



No Pride In Detention

Key findings from a pilot study into LGBTQI+ experiences of immigration detention

! Content warning:

Some people may find the topics discussed in this briefing triggering. It includes descriptions of homophobia, transphobia, verbal and physical abuse and violence.

In the UK, people going through our asylum and immigration system can be detained indefinitely with no idea when they might be set free. Detention should normally only be used when someone is about to be removed from the country, but the vast majority of those detained are released back to the community – their detention having served no purpose other than to isolate and traumatise them.

Detention is damaging to everyone, but LGBTQI+ people are particularly at risk of harm. In 2016 joint research from Rainbow Migration and Stonewall, [*No Safe Refuge*](#), found that LGBTQI+ people were harassed and abused by others in detention, and discriminated against by staff who failed to keep them safe. Healthcare was inadequate, and the dangerous environment they were trapped in had serious and long-lasting effects on their mental health.

In September 2016 the government introduced its [Adults at Risk in Immigration Detention policy](#), recognising that trans and intersex people are particularly at risk of harm in detention and should not be detained in most circumstances. But despite the evidence of harm suffered, they did not include other LGBQ+ people in this policy.

A pilot study conducted between July and December 2022 set out to explore whether there have been any changes in the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in immigration detention since [*No Safe Refuge*](#) and since the Adults at Risk policy was introduced. Five LGBTQI+ people (three gay men and two non-binary people) who had been detained since September 2016 were interviewed. Four of the participants had been held in Immigration Removal Centres for several months, and one in a Short-Term Holding Facility for 48 hours.

[The study](#) found that detention centres continue to be very dangerous places for LGBTQI+ people.

- ▶ **Participants feared being 'out' while in detention and felt a need to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity.** However, they were not always able to do this despite trying to, so they remained exposed to the risk of bullying and abuse.

"I don't want to hide my sexuality here but I didn't tell anyone because I was so scared."

Johnson (South Asia)

- ▶ **Participants experienced verbal and physical homophobic abuse from other people held in detention,** including from individuals they were forced to share locked rooms with at night.

"He spat on my face for being a gay."

Usman (West Africa)

- ▶ Although some participants found staff to be a source of help and support, others reported problems including **verbal homophobic abuse from staff,** being **afraid to report homophobic bullying** to staff, **inaction from staff in the face of escalating homophobic bullying** and **misgendering by staff.**

*Usman complained about the person he shared a locked room with calling him "a f*cking gay" and spitting in his face, but was not moved until the person physically attacked him.*

- ▶ **Participants experienced worsening mental health and delayed access to mental health support** while in detention, as well as being **put in situations that resembled past traumatic experiences.**

Johnson had experienced significant traumas including being locked in a room by their family as a child, and a violent homophobic attack in which their partner was killed. Despite this they were repeatedly locked in a room overnight with someone who was openly homophobic towards them, causing them extreme distress.

- ▶ **Being held in detention and trying to remain in the closet made it hard for participants to keep in contact with or seek support from LGBTQI+ community groups and networks**, as did the confiscation of their personal mobile phones. However in some cases LGBTQI+ people within detention formed their own informal communities of support to share information and advice.

The findings indicate that all LGBTQI+ people (not just trans and intersex people) are at particular risk of harm in immigration detention and should not be detained. The government should urgently update its Adults at Risk in Immigration Detention policy to include all members of the LGBTQI+ community in the list of people who are "particularly vulnerable to harm" in detention.

The UK must not continue locking up LGBTQI+ people in spaces where they are subjected to LGBTQI-phobic bullying and abuse. **Join our No Pride in Detention campaign to find out more and help end LGBTQI+ detention.**

*The pilot study was funded by the **Centre for Transforming Sexuality and Gender** and the **Centre for Digital Cultures and Innovation** at the University of Brighton and supported by **Rainbow Migration**. All research interviews and analysis were conducted by **Dr Laura Harvey** at the University of Brighton. Image below by [Jade Smith](#).*

The pilot is being used to develop a larger participatory study on the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in immigration detention. For more information about the wider project or to get involved, contact Lj.harvey@brighton.ac.uk For media enquiries contact press@rainbowmigration.org.uk

