interviewed professional argued, in general, public social services as well as civil society organizations could not – at least, not initially – respond to the needs of vulnerable people – including LGBTQI+ people – during the pandemic.

Interviewed professionals were also asked to assess the skills and competences that a professional working in the field (support services providers) should have in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people and/or when working during a time of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Professionals were also asked to suggest training topics and modules in order to equip



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professionals so as to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people and/or work while in a crisis situation. But before these, professionals had to reflect on the ways their colleagues – not necessarily those who work in the same organization or service – adapted and responded to the new reality.

In general, many professionals felt very challenged and pressured when working in the framework of the public health crisis and/or they think that their colleagues were challenged and pressured (too):

- Some professionals found it hard to adapt to the new pandemic reality, as they all found it very hard to handle the feelings emerging from the isolation circumstances as well as to change the way they were working until now – the lack of relevant training and preparedness was one of the reasons that made their adaptation a challenging task.
- For some professionals who managed to start offering their services remotely, online sessions made them feel uncomfortable, as support should be provided in person, thus not in a “distance” but in a “human” way. Similarly, some professionals found it hard to adapt to the new reality of the pandemic because the very nature of their profession requires physical/personal contact with people and, because of the restrictive measures, all services should now be provided remotely.
- Professionals working in the field also felt fear of becoming ill and or becoming the reason that someone else gets sick.
- In some cases, professionals faced “difficulties” when trying to adapt to the new reality. These difficulties - linked to restrictive measures following the break out of the pandemic - included requests or complaints made by beneficiaries because they could not “reach” the organization/service and receive support and/or responses on their requests for support were “delayed”. As a result, more time and effort were needed on behalf of support services providers in order to respond to the “large number of requests”.
- Many professionals did not receive proper support from their employers - e.g., they did not prepare them to adapt and/or did not acknowledge their efforts and/or challenges - who “should protect their people [staff members]”.





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- Adaptation was particularly difficult for public social services due to their lack of *“flexibility”*: professionals working in CSOs could suggest and implement adaptive measures but this was not the case in public social services. Moreover, CSOs provided additional necessary equipment or covered additional costs for their staff members - e.g., they covered the cost of mobile phone services for professionals working via mobile phone - while professionals working in state/public services did not receive such support.
- For some professionals, level of adaptation (of professionals) in the new pandemic era was linked to three different factors: availability of *“technical equipment”*, *“familiarization”* or *“will for familiarization”* with such equipment, *“how each one of us [professionals] responded [to the new reality] and experienced the lockdown measures on a personal level”*.
- For lawyers/legal counsellors working with vulnerable people, *“different ministerial decisions [made] every day”* regarding restrictive measures also made their work harder: this created *“an ambiguity regarding the services that we [professionals] could provide”*, followed by a feeling of *“insecurity”* for both professionals and their beneficiaries. Lawyers/legal counsellors faced *“obstacles”, “delays”, “inefficiency”, “disappointment”* during the pandemic and the adopted restrictive measures, because their work *“is based on the direct communication [with the authorities]”*, so when they could not get in touch with public/state services or judges, the needs and rights of the beneficiaries of their services are not efficiently or not at all met.
- Online support *“excludes”* some people (support service receivers), that is to say people who do not have the necessary means of communication (devices, internet connection etc.).

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Professionals interviewed identified a wealth of skills and competencies that professionals working with LGBTQI+ people should have: empathy towards LGBTQI+ people, *“understanding the wider framework in which those people will have to survive”*, be able to *“understand more about their needs [of the target group]”* e.g., *“how they feel”* or *“how they are identifying themselves”*, be aware of their living conditions, their social/demographic *“profile”* etc., *“openness”* and *“awareness of our very own stereotypes, prejudices”*, professionals should have *“at least a minimum knowledge who is the Other, who we are, what our motives are, what our expectations from our job are”* and *“what is the framework in which we work, that is to say how the framework affects the way*



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according to which we interact with other people, the way we approach them, the way they approach us, etc.” in order to be able to “approach other people”, “ability to understand that people are ethos/culture carriers and that all ethos/culture are not the same and ethos/culture affect the way people think, behave, etc.”, “information on the specific [LGBTQI+] issues”, “understanding of particular [LGBTQI+] terms” - knowledge of LGBTQI+ terminology, acceptance of LGBTQI+ diversity, in-depth knowledge and awareness on LGBTQI+ issues, “learn by/through the population groups with which you work”, that is to say to be able to “listen to the people and understand the status of each one of them”, continuous personal study of relevant scientific literature – this activity will “open the mind” of professionals and help them “deal with some situations/cases”, “patience” as well as the “persistence” in order to be able to “identify” the needs and status of other people, “basic knowledge” regarding ways to handle cases of people that “are in a state of crisis” as well as knowing “specific features” of particular population groups e.g., “which topic would be too sensitive to ask [a LGBTQI+ beneficiary] about” or how to discuss/ask “in a tactful way” about certain topics, be informed very well about the services that their very organization can provide and be aware of available support services provided by other organizations, institutions etc. as well in order to refer people to them for additional support.

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Some professionals also identified skills and competencies that professionals should have in order to better adapt and respond under crisis situation like a pandemic: “flexibility”, patience, be “creative”, able to “create paths in places where they do not already exist” in order to support people in need, ability to adapt, ways to deal with the pandemic/isolation circumstances in order to be able to better respond to people’s needs, “assessing the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups”, “knowledge of technology in order to be able to communicate with people” - be able to use “computer devices”, “the internet”, “online databases” provided by their employers and conference and communication applications (e.g., “Skype”, “Viber”, “What’s up”) as well, “willing” to learn how to use different “applications” (in case they do not already know how to do it).

Finally, all interviewed professionals – regardless of their level of experience and skills - expressed their interest to participate in a relevant training activity in order to acquire some of the

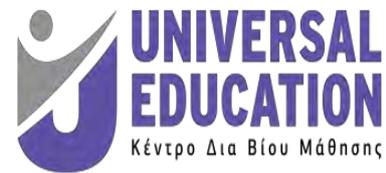


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aforementioned skills and competencies and suggested training topics such as: *“evolution”* and analysis of LGBTQI+ terminology and communicating with LGBTQI+ people – use of proper language, how each person *“experiences whatever happens to him/her”* through examination of *“personal stories”*, thus trainees *“will come closer together”* with LGBTQI+ people and develop *“more empathy”* towards them and finally *“accept”* them, learn to have *“their ears and mind open and more desire to hear than speaking”*, *“basic thematic topics on LGBTQI+ people”*, *“historical framework”* regarding past *“problems”* (challenges) that LGBTQI+ people had faced as well as current challenges/problems, *“how LGBTQI+ people are affected during the pandemic or a crisis in general”*, *“available tools to use in order to better support them”* - what professionals can do in order to improve their response to the needs/requests of LGBTQI+ people, supporting LGBTQI+ people when in court (e.g. legal gender recognition) or during the examination of their asylum request, what LGBTQI+ people themselves expect from social services/professionals when they seek for their support, organization and response of social services – both public and the ones of the civil society sector - during emergency/crisis times, emphasize on *“practical”* aspects in order to handle cases, solve problems, respond to challenges, available support services in general and those targeting LGBTQI+ people in particular, protection of LGBTQI+ human rights and emergency response to the needs of LGBTQI+ people in times of crisis, challenges they [the professionals] have faced and how they have overcome these challenges, personal stories / experiences of LGBTQI+ people regarding support – *“how they were supported/helped”*, *“how they felt”*.

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### 3. Summary analysis of online research

In addition to the focus groups and in-depth interviews that were conducted with the participation of professionals, we ran an online survey addressed to LGBTQI+ individuals and service providers, as an attempt to verify or further analyse the views and stances that were delivered to us by the interviewees. The survey was available for quite an extended period of time, covering almost 6 months (from late September 2021 until late March 2022) and was anonymous.

Overall, 66 people responded sufficiently our survey, coming from a wide age and sexual orientation spectrum. Most answers were provided by the 20-29 age group, counting for 43.9% of the total respondents. The second largest group was between 30-39, giving 27,3% of the answers. Respondents between 40-49 aggregated 15.2% while 50-59 around 13.6%. These statistical records have increased the diversification of our target group and enhanced the representation of data which is expected to reveal a trend that is broadly shared among the members of the two subgroups at national level.

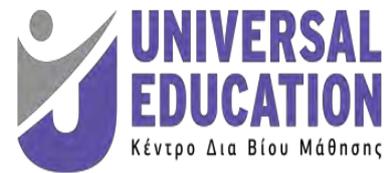
With regards to gender representation, most of the answers were given by women/non-transgender (54.5%), followed by men/non-transgender (40.9%). Transgender men, non-binary and “not wanting to answer” sub-groups represent a very low rate (only 1.5% each). On the contrary, there was a greater diversification with regards to sexual orientation; even if straight people are dominating the sample at a 54.5% percentage, 45.5% is distributed among gay/lesbians (28.8%), bisexuals (12.1%), non-specified/other (3%) and not wanting to answer (1,5%).

Furthermore, there is an almost equal representation between LGBTQI+ individuals (48.5%) and professionals (51.5%), despite the fact that some professionals have also identified themselves as homosexuals or bisexuals. However, it should be noted that most of the professionals who responded to the survey claimed that they were heterosexual which may compromise their perceptions with regards to the actual needs of LGBTQI+ individuals after the pandemic. Besides, we need to emphasize that there were a few respondents who replied that they had not offered





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their services to vulnerable groups even if they filled in the questions of the respective sections, presumably because they were not direct service providers (e.g., holders of administrative posts within their organizations).

In any case, the answers to the questionnaire provide some useful indications to both the feelings and thoughts of LGBTQI+ individuals during the pandemic and the challenges the professionals have experienced, as they were asked to adapt to remote services so abruptly.

### 3.1. LGBTQI+ Individuals

The questions addressed to LGBTQI individuals cover three sections: mental well-being, safety and discrimination as well as access to services.

#### Mental well-being

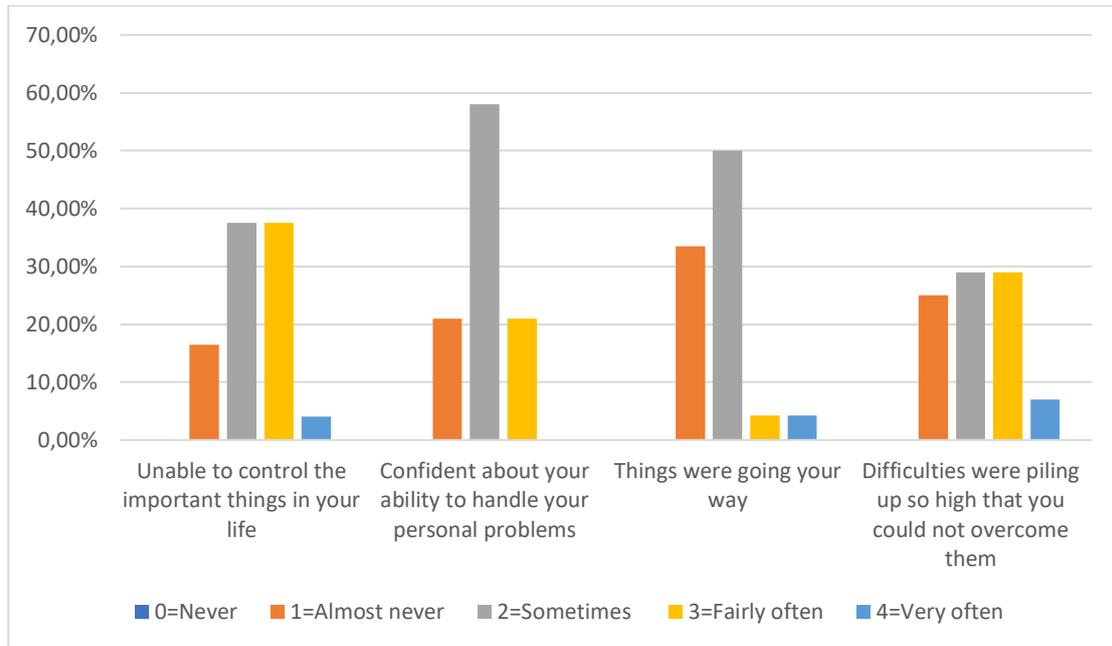
In this section, we aimed to explore the feelings and thoughts of the respondents during the last month, specifying also the frequency they felt or thought this certain way. In the following graph, the figures show that the individuals' **confidence in their ability to handle their personal problems** and **the feeling of things going their way** were mostly affected by the pandemic, scoring high in the midst of the scale, namely in "sometimes" feeling this way during the last month. Interestingly enough, the levels were lower with regards to **how often the respondents had felt that they were unable to control their thoughts** or that **the difficulties were piling up so high that it was hard to overcome**, registering even positive answers, such as "fairly often".

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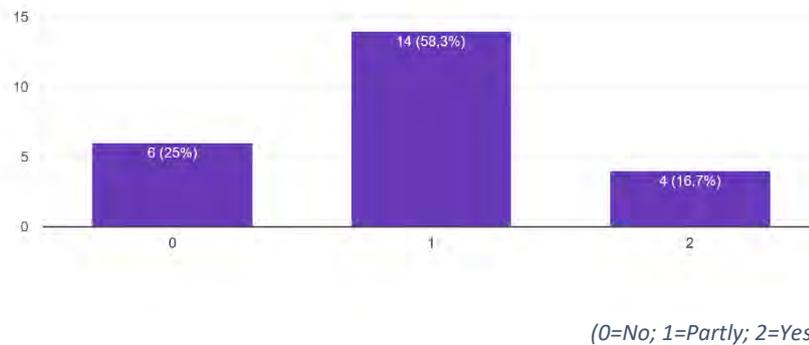
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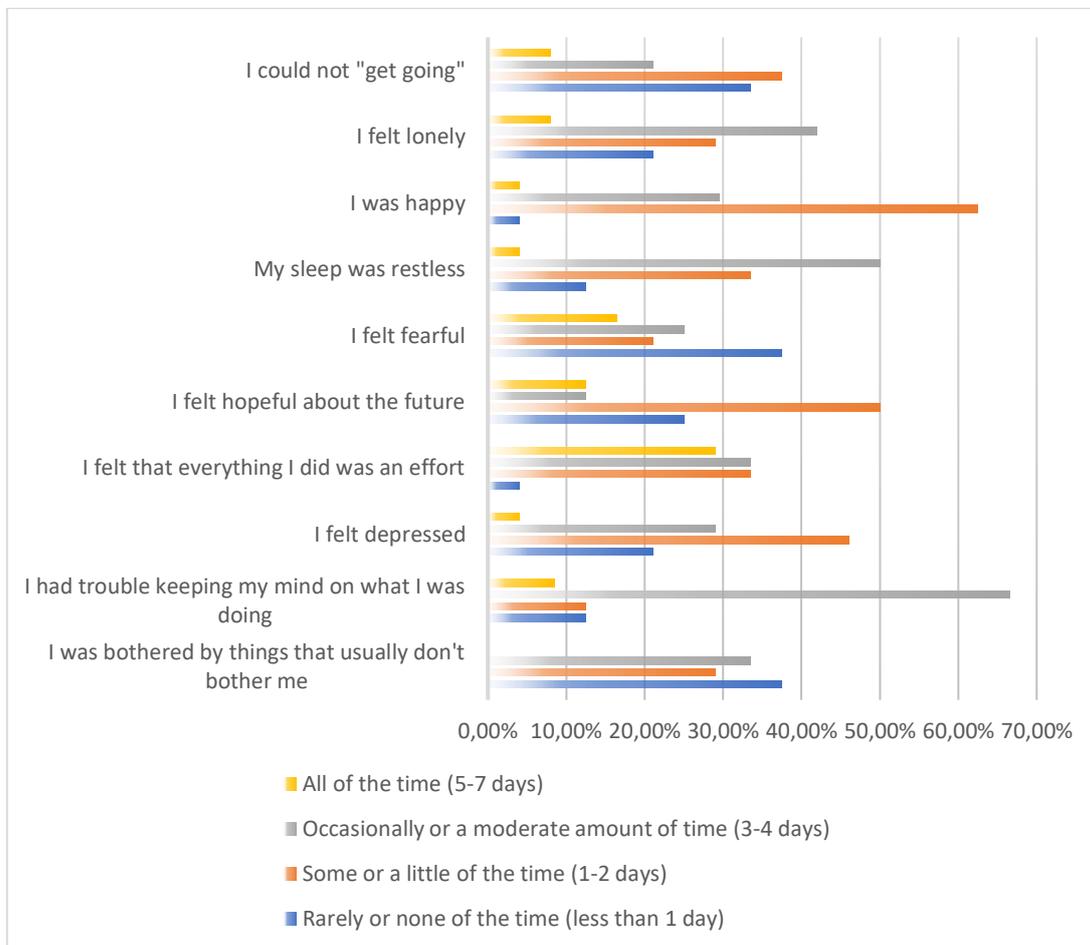
**Diagram 1. The following questions ask you about your feelings and thoughts during THE LAST MONTH. In each case, please indicate your response by scoring HOW OFTEN you felt or thought a certain way.**

As expected, most of the feelings that were examined above were related to COVID-19 pandemic. Only ¼ of the respondents expressed that they experienced similar feelings even before its outbreak.



**Diagram 2. Do you think such feelings were related to the Covid-19 epidemic?**

The next question was about a list of diverse feelings, positive and negative, that the respondents experienced during the last week and their frequency. These covered the following conditions and states of mind:

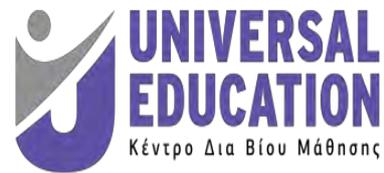


**Diagram 3. List of some of the ways you may have felt or behaved. Please indicate how often you have felt this way during the past week**

As it appears on the above graph, most of the LGBTQI respondents admitted that they were **not agitated by things that usually didn't bother them** (37.5% of the respondents), an answer that was followed, though, by a considerable percentage of people (33.5%) who were indeed bothered occasionally (3-4 days per week). With regards to **being hopeful for the future**, half of LGBTQI+ individuals experienced this feeling only 1-2 days per week or not at all. On the positive side, however, **feelings of fearfulness** remained low, with 37.5% of the respondents reporting that either



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rarely or none of the time felt this way. Likewise, a percentage of 33.50% did not share the thought of *not getting going*.

On the other hand, there was a clear indication that LGBTQI+ individuals suffered from *lack of concentration* (66,5% of the respondents) on a moderate amount of time while they experienced *feelings of depression* (72%) and *loneliness* (71%) at least for 1-2 days or 3-4 days per week (aggregated data). Another revealing fact is that most of the LGBTQI+ respondents needed to *make an effort in order to respond to their everyday tasks* (67%), with almost 29% to claim that they felt this way throughout the week. High percentages were recorded in incidents of *restless sleep* as 83.50% argued that occasionally (50%) or sometimes (33.50%) had sleeping problems. In terms of *feeling happy*, 62.5% of LGBTQI+ participants alleged that they felt this way 1-2 days per week whereas the two ends of the continuum (“all of the time” and “never”) accumulated a mere 4%.

Overall, the data that were analysed above could imply that, despite the difficult time and stress LGBTQI+ people have endured during the pandemic, they managed to strengthen their resilience and ability to cope with negative feelings, even if not in absolute terms.

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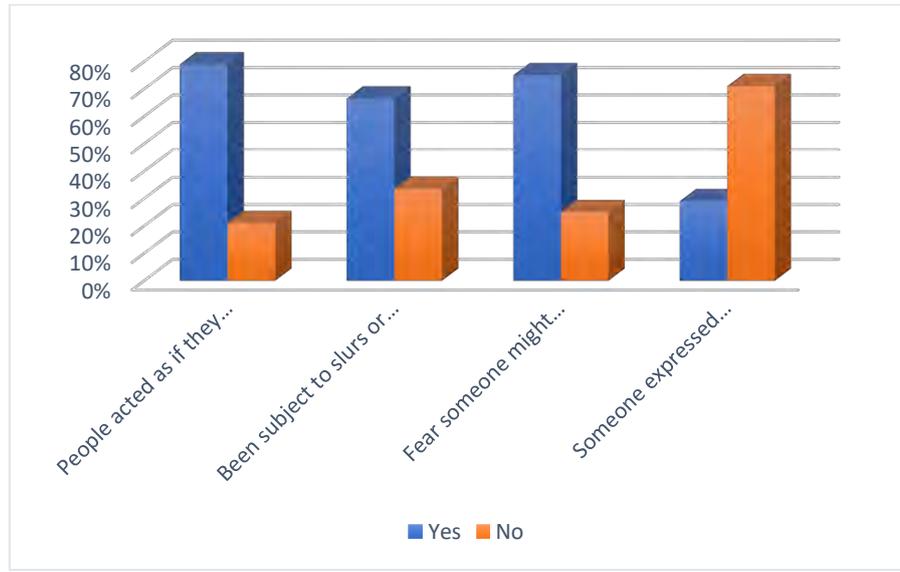
### Safety and discrimination

The questionnaire attempted a comparative analysis of homophobic/transphobic attitudes and incidents of discrimination due to sexual orientation, gender identity or gender characteristics after the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. As it appears on the graph below, however, negative incidents in the form of passive or aggressive behavior towards LGBTQI+ were not much affected by the coronavirus outbreak. On the contrary, support showed a significant increase, reaching 71% as compared with the previous period.



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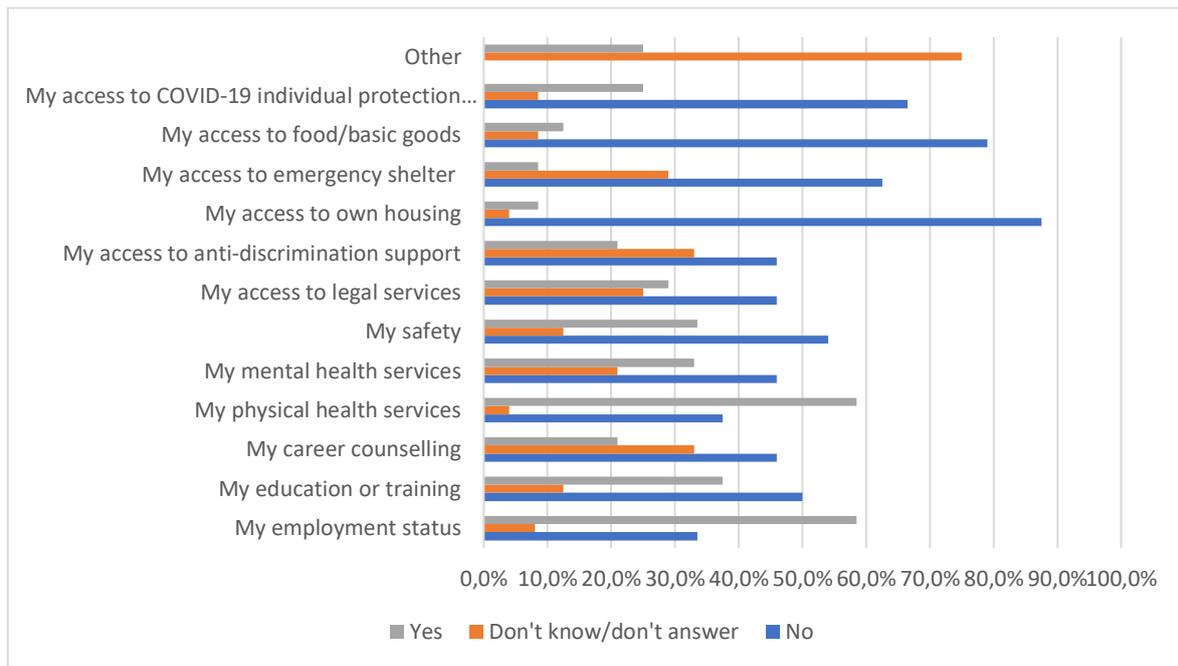
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**Diagram 4. Experiences of discrimination since the coronavirus outbreak as compared to the pro-pandemic period**

**Access to services**

Another illustrating figure is that the majority of LGBTQI+ people did not seek support services during the pandemic which may be associated with cultural characteristics of Greece, where people tend to rely on their families, friends and unofficial networks of support. Nevertheless, the opinion of those who had sought professional support about the providers’ preparedness to effectively help them was that they needed further training in order to respond to the new challenges. Another noteworthy aspect is that most of the LGBTQI+ recipients of support services did not face a discriminatory or unfair judgment during the last year and even if so, discrimination had little or nothing to do with their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender characteristics; this is a promising trend for the future quality of the services.



**Diagram 5. Areas affected negatively during the pandemic**

From the analysis of the figures, the major areas of concern for LGBTQI+ people – and the fields that were mostly affected in a negative way- were their employment status and physical health services, followed by education or training, mental health and access to legal services. Access to own housing and emergency shelter as well as to food/basic goods and COVID-19 individual protection remained, at greatest part, unaffected or scored very high in a positive way.

### 3.2. Professionals

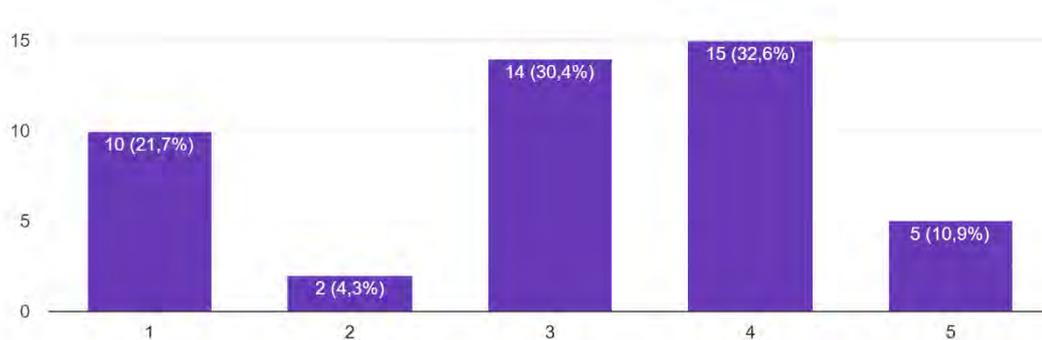
In total, 46 professionals responded to our online survey, coming from diverse career backgrounds, distributed among the following fields (on numerical order): Vocational Education and Adult Training (37%), psychosocial support (23.9%) physical health and other services (10.9%) human rights (8.7%), career counselling/coaching and distribution of basic goods (4.3%). More specifically, the majority of professionals work for Vocational Education and Training institutes (30.4%), NGOs and financial/accounting services (15.2%), public hospitals/clinics and public social services (10.9%),

NGO providing health services and/or basic goods (8.7%), non-specified/other organizations (6.5%) and LGBTIQ+ organizations (2.2%).

According to the data provided by the professionals themselves, 72% of them were required to switch to online services. From those, the two thirds replied that they found it challenging, which justifies the need for training dedicated to the development or improvement of professionals' digital skills and effective provision of remote services.

Professionals were also asked whether they thought that LGBTIQ+ people might need different or additional support during the pandemic. Surprisingly, 18 out of 46 professionals gave a neutral answer ("neither agree nor disagree") while 19 of them said that they somewhat or strongly agreed. Furthermore, almost half of the respondents confirmed that they had offered their services to LGBTIQ+ whereas 24.4% said that they were not aware of the sexual orientation of their clients. Similar results were provided when the participants were asked whether they had a particular knowledge on the challenges LGBTIQ+ people had faced during the pandemic, as shown on the graphic below.

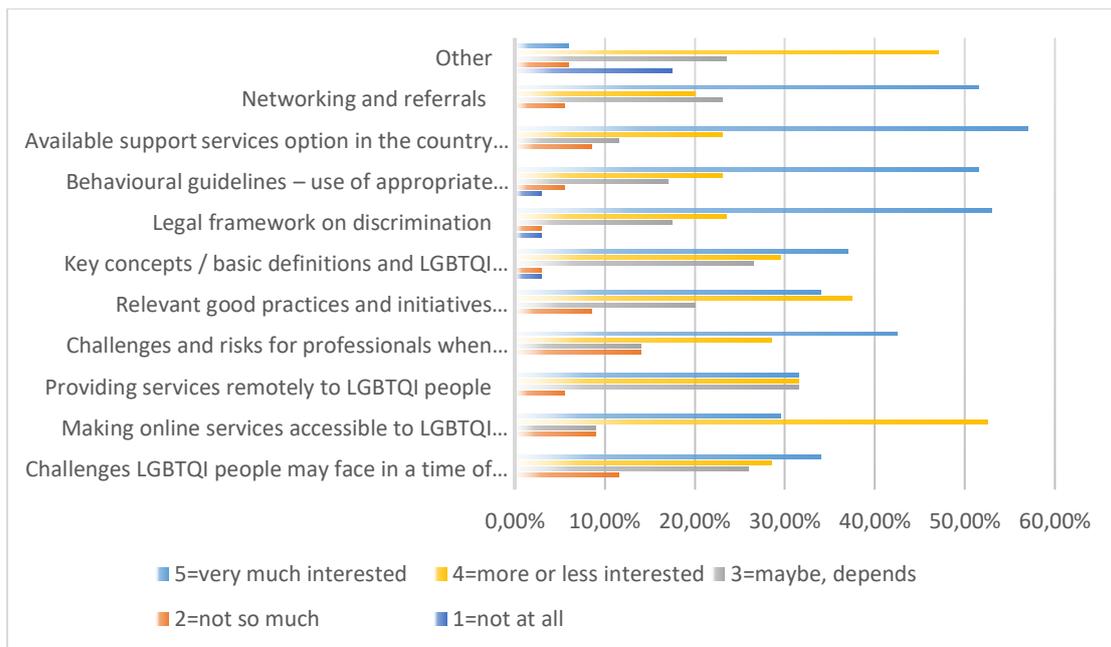
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(0=Not at all; 1=not so well; 3=not sure; 4=well enough; 5=very well)

**Diagram 6. Are you aware of the specific challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ people due to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

An impressive fact is that 41.3% of the professionals claimed that they had received training tailored to LGBTQI+ issues. Without being able to specify the extent and the particular area of LGBTQI+ training, this percentage seems quite adequate given the national context and societal habits. Also, 39 out of 46 professionals expressed their interest to receive further training with the answers to extend from “maybe, it depends” (24.4%), “more or less interested” (26.7%) and “very much interested” (35.6%).



**Diagram 7. Professionals’ expectations and topics of interest**

Evidently, the professionals would like to become aware of the available support services in the country, networking and referrals, the legal framework against discrimination, the behavioral guidelines and existing challenges for themselves when they offer their services remotely. Another field of concern is how to make online services more accessible to LGBTQI+ people.



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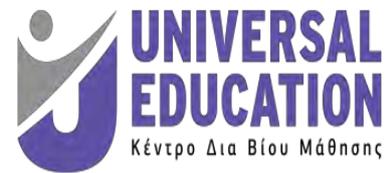


**Part C: General conclusions** *Thanasis Theofilopoulos & Victoria Topalidi*





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The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures that were adopted as a consequence by the Greek government, posed additional challenges on the most vulnerable population groups in the country, including LGBTQI+ individuals. In particular, the feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced by LGBTQI+ people, were piled up on the un- (or limited) availability of much-needed legal, (mental) health and social services, the suspension of medical and legal procedures related to gender transition/affirmation, homo/trans/bi/interphobic domestic abuse and violence exacerbated by the lockdowns, and the lack of access to “safe spaces” or places of LGBTQI+ safe “social interaction” (at least during the first year of the pandemic).

Transgender people faced additional discrimination, due to the identification procedures that were conducted by police officers during document control or by (security) personnel before entering into retail shops or public services including social ones. Incidents of homo/trans/bi/interphobic abuse or assault, despite being reported in a less frequent rate than before the pandemic, were delivered virtually, leading to another form of LGBTQI+ exclusion during a very challenging period. Moreover, LGBTQI+ people on extreme vulnerability, such as migrants/refugees, homeless or individuals with very low or no income due to the restrictive measures in the operation of central (governmental) or municipal authorities, social services, NGOs (either focusing on LGBTQI+ people or in vulnerable groups), were found on anticipation of additional support in order to address their most basic medical, food and shelter needs.

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On the other hand, professionals and service providers offering their services to LGBTQI+ people have come across their own challenges. The fact that they had to switch to online, remote services, without being prepared or trained about it, within a very short period of time, created feelings of stress as they were put under extreme pressure in order to meet the needs of their beneficiaries and the requirements of their employers. More than that, professionals often felt undervalued and ignored by their employers, with their efforts to address the gaps and the necessities of the new working reality not being appreciated.



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Our research within the EU-funded project RAINBO - Raising the Digital Literacy of Professionals to Address Inequalities and Exclusion of LGBTQI+ Community, has focused on identifying both the needs of LGBTQI+ individuals during COVID-19 (and subsequently on times of crisis) and the ones of the professionals under the new digital-oriented working environment that is being shaped – as a result of the pandemic which has enhanced the trend of remote work. Despite the fact that a set of good practices were introduced, implemented or endorsed during the pandemic (especially during the second year), which have provided valuable support, their scope had either limited efficiency or required further actions in order to be established and embraced by the society. Among these practices, we can distinguish:

- adaptation of LGBTQI+ oriented services (e.g., support groups organized by Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community) or events (e.g., Athens Pride Festival) provided by NGOs into online, remote settings
- re-activation of support helplines for LGBTQI+ seeking psychological support (e.g., reactivation of the 11528 “Next to You” helpline for LGBTQI+ people) as well as development of selfcare guidelines for LGBTQI+ people (and/or professionals supporting them) during the pandemic and the implementation of the restrictive measures (e.g., guides published by Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community and Orlando LGBT+ Mental health without stigma)
- official guidelines towards police officers and central/local authorities for the verbal confirmation of identity for transgender people (whose gender identity has not been legally recognized) while checking their ID’s during the restrictive measures audit procedures (e.g., Joint Ministerial Decision, Ministry of Citizen’s Protection)
- increased (due to the pandemic’s impact) social solidarity allowance – provided by the state to all people in need
- distribution of Covid-19 tests or self-protection equipment, meals and/or basic goods to people in need (including LGBTQI+) by NGOs sometimes supported by local authorities, the Greek Government, other NGOs and international institutions (e.g., relevant interventions from Positive Voice NGO and the Greek Transgender Support Association)
- advocacy actions carried out by NGOs for the protection of LGBTQI+ during the pandemic.

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Furthermore, we organized personal, in-depth interviews and focus groups as well as an online survey targeting both LGBTQI+ individuals and professionals and service providers supporting them.

During our analysis, we concluded to the following outcomes:

A. LGBTQI+ people

- The majority of LGBTQI+ people did not seek support during the pandemic which may be explained by the particular societal characteristics of Greece. From the ones that addressed to professionals for support, the majority said that they did not feel discriminated against due to their SOGISCs but they revealed that the professionals needed additional training in order to be able to provide efficient services.
- The most affected fields during the pandemic, as were identified by LGBTQI+ people themselves, were their access to physical health services and their employment status, followed by their education and their access to mental health services.

B. Professionals:

- Two thirds of the professionals who responded to the online survey admitted that they found it challenging to adapt to remote services and that, although they had received training for LGBTQI+ people's needs (without specifying what kind and to which extend, though) they would appreciate additional training. The same was testified by the professionals that were interviewed during in-depth interviews.
- Among the skills that professionals supporting LGBTQI+ people should have, the most important are: *flexibility, openness, empathy, awareness of their own prejudices and stereotypes, mental resilience, creativity, further knowledge on LGBTQI+ terminology and issues as well as digital skills (at least to the point they can effectively offer their services to their clients).*
- Among the areas of training that were identified as necessary during the interviews and through the online survey, are *support services, networking and referrals, legal framework for the protection of LGBTQI+ people, behavioral principles, the social, psychological, financial, physical needs of special social groups as well as risks the professionals themselves may face.*

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To conclude, it becomes evident that, having experienced such an unprecedented challenge like a pandemic recently, the level of preparedness, resilience and establishment of networks that could efficiently support people in need, in particular LGBTQI+ individuals for the purposes of the current research, is a critical factor that needs to be seriously considered in the aftermath of COVID-19 or in the design of intervention plans for future crises. Besides, as we are heading to a new working reality, driven by digital technologies and remote services, professionals need to build or improve their skillset in order to be able to respond effectively in the challenges that will arise in the near future. Even if, in social sciences and first response services, personal interaction plays a vital role, professionals need to be further trained, supported and heard of, as they are required to carry out very important responsibilities with a strong social impact.

