Project's RAINBO transnational summary report.

Challenges and inequalities faced by LGBTQI+ people during Covid-19 pandemic, needs of professionals and good practices

Written by: Thanasis Theofilopoulos

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Foreword

Project "RAINBO - Raising the Digital Literacy of Professionals to Address Inequalities and Exclusion of LGBTQI Community'' is implemented in Greece (Symplexis and AKMI International), Luxembourg (Novel Group Sarl), Netherlands (Stichting Global Alliance for LGBT Education - Stichting GALE), Portugal (Sociedade Promotora de Estabelecimentos de Ensino), Romania (HIP - Hub for Innovation Policy S.R.L) and the United Kingdom (CCW Training Academy Limited) and is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The project is coordinated by CCW Training Academy Limited.

The project aims to build the capacity of professionals working in the field (support services providers) in order to be able to cope with online technologies and social distancing and better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people in need, during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as in future crisis. In order to do so and in context of the project, field (primary) as well as desk (secondary) research was conducted with the purpose to identify challenges and inequalities faced by LGBTQI+ people during Covid-19 pandemic, assess the relevant training needs of professionals - especially with regards to online/remote support services provision – as well as to collect existing good practices and initiatives in the EU participating countries and the UK which took place during the pandemic activating communication, solidarity, and social protection in order to support, inform, and provide relief to LGBTQI+ people (e.g., counselling, helplines, provision of medication, food, meals etc.).

The present report summarises the main findings of the desk and field research conducted in Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Section 1 includes basic information about the research methods used, the sample and the research team, section 2 summarises the main findings regarding challenges and inequalities that LGBTQI+ people faced during the Covid-19 pandemic in Greece,

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Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom as identified by both LGBTQI+ people living in the aforementioned countries and professionals working in the field, section 3 summarises the main findings regarding training needs assessment of professionals together with identified skills and competencies that they should have - again as identified by both GBTQI+ people living in the aforementioned countries and professionals themselves - in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people and be properly equipped to better respond in times of crisis and work remotely / online and, finally, section 4, briefly presents best practices implemented in the aforementioned countries by civil society organisations, governments, public services, activists and/or human rights defenders to provide support services to LGBTQI+ people during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as keep advocating their human rights in these challenging times.

More, in-depth information regarding the situation in each country and/or other projects activities, can be found in the project's website www.rainboprojectlgbtqi.eu and/or its Facebook page www.facebook.com/Rainboproject

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1. The RAINBO's research

The research team consisted of Thanasis Theofilopoulos and Victoria Topalidi (Greece), Ester Maria Kalogeroudi (Luxembourg) Peter Dankmeijer (Netherlands), Joana Silva (Portugal) and Mike Tan and Harri Shuffley (United Kingdom). The researchers conducted a combination of desk research and field research that included personal interviews, focus groups as well as online surveys. The research was designed by Thanasis Theofilopoulos (Symplexis) with the contribution of Peter Dankmeijer (Stichting GALE) and was implemented during 2021-2022.

Overall, researchers from participating organisations and countries conducted 41 personal interviews with professionals working in the field / support services providers (10 in Luxembourg, Portugal and Greece, 7 in Netherlands and 4 in the UK), 25 personal interviews and one focus group with 5 LGBTQI+ people - in total 30 LGBTQI+ people - living in the participating countries (10 in Luxemburg, 5 in Portugal, 2 in the UK, 7 in Netherlands and 6 in Greece). All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded after participants have provided their - informed and signed – consent, in order to facilitate analysis of the results.

The observed differences with regards to sample among countries reflect the multiple challenges that researchers faced – more or less – in all participating countries: one of the most common was the reluctance of LGBTQI+ people to participate in the research although the latter one was totally anonymous and was conducted mainly via online conference applications in order to facilitate the participation of LGBTQI+ people across the participating countries. Only assumptions can be made regarding this reluctance. But, in any case, researchers are and should be always aware that people often marginalised and discriminated against and/or feeling that nothing will change and/or with past bad experiences (e.g., from their participation in former research)

may be very reluctant to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences for research purposes.

In order to ensure the participation of as many LGBTQI+ people (and professionals) as possible, researchers conducted an - again totally anonymous - online survey as well. Numbers and percentages of participants from both target groups in all participating countries are included in **Table 1**.

Country of origin	Total Number of participants	% of total sample	Number of LGBTQI respondents	% of LGBTQI respondents	Number of professionals respondents	% of professionals respondents
Greece	112	36%	57	51%	55	49%
Luxembourg	40	13%	25	62,5%	15	37,5%
Netherlands	62	20%	45	73%	17	27%
Portugal	54	18%	36	67%	18	33%
UK	31	10%	15	48%	16	52%
Other European country	6	2%	4	67%	2	33%
Outside Europe	2	1%	2	100%	0	0%
TOT	**307**	100%	**184**		**123**	
Missing	**2**	1%				

Table 1

2. Challenges and inequalities LGBTQI+ people face during Covid-19 pandemic

This section summarises major challenges and inequalities faced by LGBTQI+ people in Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and the UK as identified by professionals/support services providers and LGBTQI+ people who took part in RAINBO project's research. The combination of these different perspectives and experiences, provide a wider and in-depth insight of the aforementioned challenges and inequalities.

2.1. The professionals' perspective

- **Lockdown in hostile family/domestic environments**: LGBTQI+ people were forced to live under the same roof with people who did not choose and/or with family members who were unaware of their SOGICH or did not accept/respect them (research participants in Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Portugal).

- **Domestic homo/trans/bi/interphobic violence and abuse increases**: In some cases, the forced cohabitation (lockdowns) due to Covid-19 pandemic with family members who do not respect/accept the SOGISC (sexual orientation/gender identity/sex characteristics) of their LGBTQI+ relatives living with them, led to (increase of) homo/trans/bi/interphobic domestic violence and abuse (research participants in Greece, Netherlands and Portugal).

- **Stigmatization, victimisation, profiling while implementing or monitoring restrictive measures**: In some cases, LGBTQI people were discriminated against by local authorities and officials during the implementation of Covid-19 restrictive measures and/or the respective checks and/or were considered to be more vulnerable to Covid-19 pandemic (research participants in Luxembourg).

- **No or limited access to LGBTQI+ friendly environments and/or communication**: *"Escape exits''* - such as to LGBTQI+ friendly bars and clubs where a LGBTQI person

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can find his/her/their *"second"* or *"chosen"* family, feel safe and not being judged for who he/she/they is/are - from unwelcoming and/or hostile family/domestic environments were no longer available due to Covid-19 restrictive measures (research participants in Greece and in Netherlands). Moreover, lockdown in hostile/unwelcoming environments also meant that LGBTQI+ people find it difficult to have at least safe online interactions with LGBTQI+ people and/or discussions regarding SOGISC due to lack of privacy (research participants in Netherlands).

- **Increased negative impact to mental health**: Lockdown in hostile/abusive environments, increased (domestic) homo/trans/bi/interphobic violence, lack of "escaping" options - e.g., visiting LGBTQI+ friendly bars and clubs, disruption of sex life (=due to lockdown measures which prevent LGBTQI+ people from visiting cruising spots, meeting in person people the met in LGBTQI+ applications etc.) and/or lack of support services - together with the general socioeconomic insecurity and the negative effects of the pandemic to jobs and income - all these led also to increased levels of stress and feelings of isolation, loneliness and - sometimes - desperation and/or suicide thoughts among LGBTQI+ people (research participants in Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and the UK).

- **Increased negative impact to income**: LGBTQI+ people were more likely to work in highly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic industries and sectors such as fashion, hairdressing, food, retail, sex work etc. (research participants in Luxembourg).

- **Additional mental health burden for LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees**: the disruption of available support services due to restrictive measures *"increases survival stress"* of these populations (research participants in Greece).

- **Lack or disruption of available support services for LGBTQI+ people**: Many support services had to close down for some time - at least at the beginning of the pandemic and before necessary adaptations – remained closed (research participants in Greece and Netherlands) or when available again online, they were

no so effective / sufficient as they were before the pandemic outbreak (research participants in the UK).

- **Health services focused on Covid-19 and/or deprioritizing health needs of LGBTQI+ people**: Health systems were particularly focused on how to stop the spread of the pandemic and/or deprioritized other health needs as non "urgent" – for example, LGBTQI+ people who are HIV positive, faced challenges when seeking their medication or treatment (research participants in Luxembourg and Portugal).

- **Additional obstacles for LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees seeking support, including safe housing**: LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants who already find it hard enough to speak up and trust support services providers, find it even harder to trust and seek the support of services providers with whom they could no longer meet in person due to restrictive measures (research participants in Greece). Furthermore, in some cases, LGBTQI+ safe housing facilities for LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants (=especially for the ones without papers) had to close down / were not available during the Covid-19 pandemic - as a result, LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants became homeless or they had to live in unwelcoming (homo/trans/bi/interphobic) and even dangerous facilities (research participants in Greece, Luxembourg and Netherlands). In some cases, refugees and undocumented people even faced racist behaviors for support services providers (research participants in Netherlands).

- **Obstacles to legal gender recognition procedures**: In some cases, due to the restrictive measures, courthouses had to close down thus, legal gender recognition procedures stopped (research participants in Greece) and/or justice services were available only for issues that were falsely considered to be more "urgent" (research participants in Luxembourg). Moreover, bureaucratic procedures related to legal gender recognition got worse during the Covid-19 pandemic (research participants in Portugal). Furthermore, lockdown together

with disrespectful and unsupportive family members also disrupted transition procedures (research participants in Greece).

- **Limited access to asylum/migrations services**: During the Covid-19 pandemic, access to asylum services was limited for all asylum seekers - including the LGBTQI+ ones (research participants in Greece). Furthermore, refugees and migrants without papers also faced bureaucratic obstacles and the inadequacy of officials (research participants in Netherlands).

- **Lack of precaution measures in LGBTQI events or venues**: In some cases, the measures preventing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic were not effectively implemented in LGBTQI events or venues (research participants in Netherlands).

2.2. The LGBTQI+ people's perspective

As Diagram 1 shows, 13% (Netherlands) to 33% (Luxembourg) of the LGBTQI+ respondents to our online survey felt that during the Covid-19 pandemic "difficulties are pilling too much", 24% (Luxembourg and Portugal) to 30% (Netherlands) felt that "things were not going their way", 18% (Luxembourg) to 35% (Netherlands) were struggling with a "lack of confidence" while 18% (UK) to 34% (Portugal) were struggling with a lack of control".
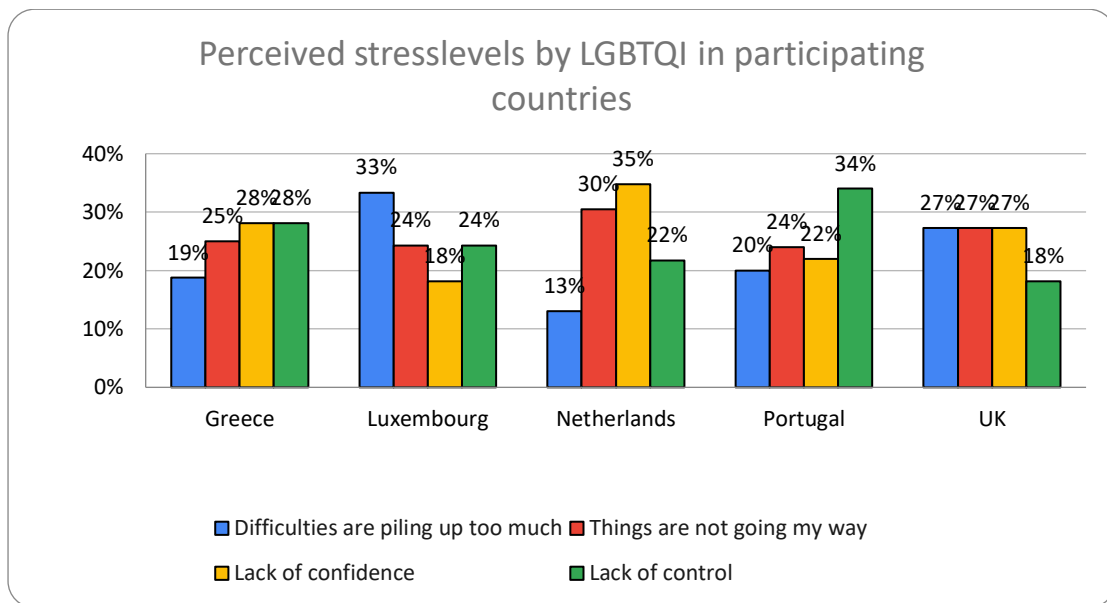
Perceived stresslevels by LGBTQI in participating countries

Diagram 1

In most countries (Greece, Portugal and the UK), the majority of LGBTQI+ respondents believed that the stress they experienced was "partly" related to Covid-19 pandemic (51%, 63% and 58% respectively), while in Luxembourg answers were equally divided to "partly" related to covid-19 pandemic and totally related to covid-19 pandemic (Diagram 2). Only in the Netherlands, the majority (51%) of LGBTQI+ respondents believed that there is no link between the stress they experience and the Covid-19 pandemic, yet there is a strong 36% that believed that they are "partly" related (Diagram 2). A possible explanation of the aforementioned is that Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated already / existing (pre-covid) stressing factors and sources (e.g., inequality, violations of human rights, homo/trans/bi/interphobia in society etc.) thus LGBTQI+ respondents felt that their stress was "partly" linked to the pandemic.
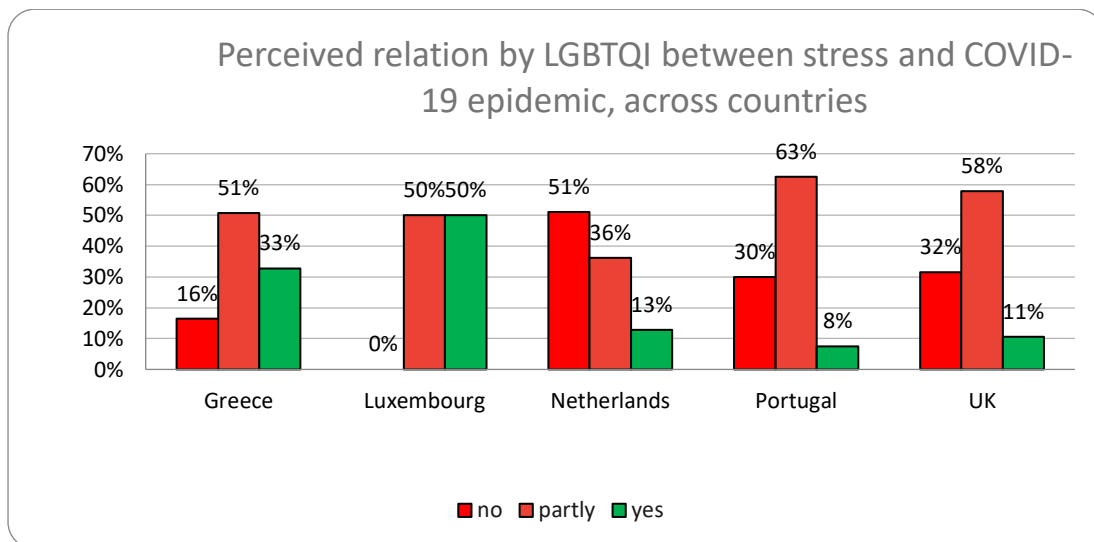
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Diagram 2

According to Diagram 3, LGBTQI+ participants responses from Greece top all "expressions" of depression (except for feeling "not get going" equally shared with responds from Luxembourg) followed by those in Luxembourg (feeling "lonely", "fearful" and "depressed", "trouble focusing" and feeling "bothered") while responds in the Netherlands reach the lowest levels in 7 out of 10 available (optional) responds.

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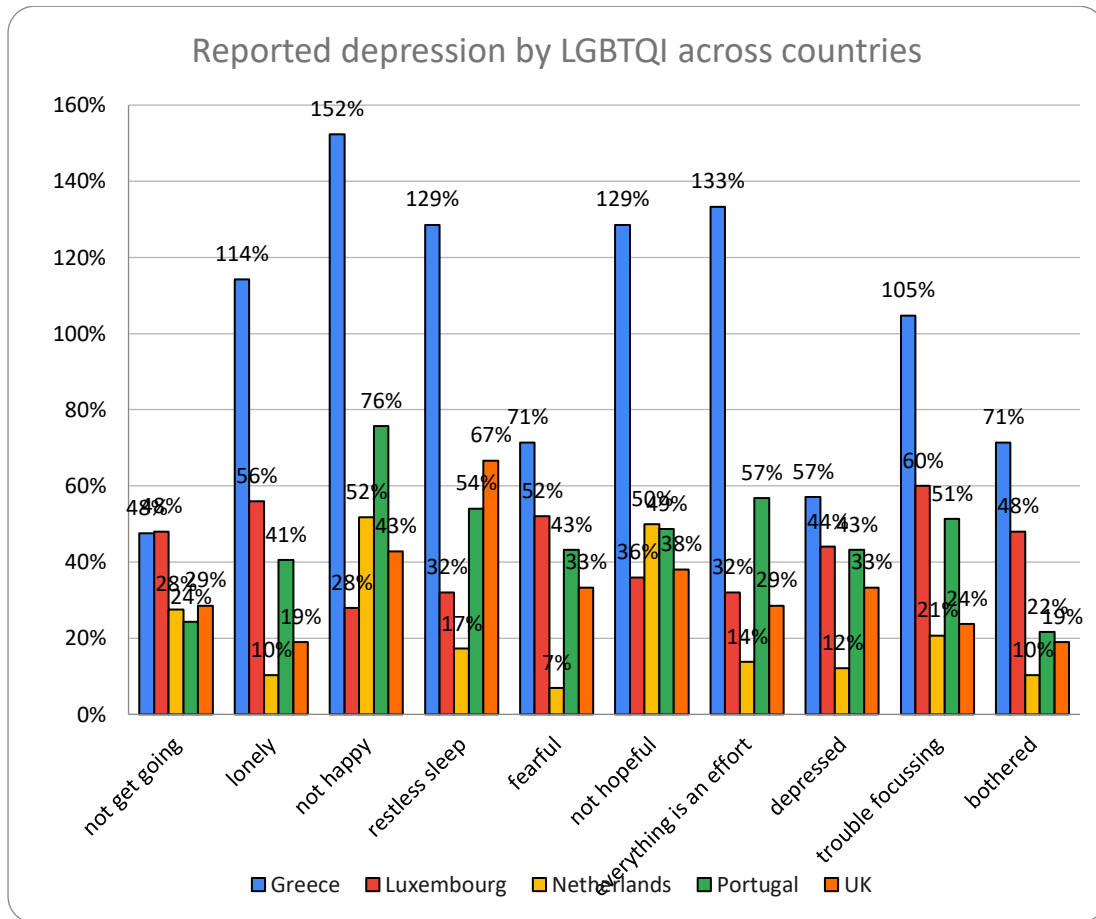## Reported depression by LGBTQI across countries

Diagram 3

In most countries (Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal and the UK), half or the majority of LGBTQI respondents (57%, 50%, 48% and 79% respectively) think the level of depression is "partly" linked to Covid-19 pandemic (Diagram 4). Luxembourg has also the highest rate (50%) of LGBTQI+ respondents who believe that there is a relationship between level of depression and the covid-19 pandemic as well as the lowest (0%) of those who do not believe that such relationship exists (Diagram 4). In Portugal, LGBTQI+ respondents equally believed that there is no such relationship or that there is "partly" a relationship (48% respectively), while in the UK none of the respondents believed that depression and Covid19 pandemic are totally related to each other.
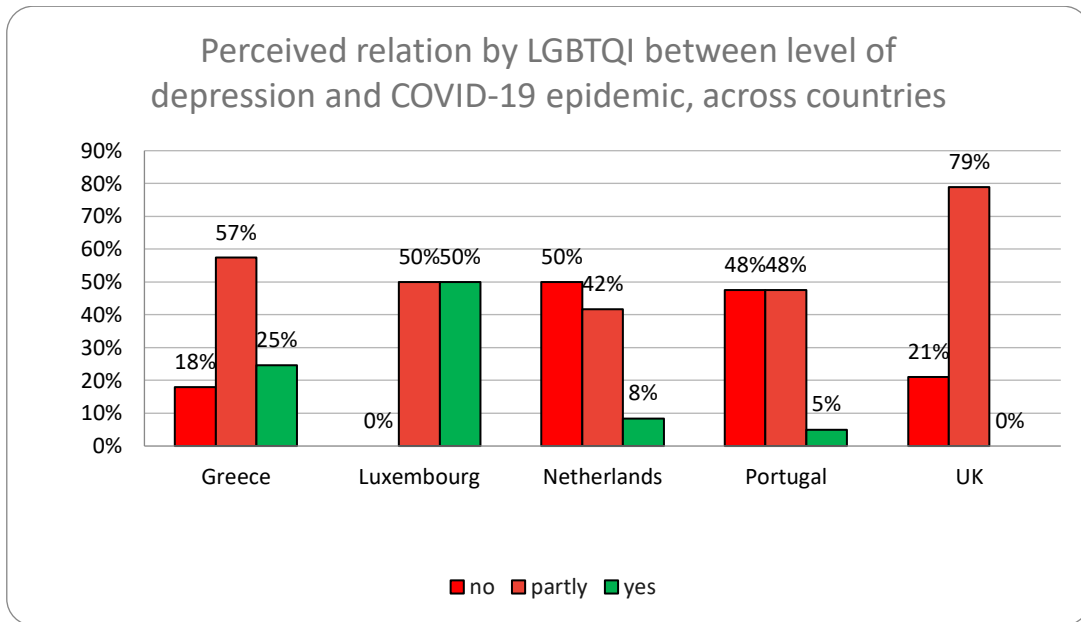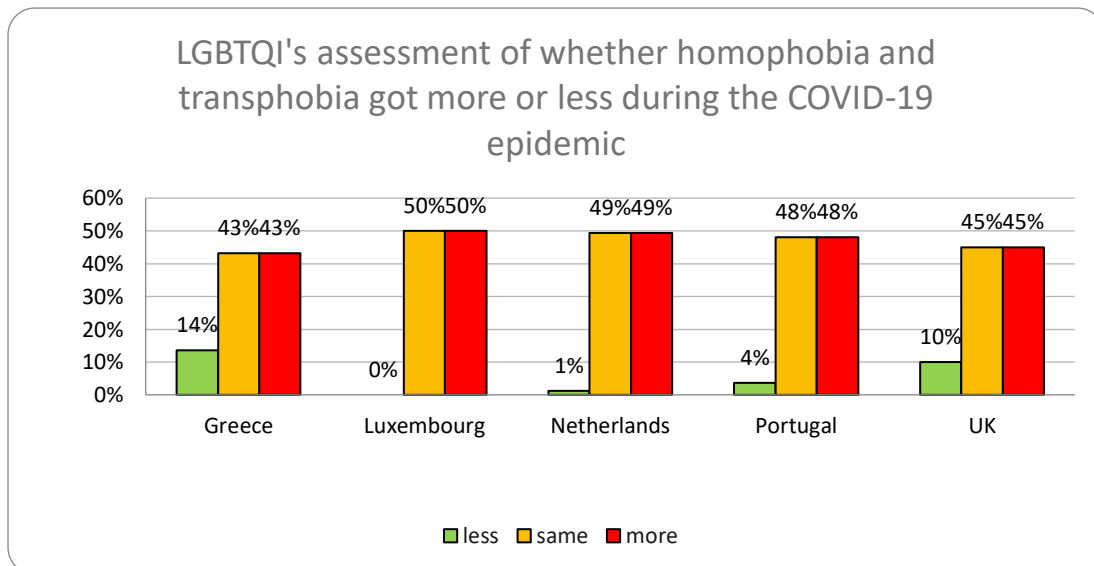
Diagram 4

Diagram 5

In all participating countries, LGBTQI+ respondents equally believed that homo/transphobia is either the "same" or gotten worse during the Covid-19 pandemic (Diagram 5). During the pandemic, the majority of LGBTQI+ respondents in four out of five participating countries felt that other people "supported them" (Diagram 6).

Among all five participating countries, LGBTQI+ respondents in the Netherlands suffered less from homo/trans/bi/interphobic "slurs/jokes" or "physical attacks" or "uncomfortable" behaviours from other people (Diagram 6). This reveals that the wider social context in the country is quite safe for LGBTQI+ people. Luxenbourg and Greece seem to be less safe – among all five participating countries - for LGBTQI+ people during the Covid-19 pandemic as quite high rates of homo/trans/bi/interphobic "slurs/jokes" or "physical attacks" or "uncomfortable" behaviours towards LGBTQI+ people indicate (Diagram 6).
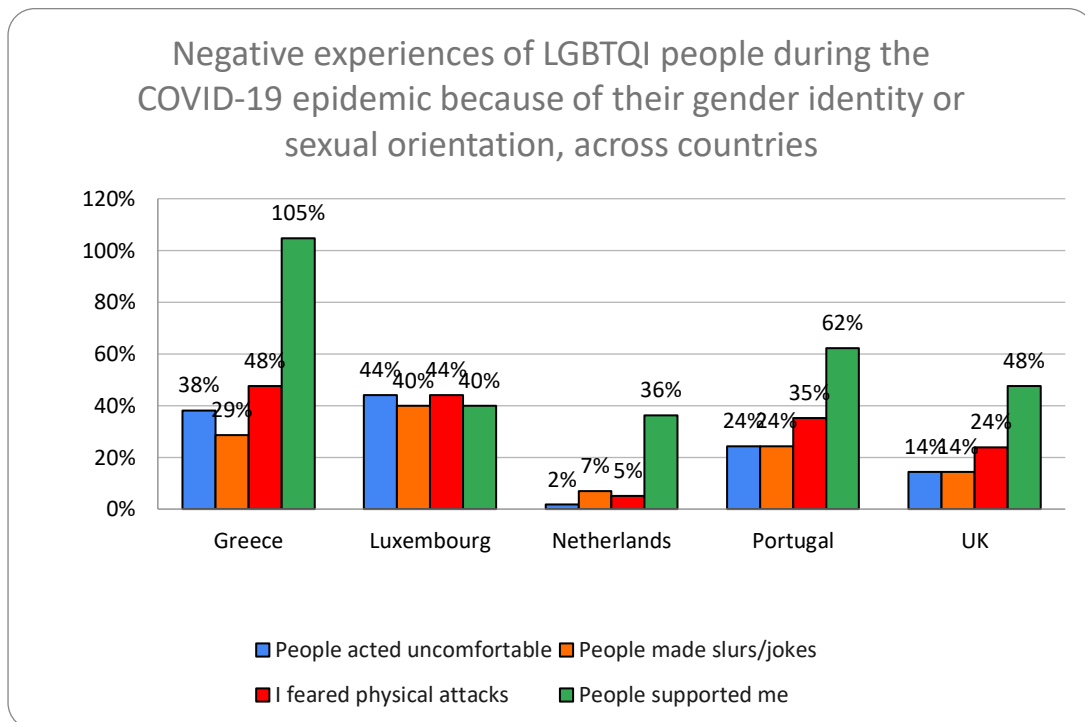
Diagram 6

As Diagram 7 shows, the majority of LGBTQI+ respondents in four out of five participating countries did not seek any kind of support service during the Covid-19 pandemic. Past negative experiences, fear of discrimination and/or abuse, lack of knowledge of available support services and/or lack of support services targeting LGBTQI+ people are some possible explanations for this especially when considering the rest of the RAINBO's projects research results.

LGBTQI asking for help during COVID-19 epidemic, across countries

Country	no	don't know	yes
Greece	80%	7%	13%
Luxembourg	26%	30%	43%
Netherlands	53%	0%	47%
Portugal	65%	8%	28%
UK	47%	11%	42%

Diagram 7

LGBTQI+ respondents in Greece report the highest negative impact - in terms of accessibility - of Covid-19 pandemic in a vast majority of services and rights (Diagram 8), t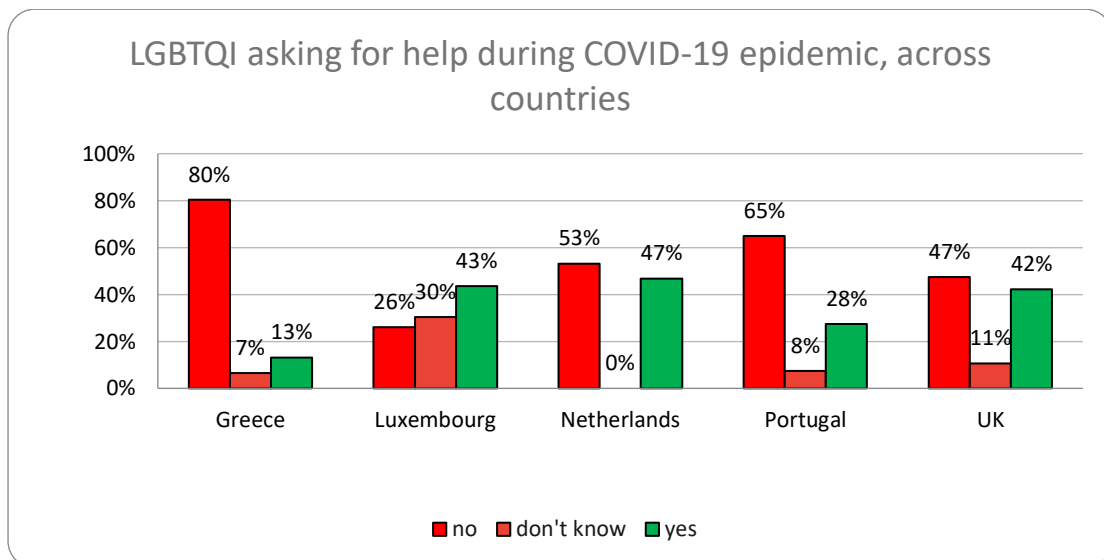hus revealing that the country failed - at least in a sufficient enough way – to properly respond to the needs of LGBTQI+ people during the Covid-19 pandemic. In other participating countries, challenges and obstacles were mainly identified regarding "safety" and "other" sectors (Luxembourg), access to "housing" (Luxembourg and then Portugal), "emergency shelter" and "anti-discrimination report" (Luxembourg and then Portugal and UK), "access to covid-19 protection" (Portugal and then Luxembourg), "access to food" (Luxembourg and then Portugal), "legal services" (Luxembourg and then Portugal). Among all five participating countries, LGBTQI+ respondents from the Netherlands believe in a (much, in some case) lesser degree that their access to basic services and rights has been negatively affected during the Covid-19 pandemic (Diagram 8).
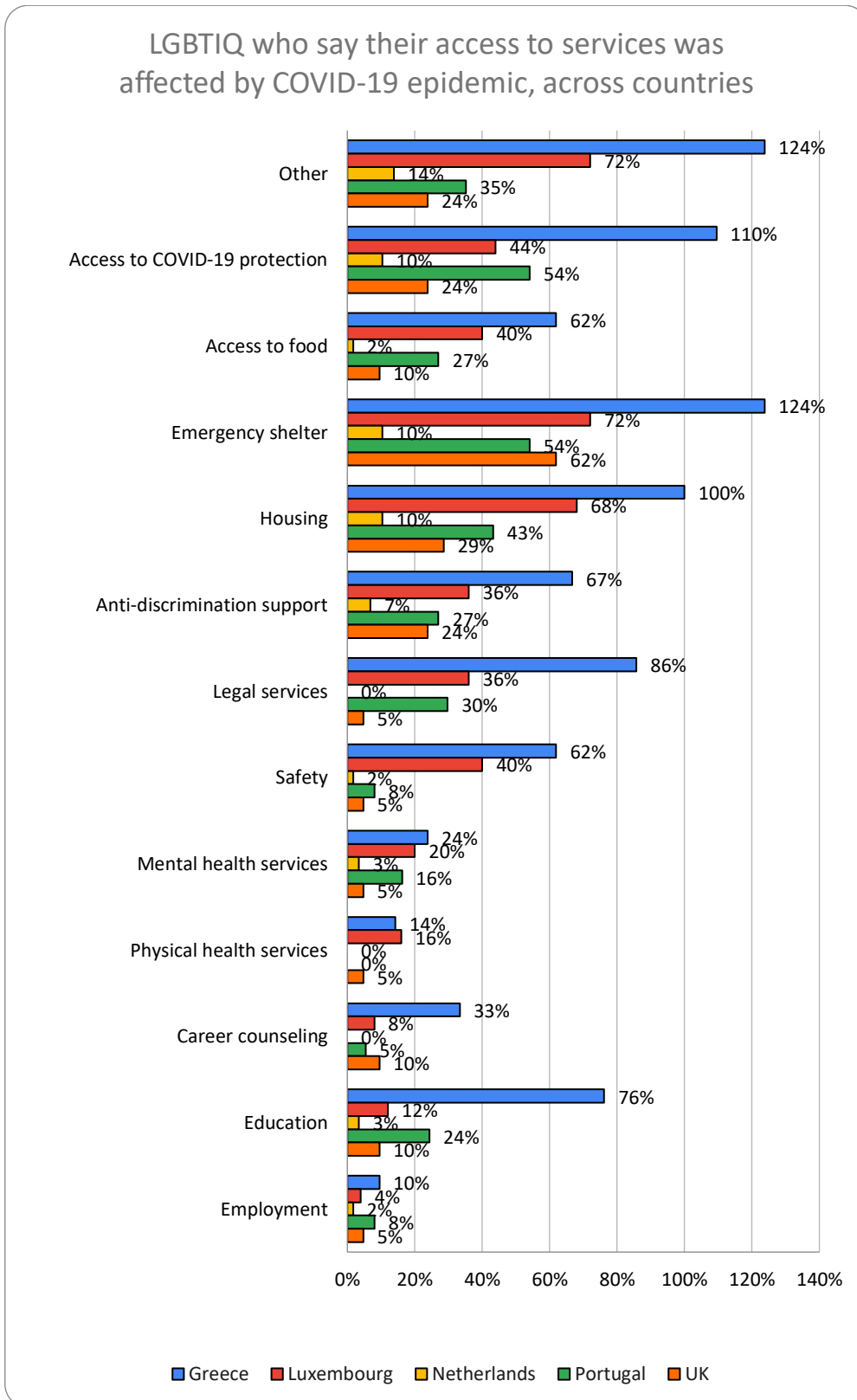
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Diagram 8

- **Increased negative impact to mental health**: Some people belonging in the LGBTQI+ spectrum - e.g., Lesbian women - often have to fight with loneliness but during the Covid-19 pandemic the situation was exacerbated (research participants in Netherlands). Furthermore, LGBTQI+ people referred to the appearance of feelings of anxiety and melancholy related to Covid-19 pandemic as well as stress of getting ill with Covid-19 (participants in Luxembourg), while stress linked with feelings of isolation were also present (participants in Portugal and the UK). In general, mental health issues among LGBTQI+ people increased during the Covid-19 pandemic (participants in Luxembourg).

- **Increased negative impact to employment status and income**: LGBTQI people – like many non LGBTQI+ people – saw their income decreasing and/or they lost their jobs but many LGBTQI+ people work in sectors that were particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (participants in Luxembourg).

- **Existing discrimination and other challenges exacerbated**: Anti-LGBTQI discrimination in employment and housing, increased possibility of homelessness, ineffective health treatment etc. often faced by LGBTQI+ people, exacerbated during Covid-19 pandemic (participants in Luxembourg). Trans people and LGBTQI+ people of colour were particularly vulnerable before the pandemic and became even more after the outbreak of the pandemic (participants in Luxembourg).

- **Challenges during police checks in public spaces**: In some cases and during lockdown measures, people were allowed to go for a small walk only with family members with whom they lived in the same house or visit close family members but only in case of an emergency – thus, during a potential police check, LGBTQI people could face challenges when they were out with their (same sex) partner or wanted to visit them (in case they did not live in the same house) as they could hardly *"prove"* - compared with cis-straight couples - that they are related (research participants in Greece).

- **Challenges faced by trans people during police checks as well checks in stores etc**: Furthermore, trans people without legal recognition of their gender identity could be fined by the police or refused access to stores, restaurants etc. due to the inconsistency between the name in their ID and the name in their vaccination certificate (research participants in Greece).

- **Stigmatization and discrimination towards LGBTQI+ people during monitoring the implementation of restrictive measures**: increased police presence in public cruising spots as well as increased and strict police checks to people walking or moving close to such spots (research participants in Greece).

- **LGBTQI+ venues closed down or with limited access**: Due to the restrictive measures, LGBTQI+ people could no longer visit places where they are *"safe"*, they can *"express themselves"*, *"self-identify"* and meet other people with whom they would feel *"familiar"* and/or like a *"family"*, thus *"escaping"* from the wider *"suppressive, heteronormative"* social environment (research participants in Greece).

- **Disruption of sex life**: Fear of Covid-19 and/or restrictive measures prevented LGBTQI+ people for meeting new people and/or have sex with them (research participants in Greece and Netherlands).

- **Lack of LGBTQI+ visibility in information and awareness regarding Covid-19 pandemic**: Public messages, campaigns and news regarding the pandemic the preventive and protective measures failed to include a LGBTQI+ perspective e.g. by referring to LGBTQI+ issues/dimensions, including LGBTQI+ people with whom the rest LGBTQI+ people could be related to etc (research participants in Greece).

- **LGBTQI+ issues deprioritized and limited chances for advocacy**: All issues related to LGBTQI+ identities and human rights considered to be less "urgent" in the framework of the pandemic (research participants in Luxembourg). Furthermore, advocacy activities were limited as access to legislators, authorities etc. was also limited (research participants in Luxembourg).

- **Services provided online do not come without disadvantages**: For some LGBTQI+ people, support services - e.g., psychological ones - provided online are not so effective as the ones provided in person (research participants in Portugal). Moreover, for some LGBTQI+ people, different kind of activities – e.g. studying in a University – was also a way out of isolation – due to Covid-19 pandemic such activities (Universities lessons) were carried out online, thus LGBTQI+ people remained even more time at home (research participants in Portugal).

3. Training needs and necessary skills and competencies of professionals working in the field

In this section, the training needs of professionals/support services providers - as assessed during the field research interviews and/or focus groups, online surveys) in the participating country – as well as suggested (by the research participants) training topics, approaches, methods and activities are summarised. The section also includes skills and competencies identified by research participants - both professionals/support services provides and LGBTQI+ people – as necessary for professionals/support services providers working with LGBTQI+ people and/or (remotely) during a crisis e.g., the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to be more efficient and better respond to challenges faced and the needs of the beneficiaries of their services.

3.1. Assessed training needs and training approach, structure, methods and activities

The RAINBO's online survey revealed that 13% (Portugal) to 28% (UK) of LGBTQI+ respondents in the five participating countries believe that professionals working in the field are not well equipped to support them during the Covid-19 pandemic (Diagram 9). Moreover, in three (Greece, Luxembourg, UK) out of five participating countries, the most popular answer - among LGBTQI+ respondents - was that they neither agree nor disagree with the opinion that professionals are well equipped. Only in Portugal, the majority of LGBTQI+ respondents believed that professionals were well equipped, while in the Netherlands the respective percentage was 50%. In other words, only in two out of five participating countries, professionals – according to LGBTQI+ respondents – were able to properly adapt and respond during the public health crisis in order to meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people.

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LGBTQI who think their professionals were well equipped to support them during the COVID-19 epidemic, across countries
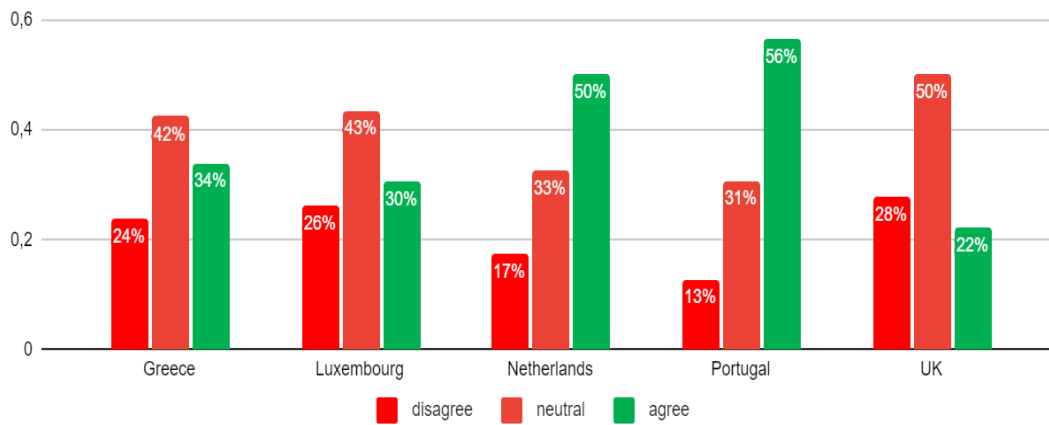
Diagram 9

These results are in line with other research findings according to which, the majority of professionals/support services provider in all five participating countries believe that working remotely was a challenging task (Diagram 10), while the majority of professionals in three out of five participating countries - and little less than half in another - were not aware of the specific challenges that LGBTQI+ people face during the Covid-19 pandemic (Diagram 11).

Providers who think that working online was challenging

	Greece	Luxembourg	Netherlands	Portugal	UK
no	31%	20%	33%	42%	40%
not sure	9%	7%	0%	0%	7%
yes	60%	73%	67%	58%	53%
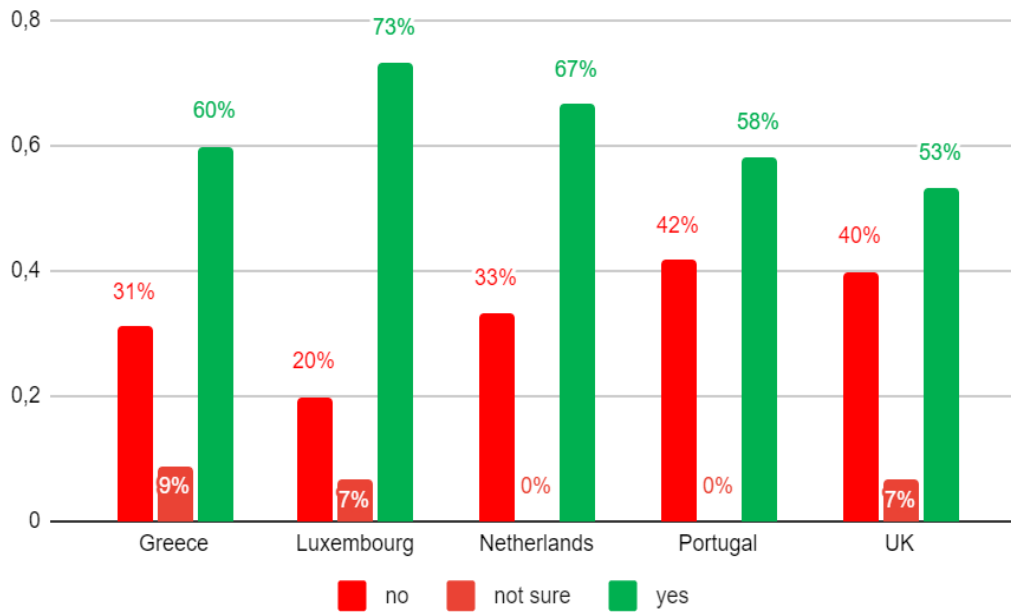
Diagram 10

Providers who think they are aware of specific challenges facing LGBTQI during the COVID-19 epidemic

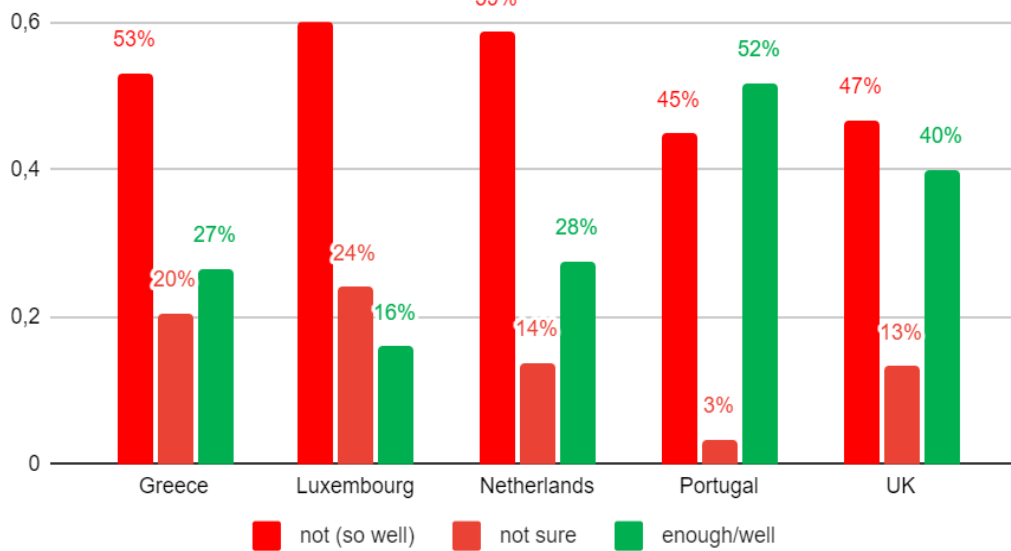|	Greece	Luxembourg	Netherlands	Portugal	UK
not (so well)	53%	60%	59%	45%	47%
not sure	20%	24%	14%	3%	13%
enough/well	27%	16%	28%	52%	40%

Diagram 11

The majority of professionals in Portugal and Luxembourg who took part in our research have been trained on LGBTQI+ issues in the past (Diagram 10). In Netherlands, the majority of participants were equally divided to those who were trained and to those who were not trained (a small percentage of participants were not sure), while responds from professionals in the UK (Diagram 10) are more or less in line with responses from LGBTQI+ people (Diagram 9). In Greece, while almost 3 out of 5 professionals did not have a training on LGBTQI+ issues in the past (Diagram 10), 1 out of 3 LGBTQI+ respondents believed that professionals were well equipped (Diagram 9).
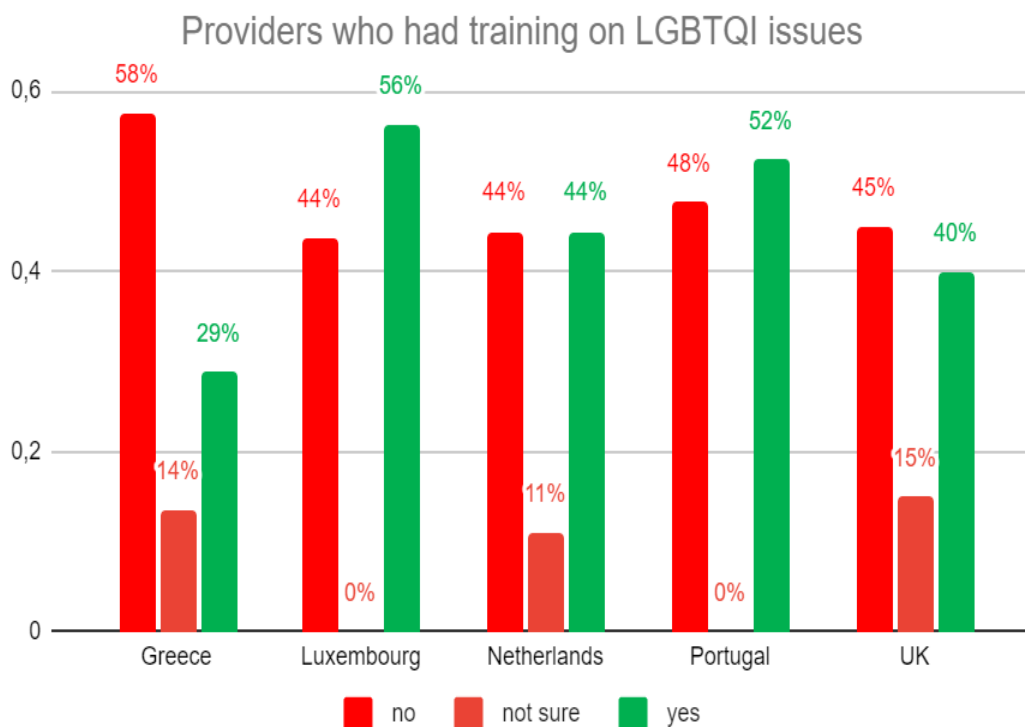
Diagram 12

Professionals in Portugal and UK – and, to a lesser degree in Greece and Luxembourg – expressed great interest for the majority of the recommended training topics (Diagram 13). Most popular training topics among research participants (professionals) in Portugal and UK were "good practices", "providing remote services'',

"behavioural guidelines", available "support services" and "referrals" pathways (Diagram 13). In Greece, most popular training topics were available "support services", existing "legal framework", "behavioural guidelines", "referrals'' pathways" and "access for LGBTQI to online services", while in Luxembourg most popular training topics included "good practices", "behavioural guidelines", "challenges for LGBTQI people" (Diagram 13). In Netherlands, most popular training topics included "referrals" pathways and then "access for LGBTQI to online services" (Diagram 13).

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Providers who express a slight or great interest in training about LGBTQI, across countries

Topic	Greece	Luxembourg	Netherlands	Portugal	UK
Other	11%	13%	0%	39%	19%
Referrals	56%	47%	47%	67%	75%
Support services	64%	40%	29%	67%	75%
Behavioural guidelines	56%	60%	29%	72%	75%
Legal framework	58%	53%	24%	67%	56%
Key concepts	53%	47%	6%	56%	44%
International good practices	55%	67%	35%	83%	81%
Challenges working remotely	55%	47%	35%	67%	75%
Providing remote services	47%	47%	35%	83%	75%
Access for LGBTQI to online services	56%	33%	41%	72%	63%
Challenges for LGBTQI	51%	53%	24%	0%	0%

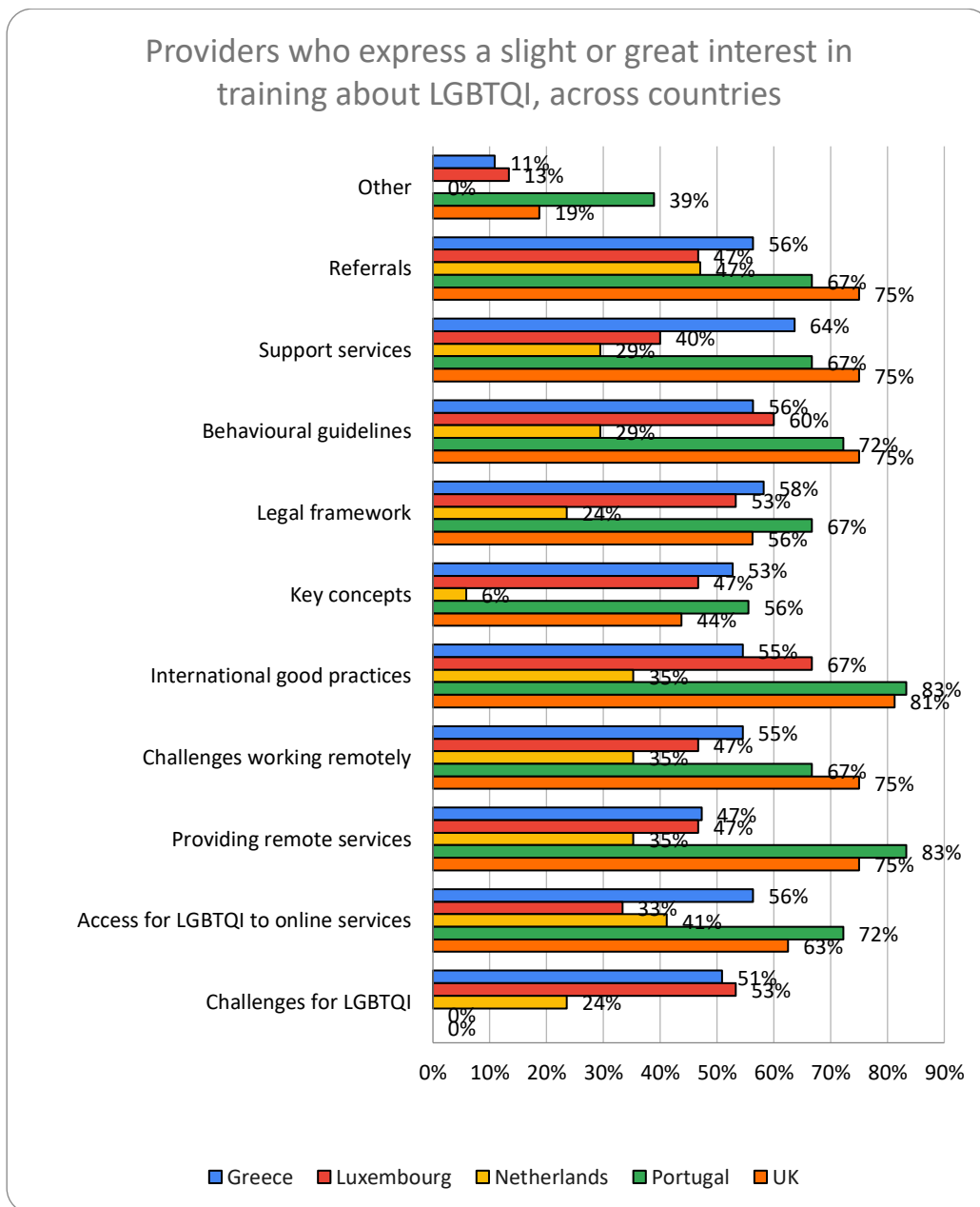**Diagram 13**

Recommended training topics from research participants (professionals/support services providers and/or LGBTQI+ people) include:

- Ways to handle online individual and group support services sessions (research participants in Netherlands).

- Mental health empowerment and resilience – dealing with isolation when working from home, when in lock down etc. (research participants in UK).

- Professional online / by phone communication (research participants in UK).

- Using conference applications (research participants in the UK).

- Social media skills / navigating through social media, including identifying misinformation and fake news which are disseminated through social media (research participants in the UK).

- Computer / internet surfing skills as well as team working online (research participants in UK).

- Identify the mood / emotional state of beneficiaries when supporting them online and/or handle conflicts if they occur online (research participants in Netherlands).

- LGBTQI+ terminology (research participants in Greece).

- Legal framework and human rights (research participants in Portugal).

- Explore and understand key concepts e.g., human sexuality, equality, gender identity (research participants in Portugal).

- Soft skills – empathy, learning to walk in other peoples' shoes (research participants in UK), understanding your privileges (research participants in Netherlands).

- Acceptance and understanding of LGBTQI+ diversity in all levels (research participants in Netherlands and the UK).

- Becoming an ally to LGBTQI+ people (research participants in Netherlands).

- Communicating with LGBTQI+ people – use of proper, non-abusive neutral, non-binary, inclusive language e.g., correct pronouns and terms as well as labels that LGBTQI+ people may prefer to use for themselves (research participants in Greece, Netherlands, Portugal and UK).

- How to avoid pathologisation of SOGISC (research participants in Netherlands).

- Learn how to identify the links between vulnerability due to being LGBTQI+ and vulnerability when in 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"* (research participants in Greece).

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- Community maintenance – support and maintain the community: lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic (research participants in Netherlands).

- Empowerment of LGBTQI+ people – the challenges they face are not their fault (research participants in Netherlands).

- Becoming aware of safety risks – remote/online support provision to LGBTQI+ people may be a challenging task due to lack of privacy in a hostile domestic environment. Moreover, professionals should understand that, in such a case, while they can guarantee the safety of their services, they cannot change the situation (e.g., their home/family environment) in which their beneficiaries receive this support (research participants in Netherlands).

- Set limits / boundaries regarding the support services provided (research participants in Netherlands).

- Avoiding quick judgements regarding needs of other people - *"Step back and do not assume the needs of other people"* (research participants in Greece).

- Become aware of the specific challenges that LGBTQI+ people face and learn how to be sensitive to signals of this (research participants in Netherlands), understand the needs of Others (research participants in UK).

- *"Assessing the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups"* - *"how do LGBTQI people are affected during the pandemic or a crisis in general",* understand the impact of lockdowns to LGBTQI+ people e.g., living in a hostile/abusive domestic environment and its impact on LGBTQI+ peoples' health (research participants in Greece).

- Provide support to LGBTQI+ people suffering from loneliness and/or total inactivity (e.g., out of studies, work etc.). In this context, be equipped to support people who turn to addictions in order to combat their loneliness (research participants in Netherlands).

- Supporting people during a crisis e.g., a pandemic (research participants in the UK).

- Get to know good practices/examples from professionals/organisations working in the field (research participants in Greece).

- Making referrals to formal as well as to informal social networks (research participants in Netherlands).

- Organisation and response of social services – both public and the ones of the civil society sector - during emergency/crisis times, what can professionals do in order to improve their response to the needs/requests of LGBTQI+ people (research participants in Greece). Identify your organisation's gaps in services (research participants in the Netherlands).

- Focus on how each person *"experiences whatever happens to him/her"* (research participants in Greece).

- *"Basic thematic topics on LGBTQI people"*, *"introduction"* to *"key issues of the LGBTQI+ community"* (research participants in Greece).

- LGBTQI+ history, *"historical framework"* regarding past *"problems"* (challenges) that LGBTQI+ people faced (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Current challenges/problems LGBTQI people face including more specific issues as well such as the multiple challenges that sex workers face and their needs (research participants in Greece).

- *"Available tools to use in order to better support them* [=LGBTQI+ people]*"*, support services methods (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Bringing together - e.g., by organising safe spaces - LGBTQI+ people with similar experiences and ways of thinking, thus promoting mutual recognition and understanding while empowering them, creating safe spaces for adults, minores etc. (research participants in Netherlands and Portugal).

- Available support services for LGBTQI+ people, *"know what each organisation do"* – also places where LGBTQI+ people may find information to support themselves (research participants in Greece and UK).

- Working together with people from diverse/multicultural backgrounds – LGBTQI+ migrants and asylum seekers (research participants in Netherlands and the UK).

- Establishing a beneficiary/client focused service (research participants in the UK).

- Establishing a trans/gender non-conforming inclusive service (research participants in the UK).

- Implementing / ensuring zero tolerance for homo/trans/bi/interphobia in your service (research participants in the UK).

- Protection of LGBTQI+ human rights and emergency response to the needs of LGBTQI+ people in times of crisis (research participants in Greece).

- Supporting LGBTQI people during legal related procedures e.g., when in court (e.g., legal gender recognition) or during the examination of their asylum request (research participants in Greece).

- Needs and expectations of LGBTQI+ people when seeking the support of professionals e.g., social workers - and, general social services (research participants in Greece).

- Experiences from professionals working with the target group - challenges professionals faced and how they overcame these challenges (research participants in Greece).

- Personal stories of LGBTQI+ people as well as experiences of LGBTQI+ people regarding support – *"how were they supported/helped"*, *"how did they feel ''* (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Examine the *"fragility of cisgender heteronormativity"* – as *"male fragility"*, cisgender heteronormative fragility can become a big obstacle to awareness of professionals regarding supporting LGBTQI+ people (research participants in Netherlands).

- LGBTQI+ health: sexual health and safety, mental health issues LGBTQI+ people may have to deal with etc. (research participants in Portugal).

- Establishing a lifelong learning culture (research participants in the UK).

- Problem solving and crisis management - deal with possible problems and challenges, handle cases, solve problems, respond to challenges (research participants in Greece).

- Taking initiatives (research participants in the UK).

- Emotional management (research participants in Portugal).

- Stress management (research participants in Portugal).

- Guidelines and tips to practice (and remotely/from home) mindfulness (research participants in UK).

- Networking with other organisations (research participants in Portugal).

- Social media management and marketing (research participants in Portugal).

- Implement projects, project and financial management (research participants in Portugal).

- Get funding (research participants in Portugal).

Finally, research participants (professionals and/or LGBTQI+ people) also made suggestions regarding the training approach, structure, methods and/or activities:

- *"Interdisciplinary"* approach by involving trainers and trainees of many different professional backgrounds (research participants in Greece).

- Adopt an intersectional approach by including not just the white, middle class LGBs but focus on the most challenged groups inside the LGBTQI+ spectrum e.g., black migrant transgender people (research participants in Netherlands).

- The training should have a solid purpose and not just be *"business as usual"*: both trainers and trainees should understand the potential *"impact"* of the training and the purpose of it - *"why are we doing this"* and not handle this training just as another activity among many others (research participants in Greece).

- Organise a *"radical education"* – trainees should be aware that their work is political, as the challenges that LGBTQI+ people face have deep, long-lasting socio-political roots. Thus, professionals become political activists, promoting a wider change. For this purpose, they also become allies with organisations that fight racism, homo/trans/bi/interphobia, poverty etc. and they join forces in common activities e.g., demonstrations (research participants in Netherlands).

- Online training should be combined with "face to face" training as some trainees may have limited computer skills (research participants in the UK).

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- Include an introductory and ice-breaking section during which trainees will get to know each other, inform about their background, the preferred pronouns when addressing them etc. (research participants in Portugal).

- Training should be divided to 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"* (research participants in Greece).

- Online available training material should be easily accessible to both experienced professionals who want to receive a quick answer and professionals who want to have in-depth training. Thus, any online available training material should offer quick access (and answers) options as well as links to an in-depth training experience (research participants in Netherlands).

- Experiential training in order to learn to *"walk in someone's else's shoes"*, thus *"stereotypes and prejudices are reduced"* – combat *"inner stereotypes"* (research participants in Greece).

- Interactive training (research participants in Netherlands).

- Training should be delivered by *"well trained on these topics experts"* – from specialised and experienced trainers (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Trainers could also be LGBTQI+ themselves thus they will speak from their *"*[personal] *experience"* as well while non LGBTQI+ trainers will still train from a *"privileged"* position (research participants in Greece). Organisers should also consider that "nothing *for* LGBTQI *without* LGBTQI" actually means that LGBTQI+ people should be hired for the purposes of the training activities, thus - in one hand - establishing a real connection and on the other hand – maintain a good relation with the LGBTQI+ community (research participants in Netherlands).

- Invite guest experts from other organisations to present good practices they implement and/or organise - for the same purpose - study visits to other organisations (research participants in Greece).

- Include training material developed by professionals of colour (research participants in Netherlands).

- Facilitate *"networking"* among trainees – the training should be an opportunity for professionals and organisations to *"meet each other"* and *"commit to cooperate"* (research participants in Greece).

- Facilitate the *"exchange"* of *"accumulated experience"* among trainees (research participants in Greece).

- Include real cases/experiences of LGBTQI+ people as well as professionals (e.g., challenges they face) (research participants in Greece).

- Ensure the sustainability of the training course (research participants in Netherlands).

- Establish a "hangout hub" that will allow participants to engage online and work together (research participants in the UK).

3.2. Assessed skills and competencies

Professionals/support services providers and LGBTQI+ people who took part in our research identified basic skills and competencies that the first ones should have - regardless of their expertise - in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people:

- Be aware of appropriate language (e.g., use of pronouns) and/or terminology when addressing LGBTQI+ people (research participants in Greece and in Luxembourg) and avoid assuming their sexual orientation based on your hetero-normative standards (research participants in Portugal).

- Be able to deeply understand key concepts such as "sexuality" or "gender identity-ies" (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- *"Patience"* as well as "*persistence"* in order to *"identify"* the needs and status of

- Deep knowledge of basic LGBTQI+ related issues, be aware of the *"needs"* of the target group, their living conditions, their social/demographic *"profile"*, *"what challenges LGBTQI community faces"*, *"Information regarding HIV and the stigma around it"*, be aware of the cycle of violence they may have gone through etc. (research participants in Greece and Portugal), have *"information on the specific* [LGBTQI+] *issues"* - be aware of *"specific features"* of particular populations 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 aware of possible mental health issues that some LGBTQI+ people may have to deal with (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Have knowledge of *"protocols"* and standard procedures for reception, support etc.; have *"basic knowledge"* of ways to handle cases of people that *"are in a state of crisis"*, (research participants in Greece).

- Be aware of other available support services - provided by either your organisation or other organisations - in order to refer to them a LGBTQI+ person in need and, in general, be =aware of existing infrastructures (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Have empathy – professionals should learn be able to *"understand more about their needs* [of the target group]*"* e.g., *"how they feel"* or *"how are they identify themselves"*, a professional should *"learn by/through the population groups with which he/she works"* - that is to say to be able to *"listen to the people and understand the status of each one of them"* – moreover, *"understanding the wider framework in which those people will have to survive"*, professionals should have *"at least a minimum knowledge who is the Other, who are we, what are our motives, what are our expectations from our job"* and *"what is the framework in which we work, that is to say how the framework affects the way according to which we interact with other people, the way we approach them, the way they approach us, etc."* (research participants in Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Portugal).

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- Have compassion and show affection (research participants in Portugal).

- Be respectful and not judgemental (research participants in Portugal).

- Acceptance of LGBTQI+ diversity (research participants in Greece), inclusiveness (research participants in Portugal).

- Self-monitor and deconstruct your own prejudices, be aware of the "invisible bias", have *"awareness of our very own stereotypes, prejudices"*, study *"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 will be able to "*make a proper reception* [of an LGBTQI+ person]*"* (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- *"Ability of reflection"* e.g., *"what people have I met today, how was my behaviour towards them"* (research participants in Greece).

- Open-minded – have *"openness"*, *"be open and recipient towards other people"*, professionals should learn to have *"their ears and mind open and more desire to hear than speaking"* (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Be an active listener (research participants in Luxembourg and Portugal).

- Communication skills (research participants in Luxembourg and Portugal).

- Organisational skills (research participants in Luxembourg).

- Proactivity (research participants in Portugal).

- Resilience (research participants in Portugal).

- Creative thinking (research participants in Portugal).

- Self-assurance (research participants in Portugal).

- Comprehension (research participants in Portugal).

- Conflict-solving skills (research participants in Portugal).

- Be aware of others' boundaries and limits (research participants in Portugal).

- Emotional management skills (research participants in Portugal).

- Cultural competence (research participants in Luxembourg).

- Flexibility (research participants in Netherlands and Portugal).

- Patience (research participants in Luxembourg).

- Critical thinking (research participants in Luxembourg).

- LGBTQI+ people (research participants in Greece).

- Be professionally committed (research participants in Luxembourg and Portugal).

- Keep learning – keep educating yourself (research participants in Portugal).

Some research participants also identified necessary skills and competencies - that professionals/support services providers should have in order to be able to keep providing effectively their services during times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic:

- *"Familiarization"* with *"technical equipment"* – be able to use *"computer devices"*, Be able to adapt to modern technological development (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Be familiar with conference and communication applications (e.g., *"Skype"*, *"Viber"*, *"What's up"*) as well as *"the internet"* and *"online databases"* (research participants in Greece).

- Be *"willing"* to learn how to use different *"applications"*, in case they do not already know how to do it) (research participants in Greece).

- Disaster/risk/emergency management (research participants in Greece).

- Be able to *"make decisions on the spot"*, *"make quick decisions"* (research participants in Greece).

- *"Be able to identify situations as they are and not be influenced by his/her personal opinions"* (research participants in Greece).

- Ability to adapt (research participants in Greece).

- Be *"flexible"* (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Creative-thinking, be *"creative"* – be able to *"create paths in places where they do not already exist"* in order to support people in need (research participants in Greece and Portugal).

- Be aware of ways to deal with the pandemic/isolation circumstances in order to be able to better respond to people's needs (research participants in Greece).

- Be aware of available support services - especially regarding the population groups you work with after/during a crisis/disaster - and how to access them (research participants in Greece and Portugal).
- Patience (research participants in Greece).

4. Good practices and initiatives: supporting LGBTQI+ people during the Covid-19 pandemic

In this final section, best practices and initiatives identified during both the desk and the field research in the project's participating countries are briefly presented. These practices and initiatives - implemented by various actors – were developed during Covid-19 pandemic aiming at providing support services to LGBTQI+ people having been affected by the pandemic's impact in multiple levels as well as to continue advocating their human rights:

- **Official guidelines to police officers in order to avoid transphobic mistreatment during the Covid-19 restrictive measures monitoring procedure**: 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.

- **Government measures in order to facilitate identification of trans people during the Covid-19 auditing measures procedure**: In Greece, according to a Joint Ministerial Decision on *"emergency measures to protect public health from the risk of further spread of the coronavirus COVID-19"*, auditing bodies and authorities must accept the verbal confirmation of trans people - whose gender identity has not yet been legally recognized - that they are the same persons with the persons identified in their documents, without further delays, doubts or additional checks.

- **Already available support services for LGBTQI+ people turn online and/or ones are launched online**: Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community decided to continue organise its charge free empowerment groups for LGBTQI+ people online, thus allowing beneficiaries to continue receiving support and, at the same time, allowing more people from all over the country to join as well. In the UK, according to some research participants, Stonewall also made available online its

counselling, emotional and peer support services for LGBTQI+ people. Moreover, Gender Intelligence charity launched an online Covid-19 Resources Hub which includes valuable information and resources for LGBTQI+ people living in the Covid-19 pandemic era: self-care guidance, findings food or shelter, getting psychological/emotional support, online entertainment options (e.g., free e-books, queer films, art lessons) etc.

- **Distribution of basic goods and Covid-19 self-protection material to LGBTQI+ people in need during the pandemic**: In Greece, the Transgender Support Association – with the support of the Municipality of Athens – distributed basic goods to LGBTQI+ people in need. Similarly, Positive Voice ("Thetiki Foni") NGO also offered meals and self-protection measures from Covid-19 to vulnerable people living and/or working in the street – such as homeless and sex workers – some of whom are also LGBTQI+. The Greek Government's General Secretariat for Social Solidarity & Fight Against Poverty, the Municipality of Halandri, private corporations, other Greek human rights NGOs and individuals also supported these initiatives of Positive Voice NGO. In UK, according to research participants, the NHS services also distributed food to LGBTQI+ people in need, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Charge free Covid-19 tests for LGBTQI+ people**: In Greece, the Transgender Support Association – with the support of Greek NGO Centre for Life ("Kentro Zois") – offered charge free molecular testing of Covid-19 to all LGBTQI+ people in need.

- **Financial aid for LGBTQI+ people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic**: In Greece, the Transgender Support Association - with the support of the Council of Europe and the AIDS Healthcare Foundation provided – provided financial support to LGBTQI+ people who were particularly affected during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Shelters for LGBTQI+ people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic**: In Portugal, the "Casa T - Centro de Acolhimento, sociabilização e autonomia Transvestigênere" (Center for Reception, Socialization and Transgender Autonomy) was established

as a sanctuary for the country's trans migrants after many were made homeless in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic. The establishment of such shelter was necessary anyway, as trans people face multiple prejudices and discrimination.

- **Special publications targeting LGBTQI+ people during the Covid-19 pandemic**: In Greece, both Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community and Orlando LGBT+ - Mental health without stigma, published guides targeting LGBTQI+ people: both Guides were available online and charge free and included guidelines for self-care and protection during the pandemic – the Orlando's guide also provided guidelines to mental health professionals in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people.

- **Certification of transition for trans people**: In Greece, Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community provided trans people - whose gender identity has not been legally recognized – "certifications'' that they are under transition, in order to use them in case police asks them for IDs during the restrictive measures monitoring procedure. While this practice has been embraced by the Greek Orlando LGBT+ Mental health without stigma NGO as well as Transgender Europe, it has caused controversy as the - then - President of the (Greek) Transgender Support Association rejected this practice as way of "medicalizing trans identities", "cancellation of [trans people's] demands", and "violation of trans people's personal data''. ILGA-Europe also recorded - in a negative way - this practice in its Annual Report.

- **Adaptation of major LGBTQI+ events due to the pandemic**: In Greece, Athens Pride Festival - the oldest and biggest pride festival in the country – was replaced by many online activities, available and easily accessible to all. The same practice was implemented in Luxembourg and in Amsterdam/Netherlands, as the local pride festivals were replaced by a number of online events as well. In the case of the Dutch pride festival, the online events were streamed by the local television station in Amsterdam as well as by the national commercial LGBTQI+ channel, reaching about 3 million people – many more than "live" pride festivals used to

reach in the pre-pandemic period. Similarly, in UK, many pride festivals were organised online e.g. Aberration Pride for the LGBTQ community of mid-Wales; a Wales-Wide Virtual Pride; Virtual Pride organised by Glitter Cymru. Finally, in Portugal, organisation "Bears on Motorbikes", launched the "LGBTQI Pride Celebration 2020" initiative – that is a 30-days event during which the organisations' members visited 24 cities and 28 places and organised small scaled meeting in public spaces, promoting LGBTQI+ visibility in this time of public health crisis in which no wide marches or gatherings were allowed.

● **Sharing experiences of LGBTQI+ people during the pandemic**: A magazine focused on HIV people in the Netherlands published personal stories and experiences of HIV positive and LGBTQI+ people during the public health crisis as well as introduced polls on issues related to pandemic. Thus, the magazine gave voice to needs and thoughts of HIV positive and LGBTQI+ people in this time of crisis. Moreover, organization "Upside Down" in Netherlands started an online "Meeting Generations Quiz" allowing lesbian women across generations as well as countries to come together and discuss about their experiences (related to their LGBTQI+ identity). Similarly, two young lesbian women in Netherlands started a podcast - the "lesbian League" - about lives of lesbian women during the Covid-19 pandemic. The initiative was very successful and soon they started to invite more people and they also started making live broadcasts.

● **Organizing online entertainment, educational, cultural etc. activities for LGBTQI+ people in order to combat isolation and/or loneliness during the lockdowns**: In Netherlands, the aforementioned "Lesbian League" also organizes online lesbian film screenings followed by discussion about them - *"It is a way to lose your loneliness"* according to a research participant in the country. In Portugal, LGBTQI+ organisations - e.g., Clube SAFO – have created websites with LGBTQI+ content (e.g., "queerentena" of Clube SAFO) and/or online activities such LGBTQI+ books and film sharing as LGBTQI+ etc. Moreover, the organisation LGBTI Viseu launched

new online initiatives such as "Descentracenas" which is actually bringing together LGBTQI+ and sharing LGBTQI+ related news across the country.

- **Increasing visibility of LGBTQI+ artists**: In Netherlands, lesbian activists managed to engage a lesbian singer from Canada to record her performances and make them available charge free to their Dutch online events. Moreover, such performances were now available to lesbian women on dedicated Instagram channels while a lesbian playing list was also created on Spotify. Similarly, LGBTQI+ pride movement in the country, while preparing the online adaptation of these events due to the Covid-19 pandemic, identified previous exclusion practices that left LGBTQI+ artists out of such events as famous cis-straight artists were - until then - hired for these events. The necessary online adaptation due to the pandemic, gave these people the opportunity to understand major exclusion practices and advise the organisers to start inviting LGBTQI+ artists, thus giving them the opportunity to show their talents and work.

- **Funding for LGBTQI+ organizations in order to continue operating during the pandemic**: In Greece, NGO Human Rights 360 provided – though the Global Whole Being Fund of RSF Social Finance – financial aid to Colour Youth Athens LGBTQ Youth Community in order to cover its operating costs. In this way, Colour Youth was able to continue providing support services to LGBTQI+ people during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, during the project's research some other practices and initiatives developed during the Covid-19 pandemic but were not directly linked with the public health crisis and its impact - that is to say, they were not initially designed and/or developed in order to address the impact of the pandemic - were also identified. Some examples of them include:

- **(Re)establishment of helplines and psychological support services for LGBTQI+ people**: In Greece, the "11528 Next to you" helpline – which is coordinated by a number of Greek LGBTQI+ and human rights organisations with the purpose to

provide charge free psychological supporting to LGBTQI+ people - started operating again during the Covid-19 pandemic. The helpline is funded by an American multinational consumers goods cooperation. In Portugal, according to some research participants, ILGA-Portugal provided psychological support to the LGBTQI+ population of the country.

- **Online training modules on LGBTQI+ issues for professionals**: In Netherlands, the national knowledge institute MOVISIE developed a 30-minute e-course for care-givers on how to support their LGBTQI+ clients in general as well as their LGBTQI+ elderly and their Trans clients. The Institute also developed the charge free, short e-modules "Coming In" - equipping professionals and volunteer supporters in order to better meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people with a bicultural background – and "Contact with transgender persons in public service organizations" – equipping receptionists, telephone operators and desk employees of government institutions, companies and social organizations on how to properly communicate with trans people.

- **Promoting LGBTQI+ inclusion and diversity in workplace**: In Luxembourg, IMS (Inspiring More Sustainability – a network of Luxembourg companies involved in Corporate Social Responsibility) published a Guide including experiences and best practices targeting businesses in order to promote LGBTQI+ inclusion in the workplace.

- **Raising awareness of families/parents, communities' action stakeholders and school communities on LGBTQI+ issues:** In Portugal, AMPLOS - Associação de Mães e Pais pela Liberdade de Orientação Sexual e Identidade de Género (Mothers and Fathers Association for Freedom of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) – in the framework of project "Ampliando Famílias" project – developed information and educational material on LGBTQI+ issues, targeting LGBTQI+ families, community action stakeholders and school communities and empowering them to become active mediators to combat anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination. This material

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includes for families of trans people, LGB people and community and school stakeholders.

● **Introducing a list of LGBTQI+ safe psychologists**: In Portugal, a LGBTQI author created a list of LGBTQI+ safe psychologists in the country. The list does not exclusively include psychologists who are experts in LGBTQI+ issues but professionals who welcome all people regardless of their SOGISC.

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