

Meeting the realities faced by racialised LGBTI asylum seekers

[Blog](#), [Civil Rights and Freedom](#), [Anti-racism](#), [Asylum](#), [Germany](#)

In the first of a new series of blogs, highlighting the work of LGBT organisations tackling injustice, racism, and discrimination, we explore how The Break Isolation Group in Germany supports racialised LGBTI asylum seekers.

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In this series, we’re sharing insights from work done by LGBTI organisations who address intersectional impacts of injustice, racialisation, racism and supremacy, and specific harms affecting the lives of racialised LGBTI communities across Europe. We hope their stories and practices will inspire and resonate across communities. We believe that solutions and approaches that include a few will pave the way and point to the solutions for many.

[The Break Isolation Group](#), part of the International Women* Space (IWS), provides a compelling example of how grassroots, refugee-led initiatives can address the systemic isolation and oppression faced by asylum seekers in Germany. The group operates alongside Resilient Voices, a working group focusing specifically on the needs of queer refugees. Together, they tackle the overlapping and distinct challenges faced by marginalised communities in the asylum process.

Understanding the system: isolation as policy

The asylum system in Germany like in many other countries across Europe, as described by Ann, a member of IWS, “thrives on isolation.” Refugees are often placed in remote, restrictive accommodation centres, known as *lagers*¹, which are specifically designed to curtail mobility and exacerbate social exclusion. Ann reflects on the systemic dehumanisation inherent in this setup: “The system seems to want us to be content with the bare minimum, to accept being treated as less than human.”

For queer asylum seekers, the challenges multiply. Ann highlights that the asylum process burdens LGBTI people with proving their sexuality in invasive and humiliating ways: “Just saying you identify as queer isn’t enough—you’re expected to provide proof, though no one tells you what that proof looks like.” Shared accommodations expose them to further risks. Rose, another member of IWS, points out, “Homophobia doesn’t disappear when people leave their countries. You’re often housed with people from the same communities, who perpetuate the same biases and violence.”

Peer-to-peer support as a cornerstone of resilience

Against this backdrop, Break Isolation Group has built its work on peer-to-peer support. Ann emphasises the approach’s significance: “No one can tell you better how to navigate the system than someone who has lived through it. We’re tired of people deciding for us or speaking on our behalf.”

Their monthly visits to *lagers* allow them to connect directly with asylum seekers, but discretion is key to ensuring safety. “We don’t loudly announce that we’re queer representatives,” Rose explains. “Instead, we create safe ways for people to connect with us—through WhatsApp groups or anonymous info lines funded by collaborators.”

These efforts help asylum seekers feel less isolated in a system designed to isolate. “Sometimes, just seeing a familiar face—someone who looks like you and has been through the same thing—can be transformative,” says Ann.

Bridging isolation through community building

Break Isolation Group also focuses on fostering community. Their strategies range from storytelling and shared meals to more structured activities like legal workshops. Rose shares an example: “The Ubuntu Kitchen brings women together to cook and share meals. Food is a powerful way to build trust and connection.”

Annual retreats offer a space for asylum seekers to step away from the daily struggles of the asylum system. These events combine moments of rest and healing with workshops and advocacy training, helping participants recharge and develop skills for navigating the system and organising collectively.

From survival to advocacy

While much of their work addresses immediate needs, Break Isolation Group also aims to challenge the systemic structures perpetuating these challenges. They advocate for the abolition of *lagers*, the right to work and study, and freedom of movement. “The asylum system isn’t designed to support us—it’s a hotbed of oppression,” Ann explains. “We need to dismantle these systems and replace them with ones that prioritise dignity and autonomy.”

The group is also campaigning against the introduction of [payment cards](#) (Bezahlkarte) for asylum seekers, a measure resulting from the revision of the Asylum Seekers’ Benefits Act. These cards limit and control how asylum seekers can spend their financial support, preventing them from withdrawing cash and restricting where and on what they can spend money. “This system dehumanises us by taking away our ability to make basic choices,” Rose says. “It’s a regression to policies that were already deemed harmful a decade ago, when a similar system of vouchers was in place.”

Another critical area of their advocacy is recognising climate refugees. Rose highlights the gap in current asylum frameworks: “The system only seems to understand migration as a result of war, but climate change is forcing millions to move, and we need policies that acknowledge that.”

Lessons for the wider movement

Break Isolation Group is a grassroots, refugee-led initiative that addresses systemic injustice. Their work demonstrates that those most affected by these systems are best placed to identify solutions and changes that need to come about. As Ann says, “We are not just survivors of these systems—we are experts in how to dismantle them.”

Group’s focus on peer-to-peer support and community-building, the intrinsic intersectionality of their work and the bedrock of their advocacy efforts being around basic human rights provide valuable insights for broader movements. “When we focus on the most marginalised, we create solutions that benefit everyone,” Rose asserts.

The group’s work challenges us to ask: how can we listen to and amplify the voices of those most affected? How can we build movements that prioritise both immediate care and long-term transformation? Where our work could lead us when we put basic human rights, like freedom of movement, or intersectionality, like racial and climate justice, at its forefront?

New funding

ILGA-Europe continues its commitment to providing funds and support for this part of LGBTI movement that addresses intersectional impacts of injustice, racialisation, racism and supremacy. On 30 January 2025, we launched [a new call for proposals](#) to support European groups working for and with racialised LGBTI communities. This is the third cycle of this programme. Apply by 30 March 2025, 23.59 CET.

1. Here and throughout the blog, we use “lager” as a reference to refugee accommodation centres. This term is strategically chosen by activists, including Break Isolation Group, to describe the isolating nature of these guarded buildings and complexes, which are typically located on the outskirts of towns, disconnected from communities, and impose curfews and visitor restrictions. Activists reject the official term “Heim” (a German word for home) because it sugarcoats the dehumanising character and historical context of this form of accommodation.

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