

Professionals' attitudes and knowledge on the specific needs of LGBTQI+ migrants & refugees

National Report – Italy



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Fostering inclusion of LGBTIQ+ migrants at local level

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Introduction

The intersection of LGBTQI+ identities and migration presents a complex set of challenges, often overlooked in mainstream discussions on asylum policies and integration strategies. In Italy, as in many other European countries, the absence of official statistics on LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees hinders efforts to develop targeted policies and support systems. Despite this gap, research and reports from civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) highlight the growing number of asylum seekers fleeing persecution based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). However, even after reaching Italy, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers continue to face discrimination, violence, and exclusion, both within reception facilities and broader society.

The legal framework in Europe recognizes SOGI-based claims under the Qualification Directive, but the explicit inclusion of gender expression in national regulations remains rare. This lack of recognition creates challenges for asylum applications, as existing policies often fail to address the unique vulnerabilities of SOGI applicants beyond a binary gender perspective. While the Istanbul Convention acknowledges the special vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ refugees, its ratification at the EU level remains contested, affecting the implementation of comprehensive protective measures. Additionally, the lack of explicit consideration of gender identity and expression in anti-discrimination legal frameworks makes it difficult for queer and gender non-conforming individuals to be recognized as members of a specific social group in asylum procedures.

The integration of LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees is further complicated by gaps in knowledge and sensitivity among key stakeholders, including migrant organizations, LGBTQI+ advocacy groups, and local authorities. Many asylum seekers feel pressure to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity due to fears of discrimination, harassment, and violence in reception centers. Transgender refugees, in particular, experience heightened levels of minority stress, encountering transphobia not only from fellow asylum seekers but also from service providers and institutional structures. Limited access to healthcare, lack of awareness about medical and social services, and distrust in institutions exacerbate their vulnerabilities. Some transgender migrants' resort to self-medication due to misinformation and fear of deportation, while others avoid medical facilities altogether.

Beyond institutional barriers, cultural and social challenges further complicate the inclusion of LGBTQI+ migrants. There is often an assumption that they will naturally seek out LGBTQI+ organizations for support, but research suggests that many feel alienated from mainstream LGBTQI+ spaces, which they perceive as exclusive, overly Westernized, or disconnected from

their experiences. At the same time, migrant communities may not always be accepting of LGBTQI+ identities, reinforcing a sense of isolation. Language barriers further contribute to invisibility, as asylum seekers often struggle to articulate their experiences in an appropriate and sensitive manner, particularly when interpreters from their ethnic backgrounds are involved in the asylum process. In addition, the lack of awareness about LGBTQI+ rights in reception centers and among immigration authorities contributes to the silencing of SOGI-based claims.

The absence of specialized reception centers for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in Italy further exacerbates these issues. Unlike the MIT experience in Bologna, no other dedicated shelters exist across the country. Many asylum seekers find themselves housed in reception centers with people from their same ethnic backgrounds, which can increase the risk of violence and discrimination. This lack of safety extends to the formal asylum process, where the first individuals an asylum seeker encounters are often police officers and interpreters who may lack training on LGBTQI+ issues, leading to further retraumatization and reluctance to disclose SOGI-based claims.

LGBTQI+ migrants also face heightened risks of homelessness and economic insecurity. Research indicates that housing precarity is three times higher among LGBTQI+ individuals than in the general population, with intersecting factors such as homophobia, transphobia, racism, and xenophobia further limiting access to stable housing. The Refuge LGBT+ network has provided essential shelter services for LGBTQI+ youth and trans individuals, including the recent conversion of a mafia-seized property in Rome into a co-housing facility. However, the limited availability of such initiatives highlights the urgent need for state intervention to ensure the safety and well-being of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in housing and reception centers.

Addressing these challenges requires an intersectional approach that acknowledges the unique experiences of LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees. Policymakers, practitioners, and service providers must be trained to recognize and respond to the specific needs of this population, ensuring that asylum procedures and support systems are inclusive and culturally sensitive. Training programs should focus on understanding the complexities of sexual orientation and gender identity, recognizing implicit biases, and fostering safe and supportive environments for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers. Additionally, greater efforts must be made to provide accessible information on SOGI-based asylum rights in multiple languages, ensuring that all migrants are aware of their protections under international and European legal frameworks.

This report examines the key figures, challenges, and policy responses concerning LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees in Italy, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that promote dignity, safety, and full participation in society.

Methodology

This report employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees in Italy, focusing on their experiences within the asylum process and reception systems. The research is informed by both qualitative and quantitative data collected from a variety of sources, including primary research, secondary sources, questionnaires for a variety of stakeholders and interviews with interested subjects.

- a) Context of Key figures and statistics about LGBTQI+ migrants & refugees' inclusion (including: LGBTQI+ population statistics, age, countries of origin, educational level, employment & unemployment rates)

As in most European Union countries, the situation in Italy shows that states do not collect or store statistics on the number of migrants claiming anti-LGBTQIA+ persecution as a reason to seek protection as refugees under international law. Therefore, it is challenging to provide precise figures. However, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been closely monitoring this phenomenon and have reported an increase in numbers, especially as some countries pass or enforce stricter anti-homosexuality laws (Volonterio, 2024).

Italy has a two-pronged approach to data. On the one hand, the central, state-led collection of statistics focuses mostly on emergency and security issues, often overlapping SOGI subjects with issues such as deviance and/or the need for protection from criminal offenses. In this sense, while there is no statistical data on the migration of transgender people, we do have access to limited data on the emerging phenomenon of human trafficking and sex work exploitation involving transgender populations from Brazil, Colombia, and Thailand (Coletta, 2021). On the other hand, given the great weight of the private social sphere within the issues of inequality and welfare in Italy, NGOs have more capillary control over the phenomenon (Prearo & Martorano, 2020). Notably, the current status of collecting data on SOGI migration demonstrates how the LGBTQIA+ community in Italy is addressed within scientific knowledge processes. For a long time, understanding LGBTQIA+ individuals relied mainly on direct experiences and qualitative data, collected through various forms of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) (Graglia, 2020). However, there is a lack of large-scale quantitative studies that directly or indirectly involve LGBTQIA+ communities and meet high standards of data quality and reliability (De Rosa e Inglese, 2020). It's no surprise that CSOs have long been the primary source of knowledge in Italy regarding LGBTQIA+ individuals and the discrimination they face. By conducting studies and collecting data, CSOs have contributed significantly to

increasing the visibility of the LGBTQIA+ community. Among the various ones that seem specifically involved in supporting those seeking protection, [Rainbow Railroad](#) emerges, which reported an average of around 15,000 requests for assistance per year around the world (as stated in 2023), 1,500 from Uganda alone, up from around 9,500 the previous year (AfricaRivista, 2024).

In 2011, political instability across North Africa led to an increased flow of migrants toward Italy, with Lampedusa and Sicily becoming major points of arrival. Between January and March of that year, approximately 23,000 people, primarily young Tunisian men, arrived on the island of Lampedusa (World Health Organization, 2011). As the crisis in Libya intensified, boats began transporting individuals from various backgrounds, including Eritreans, Somalis, and Libyans fleeing conflict. This sharp rise in migration raised significant concerns about the increasing presence of undocumented migrants and refugees in both Lampedusa and Sicily, placing considerable pressure on the region's reception and support systems (World Health Organization, 2011).

From 2011 until 2018, the ARCIgay Palermo helpdesk received about 120 people, with an exceptional increase in requests, especially since 2014 (Arcigay Palermo, 2018). This increase is undoubtedly due to the entry of many Gambians into Italy, especially after the reforms proposed by Gambian President Yahya Jammeh that provide for life imprisonment for homosexual people. Among people received by ARCIgay Palermo, half held Gambian citizenship, followed by Nigerian, Cameroonian, Senegalese, Ghanaian, and Ivorian nationalities. A few beneficiaries, on the other hand, came from the following countries: Mali, Pakistan, Colombia, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Guinea Bissau, Congo, Niger, Romania, Somalia, Spain, and Turkey. The majority of SOGI refugees and asylum seekers who came to their helpdesk profess the Muslim religion; the data on religious affiliation distribution reflects the diverse backgrounds of beneficiaries. The Muslim religion was represented by more than three-quarters, followed by Christian representation, which has only 21 users. During the course of last years, and especially up to February 2018, the ARCIgay Palermo helpdesk has had 105 men beneficiaries, four women beneficiaries, and one transgender person from Colombia. It appears that the majority of beneficiaries have reached out for legal needs, with the possibility, in some cases, to take action to offer psychological or health support.

Similarly, the Intercultural Help Desk, a project by [The Gay Help Line](#) in collaboration with ARCIgay Roma, was designed to assist LGBTQIA+ foreigners and individuals who presented a migratory background. In 2023, there was a 25% increase in people seeking help (Gruppo MigraBO, n.d.). The services provided included legal and psychological guidance, as well as social mediation in and around Rome. The individuals seeking help were between the ages of 18 and 63, with 29% from Central and South America, 14.3% from Eastern Europe (mainly Russia), 25% from north-African

countries, 16.7% from sub-Saharan Africa, and 13.1% from South East Asia (mainly Pakistan). For 43.8% of the individuals, they sought help before applying for SOGIESC protection (for sexual orientation or gender identity). However, 75% of them were still in the process of applying for protection six months later, facing difficulties in accessing essential documents related to health, work, and reception rights (SOGICA, 2020). For individuals who responded to the Intercultural Help Desk, choosing labor and/or sexual exploitation as the motive of the displacement (12%), reintegrating into the regular system was a challenging and often prolonged process, compounded by a lack of support network due to homophobic rejection. Moreover, 14.7% of these beneficiaries reported experiencing attacks and violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, even in Italy (Open Migration, 2017). In some cases (33.4%), the violence occurred in reception centers, often perpetrated by fellow countrymen or individuals from contexts in which intolerant behaviors towards LGBTQIA+ people are not being punished. 17% of people requested psychological support at the center, due to the vulnerability caused by traumatic experiences of violence based on gender or sexual orientation. The data on reception requests is also significant: 27.4% of migrants were in a housing emergency or declared themselves homeless. However, only 46% of these individuals were asylum seekers or refugees with the right to housing in the Ministry of the Interior's Reception and Immigration System. Moreover, transgender women faced greater challenges, with 36.2% experiencing homelessness (Arca di Noè Coop, 2021). When it comes to the employment situation of vulnerable individuals, exclusion from the labor market becomes even more widespread when gender nonconformity is combined with foreign or migrant origin. In such cases, the likelihood of securing a regular job and related protections decreases to below 10%. Data collected by the Gay Help Line shows that 7.1% of the individuals they assist in Italy through the phone line, have experienced or are currently experiencing labor exploitation, with 73% of these cases involving sexual exploitation, particularly among those with a migration background. Transgender women, especially from Latin America, are the primary targets of sexual exploitation, often falling into the hands of networks of exploitation that control migration routes. This situation deprives them of the ability to make their own choices, leaving them vulnerable to stigma, objectification, and gender-based violence. Cisgender men and nonbinary individuals from the SWANA region countries are also caught up in trafficking and forced prostitution systems, especially if they are of minor age. In all these cases, economic coercion compounds the discrimination and stigma faced by these individuals in their own diaspora communities, making it in many cases difficult for them to break free from these circumstances and gender-based violence. Cisgender men and nonbinary subjectivities from the SWANA region countries are also involved in trafficking and forced prostitution systems, particularly if they are minors. In all these cases, economic blackmail is added to the homobisbotransphobic stigma acted out in their own communities, precluding any possibility of emancipation (Gay Center e Rossi, 2024).

b) Existing Policy, Frameworks and Legislation about LGBTQI+ migrants & refugees' inclusion in all aspects of their integration (health, employment/labour market integration, education and training, housing)

The Italian law no. 189/2002 established the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees¹ (SPRAR) to manage reception measures for asylum seekers. Directive 2013/33/EU, implemented through Legislative Decree no.142/2015, brought special attention to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers by addressing sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) requests in asylum applications. The law ensures procedural guarantees and counseling services for individuals who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence (SOGICA, 2020). According to article 17, it specifically considers the reception of persons with special needs, including those who have suffered torture, sexual violence (such as rape), or other serious forms of violence related to sexual orientation or gender identity. Moreover, the latter article states that cooperation with the ASL (Local Health Authority) must provide special care measures and psychological support to individuals who show and have suffered through such vulnerabilities. Through said measures, in 2015 an attempt was made to bring the reception procedure, which was previously managed on an emergency basis, back to governance, also taking into account the specificities of individual cases, to carry out optimal and programmable management of all interventions in support of asylum seekers, including those necessities that LGBTQIA+ people might show. In Italy, a SOGICA (2020) study identified a certain degree of inconsistency in decision-making processes and officials needing to correctly apply existing laws and policy. As a proposal to address these issues, the project suggested the expansion of effective training for newly recruited administrative officials and decision-makers. The training would be aimed to improve the quality of their work by addressing situations such as stereotypes, prejudices, and interview techniques. Moreover, the Italian legal system is known for the active involvement of the judiciary sector in addressing the lack of detailed legal data on asylum, particularly for SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) refugees and asylum seekers. Italian judges have frequently applied domestic and international laws in alignment with UNHCR guidelines. To this day, such professional figures demonstrate to hold a proactive role in gathering information to support the credibility of asylum seekers, as requested by the European Union (Prearo, 2021). Since the interpretation of persecution has evolved significantly, the Court of

¹ Concerning the use of specific terminology, as well as the difference between people on the move who identify as LGBTQIA+, and SOGIESC refugees and asylum seekers, this document uses both terms. This choice is not dictated by a desire to make the terms interchangeable, but rather follows a desire to gather data from institutional sources that deal with both collectives. The reader is requested to consider, if any, the juxtaposition of these identities (personal but also legal) as the best way to describe, in a complete and comprehensive manner, the reality of foreign people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Cassation recognizes the criminalization of homosexuality and same-sex sexual acts in the countries of origin of SOGI asylum seekers as grounds for persecution. Italy has adopted the practice of considering the existence of laws condemning homosexuality as persecutory in itself, as confirmed by the Court of Cassation in 2012, and is also characterized by the particularly active role of the judiciary, which is sometimes called upon to tackle the lack of detailed legal data on asylum (Pannarale & Armigero, 2021). This is evident for SOGI refugees and asylum seekers. In dealing with such cases, domestic judges have often been able to apply domestic law and international obligations in line with the relevant UNHCR guidelines (2012). This is not only a matter of the proactive role that all Italian authorities are called upon to play in gathering information that can confirm the asylum seeker's credibility.

Despite this, the Italian legal system does not explicitly condemn violence against LGBTQIA+ people as crimes of a discriminatory nature. This gap in the law has been highlighted by human rights organizations, which have been asking the Italian authorities for years to consider crimes motivated by discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in the same way as those based on other types of discrimination, such as race, nationality, ethnicity, and religion, which are already punished by the Mancino Law no. 205/1993 (Caroli, 2023). The so-called Zan law decree, presented on 2/05/2018, was named after the first signatory of the text: the Democratic Party deputy Alessandro Zan. The object of the law decree, as stated in the header, was to introduce 'Measures to prevent and combat discrimination and violence on the grounds of sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability.' The bill also amended the so-called 'Mancino Law' (Law No. 205 of 25 June 1993), named after its proposer, Nicola Mancino, then Minister of the Interior. The Mancino Law punishes hate crimes and incitement to hatred, with particular reference to racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination. Again, Zan's bill wanted to add discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability to those already covered by the law. Finally, the decree predicted that at least every three years, through the National Institute of Statistics and the Observatory for Security Against Discriminatory Acts (OSCAD), statistical revelations on discrimination would be made, also measuring the opinions and characteristics of those most at risk. The purpose of these surveys would have been to design and implement policies to prevent and counter discrimination and violence on racial, ethnic, national or religious grounds, or based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Ultimately, the decree law was not approved in the Senate. Following the failure of the legislative attempt to expand protections through the Zan Bill, the current legal framework in Italy still only addresses crimes committed "for purposes of discrimination or hatred based on ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion, or to facilitate the activities of organizations, associations, movements, or groups with such aims." This leaves out other social groups, notably the LGBTQIA+ population, who remain among the primary victims of hate and discrimination. Despite the absence of a specific legal provision recognizing homotransphobia as an aggravating circumstance, judicial practices have developed various techniques to compensate for this gap (Pannarale & Armigero, 2021).

However, without a dedicated law that explicitly acknowledges homotransphobic violence as a hate crime, the justice system struggles to address these bias-related factors and to establish protective measures for victims. This shortcoming weakens the effectiveness of criminal procedures, limiting the systemic implementation of best practices to prevent secondary victimization. Moreover, it highlights the challenges in providing adequate training to all those involved in legal proceedings, from law enforcement to prosecutors and judges. The lack of specific training is also evident among juvenile court judges and administrative tribunals, who are called to address cases of family abuse against LGBTQIA+ youth and the application of Law 164/1982 regarding the correction of personal data following gender-affirming medical procedures. This knowledge gap further complicates efforts to ensure justice and protection for vulnerable individuals (Prearo & Martorano, 2020).

c) Challenges, own prejudices and stereotypes of migrants' organizations, LGBTQI+ organizations and local authorities. towards LGBTQI+ migrants/refugees affecting their inclusion in the local level

In Italy, asylum seekers face numerous challenges after submitting their applications, especially in securing housing, finding employment, and integrating into the local community. The experiences of individuals vary significantly based on their visibility as LGBTQIA+ individuals (Open Migration, 2017). According to interviews conducted by the Epsilon project team, many asylum seekers indicated that concealing their sexual orientation or gender identity is often the safest option while residing in reception centers. Those who are unable to conceal their identities often encounter discrimination and violence, leading to feelings of isolation. Upon arriving in Italy, participants reported feelings of loneliness and encountered institutional transphobia within reception circuits (Graglia, 2020). An asylum seeker from Sub-Saharan Africa, S., vividly expressed his profound sense of loneliness and isolation, stating, "I feel alone in the world as a gay man and as a migrant," during an interview with the Epsilon project team.

Studies have revealed that for example transgender refugees in Italy face multiple sources of minority stress², both in their country of origin and in their new country. The primary reasons for migration among the participants were the trauma they experienced and the challenges they faced in openly expressing their gender identity in their home country (Coletta, 2021). Due to the intersection of various minority identities, transgender refugees are at a heightened risk of isolation, discrimination, and victimization in their host country. These challenges may arise

² We refer to minority stress in regards to the so-called stressors related to sexual minorities, including the experience of prejudice, expectations of rejection, hiding and concealment, internalized homophobia and ameliorative coping processes (Coletta, 2021).

from encounters with asylum services, including a lack of training, racial bias, and transphobia among service providers. However, the study also found that participants exhibited a positive sense of individuality linked to gender affirmation treatments and developed effective coping strategies to harmonize meaningful social identities, such as those related to religion and gender (Rosati et al., 2021).

Research findings indicate that national authorities and policymakers must take into account an intersectional approach when developing social policies, particularly concerning meeting the specific needs of transgender refugees. For instance, this could involve training service providers on issues related to LGBTQIA+ individuals. It's important to note that transgender refugees still confront significant challenges such as discrimination, violence, and obstacles in accessing both healthcare and social services (Graglia, 2020). The tools and strategies recommended to professionals include a focus on self-reflection regarding various aspects of identity, such as racial-ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation. These considerations are especially valuable for healthcare providers, as they enable a thorough understanding of the multifaceted nature of identity. Understanding that the combination of these potential sources of discrimination creates a unique and significant impact on individuals is crucial for effectively assessing and engaging with people. For example, being a black transgender woman with limited financial resources exposes individuals to a complex form of discrimination that transcends the sum of its components (De Rosa & Inglese, 2020).

While there is recognition that progress has been made, there is also an acknowledgment that much more work is needed, particularly in Italy. Arcigay Antinoo, located in Naples, collected relevant data about direct experiences of transgender people, who find themselves to be hosted within co-housing projects in the Parthenopean area. When asked about the assistance they received when they first got to Italy, guests stated none. Particularly, they weren't informed about medical and socio-sanitary systems and procedures, so many transgender migrants carried on with self-medication and injections at home. Moreover, a sense of mistrust towards institutions emerges, leading transgender migrant women in Italy to avoid doctor appointments, hospitals, and first aid stations (Graglia, 2020). Recent literature notes how the absence of research on the subject and data on the trans population in Italy (e.g., employment rate) is intertwined with the absence of institutional support (Ferrara et al., 2021). Misinformation can therefore be considered responsible for the failed access to medical care, as the fear of transgender migrant women lies in the belief that any sort of contact with hospital institutes would lead to deportation, as well as law enforcement agents' involvement (Coletta, 2021).

When addressing such themes from a practitioner's point of view, cultural norms must be taken into consideration, together with the personal experience of each beneficiary. It is thus

that traumatic experiences in the country of origin, such as, for example, psychological abuse, physical and sexual assault, forced conversion therapy, blackmail, and public humiliation (Alessi et al., 2018), encounter a certain continuity with secondary victimization processes in the country of arrival (Martorano & Prearo, 2015). The latter are observed, in particular, in the lack of preparation of those working in the reception system on trans issues, i.e., those who disregard SOGI protection guidelines. The result is invasive questions, investigations of trauma, and demands for adherence to Western sexual and gender categories (Prearo, 2021). Another challenge that has been highlighted by interviewees, who were heard by Ferrara, is about the gap that exists between bureaucratic procedures and the time that people, particularly SOGI asylum seekers and refugees, may need to communicate their needs within a relationship of trust with practitioners and to get accustomed to the praxis of the receiving system (Ferrara et al., 2021). Practitioners themselves convey the issue of taking the time to get to know the communication modes of each beneficiary, before assisting them with the documentation required to obtain a permit, according to the expectancies of administrative and jurisdictional decision-makers. However, expectancies are not to be attributed to the legal system exclusively, as those can be encountered within the receptive accommodations as well. Vesce (2021) underlies the great value that performance and performative behaviors hold within the migrant-operator relationships, especially within the circumstance of dealing with the Territorial Commission. As the anthropologist underlies, operators may find themselves biased by its own expectations regarding a gendered performance, complying with the binarism expected by evaluators.

Oftentimes, practitioners' expectations may not align with the needs of individuals, particularly when it comes to the inclusion of migrants with diverse sexual and gender identities. For example, practitioners may assume that LGBTQIA+ migrants want to be part of LGBTQIA+ associations, but this is not always the case (Prearo & Martorano, 2020). Sometimes, offering participation in such initiatives can lead to negative reactions from the beneficiaries, and may even create a sense of opposition and hostility. This could be due to the perception that migrant communities are hostile to LGBTQIA+ rights, while simultaneously perceiving LGBTQIA+ associations as xenophobic and hyper-individualistic (Lelleri et al., 2009).

Below are some of the factors contributing to self-exclusion within the LGBTQIA+ community: the limited access to meeting places and clubs, which are often perceived as exclusive and filled with barriers (Lelleri et al., 2009). Reasons for this perception include lack of information about the services provided, absence of promotional materials in languages other than Italian, membership requirements, financial constraints for attendance, and the display of homosexuality (deemed unrelated to personal experiences) (Lelleri et al., 2009). Additionally, there are prejudices against migrants. Interestingly, many migrants who do decide to engage with LGBTQIA+ spaces and activists often do so with the help of friends or partners, rather than through guidance from socio-cultural workers. Some individuals also express the desire to

break free from uncomfortable labels and claim the right to more understanding and accepting environments for their unique identities. On the other hand, some migrants feel disconnected from the mainstream western *gaylifestyle* (as mentioned in Masullo, 2015) and do not see the need for dedicated social spaces for gay individuals. This group often holds the Italian gay male community responsible for perpetuating social stereotypes of homosexuality, leading to a self-imposed sense of exclusion. It's a good practice to discuss the matter with the person, inquire about their interest, and if they are interested, provide them with contact information for social networks (like Facebook) or relevant organizations. However, it's important to remember that leaving flyers or promotional materials in inappropriate places, such as shared living spaces, could inadvertently expose someone's sexual orientation or gender identity to others (Zabonati, 2018).

d) Main gaps and needs in knowledge and sensitization of migrants' organizations, LGBTQI+ organizations and local authorities

The legal framework in Europe recognizes the expression of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) under the Qualification Directive as mentioned above. However, explicit inclusion of gender expression in member-state regulations is rare. Within the European legal framework, there are several challenges for asylum applications based on SOGI. One such challenge is the absence of specific legislative instruments dedicated to the unique situation of SOGI-based applicants. Their vulnerability is only addressed to a limited extent through the adoption of a gender-sensitive approach, which unfortunately seems to be confined to a binary view of gender and does not allow for special considerations of individuals' sexual orientation or characteristics (Pannarale & Armigero, 2021; Caroli, 2023). However, the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention does consider the special vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ+ refugees. This consideration may have influenced the European Commission in drafting its non-binding LGBTIQ Equality Strategy for 2020-2025, utilizing its powers to incorporate similar considerations into the EU framework (SOGICA, 2020). However, it's important to note that the EU has signed the Istanbul Convention, but its ratification raises sensitive issues (Andrade et al., 2020; De Rosa & Inglese, 2020).

Another challenge is the lack of explicit consideration of gender identity and expression in most non-discrimination legal instruments. This absence of inclusion affects queer individuals and those with gender non-conforming expression, making it difficult for them to be considered as part of a specific social group (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2013). There is hope that EU legislation, which specifies that the characteristic on the basis of which a person is persecuted can be ascribed and not particularly possessed, could ensure that gender expressions are considered in the assessment of gender expression-based applications (Hilário Pascoal, 2020; Degani,

2021). Therefore, the visibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals while seeking international protection is crucial. When considering visibility, it is crucial to carefully choose appropriate and sensitive language that acknowledges the traumatic experiences and diverse subjectivities of the individuals we are working with. Frequently, the language used is unsuitable; it may be judgmental or contribute to creating new vulnerabilities or exacerbating existing ones. Therefore, the discrepancy lies in the linguistic framework and the employed categories. Furthermore, it is important to note that the language barrier not only impacts the acknowledgment of specific rights, leading to a lack of visibility but also has implications for the security of individuals (Rainbow Welcome! 2022). Therefore, all parties involved in the procedure need to be adequately prepared. Upon arrival in Italy, migrants often do not feel safe to express their sexual orientation or gender identity, as they may be placed in reception centers that do not cater specifically to LGBTQIA+ individuals (Graglia, 2020; Amato, 2019). Unlike the [MIT](#) experience in Bologna, there are no other specialized centers for LGBTQIA+ people in Italy (Arcigay Palermo, 2018). For instance, someone from Pakistan or Nigeria may find themselves in a reception center where they share their living space with people from the same ethnic background, which can make them feel unsafe and unable to express their identity freely (Arca di Noè Coop, 2021; Open Migration, 2017).

This lack of safety also extends to the formal application process for international protection, where the first individuals the asylum seeker encounters are police officers at the immigration office, often with interpreters from the same ethnic group, leading to further difficulties in expressing their situation (Womens' Refugee Commission, 2021). Furthermore, Italy is not a safe country for LGBTQIA+ individuals, nor is it for protection against racist and xenophobic attacks. In May 2023, three local police officers in Milan were suspected of beating a 42-year-old Brazilian trans woman with batons and kicking her, including on the head (Volonterio, 2024). Even though the use of public force is, in Italy, permitted by law in emergency situations, striking to the head represents, for a law enforcement agent, a violent and unjustified gesture, and therefore a clear abuse of power, which can lead to penal consequences. In this regard, it is no surprise that Italy holds the 35th place within the most homo-bi-transphobic countries' chart (Ferrara et al., 2021).

The efforts of organizations and groups that aim to offer legal, psychological, and mediation assistance are crucial. Individuals with specific training in supporting LGBTQIA+ migrants from such organizations must be integrated into all levels of the international protection system, including police headquarters, commissions, and courts (Coletta, 2021; Prearo & Martorano, 2020). This will help ensure that SOGI refugees and asylum seekers receive the needed support and that their applications are assessed without preconceived notions or prejudices. The training program should cover topics such as understanding the unique challenges and barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ migrants, raising awareness about the complexities of sexual orientation and gender identity, and providing specific guidance on how to communicate and

interact with LGBTQIA+ individuals effectively (Carnassale & Garofalo Geymonat, 2024). It should also emphasize the importance of creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all migrants, including those who are not cisgender and heterosexual (Prearo, 2021; Graglia, 2020).

Additionally, the training should focus on recognizing implicit biases and addressing any discriminatory behavior that may occur within the workplace (Prearo & Martorano, 2020). The approach to the reception and social integration of asylum seekers and refugees with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI) in Italy shows inconsistency and lack of clarity in the normative data (Hilário Pascoal, 2020). There currently needs to be a cohesive national strategy in place. Instead, non-institutional actors have led to the establishment of specific projects to provide reception and social integration opportunities for SOGI asylum seekers and refugees, paving the way for broader initiatives (Zabonati, 2018; SOGICA, 2020). It's important to note that the social integration of these individuals is closely connected to the acknowledgment of minority rights within Italian society (Ferrara, 2019).

e) Main risks and intersectional vulnerabilities faced by of
LGBTQI+ migrant population from migrants' organizations,
LGBTQI+ organizations and local authorities

LGBTQIA+ individuals who are migrants face numerous challenges when it comes to integrating into their new communities, on top of the typical difficulties experienced by all immigrants. Existing services for migrants often do not take into account the unique experiences and needs related to sexual orientation and gender identity. This oversight can impact the services' quality and may even have negative effects. For instance, health campaigns aiming to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are typically designed for heterosexual individuals and may not address the risk of same-sex transmission (Pannarale & Armigero, 2021; SOGICA, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that LGBTQIA+ immigrants receive specialized support and resources to aid in their integration process. A SOGI refugee or asylum seeker embodies a unique form of otherness, facing the dual challenge of being both a foreigner and a member of a marginalized sexual orientation group (Ferrara, 2019). The lack of social recognition leads to compounded discrimination from both their home country and the host communities, including other LGBTQIA+ individuals who, despite their shared experiences, may still stigmatize the migrant as an outsider (Arcigay Palermo, 2018). In some cases, even social workers may advise LGBTQIA+ refugees to conceal their sexual orientation to avoid further discrimination, ultimately contributing to their sense of isolation and lack of understanding (Volonterio, 2024). As vulnerabilities increase and multiply, leading the individual to interface with more and more institutional and non-institutional actors, the chances of discrimination increase significantly. Multiple levels of discrimination can be

experienced within the relationship with local services, such as the Policy Bureau, as well as more neutral places, such as the center for Adult Education (Rosati et al., 2021). To facilitate effective intercultural mediation and ensure that their rights are upheld, it is crucial to acknowledge and respect the subjectivities of SOGI migrants. Doing so can provide appropriate reception and support per legal standards (Andrade et al., 2020). Ultimately, these principles need to be translated into practical actions involving all stakeholders, including law enforcement agents, who often serve as the first point of contact for migrants. These recommendations are pertinent to all actors involved and have been highlighted in the *Report on International Protection in Italy 2017*, developed in collaboration with UNHCR.

In Italy, SOGICA (2020) recommended that all relevant authorities, as well as non-state actors involved in managing the arrival of asylum seekers, provide information on asylum rights, including the possibility of filing claims based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). This information should be available in accessible formats and multiple languages, at minimum in key locations such as entry ports, registration offices (Questura), and asylum reception or accommodation centers (Amato, 2019). At the outset of the screening or initial interview, it is important that the interviewer ensures the asylum seeker is aware of the various grounds for seeking asylum, including SOGI-related persecution, and that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process (Graglia, 2020). Crucially, the omission of SOGI as a reason for requesting asylum should not be later used against the claimant (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2013).

In addition to these challenges, the legal recognition of homophobic, transphobic, and biphobic acts as crimes remains problematic in Italy. Data gathered by the Gay Help Line shows how in 45% of discrimination or violence cases, such acts are not classified as criminal offenses (Gay Help Line, 2024). This has contributed to the under-reporting of homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia, compounded by the lack of a monitoring system by the Ministry of the Interior and the difficulty of identifying many such incidents as crimes (Prearo & Martorano, 2020). LGBTQIA+ individuals face heightened risks of marginalization and reduced social opportunities, which result in a housing precarity rate three times higher than the general population (Arca di Noè Coop, 2021). Homelessness within this community is marked by interrelated factors, where the stigma of homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia intersects with multiple vulnerabilities (SOGICA, 2020). These combined challenges often make existing shelter systems unsuitable, leading to greater difficulty escaping social isolation. LGBTQIA+ individuals without stable housing are at risk of violence, and many are also migrants, individuals with health issues, or those without economic resources due to a lack of family support (Frasca, 2023). Since 2016, the Refuge LGBT+ network has provided shelter to hundreds of young LGBTQIA+ individuals in crisis, many of whom have been kicked out or forced to flee their homes due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The network includes Refuge LGBT (established in 2016), which supports young people up to the age of 25,

Refuge T* (launched in 2021), aimed at assisting trans people up to the age of 40. Moreover, the network opened in 2024 an LGBT+ Co-Housing Refuge, and managed to convert a mafia-seized property (a property confiscated from organized crime groups such as mafia) into a co-housing facility for LGBTQIA+ youth, victims of violence and discrimination, and/or migrants, located in the historic center of Rome (Rainbow Welcome!, 2021). Despite efforts, the realities of CSOs point out the lack of options (Caroli, 2023). They emphasize the role of states, which must pay attention to the safety of SOGI-based asylum seekers in housing and reception centers. They usually are vulnerable to homotransphobic attitudes, racism, xenophobia, violence and hatred (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2013). Therefore, among the recommendations, it is important to give SOGI applicants the option of general or specialized housing (Rainbow Welcome!, 2021).

f) Methods/practices and local plans/strategies for developing more inclusive policies for LGBTQIA+ migrants

1. STRATEGIES AND LOCAL PLANS

1.1 National LGBT+ Strategy 2022–2025, National Department for Equal Opportunities & UNAR

Regarding national and local axes of action, the most eloquent document is the *National LGBT+ Strategy 2022–2025*, an official document prepared within the collaboration between the National Department for Equal Opportunities and UNAR - National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office (Ferrara, 2019; Caramelli et al., 2021). Specifically, the axis dedicated to Security is the one that gives the most account to issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, without necessarily referring to the duties and rights of SOGI subjects. The protection of LGBTQIA+ people, to effectively counter discrimination and violence, requires the implementation of training courses for all Security professionals: police and administrative personnel, and operators of reception centers on the issue of countering discrimination (Pannarale & Armigero, 2021). The need for the implementation and realization of listening and reception centers for LGBTQIA+ people who are victims of homotransphobic discrimination and/or otherwise in conditions of fragility or social distress is also highlighted, also to promote the emergence of the phenomenon itself (SOGICA, 2020).

2. HOUSING AND ACCOMMODATION

2.1 Casa Marcella, Transgender Consultation Center, Tuscany

In this context, innovative projects have emerged at the local level to support LGBTQIA+ individuals in precarious situations. One example is *Casa Marcella*, a shelter specifically

created for transgender people who find themselves without housing, including migrants and refugees. Casa Marcella, established by the Transgender Consultation Center in Tuscany, aims to offer not only accommodation but also psychological and social support, addressing the specific vulnerabilities of transgender individuals (Consultorio Transgenere, n.d.). Similarly, *A Casa di Ornella* in Rome is another shelter that focuses on providing safe housing to LGBTQIA+ individuals, with a special focus on lesbian women who face discrimination and exclusion from mainstream shelters. The project highlights the importance of providing welcoming and supportive environments where LGBTQIA+ individuals can rebuild their lives after experiencing violence or social marginalization (Programma Integra, n.d.).

3. PROJECTS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GOOD PRACTICES

3.1 [Rise the Difference](#), San Lazzaro Sociale, Emilia-Romagna

Through SPRAR ORDINARI 2017 - 2019 funds, the *Rise the Difference* project in San Lazzaro di Savena works to promote the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers. This initiative aims to raise awareness among local communities and offers training and workshops to facilitate the integration of LGBTQIA+ individuals, helping them overcome the multiple barriers they face. It also emphasizes the importance of intercultural dialogue and the creation of safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ migrants (San Lazzaro Sociale, n.d.). These initiatives represent significant steps forward in providing tailored support to LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers.

Two specific security issues were noted, relating to refugees/asylum seekers and persons under restriction of liberty, and peculiar problems were found in which targeted responses must be given (Prearo & Martorano, 2020). In addition to the provision of training for the staff of Territorial Commissions and the staff of reception facilities for migrants and asylum seekers, the strategy underlines the need for the preparation of rights disclosure tools and guidelines, as well as the implementation of dedicated centers for LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers (Rainbow Welcome!, 2021). These measures are crucial for providing support and protection to LGBTQIA+ individuals in vulnerable situations and ensuring that their rights are respected (Amato, 2019).

3.2 [Pink Refugees](#), Circolo Pink, Veneto

Pink Refugees is a project launched in 2017 by Circolo Pink, an LGBTQIA+ association based in Verona, thanks to Catholic Church 8x1000 funds. It provides legal assistance and support for LGBTI migrants, particularly asylum seekers. The project aims to raise awareness about the experiences of LGBTI asylum seekers and collaborates with various organizations to offer training and support for staff working with LGBTI migrants. It established a support group for gay and bisexual asylum seekers, providing a safe space for them to share their personal stories and discuss their challenges in their home countries and in Italy. The project has proven

essential for providing legal support and creating a protected space for marginalized asylum seekers to gain awareness of their rights and their personal experiences.

3.3 [I-Care project, Wellspring Foundation, C.I.D.A.S. and MIT](#)

The I-Care project, an ongoing collaborative effort between the Wellspring Foundation, C.I.D.A.S., and the Trans Identity Movement (MIT), is dedicated to advancing workplace inclusion for transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals. Through FAMI 2014 - 2021, the project's primary objective is to create a practical booklet that offers comprehensive guidelines and best practices for integrating these individuals into the labor market. The booklet is designed to tackle the various challenges that transgender people encounter in the workplace, ranging from discriminatory hiring practices to issues related to disclosing their gender identity. It emphasizes the critical importance of establishing a work environment that fully respects gender identity and offers tangible solutions such as introducing an "Alias career" (temporary acknowledgment of a chosen name) and providing gender diversity training to employees. Not only does this document shed light on the systemic issues, including the stigmatization of transgender individuals and the common association with sex work, but it also equips companies with practical tools to implement change. It touches on areas such as handling CVs from transgender candidates and ensuring respectful communication during interviews. The primary focus is on evaluating skills and qualifications without the influence of gender, with the ultimate goal of reducing discrimination and fostering a more inclusive corporate culture. Ultimately, the I-Care project, supported by this comprehensive booklet, aims to instigate a cultural shift in workplaces, advocating for businesses to embrace diversity and eliminate barriers that impede the full participation of transgender individuals in the job market.

3.4 [R.A.R.O. project, Quore](#)

The "R.A.R.O." project, initiated by the Italian association Quore thanks to 8x1000 funds, offers safe housing and support for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees. Still ongoing, the project aims to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the asylum process, such as discrimination and vulnerability in traditional reception centers. It provides temporary accommodation in a welcoming environment, along with legal, psychological, and social assistance, to help residents rebuild their lives with dignity and security. The primary focus of the project is to create inclusive spaces that respect and affirm diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. In addition to housing and support, the project also concentrates on raising awareness and sensitizing the general public and professionals working with asylum seekers about the specific vulnerabilities and needs of LGBTQ+ individuals. This includes training staff in reception centers to recognize and address the discrimination that LGBTQ+ refugees often face, thus promoting inclusive and respectful environments. The project also works to dismantle stereotypes and biases through workshops, events, and collaborations

with local communities, to foster a more inclusive culture that better understands and supports the intersection of LGBTQ+ identities and the asylum experience.

4. ADVOCACY-RELATED INITIATIVES

4.1 ARCIGAY

Italian LGBTQIA+ activism has been fairly involved in addressing the specific challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ migrant community. In addition to providing essential counseling services, both psychological and legal, the national LGBTQIA+ movement has also been actively advocating for the rights of LGBTQIA+ migrants, particularly concerning immigration policies (Graglia, 2020). An example of this is the Palermo Pride, which in 2016 released a politically charged document titled "Palermo Pride Supports Migrants" (Arcigay Palermo, 2018). CSOs located in Sicily, given its strategic location as a gateway to Europe from North Africa, has been particularly focused on creating a welcoming environment for migrants, advocating for open borders, and viewing immigration as a valuable resource and a necessity (Volonterio, 2024). This approach is framed as a conscious effort to build more inclusive and prosperous communities rather than an act of mere pity or a political gesture (Frasca, 2023). The fear of prejudice may lead individuals to avoid attending LGBTQIA+ services and associations for fear of being excluded from their community. This has resulted in limited attendance at LGBTQIA+ events and services, as individuals are hesitant to be seen in explicitly gay-friendly spaces. One potential solution to address this issue is to establish LGBTQIA+-themed initiatives within migrant reception facilities to raise awareness and promote inclusivity. An example of such an initiative is the collaboration between the Italian Cultural Recreational Association (ARCI) and Arcigay's Migra_Antinoo desk in Naples, which manages several migrant reception facilities in Campania, Italy. Together, they organized a workshop on comprehensive sexuality education. The workshop involved Red-Cross volunteers, psychologists, infectious disease specialists, and lawyers who provided training on issues related to both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. To improve LGBTQIA+ services and make them more accessible to immigrant beneficiaries, it is essential to offer general services to immigrants while also creating a welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals. This approach can help identify and support individuals reluctant to come forward due to cultural or societal barriers.

Additionally, creating a network that embraces multiculturalism and multilingualism can facilitate the integration of SOGI communities within immigrant populations. To achieve this, LGBTQIA+ associations should consider collaborating with cultural and mediators and immigration experts. Similarly, migrant reception facilities can benefit from working with LGBTQIA+ associations to create more inclusive and diverse environments. This collaborative approach prioritizes inclusivity and aims to support individuals from various backgrounds within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Moreover, following the influx of SOGI asylum seekers to the Vercelli and Biella areas in 2016, two immigrant volunteers from the LGBTQIA+ community took the initiative to establish the Group Africa Arcigay. The group was formed with the primary goal of advocating for the implementation of effective practices in the realm of reception and integration, specifically tailored to individuals originating from countries where prevalent homophobia poses significant challenges. This initiative sought to streamline the often-complex bureaucratic procedures associated with obtaining residence permits, while also providing essential social support to the asylum seekers. Africa Arcigay collaborates closely with prefectures, local authorities, legal representatives, and organizations specializing in migrant affairs and anti-discrimination. The group aims to ensure that accurate and comprehensive information pertinent to LGBTQIA+ individuals is disseminated, and they actively engage with individuals within the CAS (extraordinary reception centers). Ultimately, their efforts are directed towards developing a nationwide protocol encompassing collaborative strategies, data acquisition methodologies, training programs, and effective interventions in support of LGBT+ asylum seekers.

g) **Evaluating capacity building and sensitization programmes for migrants' organizations, LGBTQI+ organizations and local authorities tailored to the gaps and needs of LGBTQI+ migrant population**

The [Rainbow Welcome! project](#), co-funded by the EU up until August 2022, aims to improve the reception of LGBTQIA+ refugees through legal frameworks and training of shelters across Europe. In Italy, the Croce Rossa Italiana is a key partner, involved in training operators to better support LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, creating safe spaces, and raising awareness about the specific challenges this community faces. Italian activities focus on improving services in refugee centers and advocating for inclusive policies. Particularly, the document entitled "Rainbow Welcome! Practical Guide for Social Workers and Field Operators" aims to improve the reception and assistance of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers in Europe. It is designed for professionals, social workers, and operators working with these individuals, who are often highly vulnerable to discrimination and violence due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC). The guide provides practical strategies to ensure respectful and inclusive support, addressing the multiple vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ migrants. Being an ally to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers involves understanding and respecting their life experiences, often marked by trauma linked to discrimination and violence. It's important to recognize that acronyms such as LGBTQIA+ and symbols like the rainbow flag may have different connotations depending on the cultural context. Allies must take the time to educate themselves and listen, acknowledging that terms and labels commonly used in Western societies may not have the same meaning for everyone. LGBTQIA+

individuals from different cultural backgrounds may not identify with Western labels, and their expressions of gender identity or sexuality might be significantly different from what is typically understood in Europe. Intercultural sensitivity is essential in this process. Allies should be aware that the cultural, social, and religious norms of the asylum seeker's country of origin may have deeply influenced their self-perception and the expression of their identity. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid imposing Western LGBTQIA+ categories and to respect the individual's own process of self-identification. The support provided must be centered on the specific needs of the person, respecting their journey of self-understanding without pushing them to adopt labels or terminology that may not resonate with their personal history. When it comes to taking action, concrete steps must be taken to assist LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, beginning with understanding the particular vulnerabilities they face. The guide emphasizes the importance of training professionals who work with LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers. These individuals face multiple forms of discrimination: as sexual or gender minorities, as migrants, and as asylum seekers fleeing persecution. As such, those providing assistance must develop specific skills to recognize and address these unique needs. Breaking down prejudices is another key aspect of effective support. Social workers and field operators must be aware of the biases that may influence their perceptions of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers. These biases, often shaped by societal views in the host country or stereotypes about the countries of origin, need to be dismantled to prevent further discrimination during the integration process. In practice, it is crucial to create safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers in reception centers and throughout the asylum application process. The guide advocates for safe environments and the involvement of local LGBTQIA+ support networks that can offer emotional and psychological support. Forming support networks helps ensure that these migrants are not isolated or exposed to further risks of violence or abuse. In addition to physical safety, the psychological well-being of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers must be addressed. Many experience high levels of trauma and psychological distress, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Continuous psychosocial support and access to appropriate medical care are essential. Moreover, legal support is critical to ensuring that asylum seekers are fully informed about their rights and understand the pathways to seeking asylum based on persecution related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Advocacy also plays a crucial role in assisting LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers. It is vital to bring their plight into public debate, raising awareness among policymakers at local, national, and international levels. By advocating for more inclusive and responsive asylum policies, allies can help improve the conditions for LGBTQIA+ individuals seeking refuge. Public awareness campaigns, such as the #RainbowWelcome initiative, can help bring visibility to the violence and discrimination these individuals endure, contributing to a broader societal understanding of their struggles.

Introduction to the field research

As part of the objective to identify the needs for changes in attitudes and processes towards LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees, data has been gathered through desk research as well as from three key groups: **municipal staff**, **representatives of organizations supporting migrants**, and **representatives of organizations supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals**. This data collection is further complemented by information gathered from an **interview** of a person with a migrant background who has a connection with the LGBTQIA+ community, which, along with additional planned interviews to be conducted starting in January, further supports the insights obtained by incorporating the perspective of the people receiving the services. In addition to this already extensive data collection, considerations have been made based on the experiences gained through CESIE's work, which has frequently engaged with the project's target group.

The collection of this data is particularly important within the Italian context, as, like in many other European Union countries, the situation in Italy reflects the fact that states do not systematically collect or maintain statistics on the number of migrants who cite anti-LGBTQIA+ persecution as the reason for seeking asylum under international law. As a result, providing precise figures on this issue remains a challenge.³



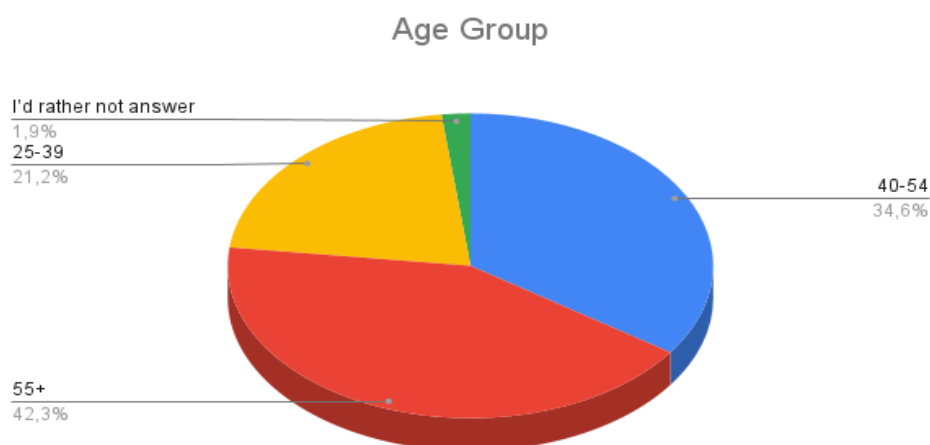
Through the cross-analysis of these sets of data, we can build a comprehensive analytical framework that sheds light on the current situation and offers valuable recommendations for improvement.

³ Desk Research Italy. a).

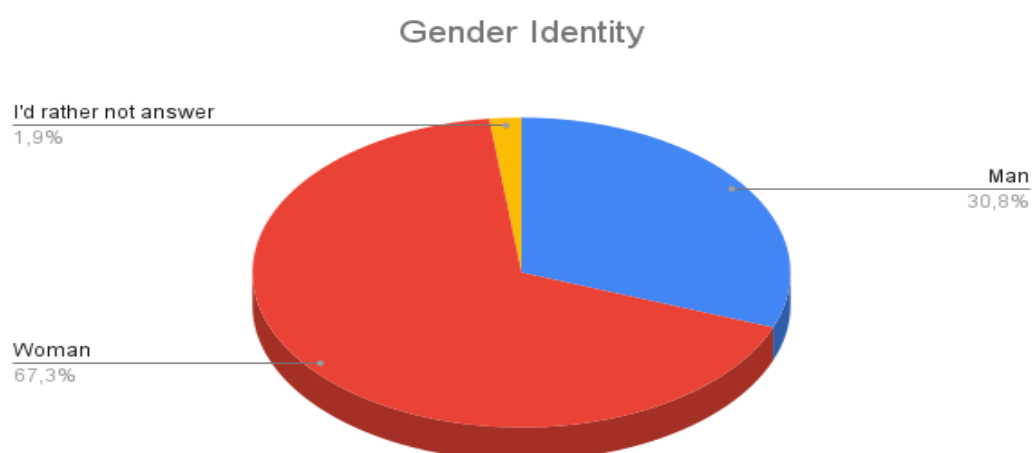
Key findings and main conclusions reached through the online questionnaires with representatives of municipal staff

In this section, we will analyze the responses provided by **the representatives of municipal staff**. The number of **participants** is **53**. More specifically, they provided the following information:

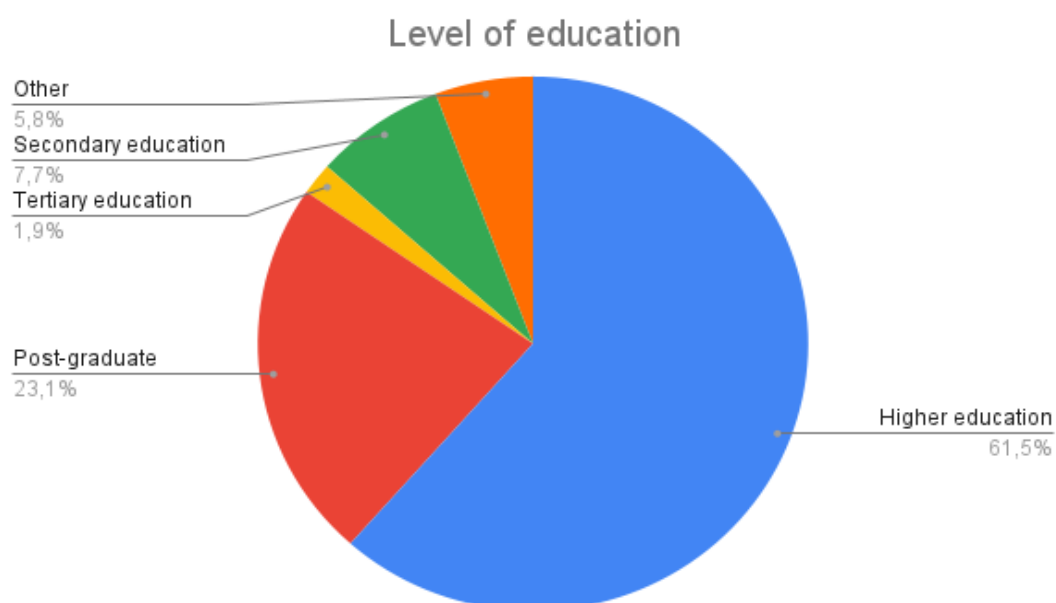
Most of the participants are 55+ years old, followed by individuals aged 40-54, then those aged 25-39, with a minimal percentage choosing not to answer.



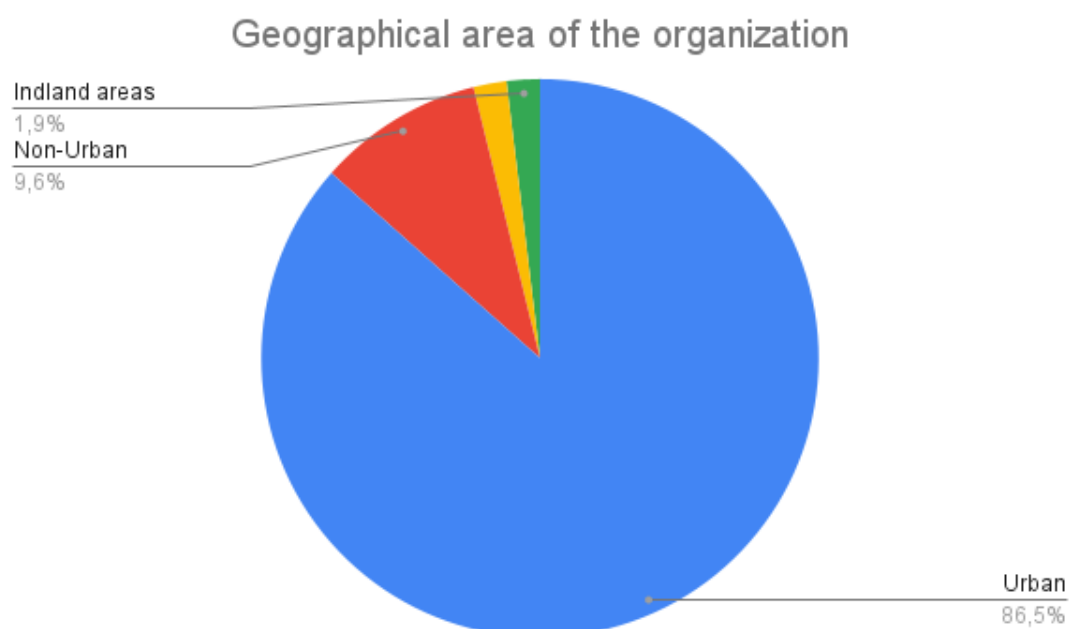
Regarding the question on gender identity, the responses were as follows:



As for the education level of the people who participated in the survey, it was found that most of them hold a university degree. Specifically:

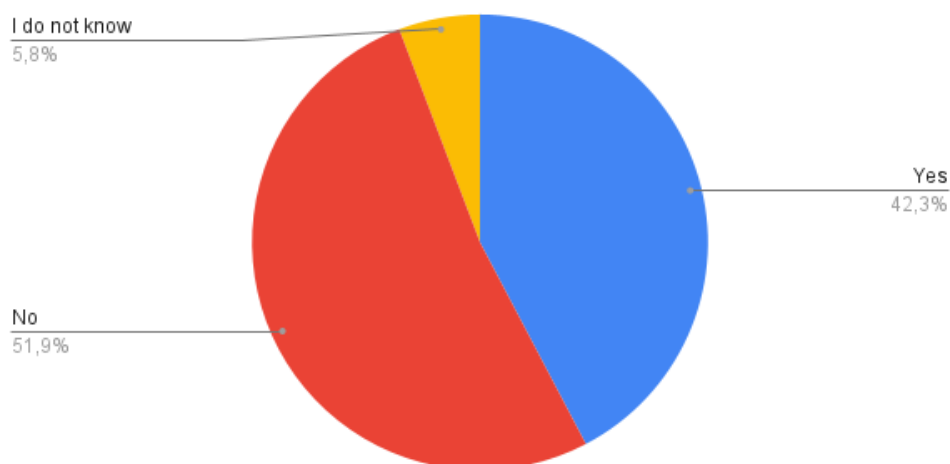


Furthermore, the geographical area where the organizations operate, whose members provided the data, is predominantly urban.

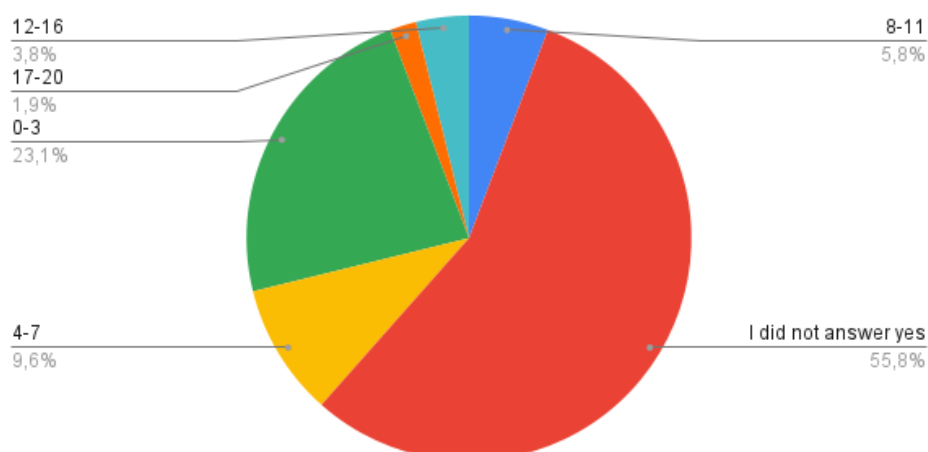


Meanwhile, the roles performed by the employees within the organizations are varied and even combined. 38,5% are involved in municipal social services, 21,2% are municipal administrators, and the remaining 40,3% specialize in various roles in social services, such as psychological or legal support.

Following this essential overview of the demographic and background data of the individuals who completed the surveys, the information provided delves more deeply into the manner and quality of the services offered to migrants and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Therefore, to the question “In your role within the organization, have you ever provided support services to LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees?”, the following responses were given:



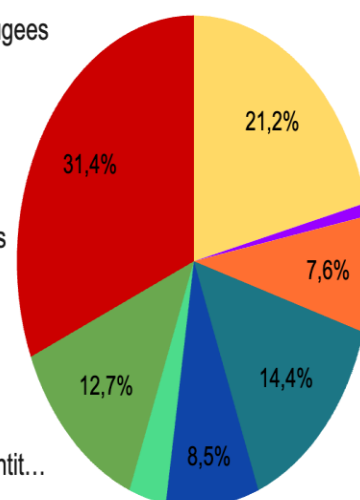
Duration of Support Provided to LGBTQIA+ Migrants and/or Refugees (in Years)



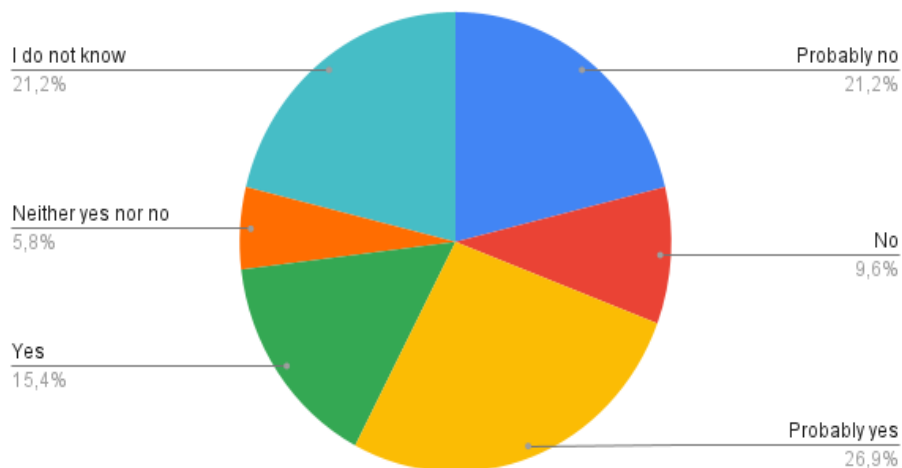
To the question “What do you think? **Do LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees face challenges/issues regarding their social participation in Italy?**” **63,5%** answered “**yes**” and another **28,8%** said “**probably yes**”.

Building on the previous point, in response to the question “If you answered yes or probably yes, what do you think these challenges are?” the respondents provided a range of answers revealing a complex landscape of challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees. Specifically:

- Inadequate or non-existent state care for the special needs of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees and/or the challenges they face
- Bureaucracy
- Inadequate or non-existent skills and abilities of people working in the field regarding the provision of support services to LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees
- Partial or complete ignorance of the LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees regarding their rights
- The limited number or complete absence of civil society actors addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees
- I haven't answered the previous question
- Inadequate or non-existent legal framework/recognition
- Double stigma and discrimination based on ethnic origin and sexual orientation, gender identit...

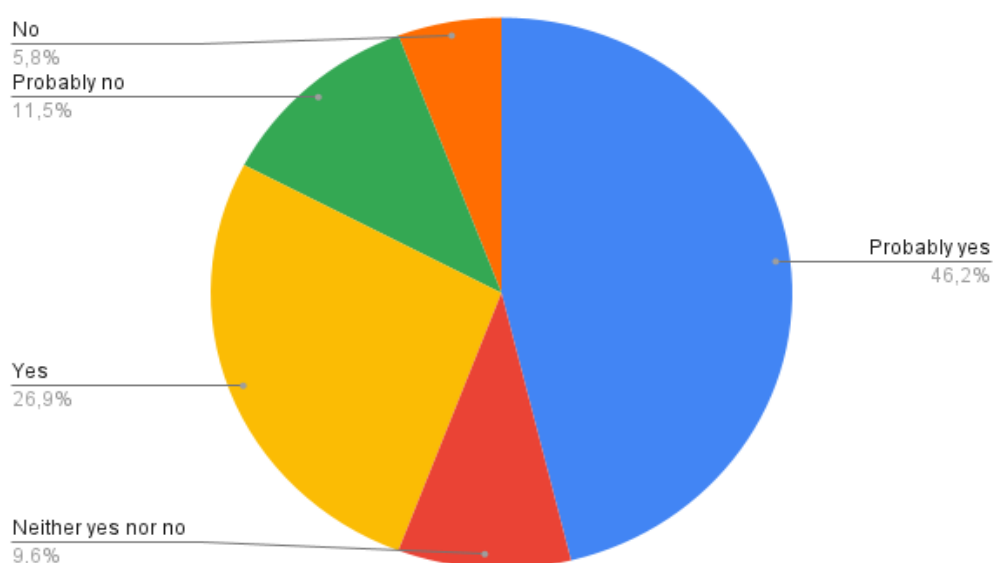


- To the question “**Do LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees face communication challenges with service providers in your organization?**”, the survey participants responded as follows:

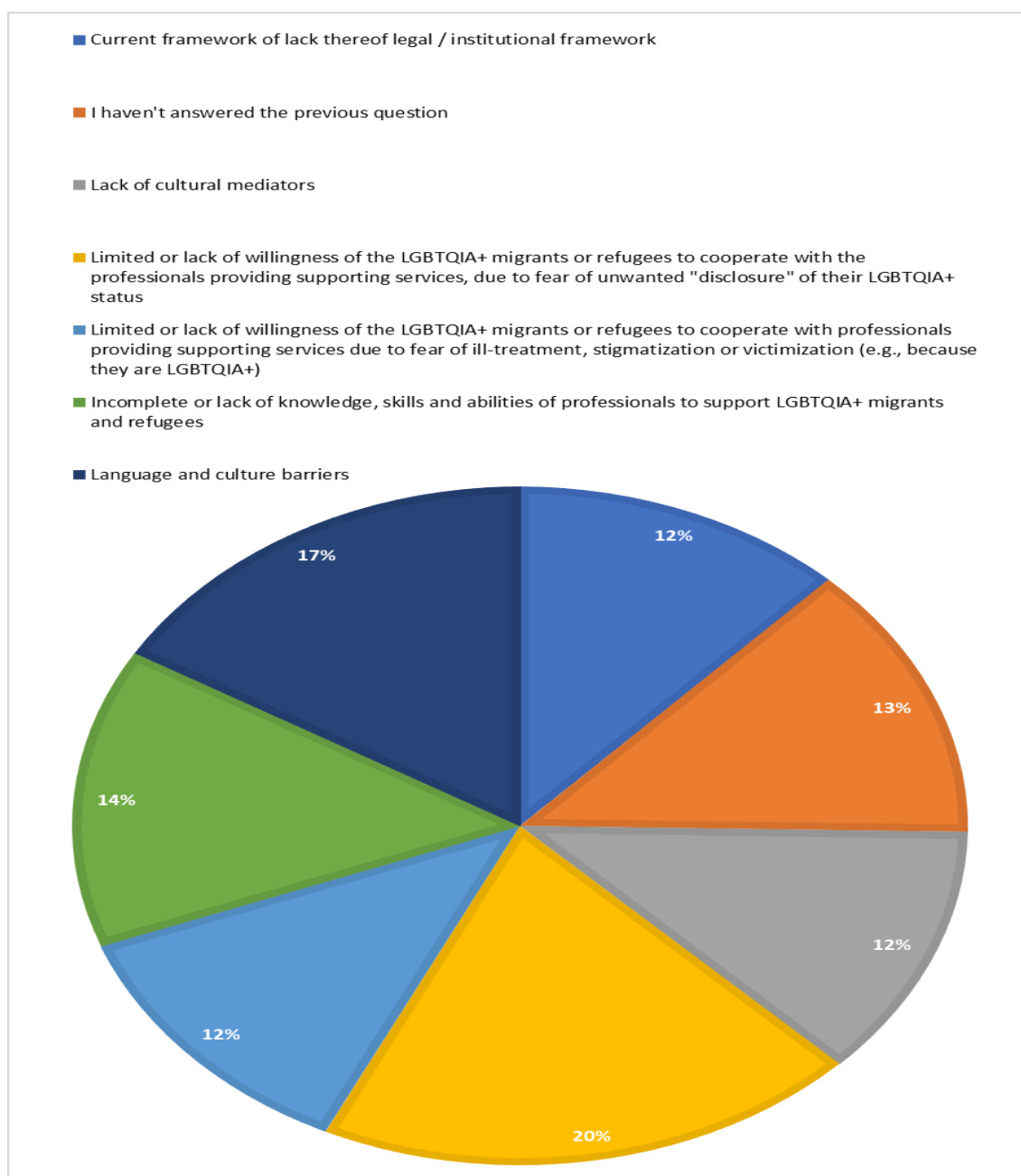


Further elaborating on the above question, participants reported whether they have ever encountered or witnessed a situation where a person provided a service to an LGBTQIA+ migrant; and here, an interesting finding emerged: **only 15,4% of participants** (out of the 42,3% who believe that LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees face communication challenges or probably face communication challenges) specified how people who provide a service to an LGBTQIA+ migrant behave, indicating the response “They are professional/friendly and take their needs into account.”

While to the question “20” the responses were as follows:

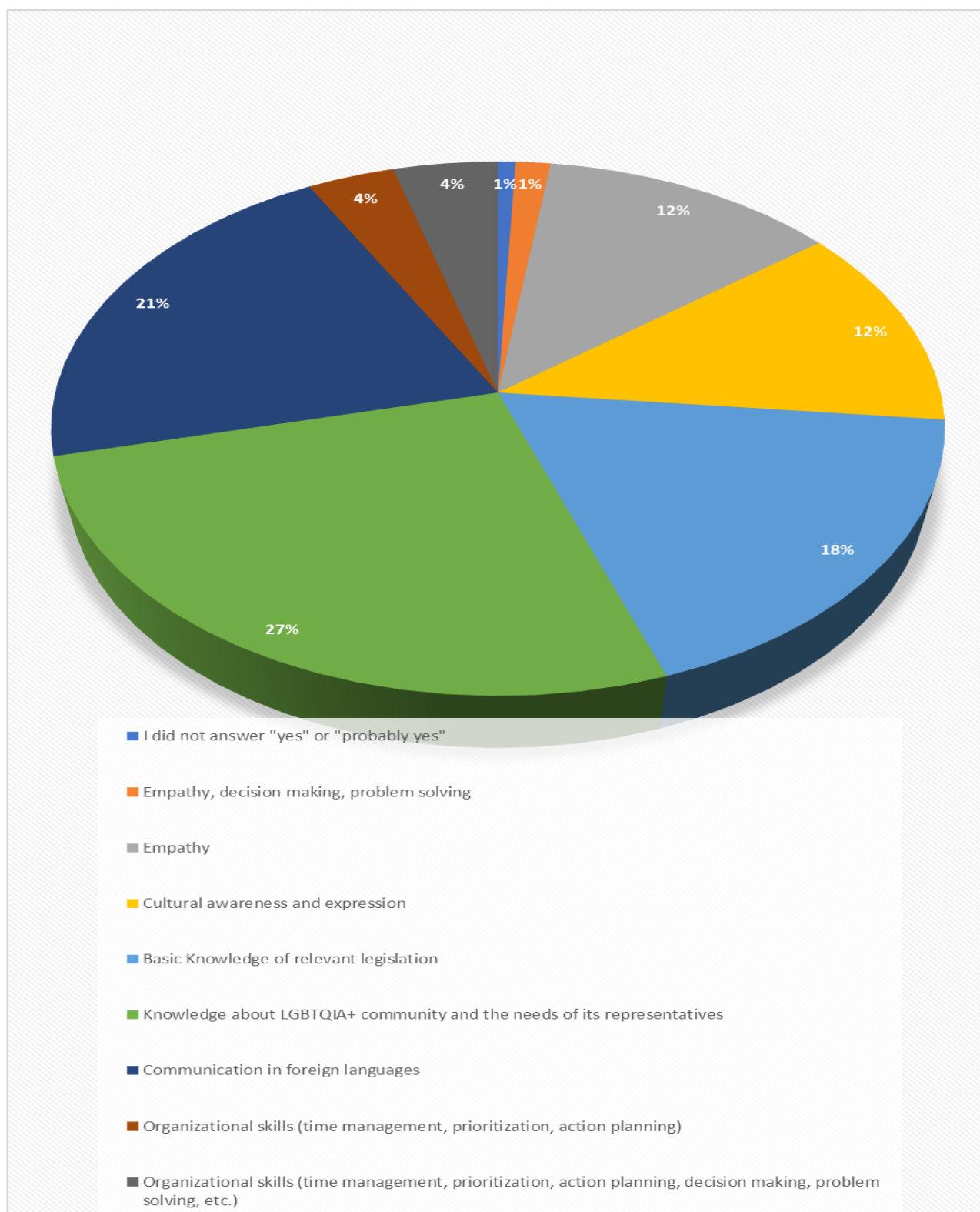


Investigating the reasons behind the above question, the percentages have been outlined as follows:



When asked, “Do you think professionals providing services in your organizations need specific skills and competencies to meet the needs of LGBTIQIA+ migrants and refugees?” 44,2% responded positively, and another 44,2% answered “probably yes.”

Therefore, when asked what these specific skills would be, the percentages were outlined as follows:

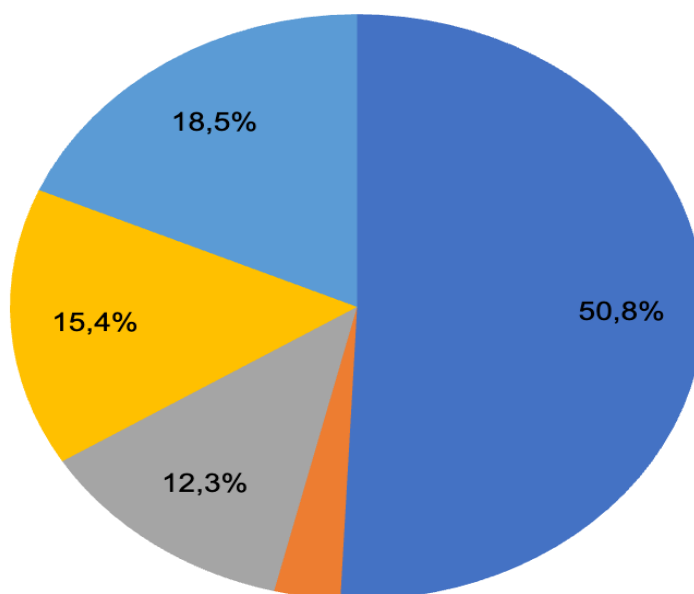


As shown in the graph, **27%** of participants believe that a **missing competence** is **knowledge about the LGBTQIA+ community and the needs of its representatives**, highlighting the need for interaction between the two parties. Furthermore, **21%** of participants state that **foreign language skills** are lacking, noting that this would help in better audience management. These

two data points are accompanied by **18%** of participants who think that a **basic knowledge of relevant legislation** is missing. The remaining percentage is distributed across organizational skills, which could be further supported⁴.

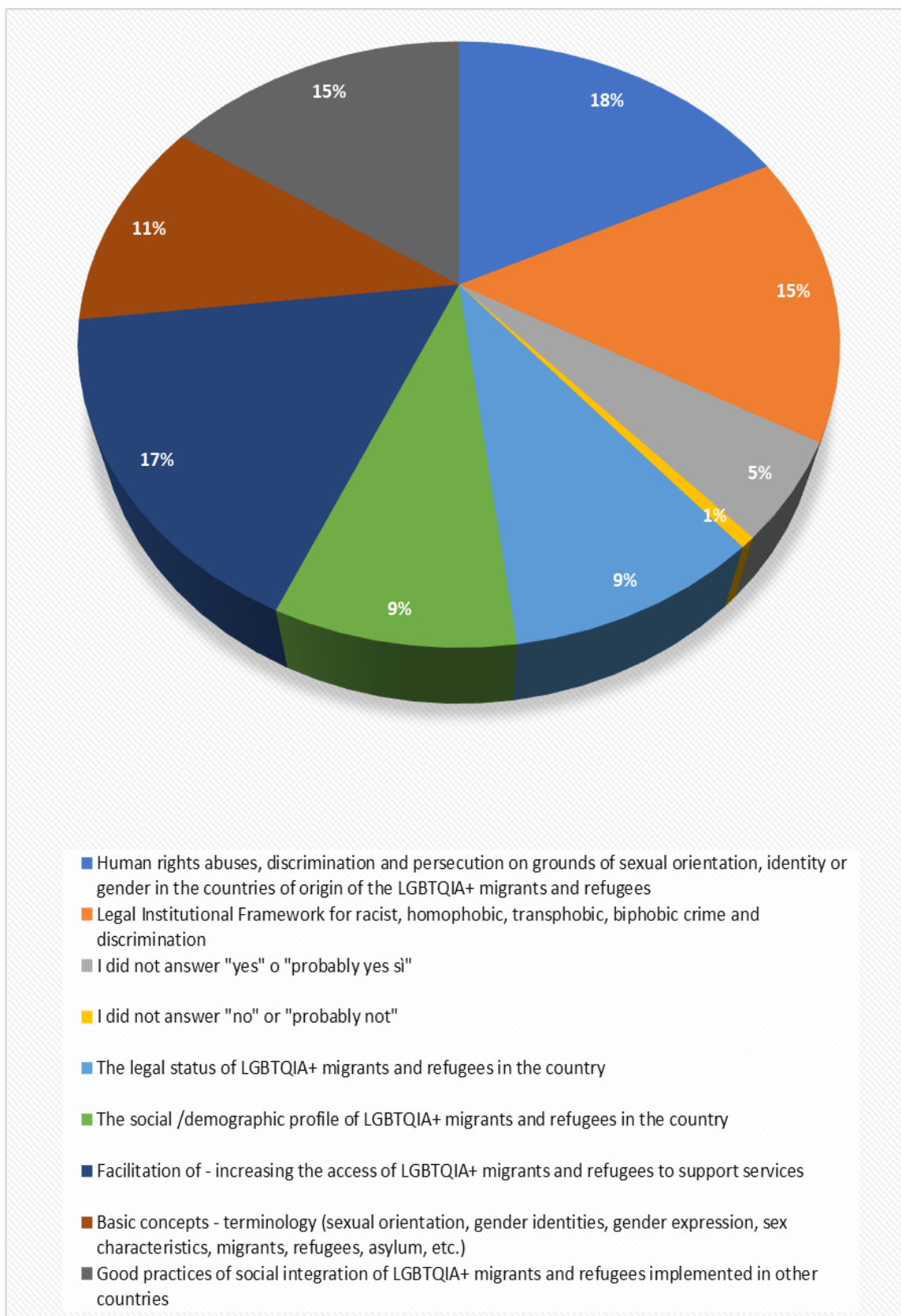
- To complete the previous question, regarding the question “If “No” or “Probably not,” **do you need specific skills and competencies?** What are the reasons?”, **82,7%** of respondents **did not answer “No” or “Probably not,”** demonstrating a clear **awareness, once again, of the missing competencies in the field.** The remaining 13,5% and 1,9% answered respectively “The already existing skills and abilities of the professionals are sufficient” and “They are not interested in developing such skills or abilities”.
- To the question “What do you think, do professionals in your sector have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide support services to LGBTQIA+ migrants or refugees?”, 44,2% answered “probably yes” along with 17,3% who answered “yes”.
- Further exploring, to the question “If “No” or “probably no,” what are the reasons for this lack of knowledge, skills, and abilities?”, the percentages were as follows:

- I did not answer "no" or "probably not"
- Professionals themselves are not interested or have a limited interest in acquiring the relevant knowledge, skills and abilities
- Limited or lack of capacity or willingness of employers to train their employees to acquire this knowledge, skills and abilities
- Low level of awareness of the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community in the institutional context (due to e.g. no legal framework, lack of targeted services to this group etc.)
- Absence or limited availability of free related training activities / programs for professionals



Of the participants interviewed, **53,8%** are **interested in taking part in a training activity focused on meeting and supporting the needs of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees**, and **26,9%** answered “**probably yes**”, demonstrating a general interest in acquiring skills in the area of service provision to LGBTQIA+ migrants or refugees. Among the **topics** that participants think training activities should include are:

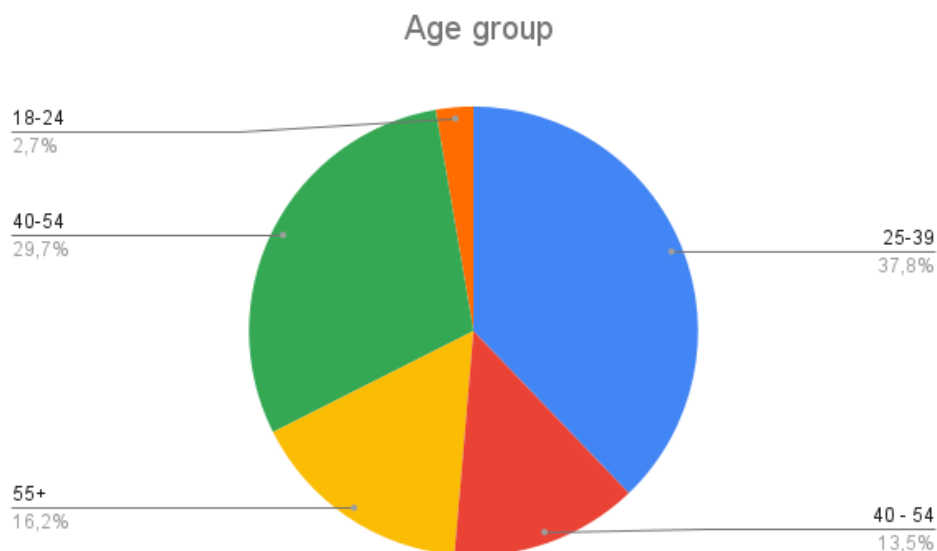
⁴ Although not completely addressed by the actions of this project, as much depends on the internal organization of the institution, along with the training courses and the individual careers of the workers involved.

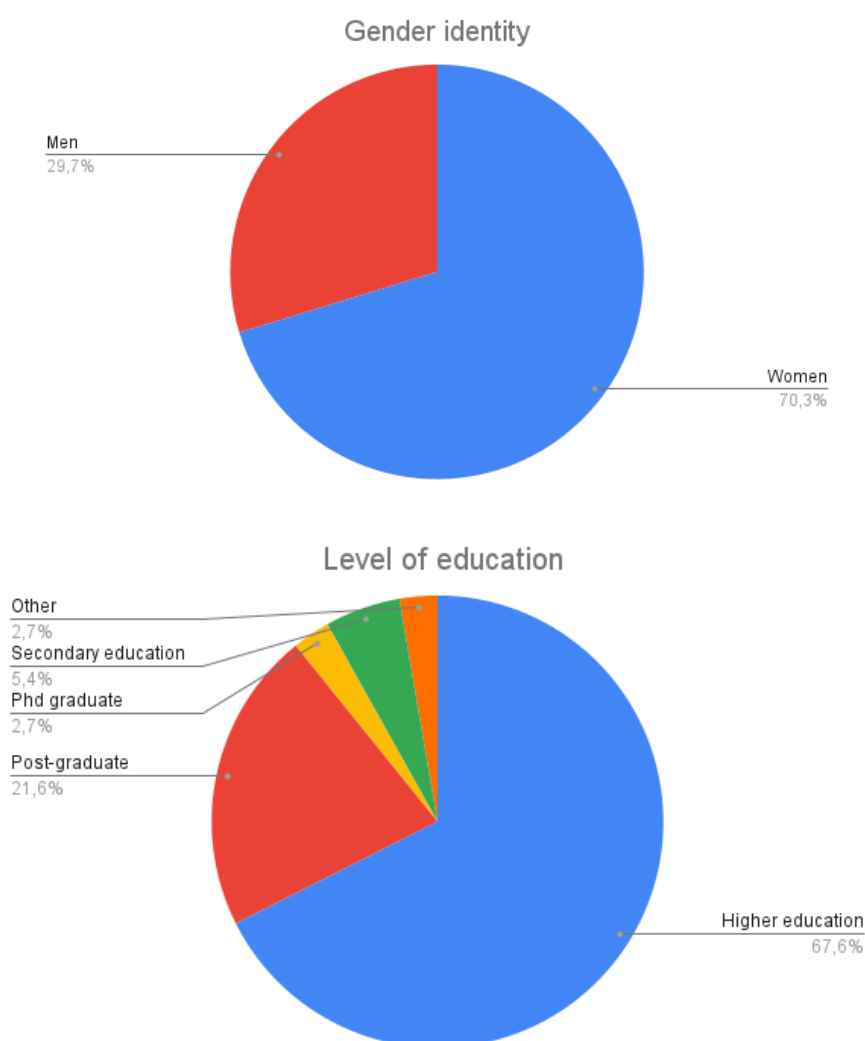


The majority of questionnaire participants are interested in taking part in a training that addresses the topics mentioned above. A small portion, consisting of 1,9%, 9,6%, and another 1,9%, are not interested in participating, respectively because they have a heavy workload, the training would not be related to the tasks they actually perform, and finally, they have no interest in the topic.

Key findings and main conclusions reached through the online questionnaires with representatives of organizations supporting migrants

The following will provide the **main demographic data** of the participants, totaling **38** workers.

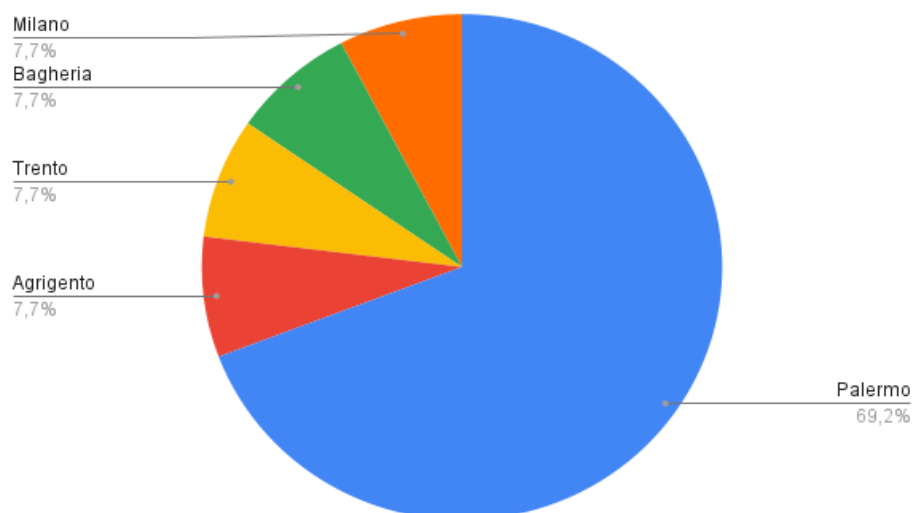




The geographical area of the organizations involved is predominantly urban (94,4%).

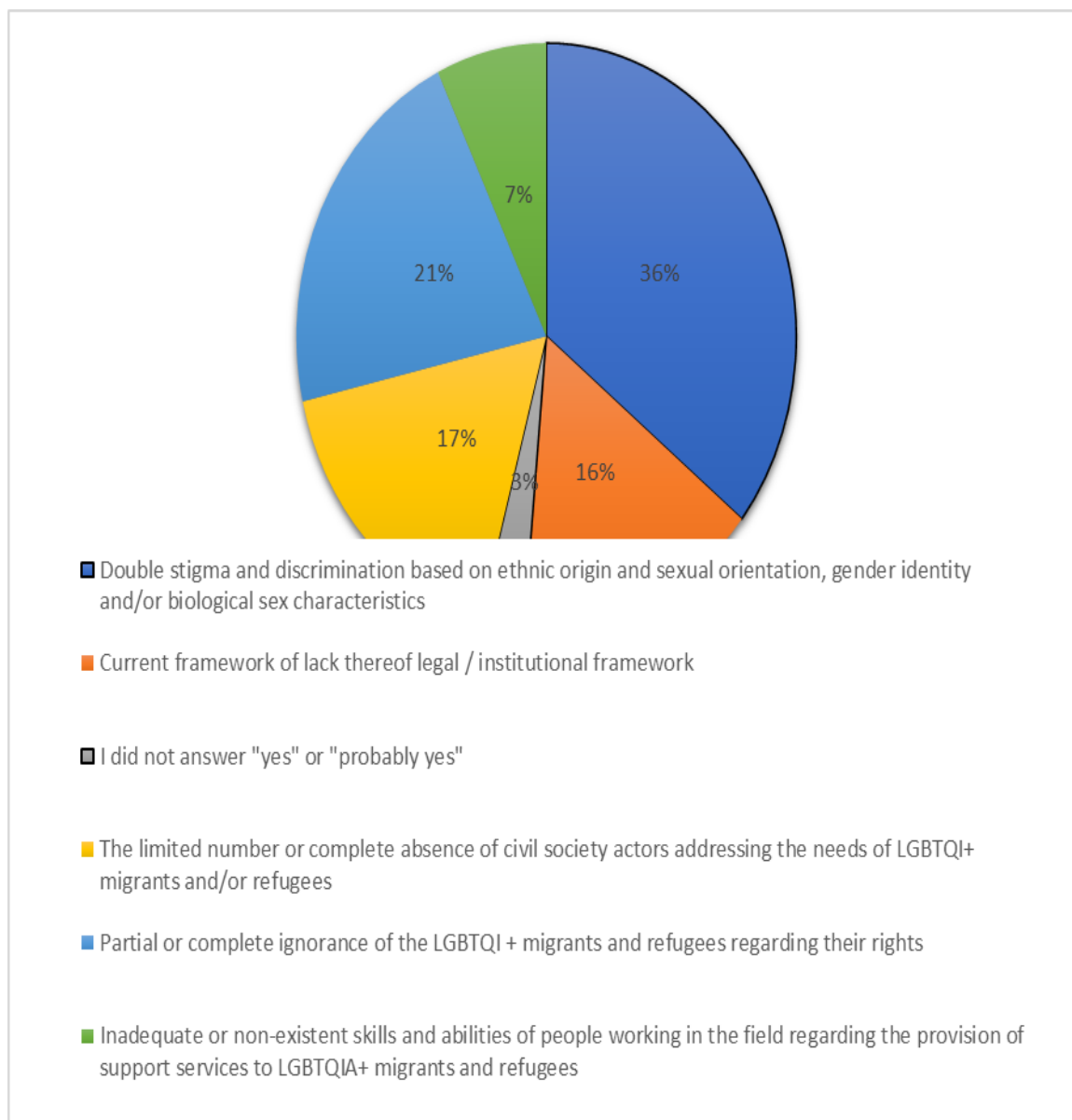
In particular, 15 participants worked in the provinces of:



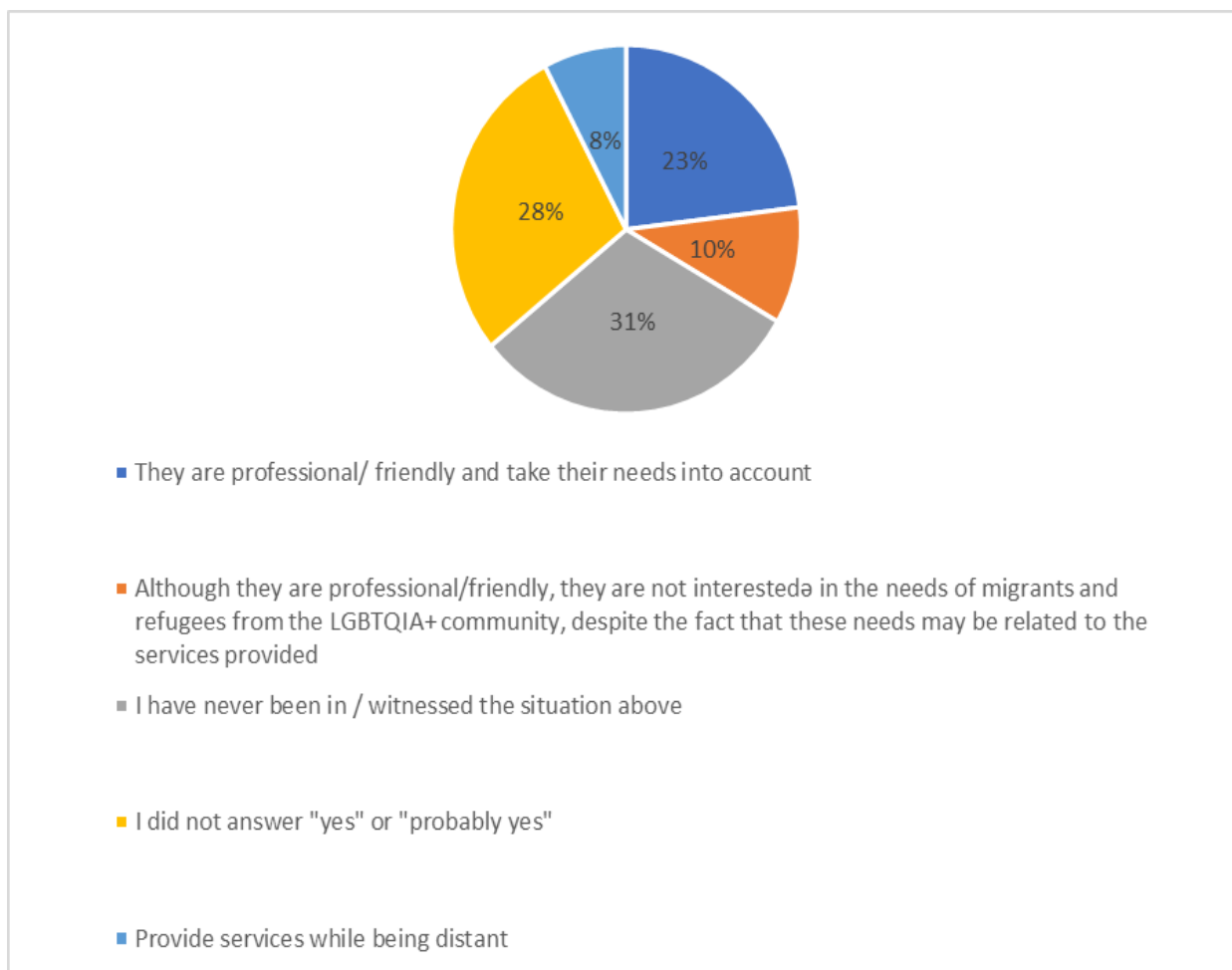


Among the participants, **37,8%** stated that they have **provided support services to LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees**, 21,6% don't know, and 40,5% stated that they have not. While the majority (50,0%) of those who stated that they have not provided support services to LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees do not, among those who have provided support, 25,0% have been doing so for 0-3 years, 10,7% for 4-7 years, 7,1% for 8-11 years, 3,6% for 12-15 years, and the remaining 3,6% have been doing so for more than 20 years.

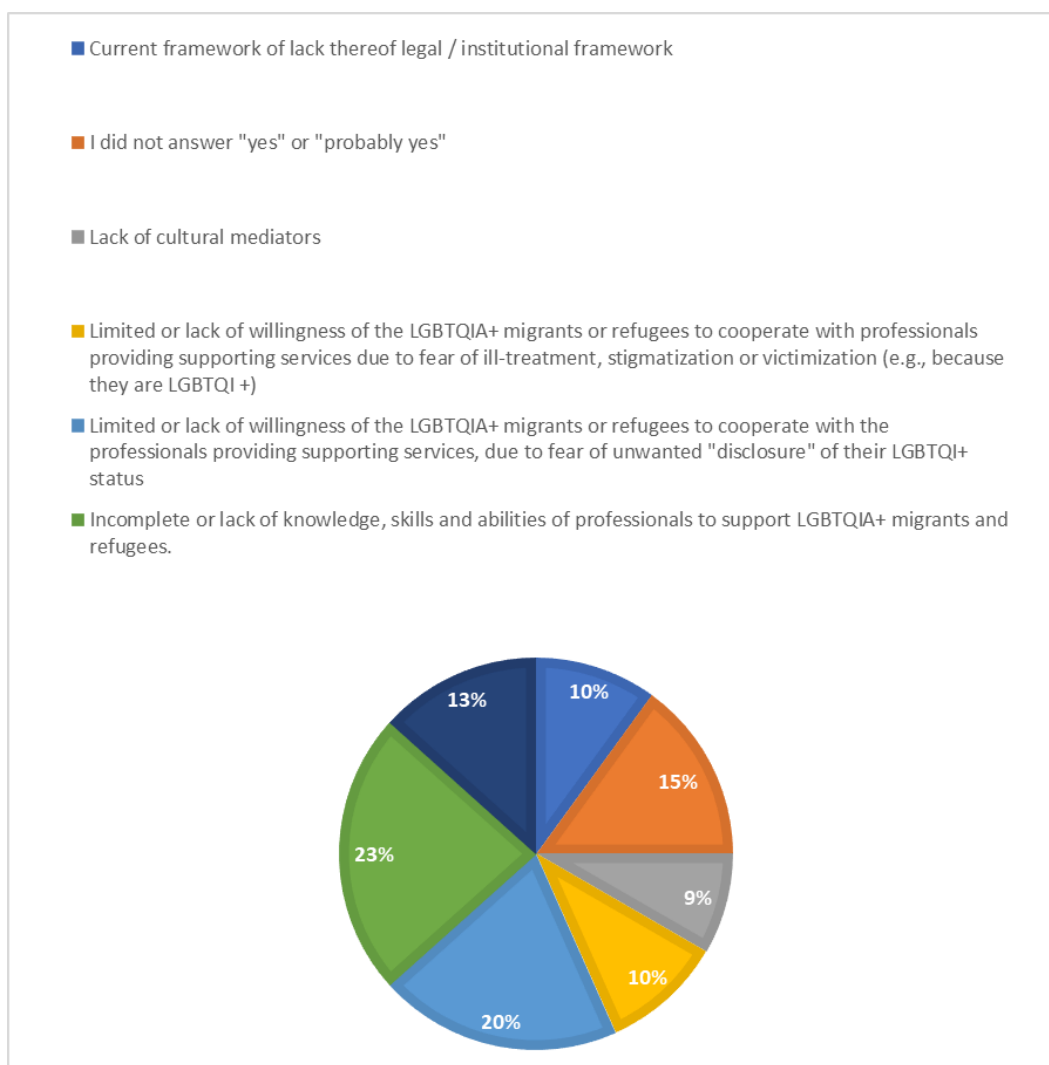
To the question **“What do you think, do LGBTQI+ migrants and/or refugees face challenges/problems regarding their social participation in Italy?”** **45,9%** answered **“probably yes”**, another **45,9%** answered **“yes”**, and only 8,1% answered **“no”**. Among these challenges and issues, the following have been the most frequently mentioned:



To the question “From your own experience, **do LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees face challenges/problems in their communication with the professionals providing supporting services in your organization?**” **27,0%** answered “**probably yes**”, along with another **18,9%** who answered “**yes**”. In particular, the participants reported the following:



Changing perspective, it was found that 45,9% of participants think that professionals providing supporting services in their organization “probably” face challenges in providing it to LGBTQIA+ migrants or refugees, along with another 18,9% of participants who who stated it for certain. Among the challenges, the following have been listed:

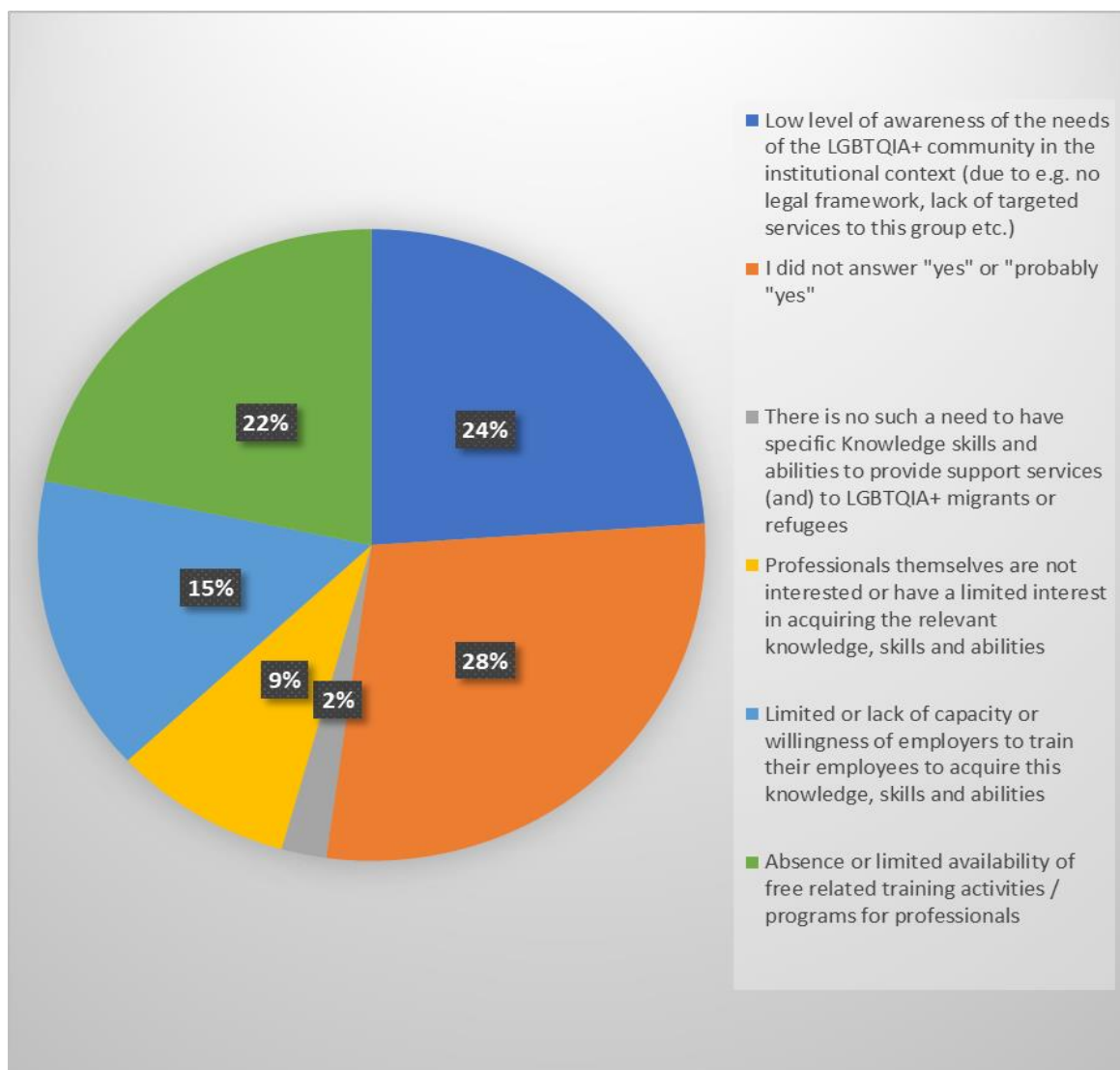


To the question “In your opinion, do you think professionals providing services in your organizations need specific skills and competencies in order to meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees?” 51.4% answered “probably yes”, and another 35.1% answered “yes”. Among those who believe that the workers in their organizations do not need specific skills and competencies, the following reasons were mentioned:

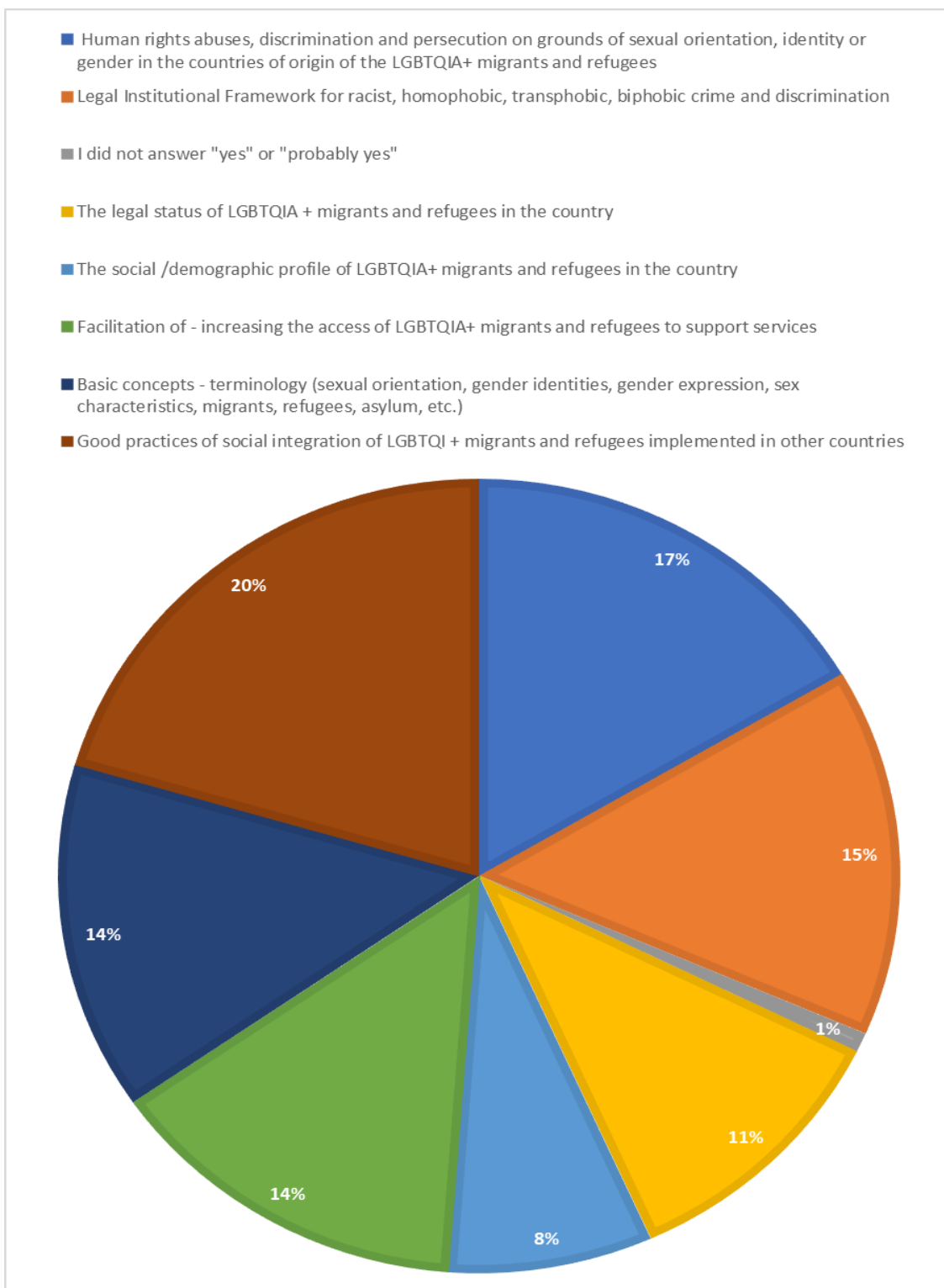
- The existing skills and abilities of the professionals are sufficient (16,0%).
- There are no special skills or abilities (12,0%).
- They are already competent (4,0%).
- Professionals should not and do not have to possess such special skills or abilities (4,0%).

To the question, “What do you think, do professionals in your sector have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide support services to LGBTQIA+ migrants or refugees?”, 37.8% answered “probably yes”, another 13.5% answered “yes”, and 18.9%

answered “probably no”. The participants believe that the reasons for this lack of necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities are as follows:



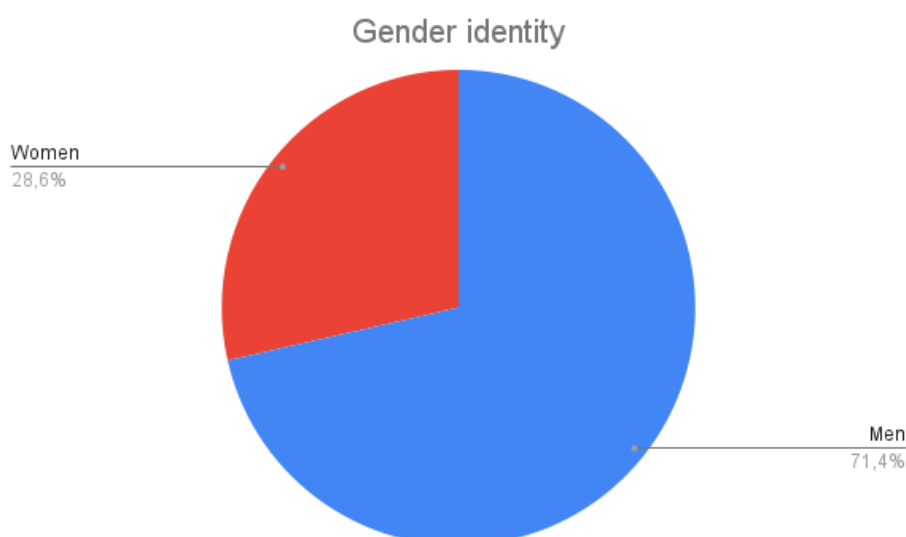
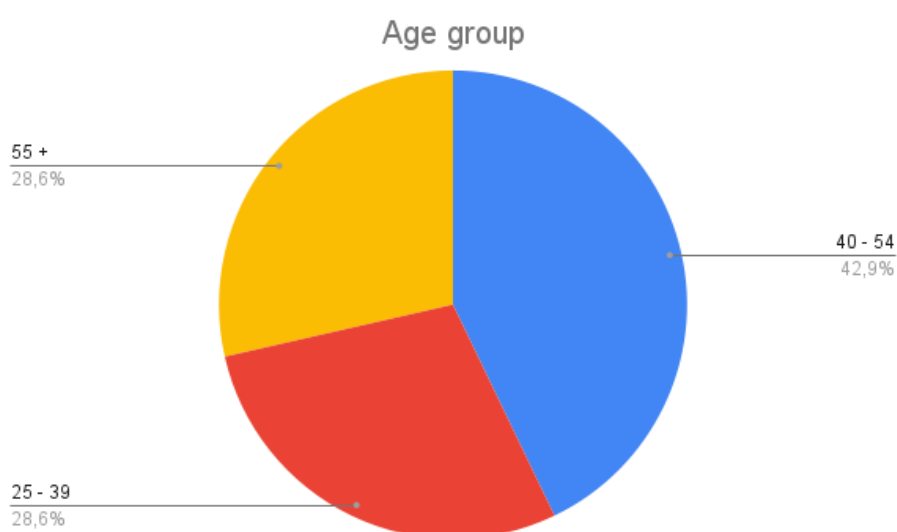
Of the participants interviewed, as many as **70,3%** expressed interest in participating in a training activity that focuses on meeting and supporting the needs of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees. Among the topics they would like to see addressed are:

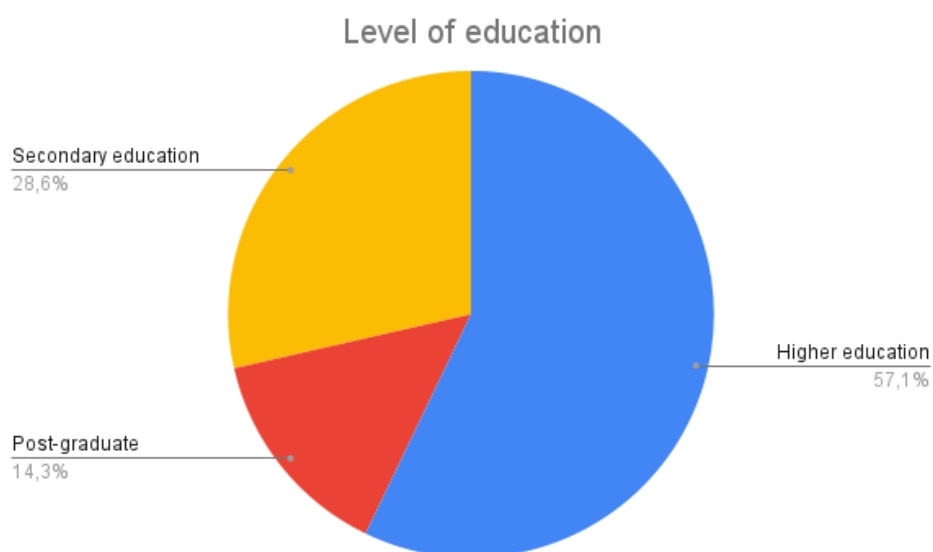


Among those who answered “no” or “probably no”, only 4,3% cited “difficult workload” as the reason, and 8,7% mentioned “no relation to actual duties”.

Key findings and main conclusions reached through the online questionnaires with representatives of organizations supporting LGBTQIA+

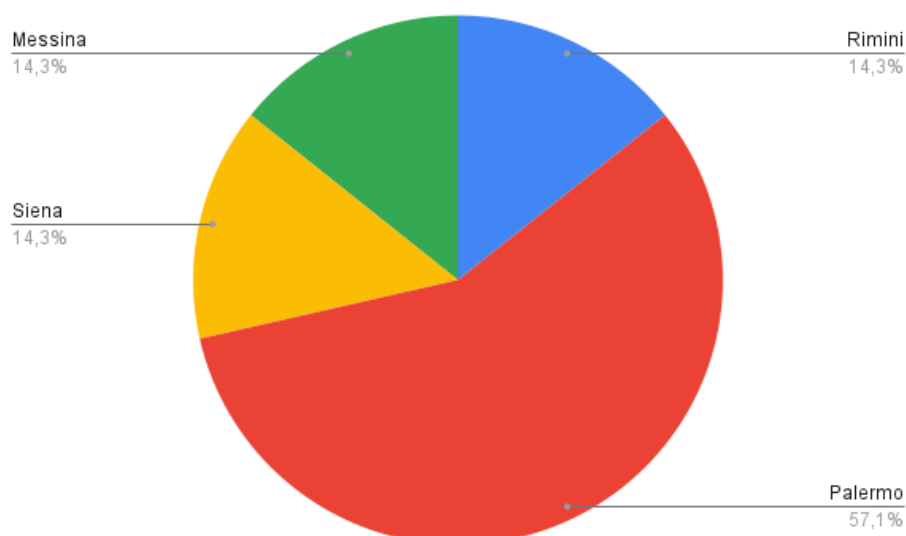
As for the data collected from organizations working with LGBTQIA+ individuals, the following information was revealed by the 7 participants:



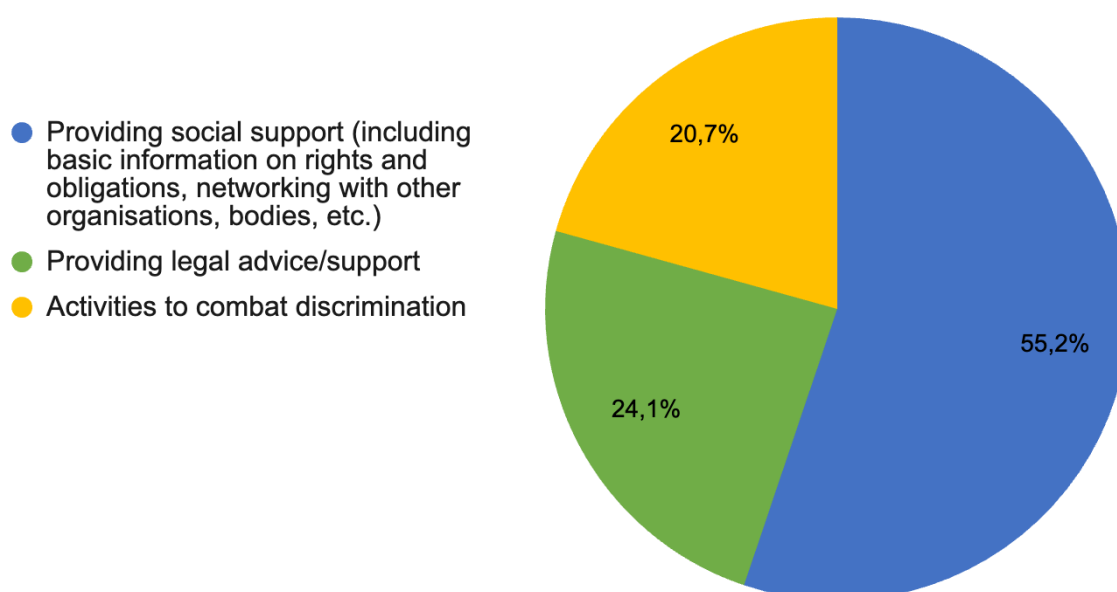
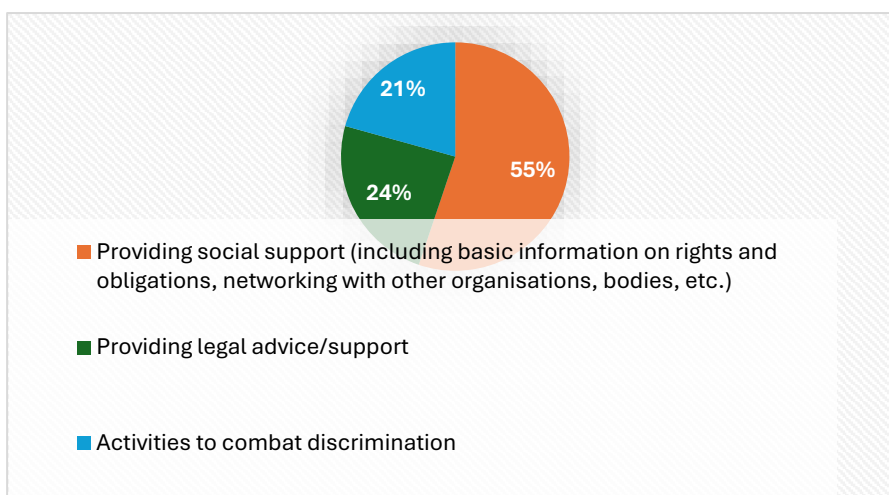


100% of the participants work in organizations located in urban areas.

In particular, in the provinces of:

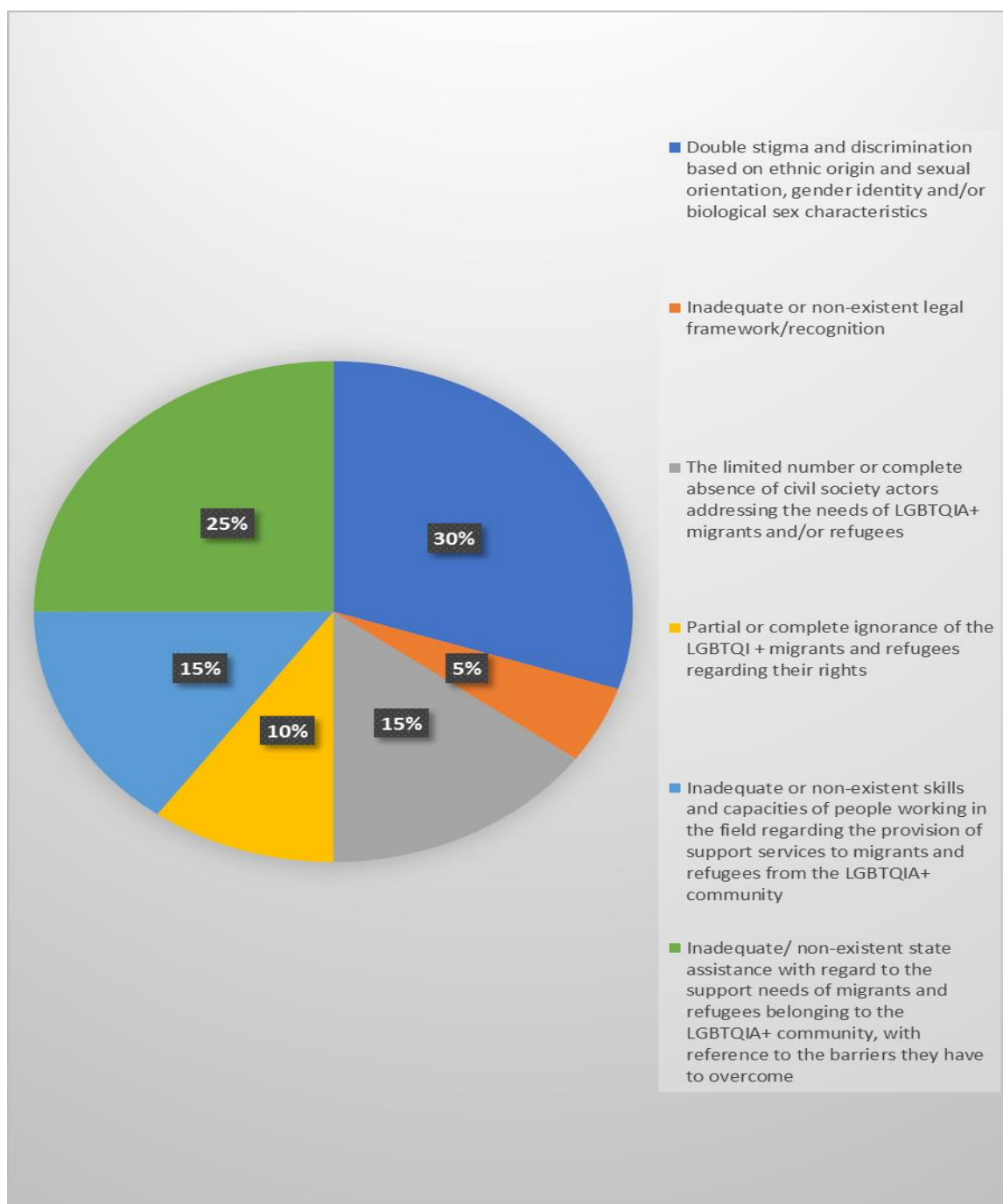


To the question “What is your main role in the organization in which you wo?”, the responses were as follows:

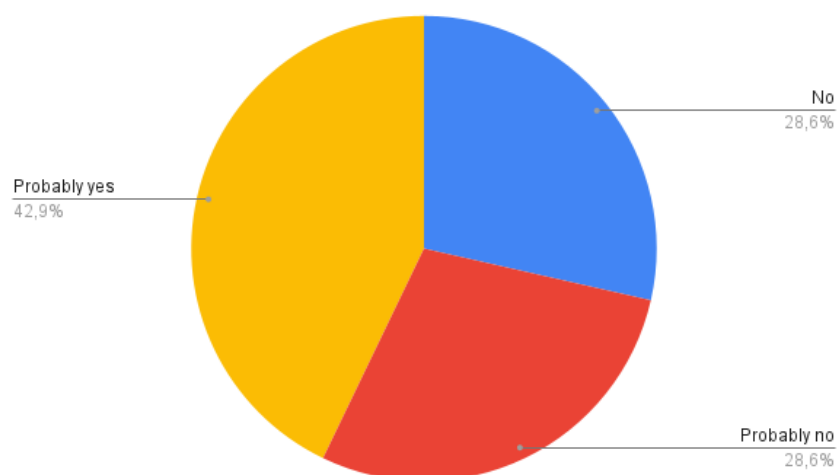


Of the 7 participants, all have provided support services to LGBTQIA+ migrant and/or refugee individuals. Among those who provided support services to LGBTQIA+ migrant and/or refugee individuals, 42,9% have done so for 0-3 years, 28,6% for 4-7 years, and another 28,6% for 8-11 years.

Among the participants, **all but one** believe that **LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees face barriers regarding their social participation in Italy**. The only participant who disagreed with this view answered “probably no”. Among the barriers, the following have been listed:

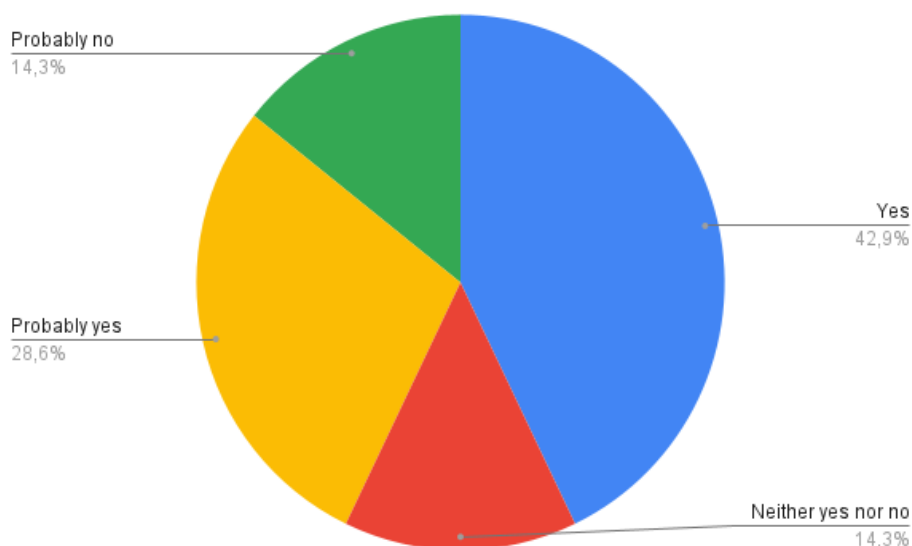


To the question “From your own experience, do LGBTQIA+ migrants and/or refugees face challenges or problems in their communication with the professionals providing support services in your organization?”, the following responses were given:

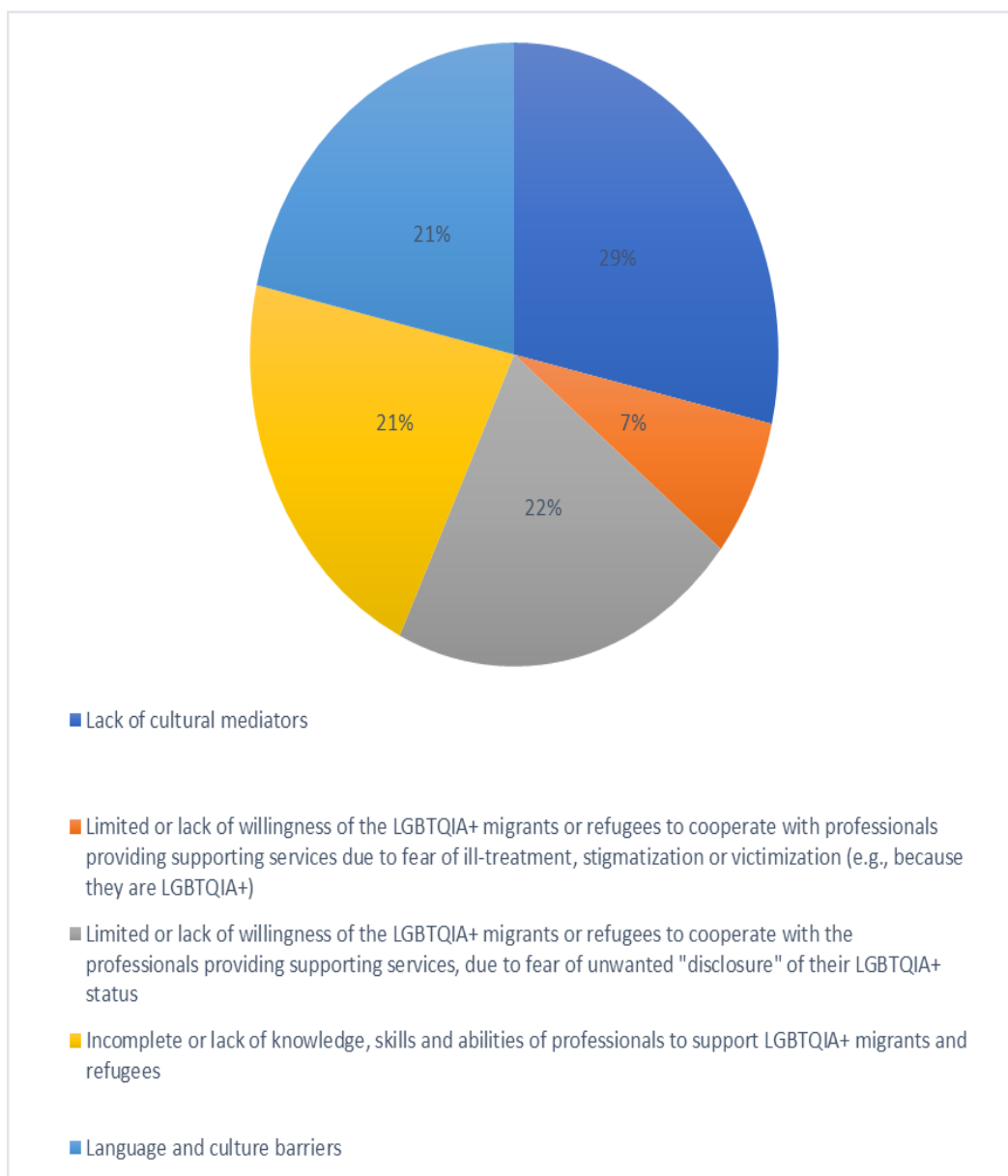


Based on the experience of providing services to LGBTQIA+ individuals with a migration background (or target group), the following attitudes were observed by the participants in professionals: 71,4% think that “They are professional/friendly and take into account the needs of the target group,” while 28,6% think that They provide services despite being distant on a relational level.

To the question “What do you think, do professionals providing support services in your organization face challenges in providing support to LGBTQIA+ migrants or refugees?”, the percentages were as follows:

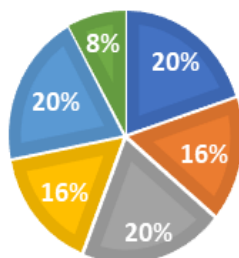


Among the difficulties, the following have been listed:

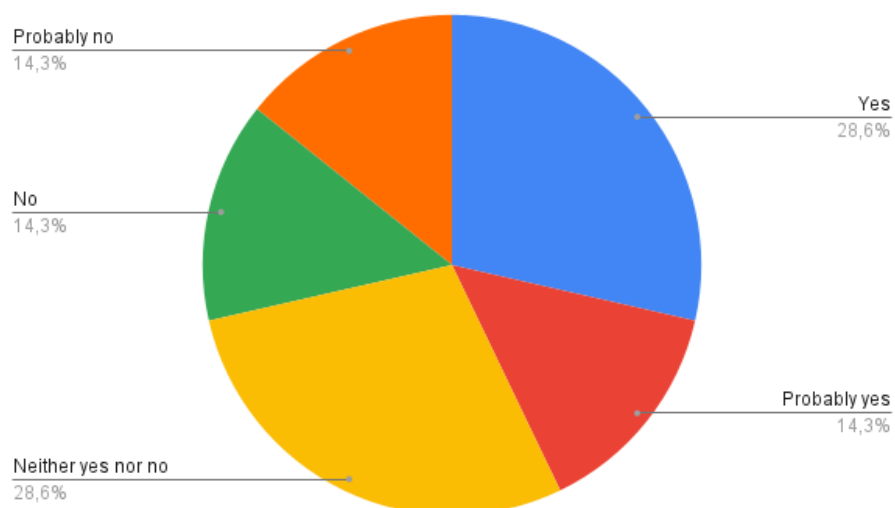


On the other hand, to the question “In your opinion, do you think professionals providing services in your organization need specific skills and competencies in order to meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees?”, 71,4% answered “probably yes” and 28,6% answered “yes”. Regarding the question above, the following skills were mentioned:

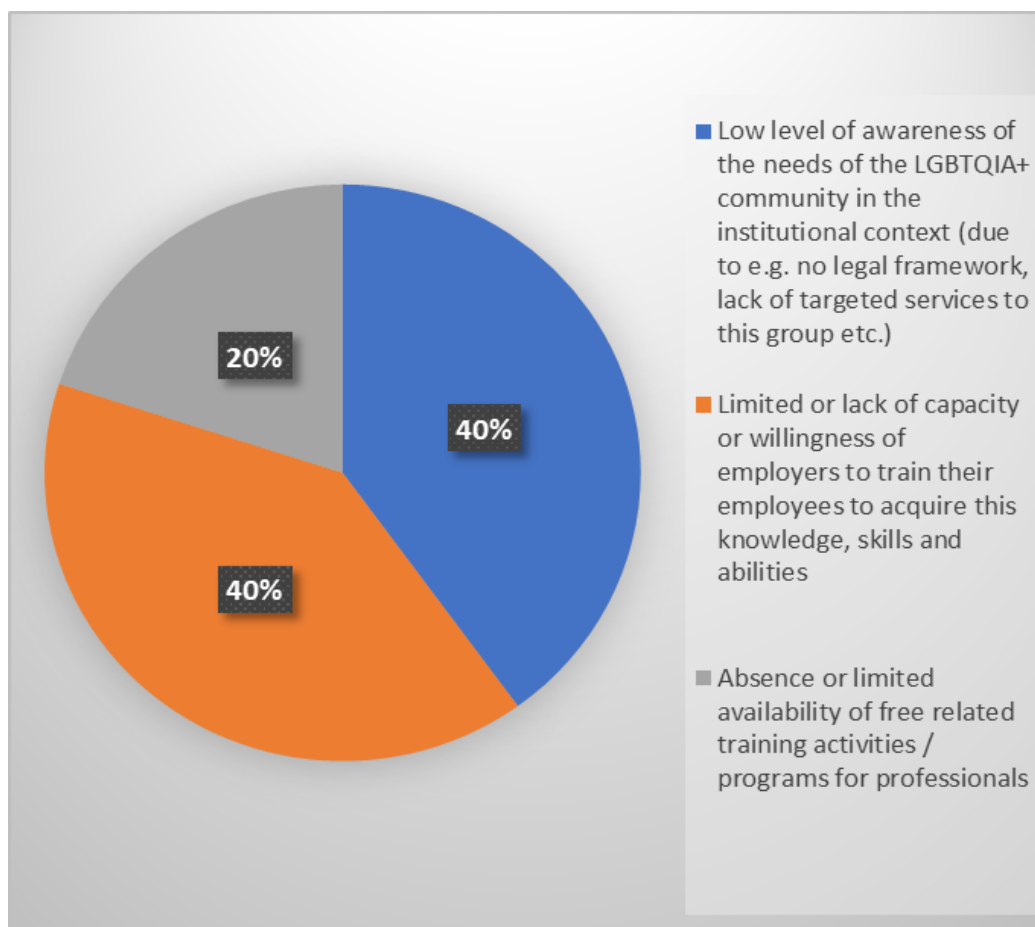
- Empathy
- Intercultural awareness and expression
- Basic Knowledge of relevant legislation
- Communication in foreign languages
- Knowledge about LGBTQIA+ community and the needs of its representatives
- Organizational skills (time management, prioritization, action planning, decision making, problem solving, etc.)



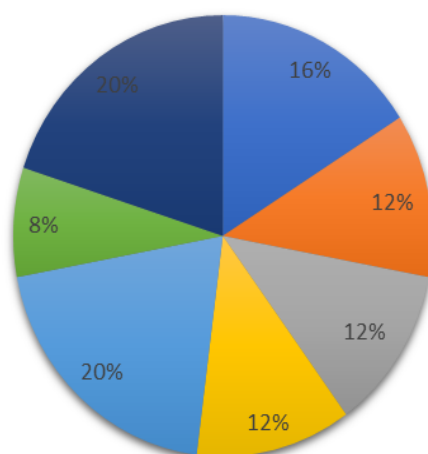
To the question “What do you think, do professionals in your sector have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide support services to LGBTQIA+ migrants or refugees?”, the results were as follows:



According to the participants, the reasons for these gaps are as follows:



Among the participants, **71,4%** expressed **interest in participating in a training activity focused on meeting and supporting the needs of LGBTQIA+ migrant and refugee individuals**; the other two responses were “probably yes” (14,3%) and “neither yes nor no” (14,3%). In particular, the participants would like the following topics to be discussed during the training:



- Human rights abuses, discrimination and persecution on grounds of sexual orientation, identity or gender in the countries of origin of the LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees
- Legal Institutional Framework for racist, homophobic, transphobic, biphobic crime and discrimination
- The legal status of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees in the country
- The social /demographic profile of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees in the country
- Facilitation of - increasing the access of LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees to support services
- Basic concepts - terminology (sexual orientation, gender identities, gender expression, sex characteristics, migrants, refugees, asylum, etc.)
- Good practices of social integration of LGBTQI + migrants and refugees implemented in other countries

Key findings and main conclusion reached through the interview

In addition to the surveys, the field research also includes conducting individual interviews with LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees SOGIESC to assess their support needs within the host community. Due to the vulnerability of the target group, many LGBTQIA+ subject with migratory background and refugees were hesitant to participate in the interviews. Despite the significant efforts of CESIE and the various methods employed—such as extensive organizational outreach, leveraging networks and personal connections—it proved difficult to find participants willing to commit to the interviews. We believe that this difficulty is also influenced by the specific territorial context in Italy and the homophobic policies spread through political propaganda.

The CESIE team had the opportunity to conduct four interviews with individuals who each have very distinct experiences and backgrounds. These interviews provided valuable insights that

allowed us to broaden our understanding and reflections on the themes we had previously analysed. The diversity of experiences shared by the participants enriched the conversation, enabling us to explore various perspectives on issues related to migration, LGBTQIA+ identity, and the intersectionality of both. Of the four interviews, three were conducted in Italian, the preferred language of the interviewees, while one interview was conducted in English. It is important to specify that the interviews were conducted with the full consent of the participants, who signed a privacy document beforehand. The document included information about the purpose of the interview, the handling of personal data, and how the responses would be used. In the privacy document was also assured that all information collected during the interviews would be treated confidentially, in respect of their privacy, and that the data would only be used for the specified purposes.

Main demographic characteristics of participants:

Age	18	40	45	27
Gender identity	non-binary	Female	Female	Female
Sexual orientation:	unspecified	Non-straight	unspecified	unspecified
Country of origin:	Russia	Cameroon	Brazil	Russia
Country of residence:	Italy	Italy	Italy	Italy
Legal status:	Italian citizenship applicant	Refugee	Asylum seeker	Refugee
Arrival in country of residence:	12 years ago	4 years ago	20 years ago	2 years ago
Living in:	Apartment	SAI - Reception System Integration	SAI - Reception System Integration	SAI Vulnerable - Reception System Integration ⁵
Living with:	Family	Others	Others	Others

⁵ These shelter pathways are dedicated to people who need specific psychosocial support, such as people with psychological disorders, trauma victims, people with disabilities, women victims of violence, or people with mental health issues. The goal of these SAls is to offer more appropriate shelter, taking into account the specific individual needs and vulnerabilities of each beneficiary.

Age	18	40	45	27
Support received:	Legal support Others	Housing support Educational support Legal support Prefer not to say	Housing support Employment support Legal support Physical health	Housing support Mental health Legal support
Employment status:	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed
* Educational Status:	—	—	—	University
* Religious Beliefs:	—	—	—	—

* In conducting the interviews, we made the decision to avoid direct questions about educational background and religion. Instead, we agreed that if these topics were to come up naturally during the conversation, we would include them, but without forcing the issue, so as not to disrupt the flow of the interview. The interviews were structured with a flexible framework of broad, open-ended questions designed to avoid putting the participants in an uncomfortable or difficult position. This approach was specifically chosen because many of the individuals we reached out to expressed hesitancy about participating, fearing that the questions might be too personal or intrusive. The decision to refrain from directly asking about religion and education was driven by several key considerations. In the current political and social climate in Italy, religion can be a sensitive and significant source of discrimination and prejudice. While, as interviewers with expertise in migration and gender, we firmly believe that religion should never be a basis for discrimination, we wanted to avoid creating any perception that participants might be judged for their personal religious beliefs. Similarly, we chose not to ask directly about their educational background, as we feared it could lead to concerns that we might form prejudices based on their level of education. Such concerns could potentially undermine the trust we had worked hard to build with the interviewees. Our primary goal was to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and confident throughout the interview process, without the fear of being judged based on personal aspects of their identity.

Interview

The team, having had the opportunity to conduct just four interviews, recognized the importance of thoroughly sharing the detailed experiences of each participant. After gathering

this valuable information, we created a comprehensive summary that highlights the main challenges faced by the individuals, as well as the potential solutions and recommendations they provided. This detailed analysis will serve as a foundation for developing and implementing targeted training courses, aimed at addressing the identified issues and improving support for similar individuals in the future. By utilizing the insights from these interviews, we aim to design effective training programs that are both informed by real-life experiences and tailored to meet the needs of those facing similar circumstances.

First interview

The interview, conducted by two members of the CESIE staff, took place online on November 14 and 20. The participant, an 18-year-old individual from Russia and non-binary identity, shared their personal experience, enriched by collective reflections that further corroborated the discussion. Having moved to Italy with their mother at the age of six, initially to a small town, they later lived in an urban center. Their stay in the small town was particularly challenging, marked by episodes of bullying and xenophobia from both teachers and peers, with insufficient educational support. The pandemic further complicated their path to societal integration. Currently, they lead an independent life and are employed. However, having just reached adulthood, they may encounter bureaucratic difficulties, especially with public administrations responsible for citizenship matters. According to data collected from municipal staff representatives, obstacles such as language barriers emerge. The interview reveals that the participant does not possess Italian citizenship; so far, this has not caused legal issues. A significant aspect is that the participant did not merge the themes of migration and LGBTQIA+ identity. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize the autonomy and individuality of each person within this group, avoiding generalizations that may overlook their unique experiences and needs. Another aspect highlighted in the interview is the importance of recognizing and valuing the skills and capabilities of individuals, rather than treating them as passive recipients of support. These individuals possess unique strengths that should be acknowledged, and support systems should be designed to empower them and encourage active participation. Paternalistic approaches must be avoided, as they can undermine autonomy and reinforce dependency. By focusing on fostering self-empowerment, we can create an environment where individuals are not only supported, but also encouraged to take control of their own paths and make decisions that align with their personal goals and values. In conclusion, the participant strongly emphasized the critical role of emotional and affective education, as well as the importance of empathy and building meaningful relationships with others. They highlighted that these aspects are essential not only within the school environment but should also extend beyond it, reaching all areas of life. According to the participant, fostering emotional intelligence, mutual understanding, and compassion is key to creating inclusive and supportive spaces for everyone, regardless of their background. This approach should be incorporated into various contexts, including community settings,

workplaces, and social environments, in order to promote well-being and positive interactions among diverse individuals.

Second interview

The interview, conducted by two members of the CESIE staff, took place online on January 27, 2025. The participant, a 40-year-old woman from Cameroon who identifies as LGBTQIA+, and is a political refugee due to trafficking, shared her thoughts and experiences with us. It is important to emphasize that the interviewee consented to the recording of the interview only because her camera was off, which made her feel more comfortable and confident. The interview revealed that she arrived in Italy four years ago and is currently residing in an SAI (System of Reception and Integration) with her 6-year-old son. At the same time, she is in the process of applying for family reunification with her 17-year-old son, who is still in her home country. She shared that, in her home country, her mother forced her to marry in an attempt to quell rumors that were circulating about her possible homosexuality. However, the interviewee tells us that she currently prefers male companionship but does not verbally, during the interview, identify these relationships as heterosexual. We also clarified that she has never used the term "bisexual" to describe herself, instead she sometimes in the first part of the interview used *apparently* "gay" as an umbrella term, this assumption stems from the fact that she has consistently referred to herself as an "LGBT person" in the following interview. This variation in definitions is significant because, as often discussed, it invites reflection on how we might automatically apply our own cultural definitions of sexual identity to people from different backgrounds. In this case, the interviewee uses a wide range of terms to describe herself, and this diversity of definitions should be recognized and respected. When asked about the competence of third-sector workers and public agencies in relating to people with experiences like hers, she responded that professionals often lack adequate knowledge regarding what it means to be an LGBTQIA+ person. In addition, based on her personal experience, as well as the experiences of others she has met in CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centers), she feels that staff members lack empathy and tact when addressing sensitive topics. She recounted witnessing situations in which operators asked very intimate questions about people's relationships. Out of shyness or fear, some individuals gave hesitant responses. The interviewee explained that, because she speaks Italian fluently, she was able to deflect such questions, but she noticed that others were not able to do so. The interviewee stated that she has never felt discriminated against as either a migrant or an LGBTQIA+ person because she does not publicly express her sexuality. When asked if she has ever perceived discrimination because of her migrant background, she explained that she is so focused on the well-being of herself and her family—finding a home for herself and her son, securing employment, and pursuing family reunification with her eldest son, who is still in Cameroon—that she does not perceive any discrimination. She added that if discrimination were happening to her, or if it were happening behind her back, she would not notice it and would not be

concerned about it. In conclusion, the participant emphasized the importance of emotional education, as well as acquiring general knowledge about LGBTQIA+ people, with a particular focus on an international understanding of what it means to be an LGBTQIA+ migrant. This perspective is largely shaped by her personal experiences, in which she has chosen not to live her sexuality openly and has not engaged with any safe spaces, such as an Arcigay, for example. This provides valuable insight for our training courses, where we will place a strong emphasis on the importance of establishing connections with such organizations in the local area, offering individuals who wish to be heard the opportunity to find their own specific space.

Third interview

The interview, conducted by two members of the CESIE staff, took place online on February 17, 2025. The participant, a 45-year-old woman from Brazil who identifies as LGBTQIA+ is seeking asylum as a transgender person, trafficked and forced to work in the prostitution circuit, shared her thoughts and experiences with us. It is important to emphasize that the interviewee consented to the recording of the interview, which was conducted with the presence of the Libellula association's social worker, who supports the interviewee. the interviewee arrived in Rome in 2005 and met the association in 2022. She had been living on the streets and in temporary housing, on the margins of society, having fallen into prostitution shortly after her arrival in Italy. Thanks to the work of the association Libellula, which conducts street patrols and focuses on identifying trafficking victims forced to work as sex workers, she was approached by an association staff member who helped her start a legal process to apply for political asylum as a Sogiesc migrant. These women often find herself completely abandoned and trapped in marginalization. The interviewee shared that, at the beginning, she was required to pay 18,000 euros as part of the trafficking system, and was controlled by a trafficker in Rome for 18 years within this cycle.

Through the support of the association, the interviewee was able to begin a path of economic and housing emancipation. Initially, the association successfully placed her in a women's family shelter, where she became the first trans woman in Rome to be accepted. While she now feels comfortable in the shelter, the social worker emphasizes that when the request for placement was made three years ago, extensive training was provided to the shelter's operators to explain the realities faced by trans South American women, especially those who are victims of trafficking. The family shelter, which accepted trans individuals, required a *gender incongruence document*. The social worker explains that the interviewee has been trans since the age of 15, making it difficult to provide such documentation as an adult, a challenge that is more pronounced compared to supporting younger trans individuals, also explaining that there are many ways to experience one's transsexuality, not necessarily undertaken because of *gender incongruence* (as they call it). Currently, the interviewee lives in a shelter for women with children, where she is one of two trans women. She reports feeling

very comfortable in this environment, and the shelter operators are well-prepared, partly due to the training provided by the Libellula association. In addition, thanks to the association's support, she has gained economic independence by working in a cleaning company in central Rome. When asked if she feels discriminated against as a trans woman and migrant, the interviewee initially stated that she has never felt discriminated against. However, after further discussion with the social worker, she mentioned feeling judged or stared at while walking on the street. Given that she had never received support from third-sector organizations for 18 years, her perspective doesn't provide much insight into how operators might work without prior training. It is clear, however, that when the interviewee entered the shelter system, she was already supported by the association, which had organized training for shelter staff. The interviewee has had frequent interactions with the police due to numerous deportation orders, which made her fearful of applying for international protection. Over the course of 18 years, she was never informed of her legal right to apply for asylum. This lack of awareness is partly due to her involvement in trafficking, which kept her from coming into contact with a system that would inform her of her rights, unlike other migrant groups. The social worker highlights that the interviewee is beginning to regain control of her life and is taking better care of her health. This suggests that the interviewee may have never had contact with healthcare professionals, as she did not respond to questions about potential discrimination in medical settings. The social worker further noted that the issue of trans South American trafficking victims remains highly invisible, and without the association's outreach efforts, their work would not be as widely known, relying mainly on word of mouth. The interviewee shared that trans women from Palermo had reached out to the association for assistance, seeking support in their area. This highlights the significant challenge of connecting trans South American trafficking victims across different regions, particularly when local associations in cities like Palermo may be hard to reach.

Fourth interview

The interview, conducted by two members of the CESIE staff, took place online on February 18, 2025. It is important to emphasize that the interviewee consented to the recording of the interview. The interviewee is a 27-year-old Russian woman who arrived in Italy in 2023. Throughout the interview, she preferred not to use words to describe herself and instead focused on expressing her need to "put out" herself. Upon arriving in Italy, she made contact with a lawyer who supported her asylum application on the grounds of SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) reasons. During her time at the CAS (Reception Center for Asylum Seekers), the interviewee received no support from the operators, despite also living with autism. She described the environment in the CAS as extremely conservative, which did not align with her personal needs or experiences. When she had her interview with the territorial commission, the interviewee was placed in a room full of people, even though she had been expecting a more private setting where she could express herself freely.

Overwhelmed by the situation, she requested a private room in order to be able to speak more openly. Another significant issue she faced during the interview was that the mediator was unable to fully understand her story, which further hindered her ability to communicate her experiences and needs effectively. Despite these challenges, the interviewee received a positive decision from the territorial commission and is now residing in a SAI (System of Reception for Integration). However, within the SAI, she continues to struggle in forming connections with the operators, as she feels that they lack the open-mindedness necessary to support her effectively. She believes that the creation of a dedicated SAI specifically for asylum seekers who have applied on SOGIE grounds is absolutely essential. Such a system would be able to better accommodate the unique needs of these individuals, ensuring they receive the rights and support they are entitled to. In addition to these concerns, the interviewee pointed out another widespread issue she has encountered with all the organizations she has interacted with over the past two years: the language barrier. Many operators were unable to communicate with her in English, which has been a significant challenge in accessing the support and services she needs. The SAI where the interviewee currently resides also has a logistical issue. It is located far from the center of Catania, and she believes that the small community where it is situated is very religious and conservative. When asked if she had ever been able to connect with organizations that support and/or organize events for people with a migratory background for SOGIE reasons, she mentioned that she is not aware of any such organizations in the Catania area. She knows about Arcigay in Palermo, but it is quite a long distance from her SAI. The interviewee currently has no place that she considers safe, nor does she have people close to her with whom she can express herself. Her greatest wish is to leave the SAI as soon as possible and try to build her own network. When we asked her if she believes that discrimination as a queer person and as a migrant could be interconnected, creating an intersectional value, she was unable to provide an answer. In Italy, she has not felt discriminated against as a Russian; however, by not openly expressing her potential belonging to the queer community, she has not experienced direct discrimination. She told us that the attitude of the operators she encountered during her reception journey rarely believed her physical (such as various allergies) and mental difficulties, nor her previous university education in Russia. She emphasized that she has never felt believed. It is important to note that throughout the interview, questions about the LGBTQIA+ community were asked in the third person, as if referring to a potential witness, to avoid pressuring her into a forced coming out. We believe that not being believed throughout this time may have contributed to her hesitance to open up.

Summary of Criticisms and Suggested Improvements

The interviews highlighted several critical issues regarding the support provided by operators in various reception systems, particularly in relation to LGBTQIA+ individuals with migratory

backgrounds. Below are the key criticisms made by the participants, along with suggested improvements:

Lack of Empathy and Tact:

- Several participants mentioned that the operators they interacted with often lacked empathy and sensitivity, particularly when addressing personal or intimate topics. In one case, participants recounted uncomfortable questions posed by staff, which some people were too shy or fearful to respond to openly. The interviewee emphasized that while they were able to navigate these questions, others with less language proficiency might have felt even more alienated.
- **Suggested Improvement:** A greater focus on empathy training for operators, particularly in reception centers and other support services, is essential. Professionals should be equipped to handle sensitive issues tactfully, respecting the dignity of individuals.

Lack of Understanding of LGBTQIA+ Issues:

- Participants consistently pointed out that operators and staff often lacked adequate knowledge of what it means to be an LGBTQIA+ person. This lack of understanding made it difficult for participants to feel fully supported, especially regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Suggested Improvement:** It is crucial that staff undergo specific training focused on LGBTQIA+ issues, with an emphasis on intersectionality and how migration status can impact the LGBTQIA+ experience in the host country. This would help providers better understand and address the unique challenges faced by these individuals.

Cultural and Language Barriers:

- A recurrent theme was the language barrier, which prevented some participants from effectively communicating their needs and concerns to operators. For example, a participant noted that many operators could not speak English, making it harder for them to access necessary services and support.
- **Suggested Improvement:** Increasing the availability of multilingual staff or providing translators would significantly improve communication and help bridge the gap between operators and clients. Additionally, operators should be trained to be culturally aware and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of the people they serve.

Lack of Safe Spaces and Support Networks:

- Participants expressed the need for safe spaces where LGBTQIA+ individuals with migratory backgrounds can connect, share experiences, and find mutual support. One interviewee mentioned the absence of such organizations in their area, while others shared

that they were not aware of any local services catering specifically to the needs of LGBTQIA+ subjectivities.

- **Suggested Improvement:** It is essential to strengthen networks between LGBTQIA+ associations present in the territory and public and third sector operators. Organizations like Arcigay could play a key role in offering outreach services even to the most remote regions, creating safe connections to spread support and solidarity. The ultimate goal is the creation of inclusive LGBTQIA+ spaces where individuals with a migratory background can feel welcomed and not discriminated against for their origins.

Paternalistic Attitudes:

- Several participants expressed frustration with the paternalistic approach they encountered from operators, who often failed to recognize their autonomy, skills, and agency. This resulted in individuals feeling disempowered, as their voices and experiences were not always acknowledged or validated.
- **Suggested Improvement:** Training should emphasize an empowerment-based approach, where the individual's autonomy, capabilities, and personal experiences are respected and valued. This would foster a more inclusive, supportive environment where participation in decision-making processes the main core of care.

Main result from the interviews

These interviews highlight the urgent need for comprehensive and competent training for operators working with people with a migration background who identify as LGBTQIA+ and asylum seekers/refugees for SOGIESC reasons. Key areas for improvement include fostering empathy, deepening knowledge of LGBTQIA+ issues—from general knowledge about the community (including the Italian community) to specific knowledge regarding legal aspects of asylum applications for SOGIESC, as well as cultural specificities to be respected—ensuring language accessibility, and strengthen the LGBTQIA+ association network on the territory with the aim of supporting the creation of a safe spaces for these individuals. By addressing these critical aspects, service providers can better support these individuals, promoting their empowerment and facilitating their active participation in society. These efforts will help make visible a phenomenon that has been completely obscured by low-quality care that fails to address specific needs, as well as by legislation that victimizes these individuals by silencing them within a confusing reception system.

Another interesting aspect that emerged from the interviews is the lack of explicit and clear recognition of intersectional discrimination by the participants. The interviewees did not perceive themselves as experiencing this kind of discrimination, and this can be attributed to several factors. For some, it could be the result of not openly expressing or living their non-normative identities/sexuality, especially in environments where they feel the need to conceal certain aspects for safety or personal reasons. For others, the lack of recognition

may stem from not being perceived by external observers as individuals with a migratory background, or their migratory background might not be a source of noticeable discrimination. To avoid generalizing experiences, it is crucial to recognize that each individual's journey is unique, shaped by their personal circumstances, background, and identity. In this context, it is essential to understand that the intersection of these two aspects—migration and sexual/gender identity—can vary significantly from person to person. Some may not perceive their migration experience as inherently connected to their LGBTQIA+ identity, while others may experience deep intersections between the two. Therefore, it is important to approach each individual's experience with openness and flexibility, without assuming that their situation reflects a universal reality. Indeed, while these specific interviews may not serve as the universal or canonical examples, through a broader examination of the Italian context and its territory, it is evident that many LGBTQIA+ individuals with migratory backgrounds —particularly those seeking asylum for SOGIESC reasons—do, in fact, experience intersectional discrimination. This discrimination arises from the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, such as being an LGBTQIA+ person and migrant, creating a more complex form of social exclusion. Therefore, although some participants did not identify these intersectional challenges in their own lives, it is important to recognize that they may be present in many other cases across the broader migrant and refugee community in Italy. Recognizing and respecting these differences allows for a more tailored and effective approach in providing support and services, focusing on the specific needs and strengths of each individual, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all solution. In this way, we can ensure that their autonomy is fully valued and that their personal experiences are recognized without imposing preconceived notions or stereotypes.

Conclusions and suggestions at the National Level

The research findings reveal significant gaps in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of service providers in Italy towards LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees. Key conclusions include:

- A widespread acknowledgment of the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees across all surveyed groups.
- The majority of professionals recognize the need for specialized skills and training to better serve this population.
- Language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of specific knowledge about LGBTQIA+ issues are common challenges across all sectors.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Develop and implement training programs that address the legal, cultural, and psychological aspects of supporting LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees.
- Focus on enhancing intercultural communication skills and cultural sensitivity among service providers.
- Provide targeted education on laws and rights pertaining to LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees.
- Promote an understanding of the intersectionality of LGBTQIA+ and migrant identities in service provision.
- Foster collaboration between municipal staff, migrant support organizations, and LGBTQIA+ support organizations to share knowledge and best practices.



Implementing these recommendations could significantly improve the quality of services provided to LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees in Italy, fostering better social participation and support for this vulnerable population.

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