



# LGBTIQ+ INCLUSION IN DANISH RED CROSS ASYLUM CENTERS

**Danish Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**

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## Background

The Danish Red Cross (DRC) runs asylum seekers centers across Denmark in agreement with National migration services. Noticing safety risks faced by LGBTIQ+ residents, DRC integrated inclusion, safety, and support elements in its services. Referral pathways and coordination with specialized services has been a core element in ensuring safe programming.

## Who was Supported and How

In Denmark's asylum centers, inclusion is more than just a principle—it's a structured and intentional practice. A comprehensive inclusion strategy has been developed to ensure that LGBTIQ+ individuals feel safe, respected, and supported throughout their asylum journey.

At the heart of this approach are **designated LGBTIQ+ focal points** in each center. These trained staff members play a crucial role in staying updated on relevant services and initiatives, connecting with external organizations, and facilitating annual knowledge-sharing meetings that strengthen referral pathways across services.

From the moment individuals arrive, they are introduced to an inclusive environment. **Reception and orientation** sessions highlight the center's core values, available referral systems, and avenues for support. Early health checks offer a discreet opportunity to express specific needs, with nurses sensitized to LGBTIQ+ issues to ensure respectful care.

A key component of the strategy is **referral to specialized support services**. This includes legal counseling through the Danish Refugee Council, which provides tailored advice for those seeking asylum based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The focus is on ensuring a respectful and culturally competent process, particularly in navigating the burden of proof and interview preparation. Individuals are also connected with LGBT Asylum, a unique organization offering peer-based, queer-to-queer support that fosters belonging and helps rebuild social ties in a new context.

To maintain a high standard of care and awareness, all staff receive **training** developed in collaboration with the Immigration Services. The training—standardized across centers—covers protection protocols, anti-harassment measures, and the importance of recognizing and upholding the rights of minorities.

Fostering a sense of belonging is equally important. Through **social cohesion and peer support initiatives**, the centers encourage interaction among residents with similar experiences. A buddy system is in place, led by trained psychosocial support volunteers from the Red Cross, creating meaningful connections for LGBTIQ+ residents.

Finally, the strategy prioritizes **accessibility of information and services**. Mobile applications provide easy access to inclusive information, while logistical support—such as transportation to community events or specialized services—is available when needed.

Together, these measures demonstrate a holistic and people-centered model of inclusion, where safety, dignity, and support are embedded into every step of the asylum process.

## Successes

This inclusion strategy is a mix of different actions that led to safe programming. The appointment of designated focal points in every asylum center which ensure consistent support, maintain up-to-date knowledge of available services, and build meaningful connections with partner organizations is one of the success of the model.

Moreover, new arrivals benefit from an inclusive orientation process and early health screenings that offer safe opportunities to disclose specific needs, with trained nurses providing sensitive and respectful care.

A major success lies in the formalization of referral pathways, particularly the collaboration with LGBT Asylum. This partnership, grounded in a queer-to-queer support model, ensures that individuals receive peer-led psychosocial support and have access to a safe space where lived experience is recognized and valued. The mutual agreement between parties to exchange information and respond to concerns has strengthened the system's responsiveness and built greater trust among residents.

## Challenges and Difficulties

Despite the progress made, key challenges remain in ensuring fully inclusive and responsive support for LGBTIQ+ residents. One ongoing concern is the issue of trust and disclosure. Some individuals have expressed discomfort in revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity to staff providing legal counselling, underscoring the need for safe, non-judgmental environments and the critical role of external actors like LGBT Asylum, where peer-led support feels more approachable and affirming.

Another challenge is geographic distance. The physical separation between asylum centers and between residents and specialized services can create logistical barriers to participation in in-person events,

community-building initiatives, or access to tailored legal and psychosocial support. While mobile information tools and transportation support help bridge these gaps, reaching everyone equitably across locations remains a logistical and operational concern.

## Lessons Learned

One of the key lessons from this experience is that inclusion is not achieved through standalone initiatives—it requires a culture shift embedded in everyday practice. Efforts to support LGBTIQ+ individuals are most effective when inclusion is seen as everyone's responsibility, not just that of specialized staff or focal points.

Another insight is that trust is not automatic—it must be earned through consistency, humility, and genuine listening. Social workers, often on the frontline of this process, are in a unique position to model inclusive behavior and act as bridges between residents and the wider support system hence creating a trustworthy referral to specialized CSOs is key.

Partnerships matter, but they must go beyond formal agreements. Building meaningful collaboration with organizations led by or for LGBTIQ+ individuals requires openness to feedback—even when it is uncomfortable—and a commitment to adapt practices accordingly.

Training is important, but not enough on its own. What truly drives change is a shift in attitudes and behaviors of the personnel. On that having good guidance and way of doing can really pay off. Awareness and sensitization are key to creating empathy and safe spaces.

Finally, inclusion thrives when people feel they belong—not only when services are available, but when they are delivered in a way that respects identity, upholds dignity, and encourages participation. Humanitarian workers, especially those working on safe shelters or in direct contact with vulnerable people, can be powerful agents of this change by staying curious, advocating for inclusive practices, and helping create environments where every people feels safe to be *themselves*.

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