



RESIST

Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics

The RESIST Project Report

Effects of, and Resistances to 'Anti-Gender' Mobilisations Across Europe: A Report on Nine Case Studies



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Executive Summary

There is a well-documented surge in what is termed 'anti-gender' politics. This study examines the impact of 'anti-gender' mobilisations, attacks, institutional discrimination and resistances across nine case studies in Europe: Belarus, people living in exile in Europe, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Spain: Catalonia and Basque Country, and Switzerland. This report shows the effects of 'anti-gender' on those subject to them: feminist and LGBTIQ+ people and communities, and their responses and resistances to these politics.

The term 'anti-gender' is not used, or only used in very specific ways, across the case studies. The report focuses on qualitative data from 254 feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists, public intellectuals, and members of the general public, specifically their experiences of anti-LGBTIQ+, anti-feminism, anti-abortion and anti-sex work, as well as sexualised/gendered racisms and other intersectional marginalisations gathered through 104 interviews and 36 focus groups between January and May 2024. Additionally, 58 participants completed a Relief Map, a tool which visualises and analyses their emotional and spatial experiences in relation to 'anti-gender' politics.

Across all case studies, including in societies that are constructed as being 'progressive', there were frequent and often increasing experiences of verbal and physical attacks, systemic discrimination, and political violence reported. This directly targets feminist and LGBTIQ+ people, as well as cisgender heterosexual women, contributing to their further marginalisation. Public spaces are common sites for these attacks, with disruptions of events, counter-protests, and threats in public settings frequently reported. For the participants, social media is now a space where attacks and harassment are routinely expected to occur.

Participants spoke extensively about the curtailment of their rights and those of others by the state and other institutions, restricted access to services, and discriminatory laws and practices. Institutional barriers can be particularly pronounced, with legal and bureaucratic obstacles significantly impacting the lives of LGBTIQ+ people. This is compounded by a lack of support, in the form of a reported lack of awareness in public services about people's lives and struggles, exacerbating the situation, leaving many feeling isolated and unsupported in their struggles against systemic discrimination. Participants' experiences of structural discrimination and institutional hostility demonstrate that 'anti-gender' politics and rhetoric are institutionalised.

'Anti-gender' mobilisations have significant and ongoing effects on the communities and people they target. This report found that this includes the physical effects of attacks, which are detrimental to mental and physical health; the loss of professional opportunities; having to leave homes and communities; and the loss of social relationships. Many participants said that they felt more scared, vulnerable and insecure, with everyday life consequences such as fear, burnout, and anxiety being common. These effects are particularly severe for individuals with intersecting marginalised identities, who face compounded discrimination—including from within communities that should support them, such as LGBTIQ+ and feminist communities.

Despite the pervasive nature of 'anti-gender' attacks, feminist and LGBTIQ+ people are not passive victims. They are actively engaged in challenging 'anti-gender' politics: resisting in the face of targeting and attacks, ensuring the survival of themselves and others. Resistances in this report include: protesting and challenging structural discriminations; building supportive networks; engaging in public activism; creating safer (and joyful!) spaces; and employing digital security measures to protect against online harassment. These are also built through solidarity with others who are not directly affected, who nevertheless offer

support and mutual aid. Care, in this research, was found to be a crucial element in the sustaining of activism and countering the effects of 'anti-gender' attacks.

Introduction

The rise of 'anti-gender' movements, discourses, and politics represents a substantial challenge to gender equality, LGBTIQ+ and feminist possibilities of living freely. The development and proliferation of these phenomena across Europe is increasingly documented¹. RESIST has augmented this work by mapping some of the ways that 'anti-gender' politics manifest both subtly and overtly across Europe including: demonstrating how movements mobilise gender as a political tool, and frame it as a threat to traditional values and social orders². This research found that the concept of gender is frequently constructed as an external ideological menace promoted by both 'foreign and domestic agents', necessitating a defence of the perceived social order³. This report builds on RESIST's earlier outlining of tactics to offer an investigation into their impact. In doing so it also augments the current research by engaging with those who directly experience the effects of 'anti-gender'.

This report explores the lived experiences of encountering 'anti-gender' politics, its effects, and resistances in nine case studies: Belarus, people living in exile in Europe, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Spain, Switzerland.⁴ We used the term 'anti-gender' cautiously recognising that it is not used, or only used in very specific ways, across the case studies (indeed, a word had to be created in some languages in order to communicate with research participants) and there is no agreed definition of the term. In this research, we focused on anti-LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer plus)⁵, anti-feminism, anti-abortion and anti-sex work, as well as sexualised/gendered racisms and other intersectional marginalisations, to undertake qualitative work with 254 feminist and LGBTIQ+ academics, activists, public intellectuals, and affected communities (see [Appendix 1](#) for an outline of data collection methods). In this report, we analyse how they understand, experience, negotiate and resist 'anti-gender' politics, discourses and actions in their everyday lives. Likewise, we consider how political manifestations of 'anti-gender' politics are experienced in everyday spaces, as well as the disjunctures between political rhetoric and lived experiences. To explore such objectives and areas of interest, the report seeks to create new understandings of the effects of 'anti-gender' on everyday lives and how they are resisted by those who are affected by them, via interviews and focus groups, ensuring the inclusion of multiple marginalised groups.

This report also discusses the results of the research, which shows that although the term 'anti-gender' is problematic and not widely used or known, individuals and organisations nevertheless face targeted, organised and institutional discrimination, hostilities and attacks in their daily lives across all case studies. These attacks include, but are not limited to, deliberate forms of political violence aimed at intimidating, silencing, and marginalising gender and sexual minorities and feminist viewholders. This pattern is

¹ Butler, J. (2024) *Who's afraid of gender?*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Graff, A. and Korolczuk, E. (2022) *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*. Routledge.

Kuhar, R. and Paternotte, D. (2017) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*. Rowman & Littlefield.

² RESIST (2024) *The RESIST Project. National and transnational reports on the formation of anti-gender politics*. European Union. Available at: https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/617/?key=547he6potvfpe1ur4w4edmxu9ah9s3 (Accessed: 6 September 2024).

³ RESIST (2024) *The RESIST Project. National and transnational reports on the formation of anti-gender politics*. European Union. Available at: https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/617/?key=547he6potvfpe1ur4w4edmxu9ah9s3

⁴ In this report, we name the case studies based on states within the European context. However, we recognise the inherent controversies in this approach and therefore maintain a critical distance from such naming, as it risks the invisibilisation of minoritised nations and the internal diversity of these political entities. These states are not homogenous, being shaped by colonial processes and sustaining the violent nature of their borders.

⁵ This term is used in this introduction and the transnational findings however each case study uses the terms that best reflect their context.

mirrored across the nine case studies comprising this report, each with its specific context and manifestations of 'anti-gender' rhetoric and politics. Crucially, our findings across the nine case studies challenge the idea that 'anti-gender' is limited to Eastern Europe, or that it does not exist in so-called 'progressive' contexts.

The report begins with a chapter synthesising the results, which cross case studies, offering an overview of 'anti-gender' experiences in Europe. This chapter draws on 254 participants' experiences and resistances from 104 interviews and 36 focus groups conducted from February to May 2024 (for more detail see [Appendix 1: Data Collection Methods](#)). The following nine chapters introduce the central findings for each case study, followed by the report from the Relief Map, an online tool that collects systematised data on the experience of 'anti-gender' politics, highlighting the spatial and emotional dimension of its effects in everyday life. Appendix 1 gives an overview of the methods used.

We hope that those reading this report either in part or in full are energised to work to amplify the voices of those affected in ways that create more liveable spaces and lives across Europe and beyond.

The RESIST Project Team

Chapter 1: Transnational Findings

Mathilde Kiening and Marianne Blidon (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University)

Executive Summary

The rise of 'anti-gender' movements, discourses, and politics poses a significant threat to gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights, and to freedom, as democratic values across Europe. The previous RESIST report⁶ shows that these mobilisations, characterised by their complexity and lack of unified purpose, utilise gender and sexual diversity as a political tool to frame traditional values as being under threat. This study examines the effects of 'anti-gender' politics and resistances to those politics across nine case studies: eight national case studies and a ninth case study of people living in exile in Europe. In identifying common patterns across, and unique manifestations of 'anti-gender' in each context, we offer new insights into the lived experiences of those targeted, the forms of resistance they bring to these attacks.

Organised and targeted attacks against women, gender and sexual minorities and/or feminists are prevalent in all case studies. These attacks, ranging from physical violence to media-fueled offensives, particularly affect trans and racialised people and communities. The impacts of these attacks range from social to economic to psychological for those targeted by 'anti-gender' discourses and policies. People targeted by 'anti-gender' politics experience relationship strain, professional and academic repercussions, distress and financial instability. While support for democratic values might be expected from institutions and states, the latter have often appeared as actors in 'anti-gender' attacks, exacerbating the situation and leading to a perceived lack of legal recourse. The pervasive nature of these issues underscores the structural discrimination present across diverse European regions (and beyond). Strategies of coping with and resisting are multifaceted, including community support, public advocacy, legal actions, and the creation of safe spaces for marginalised communities. Despite the risks, collective visibility and the struggle to be seen are strategies used by feminist and LGBTIQ+ activism to counter 'anti-gender' tactics. Across the case studies, the resistance of feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities is evident through these varied, context-specific strategies.

This research showed the range of violence and oppression faced by feminist and LGBTIQ+, trans* and racialised people, including physical and verbal assaults, material violence, online harassment, discriminatory legislation, workplace discrimination, social exclusion, and institutional barriers. These acts are perpetrated not only by religious organisations, media, or far-right groups, but also by men's rights groups, certain elected officials such as members of parliament, and, in some instances, even within feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities themselves. In particular, this can lead to the further marginalisation of racialised groups, trans people, disabled people and people from working-class backgrounds within these movements.

Throughout the case studies, feminists, LGBTIQ+ people and activists face threats and attacks, particularly in public spaces, on social media, and events like drag shows, LGBTIQ+ book clubs or feminist protests. All case studies report pervasive verbal and physical assaults. Vandalism and property destruction targeting feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists are common. Coordinated online attacks, including doxing and

⁶ RESIST (2024) *The RESIST Project. National and transnational reports on the formation of anti-gender politics*. European Union. Available at: https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/617/?key=547he6potvfpe1ur4w4edmxu9ah9s3

cyberbullying, are prevalent in several study cases with media withdrawal used as a protective strategy by some feminists and LGBTIQ+ people. Institutionalised discrimination through laws and policies is evident in the case studies of Poland and Greece, whilst organised campaigns to roll back gender-affirming healthcare policies are active in the case study of Spain. Inclusive language is banned in Germany and contested in France. Gender and sexual minorities face professional repercussions, including job loss, labour-market discrimination and unemployment. More specifically, academics face pressures to avoid certain research topics. Social exclusion driven by 'anti-gender' rhetoric leads to family estrangement and community isolation. This is particularly acute for LGBTIQ+ persons in exile, who experience racism and structural exclusion simultaneously in society and often seek to rely on communities or family of origin to survive this. Access to essential services is restricted by institutional barriers, complicating daily life for gender and sexual minorities. Finally, the different perceptions of the participants revealed what might be called a continuum between experienced attacks and systemic and intersectional violence.

Introduction

This transnational report examines the effects of 'anti-gender' movements, discourses and policies on feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities across Europe. Through an in-depth examination of nine case studies (Belarus, people living in exile in Europe, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Spain, Switzerland), this report discusses how participants in the research have experienced a multiplicity of attacks, the effects these have had on them, and the diverse strategies employed by affected communities to cope with and resist attacks.

We used the term 'anti-gender' cautiously recognising that it is not used, or only used in very specific ways, across the case studies (indeed, a word had to be created in some languages in order to communicate with research participants) and there is no agreed definition of the term. In this research, we focused on anti-LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer plus)⁷, anti-feminism, anti-abortion and anti-sex work, as well as sexualised/gendered racisms and other intersectional marginalisations to undertake qualitative work with 254 feminist and LGBTIQ+ academics, activists, public intellectuals, and affected communities (see [Appendix 1](#) for an outline of data collection methods).

The report is structured in three parts: first, experiences of 'anti-gender' mobilisations, attacks and structural discrimination; then, effects of this; and finally, resistance strategies.

The first section examines the nature and characteristics of attacks by 'anti-gender' movements, providing a brief overview of attacks on feminists and LGBTIQ+ people. The second section highlights the effects of these attacks on the people and communities affected. It offers a detailed account of participants' perceptions of the social, economic, and psychological impacts on those targeted by 'anti-gender' discourses and policies. The final section documents the various strategies employed by affected communities to resist and counteract these attacks. It emphasises the resistance of marginalised communities, which have developed multifaceted approaches to mutual aid, advocacy, and support. The report aims to shed light on the complex dynamics of 'anti-gender' mobilisations and the critical responses they generate, contributing to the broader discourse on gender equality, human rights, and feminist and LGBTIQ+ liberation.

Experiences of 'anti-gender' mobilisations, attacks and structural discrimination

Attacks and systemic discrimination are present across Europe and are increasing, or have already reached alarmingly high levels, for example in Poland, Belarus, and for people living in exile. These attacks take place across, and shape, all spheres of life, illustrating the cumulative effects of 'anti-gender' ideology and structural discrimination that affect the people and communities.

Attacks and systemic discrimination against women, feminists, and/or LGBTIQ+ people are frequent and occur in all case study contexts. This phenomenon is prevalent across Europe. In many Western, Central, and Eastern European contexts, the rise of 'anti-gender' movements is seen as significant and concerning by participants. Clearly, identities and groups overlap and are not mutually exclusive; this means that some participants identify as both feminist and queer, for example. Whilst we want to underline that not all communities are targeted in the same way, nevertheless what participants have reported highlights the pervasive nature of such attacks and violence towards these communities.

⁷ This term is used in the report introduction and the transnational findings, however, each case study uses the terms that best reflect their context.

The data suggest that attacks and violence tend to affect people and communities who are targeted either because they belong, or are perceived to belong, to particular social groups, or because they hold certain views, values, and/or political positions. These attacks appear to be perpetrated by a broad spectrum of people and groups, including but not limited to, far-right actors. In several countries, participants frequently referred to threats and attacks coming from both state actors and private individuals.

Physical and verbal assaults were reported across all case studies. Nearly all participants described having experienced verbal and/or physical attacks, ranging from harmful remarks to acts of physical violence. Such attacks are often characterised as both organised and targeted, involving physical violence, threats, and intimidation. In many contexts, public space emerged as the primary domain where these incidents occur. Additionally, several participants recounted disruptions of events such as drag shows, LGBTIQ+ book clubs, or feminist and anti-racist protests, often accompanied by physical violence. These perceptions point to a continuation and accumulation of such attacks over time.

The data also indicates a pattern of violence targeting property, particularly those of feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists, with acts of vandalism, hateful graffiti, and physical destruction being common occurrences. **Workplaces were frequently cited as targets,** with some participants reporting significant damage to the premises of their associations, including the throwing of excrement. Break-ins were also described as a method used to exert pressure on people working within these associations.

Participants further noted that their intimate and personal spaces, such as their homes, were also targets, with reports of threatening letters, messages, or objects being sent to them. Death threats were also commonly mentioned, as illustrated by Sara in Ireland, who recounted: "I had a piece of paper put through my door which obviously just basically says, 'if you ever exit this door again, you won't be here anymore'".

Participants observed that online harassment is becoming increasingly coordinated and sophisticated, with digital platforms being used to amplify harm. Reports from several countries suggest that organised online harassment, including coordinated **doxing campaigns [the publication of personal details online to incite physical attacks], and cyberbullying or online attacks aimed at discrediting and threatening activists, is a growing concern.** In Belarus, for instance, BLRINT03 recounted:

There was a period, as they recall, when all their social media were populated with **death threats, threats of rape, threats of sexualised violence.** So, it really silenced them to an extent that they felt there was no safe space to express yourself anymore.

Additionally, **participants highlighted that the media often plays a role in amplifying these attacks,** exacerbating hostility towards these communities by portraying negative images or constructing sensationalist and objectifying narratives.

'Anti-gender' attacks and discourse are often perceived as a contemporary expression of **structural discrimination.** These dynamics seem to reinforce traditional gender roles and hierarchies that marginalise and oppress gender and sexual minorities by promoting rigid binaries and normative behaviours. The data suggests that 'anti-gender' mobilisations frequently target LGBTIQ+ people while also perpetuating **broader systems of sexism,** thereby maintaining and potentially intensifying

heteropatriarchal and patriarchal⁸ structures that **discriminate against all those who deviate from conventional gender norms**. In public spaces, gender and sexualities appear to be controlled and regulated. This suggests that there is a strong interplay between structural discrimination and 'anti-gender' movements. Examining this entrenchment reveals how these attacks function **both as a manifestation and a reinforcement** of broader efforts to regulate and control gender and sexual diversity in the public sphere.

'Anti-gender' politics are often observed to include **legislative actions** such as anti-LGBTIQ+ laws, the establishment of 'LGBT-free zones', anti-abortion initiatives, and bans on inclusive language, all of which are perceived to **curtail rights and freedoms**. Institutional barriers continue to be reported as significant obstacles to equality. In several countries, participants highlighted **discriminatory laws and policies** that appear to exacerbate the challenges faced by gender and sexual minorities. For instance, in Greece, trans* participants—particularly non-binary people and refugees—described facing substantial barriers to the legal recognition of their gender identity. In Poland, the wave of 'LGBT-free zones' was seen as an attempt to institutionalise discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people. In Spain, participants described organised campaigns that aim to roll back gender-affirming healthcare policies. Discriminatory patterns were also identified in the professional sphere, where gender and sexual minorities frequently face repercussions such as job loss, labour-market discrimination, unemployment, or professional isolation and targeting, as seen in Switzerland, Spain, and Belarus.

Participants indicated that access to essential services is often restricted by institutional barriers, which they perceived as forms of systemic discrimination. In several countries, including Germany and Ireland, 'anti-gender' sentiments were described as being embedded within healthcare and education systems, thereby complicating the daily lives of gender and sexual minorities. In contexts such as France and Poland, the perceived lack of institutional and state support further exacerbates these challenges. **Participants reported that recourse via the criminal legal system remains low—rarely used or inaccessible—and that protections are perceived as insufficient**, even in cases where attacks have been reported. Additionally, some participants suggested that policing and legal systems themselves can contribute to these challenges, with certain actions or inactions perceived as producing or enabling further harm.

Participants noted that the compounding of attacks and systemic discrimination contributes to a pervasive **fear of extreme violence** against individuals and organisations. This rhetoric seems to foster an atmosphere where gender and sexual minorities, as well as people who hold progressive or non-traditional values more broadly, report feeling unsafe and undervalued. Several participants described being specifically targeted because of their identities as trans and/or racialised people, with these experiences manifesting across various aspects of their daily lives, including in public spaces, healthcare, workplaces, and social settings. In the case study with people living in exile in Europe, Lila, a trans woman activist, explained:

I was now caught up in this cycle. I experience the violence of the state, I experience it in the social sphere, I experience it in the bureaucratic sphere [...] I experience it in my personal relationships. I have nowhere else to go. I did not know what to do.

Each instance of discrimination and violence was perceived as reinforcing the next, contributing to a cycle that participants described as difficult to break. This cycle was understood as not only impacting the

⁸ We emphasise a distinction here, as certain manifestations of patriarchy are not always linked to heteronormativity. As lesbian feminists have pointed out for decades, patriarchal structures can also manifest in attacks by gay men, illustrating that heteropatriarchy and patriarchy do not always overlap.

immediate victims but also having broader implications for the community as a whole. It was seen as perpetuating structural discrimination.

Effects of 'anti-gender' mobilisations, attacks and structural discrimination

Communities and individuals appear to be significantly affected by these attacks. Participants reported that the impacts touch on various aspects of their lives, including economic conditions, social relationships, and overall well-being. While certain effects seem common across cases, individual variations were also noted.

The attacks mentioned above seem to create an environment characterised by cumulative effects, contributing to a difficult and, at times, unbearable context. Those targeted are often selected based on their real or perceived belonging to specific groups, such as queer, trans*, and/or racialised people, or individuals living in exile. They are also targeted for holding particular political views, such as being anti-racist, feminist, pro-immigration, or advocating for sex workers' rights, among others.

The impact on mental health has been frequently reported, with many participants describing both personal and collective experiences of distress. However, **despite the profound negative effects** on mental and physical health, professional opportunities, social relationships, and financial stability, **many of those affected also show resilience and continue to resist these attacks.** This resistance, often expressed through solidarity and community support, highlights the strength of the targeted communities in navigating these challenging circumstances.

Pervasive dehumanisation and erasure appear to contribute to various forms of distress, ranging from constant harassment, violence, and social stigma. Across all case studies, individuals affected by 'anti-gender' politics frequently reported experiencing emotional and psychological challenges, such as fear, burnout, and mental health issues. FRAINT01, a French trans participant, spoke poignantly about the erasure of trans lives and the concept of gender, sharing the sentiment: "You erase the concept; you erase the people."

People with intersecting marginalised identities (e.g. race, class, migration status, disability) seem to face compounded oppression and **may often prioritise immediate survival needs over addressing issues related to sexuality and gender identity.** For those awaiting refugee status, this process is described as exhausting and stressful. The cumulative effect on people, particularly those navigating **multiple forms of oppression**, appears to pull them in different directions, creating numerous fronts of struggle. In Greece, Pati remarked

The sites of struggle are so many, and taking care of ourselves and of each other is so necessary because a [feeling of] exhaustion prevails [...] Specifically, I think that in recent years in Greece, we have several collectives that articulate the issues, however, the blows we receive are so constant, so targeted, that I think they follow a shock doctrine against which you will not be able to stand up because it's so common on all fronts.

Pati's description highlights the continuous and targeted pressures that contribute to a pervasive sense of exhaustion and the constant struggles faced by many. The fear of extreme violence, as reported by several participants, appears to be less a response to isolated incidents and more the result of the cumulative effect of overlapping forms of attacks and marginalisation. This compounding of experiences seems to foster a broader **atmosphere of fear and insecurity.** In Switzerland, Mo shared a similar sentiment:

At events where I had no fear at all in Switzerland—queer events—that something could happen, I now go with an uncomfortable feeling, e.g. at Drag Story Time. A few years ago, I never had the feeling that something would happen when I went to a queer event.

This compounding effect appears to contribute to a **pervasive sense of vulnerability** among gender and sexual minorities. Across all case studies, **participants frequently reported a state of fear**, with individuals often **avoiding public events and modifying their daily behaviours to minimise the risk of confrontation**. This dynamic seems to generate widespread fear, leading to instances of **self-censorship and withdrawal from public life**. As a result, some targeted communities also reported experiencing heightened vigilance. Participants described observing their surroundings to assess whether the environment might pose a threat.

In all case studies, participants described experiencing significant **mental and emotional strain as a result of dehumanisation and living in a prolonged state of fear**. These experiences were often associated with feelings of heightened **anxiety, exhaustion, and emotional distress**, with some participants noting a deterioration in their physical health, which they attributed to chronic stress. While these reactions are not pathological, they are understood as responses to the ongoing sense of threat and insecurity.

The data suggests that self-silencing is a common response, with participants increasingly refraining from speaking out in order to protect themselves and their loved ones from potential backlash. Several participants described how anti-feminist attacks appear to have a 'silencing effect' on them. For instance, one participant in Germany (GERINT08) noted: "**I silence myself. That's an effect.**"

The impacts on careers, livelihoods, and academic pursuits were frequently reported, with isolation at work and financial instability being significant challenges for feminist and LGBTIQ+ people. In contexts such as Germany, Greece, and among people living in exile in Europe, academic participants spoke of job insecurity and restricted research topics. Financial challenges were particularly highlighted in Poland and Spain, where job loss and legal fees strain personal finances.

Migration emerged both as a consequence of 'anti-gender' violence and as a strategy to escape it. As the case studies of Belarus, people living in Exile and Greece reveal, many individuals seek asylum or relocate to safer environments, though these moves are often accompanied by difficulties related to refugee status and integration. Additionally, the idea of moving to the countryside or migrating to other countries was considered by participants in several case studies.

Resisting 'anti-gender' mobilisations, attacks and structural discrimination

Various strategies to resist 'anti-gender' politics take shape across all case studies, although some strategies exhibit particularities depending on the context. The varied and adaptive strategies of feminist movements and LGBTIQ+ people, groups, and communities reveal a form of resistance in response to attacks and systemic discrimination, with a focus on solidarity and strategic considerations around visibility.

The data indicates that resistance efforts by feminist movements and LGBTIQ+ communities are evident in all case studies, with **participants describing a range of strategies to navigate adversity**. In some cases, visibility is employed as a deliberate form of resistance, while in others, participants noted a more cautious approach, avoiding visibility to mitigate risk. Despite the inherent dangers, visibility continues to be a tool for resisting oppression.

The strategies reported include community building, advocacy, legal action, the creation of safer spaces, and measures to enhance digital security. These approaches frequently involve community support and solidarity, as individuals come together to form networks and coalitions that resist 'anti-gender' rhetoric and offer mutual aid. Activism, public protests, and social media campaigns were also highlighted as common methods used to challenge 'anti-gender' narratives and promote gender equality, as well as LGBTIQ+ and feminist liberation.

Building communities and developing networks emerge as key strategies, with a focus on strengthening collective efforts. Participants frequently emphasised the importance of **sharing knowledge, strategies, and resources.** Learning how to argue objectively was also noted as a useful tactic in countering attacks. Participants highlighted the value of political alliances and fostering local and national collaborations. By strengthening these connections, social groups can pool resources, share knowledge gained from their experiences, and amplify their collective impact in addressing the diverse challenges they face. Additionally, community outreach was consistently underscored as a crucial method of resistance.

Ensuring safety and protection appears to be a key strategy among communities facing threats. Various approaches are employed to create safer spaces, which are commonly seen as forms of resistance. Some participants reported avoiding state institutions to safeguard themselves and emphasised the importance of maintaining boundaries. **The formation of communities, often referred to as 'bubbles,' and the concept of chosen families play a crucial role,** as many rely on alliances, solidarities, and friendships for support. These strategies include living in close-knit groups or 'bubbles' to foster a sense of security, focusing on self-defence, and creating more comfortable, liveable spaces that preserve boundaries while offering opportunities for communal resistance.

Some individuals expressed a preference for avoiding protest marches and other acts of resistance that might increase their visibility and vulnerability, whilst others identified migration or leaving their country as a form of resistance. These diverse approaches illustrate the variety of tactics that are used to cope with and counteract threats. As Magda from Poland told us:

That it's a teaming up of all these people who are just in this besieged fortress, and it's also for me some kind of, I don't know [...] communication problem and [...] I'm also always trying, we've been trying for years with [name of the organisation] to build this activism just based on, you know, on trying to co-create some friendly, safe and open spaces and [...] to carve out a space for ourselves in this difficult reality, which we had and still have, scraps of a sense of security, a sense of community.

Collective mobilisation and solidarity actions appear to be vital elements in the strategies of activist communities. This often involves the formation of alliances or coalitions between groups, aimed at protecting themselves from physical threats while fostering a sense of community support and safety. Participants described how these efforts often hinge on the sharing of emotional bonds with members of communities where they feel a sense of belonging, as well as the exchange of strategies, resources, knowledge, and information. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of engaging in transformative discourse. In several countries, such coalitions were perceived to play a crucial role in sustaining both the daily lives and the resistance efforts of activist communities.

Social media has been identified as a powerful tool for advocacy and shifting public perceptions. Activists frequently utilise social media platforms to promote LGBTIQ+ rights and gender equality, addressing hate speech by removing hate comments and engaging with the media, either by speaking with media outlets or, in some instances, boycotting them. Several participants also reported efforts to create online visibility while advising against giving too much attention to online aggression. In response to

aggression, **legal actions and advocacy** have been noted as important, although these avenues of redress are reported to be insufficiently accessible in most of the case studies. **Legal proceedings are sometimes used as a strategy to challenge laws or seek recognition for damages and injuries.** The role of documentation also emerged as critical for holding systems accountable. In some cases, **monitoring 'anti-gender' activism, documenting attacks, and filing formal complaints** were highlighted as key strategies employed by activists.

Education, art, and knowledge production appear to be significant strategies employed by participants to make information more accessible. One of the recurrent themes is the desire to convey knowledge that is not solely academic and to ensure it is accessible to a wider audience. This sentiment is reflected in the following quote from a participant in Spain (ESPINT01), who shared their experience of addressing common questions through a more pedagogical approach:

One of the questions that worried us is how to respond to well-intentioned questions. We are tired of not being able to answer quickly [...] We made a very short document [...] in which we answer questions that people have asked us and then we answer them [...] in a pedagogical way so that everyone can understand. Now every time we have a situation like this we send this document which is something we think is accessible. Until now we had only generated academic articles in English, a language that no one understands here, but we think academics must not only generate content for scientists but rather we have to do an exercise in pedagogy of transferring knowledge to people.

The data suggests **that activists and allies engage in the production and dissemination of recommendations aimed at raising awareness through education and rethinking conceptual tools,** including the reclamation or creation of new terms for 'gender'. In some instances, participants reported being involved in research, particularly in areas related to sex workers' rights. Art and visibility were also cited as important forms of resistance, used to assert presence and identity. The case study data highlights that participants' forms of resistance are associated with a range of emotions, including joy, fear, excitement, disbelief, and anticipation, **creating spaces for collective joy being an important aspect of this resistance.**

Conclusion

The report suggests that **negative experiences related to 'anti-gender' movements are present across all case studies,** alongside significant resistance from feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists and communities. The overarching impacts of 'anti-gender' politics appear to threaten both individual survival and collective existence in various contexts. The data on 'anti-gender' attacks—specifically their effects on targeted communities and organisations, as well as the resistance strategies employed—indicate a consistent pattern of increased or sustained attacks, systemic discrimination, and violence across diverse countries. The findings point to the prevalence of physical and verbal assaults, online harassment, discriminatory legislation, workplace discrimination, social exclusion, and institutional barriers in all case studies, underscoring the pervasive nature of 'anti-gender' discourses and behaviours that transcend the East/West and North/South divides of Europe. Moreover, for Exile case study participants, these patterns repeat across contexts: not only do they suffer them in places outside of Europe, but yet again when seeking refuge within Europe.

Various emotional and psychological effects were reported. Some participants described the development of fears that spread from individuals to entire communities. Professionally, people face job insecurity, limited research opportunities for academics, and strained relationships with colleagues.

Socially, difficulties with family and friends contribute to isolation, particularly among LGBTIQ+ people in exile, who often face compounded discrimination in host countries. Financial instability, driven by job loss, legal fees, and security-related costs, was also mentioned as a significant source of stress and vulnerability.

Resistance strategies appear to have emerged across the case studies, illustrating the capacity and agency of feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities. Many participants highlighted the importance of building alliances and networks as key elements of resistance. Additionally, several participants underscored the significance of legal actions and formal complaints as sometimes necessary measures to challenge discriminatory laws and seek justice. Some participants emphasised the need to create safer spaces and support systems that offer refuge and solidarity for those targeted. These initiatives are often complemented by the production of knowledge by and for the communities.

Respondent Profiles

The information from this table is taken from voluntary demographic forms, where the participants could respond in their own words in open text boxes. Most participants filled out the demographic forms to a varying degree of completeness, frequently leaving boxes empty. Responses were coded inductively allowing for multiple answers for each variable. Therefore, numbers are not mutually exclusive: people can identify in multiple ways, for example simultaneously as 'lesbian' and 'queer', and they are counted in all areas that they identify.

Table 1: Overall respondent profiles

Profile	No. of Responses	Responses (multiple responses)
Age groups	223	Based on 223 filled out sociodemographic forms participants distribute as follows over the age groups: six participants are between 18-24, 69 participants are between 25-34, 81 participants are between 35-49, 36 participants are between 50-64 and twelve participants are over 65.
Gender	246	(Cis) women (128), (cis) men (40), non-binary (35), trans (22), trans women (10), trans men (5), trans non-binary (3), queer (3), inter person (2), inter non binary (1), genderfluid female (1), genderqueer (1), transmasculine (1), Two Spirit (1), genderqueer (1) and agender (1).
Sexual orientation / identity	223	Heterosexual (45), lesbian (44), gay (38), bisexual (29), queer (27), pansexual (6), asexual (2), demisexual (1) and transbutch (1).
Country of origin	212	Poland (31), Ireland (27), Belarus (18), Switzerland (18), France (16), Germany (12), Spain (13), Catalonia (8), Basque Country (6), Turkey (4), Ukraine (2), Catalonia/Spain (2), Switzerland/Germany (2), Switzerland/Italy (2), Morocco (1), Asia Minor (1), Eastern Europe (1), Greece (1), Kurdistan (1), Latin America (1), Madagascar (1), Palestine (1), North Africa (1), Albania (1), Sierra Leone (1), Haiti (1), India (1), Austria (1), Russia (1), Galicia (1), Brazil (1), western Europe (1), Switzerland/Eastern European roots (1), Switzerland/India (1), Switzerland/Somalia (1), Syria (1), Italy (1) and Portugal (1).
Country of residence / legal status	251	Poland (44), Germany (39), Switzerland (36), Ireland (35), France (30), Spain (17), mixture Barcelona/Spain, Catalonia/Spain or Basque Country/Spain (6), Catalonia (5), Basque Country (5), Belarus (2), Georgia (1), Sweden (1), France and another country (1), Austria (1) and Netherlands (1). Other participants referred to Greece as citizens and also as refugees, asylum seekers or immigrants (naturalised citizens and precarious statuses).
Racial / ethnic identity	236	White or white + European country (106), Kurdish and/or Alevi (14), Polish (12), Belarussian (11), racialised (6), Polish and other ethnic groups (6), PoC (5), Swiss/German/Central European descent (4),

		Turkish (4), European (2), Jewish (2), Belarussian and Russian (1), white-passing with Roma-roots (1), Slavic (1), black (1), white hispanic (1), German with Indian background (1), Russian (1), Gypsy (1), latin (1), Greek (1), Albanian (1), Arab (1), Sierra Leonean (1), Haitian (1), Kurdish (1), Palestinian-Syrian (1), mixed (1), socialised as Turkish (1), Yezidi-Armenian and Kurdish (1) and Laz (1).
National identity	186	Polish (20), French (15), Catalan (14), German (12), Belarussian (11), no national identity (explicit) (10), Basque (8), Greek (6), European (4), Polish-European (4), Spanish (3), German with Indian background (1), German-Turkish (1), Spanish (1), Murcian/Catalan/Spanish (1), Brazilian (1) and Galician (1).
Educational training	228	University degrees (192), higher education (11), secondary education (7), college eligibility (6), professional training (3), vocational training (1), no formal education diploma (1) and art school (1).
Religion	202	Atheist (30), Muslim (10), Catholic (8), Orthodox (7), Christian (6), no religion (5), Lapsed/ex-Catholic/raised catholic (4), Agnostic (3), Protestant churches (3), other beliefs (2), Jewish (1), Spirit (1), Roman Catholic (1), non-practicing Catholic (1), Christian (1), Umbanda (1), Jewish roots (1) and Deist (1).
Social class	211	Middle class (89), Working class (24), (Upper) middle class (14), Upper/higher middle class (11), Lower middle class (9), Working class/low income (7), Bourgeois (1), lowest class (1), Precarious (previously lower middle-class) (1), Precarious (1), Pensioner (1), Privileged working class (1), lower class (1), sociologically middle class, politically working class (1), Upper class (1) and Refugee as social class (1).
Settlement type	250	Big city (162), medium sized city (45), small town (7), village (10) and rural area (7).
Other aspects	229	Participants also had the possibility to add other aspects important for their lives: Parent/carer of children (23), living with a disability (19), chronic disease (10), living with an illness (10), mental health (7), Basque speaker (3), potential neurodiversity (1), being academic (1), polyamorous (2), having an activist experience (2), trans guy/man/boy (1), feminist since 13 years old (1), transfeminist (1), feminist (2), and defender of defenders (1).

Chapter 2: Belarus

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Executive Summary

In the wake of the August 2020 elections, the Belarusian government has harshly suppressed protests, many led by women, through excessive force and arbitrary detentions. Since 2020, the space for civil society has drastically diminished. Throughout 2021, government forces forcibly shut down, threatened, and monitored women's rights organisations, compelling many human rights defenders to either flee the country or cease their activities. The dissolution of most civil society organisations and the crackdown on women human rights defenders has left domestic violence victims without access to essential victim-centred services and severely weakened support networks for LGBTIQ+ individuals.

New legal amendments have further restricted freedoms, drawing international condemnation for human rights violations. Despite this, the Belarusian government continues its pattern of discrimination, with heightened hate speech, severe restrictions, and targeted harassment and violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals, feminists and civil society activists, often promoted by state media and religious institutions. Homophobic violence remains unrecognised and unprosecuted by state authorities, with more restrictive laws in development.

This case study, based on interviews and focus groups with 18 participants, examines the pervasive impact of 'anti-gender' politics on various aspects of the lives of people affected by it. Participants overwhelmingly associated 'anti-gender' politics with state actions, describing it as a tool for political persecution and suppression of dissent, especially after the 2020 protests. The state's discriminatory laws and rhetoric, often supported by the Church and conservative groups, target LGBTIQ+ and feminist activists.

The broader human rights crisis in Belarus further complicates the experiences of queer and feminist activists. Participants reported systemic police homophobia and a lack of legal protection for LGBTIQ+ individuals, with violent crimes often misclassified to obstruct justice. The state's 'anti-gender' rhetoric legitimises homophobic actions by law enforcement, contributing to a climate of fear and repression.

Participants reported feeling powerless and isolated, with 'anti-gender' rhetoric and discriminatory laws significantly impacting their lives. The government's use of vague legal provisions to penalise feminist, LGBTIQ+ activism and human rights organisations, coupled with state and societal hostility, has forced many activists, human rights defenders and queer individuals to leave the country. However, new forms of marginalisation, such as financial struggles and migrant status, continue to shape their experiences abroad.

Despite these challenges, activists remain resilient and determined to continue their resistance. Effective strategies include building networks with regions sharing similar political contexts, such as Central Asia and the Western Balkans, and leveraging social media to change public perceptions. Participants strongly emphasised the importance of solidarity, mutual support, and psychological care to sustain their activism and counteract the pervasive 'anti-gender' rhetoric.

Keywords: Gender; repressions; violence; homophobia; Belarus

Introduction

This case study explores the effects of 'anti-gender' hostilities in Belarus and discusses how individuals navigate, confront, and resist assaults on their identities, lives, politics, and work within the spheres of sexuality and gender. Given the extensive challenges that feminists and LGBTIQ+ people face in Belarus as well as outside of it, some of which will be detailed in this report, this case study puts the protection of participants first. Only two of our participants were based in Belarus, with most residing in other parts of Europe at the moment of the study. Participants were recruited through targeted emails to known contacts, followed by calls and emails to encourage participation. All discussions took place online and were not audio recorded. Interviews were fully anonymised to protect our participants. Extra protection was taken with the storage of data.

The report begins with an overview of the Belarussian context. This is followed by key points on the experiences of, and resistances to, 'anti-gender' from participants in one focus group (six participants) and twelve individual interviews (see [Table 2: Respondent profiles Belarus](#)). The study includes individuals with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations who are professionally involved in various fields, such as academia, law/human rights, online activism, feminist collectives, and education. Their rich conversations provide a wide range of experiences with 'anti-gender' mobilisations and how they resist them from within and outside of Belarus.

Context

Historically, Belarus was part of the Soviet Union until it gained independence in 1991 following the USSR's collapse. Since then, Belarus has grappled with defining its national identity in the context of strong Russian influence.⁹ Politically, Belarus remains closely allied with Russia, with President Alexander Lukashenka maintaining power since 1994, often relying on Russian support.¹⁰ Under Lukashenka's presidency, Belarus has witnessed a significant decline in political freedoms and civil liberties.¹¹

During the summer of 2020, Belarus garnered significant international media attention due to widespread peaceful protests triggered by the contested re-election of Alexander Lukashenka and the harsh repression of demonstrators.¹² These massive demonstrations, which included significant participation from women and queer communities, marked a decline in support for Lukashenka's 28-year rule.¹³ Women have taken the forefront in demonstrations against President Lukashenko's regime. Their involvement has brought

⁹ Kazharski, A. and Lozka, K. (2023) 'Belarus-Russia relations: identity as product and factor' in Nizhnikau, R. and Moshes, A. (eds) *Russian policy towards Belarus after 2020: at a turning point?* Lanham: Lexington Books.

¹⁰ Wilson, A. (2021) *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

¹¹ Nikolayenko, O. (2023) 'Gender and repression in an autocracy: findings from Belarus', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, pp. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2023D000000011>. (Accessed: 17 September 2024).

¹² Belarus: Ongoing Searches and Arrests of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, International Federation for Human Rights, 16 July 2021, available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/belarus-ongoing-searches-and-arrests-of-human-rights-defenders-and-journalists>; Interview with Belarusian Human Rights Defender.

¹³ Korosteleva, E.A., Petrova, I. and Kudlenko, A. (eds) (2023) *Belarus in the twenty-first century: between dictatorship and democracy*. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (BASEES/Routledge series on Russian and East European studies).

significant visibility to the protests; women have become symbols of resistance.¹⁴ The 2020 Belarusian protests have spotlighted the critical roles of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals in challenging political repression and advocating for broader social change.

Activists then called for free elections, the release of political prisoners, and an end to domestic violence and recognition of women's labour, addressing the deep-seated patriarchal structures in Belarusian society.¹⁵ Additionally, LGBTIQ+ community members have increasingly participated, displaying rainbow flags and demanding an end to homophobia.¹⁶ Overall, as existing scholarship shows, these protests signify a broader movement towards mutual recognition and equality, extending beyond immediate political grievances to encompass fundamental social issues.

Following the protests, Belarus experienced an escalating crackdown on civil liberties. Protesters, journalists, and civil society members faced unlawful arrests, detentions, violence, and ill-treatment.¹⁷ Existing studies highlight how the Belarusian government has employed targeted gender-specific repression tactics to enforce political conformity among women, revealing deeper insights into state efforts to suppress civil resistance.¹⁸ Since 2021, the Belarusian government has forcibly dissolved nearly all independent non-profit civil society organisations, including those focused on women's and LGBTIQ+ issues. The international community, including the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, has repeatedly condemned Belarus for its human rights violations against detained protesters, human rights activists and LGBTIQ+ individuals.¹⁹ Despite these condemnations, the Belarusian government remains largely unresponsive.

At present, LGBTIQ+ individuals in Belarus are left without protection against homophobia. The country lacks anti-discrimination laws; no Belarusian legislation addressing discrimination based on sexual

¹⁴ Fürst, J., Walke, A. and Razor, S. (2020) On free women and a free Belarus. A look at the female force behind the protests in Belarus, *Zeitgeschichte-Online*, September 22, available at: <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/kommentar/free-women-and-free-belarus>.

¹⁵ Sasha Razor (2020) The Gendered Dystopia of Belarusian Protests. A discussion of the crackdown on the women protesters in the wake of the pro-government forum 'For Belarus' which took place on September 17, 2020 in Fürst, J., Walke, A. and Razor, S. (2020)

Fürst, J., Walke, A. and Razor, S. (2020) On free women and a free Belarus. A look at the female force behind the protests in Belarus, *Zeitgeschichte-Online*, September 22, available at: <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/kommentar/free-women-and-free-belarus>.

¹⁶ Rust, M. (2020) The rainbow colours flying together with the white-red-white flags. The Belarusian LGBT community at protests, *New Eastern Europe*, available at: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/11/10/the-rainbow-colours-flying-together-with-the-white-red-white-flags-the-belarusian-lgbt-community-at-protests/> (Accessed: 7 August 2024).

¹⁷ Hall, S. (2023) 'The End of Adaptive Authoritarianism in Belarus?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 75(1), pp. 1–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2093332>.

Bekus, N. and Gabowitsch, M. (2021) 'Introduction: The Sociology of Belarusian Protest', *Slavic Review*, 80(1), pp. 1–3. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.27>.

¹⁸ Nikolayenko, O. (2023) 'Gender and repression in an autocracy: findings from Belarus', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, pp. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2023D000000011>.

¹⁹ Her Rights' Centre and ADC 'Memorial' (2020) The situation with human rights of women in Belarus following the presidential elections in 2020, 14. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yMdbM6XsPYxLBYh5VuO4fyi1IXgzbfY-/view>

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, OSCE Rapporteur's Report Under the Moscow Mechanism on Alleged Human Rights Violations related to the Presidential Elections of 9 August 2020 in Belarus, 5 November 2020, 35.

orientation exists.²⁰ The halting of work on the domestic violence draft legislation has also left Belarusian women who face violence without legal protection.²¹ State media and officials, including President Lukashenka, regularly engage in speeches stigmatising women protestors and LGBTIQ+ persons, contributing to a culture of intolerance and discrimination.²² New discriminatory laws are currently in elaboration, for example, the Belarusian government recently announced the drafting of a new law punishing the promotion of 'non-traditional relationships'.²³

With regard to the concept of 'anti-gender' politics, it must be noted that the concept was generally not well understood by participants. While some were familiar with the term through academic exchanges, training, and webinars, others had not encountered it. A few participants found the term 'anti-gender' somewhat misleading. BLRINT02 noted that it could be interpreted as an attempt to abolish binary gender divisions and oppose resulting discrimination. They felt it lacked explicit references to gender-based discrimination, marginalisation, and violence, making it appear utopian rather than discriminatory. Terms like anti-queer hostility, oppression, repression, and violence were seen as more nuanced descriptors for the situation in Belarus.

Findings

1. 'Anti-gender' politics is overwhelmingly associated with the state

Most participants associated 'anti-gender' politics with state repressions, discussing it in the context of human rights violations and absence of the rule of law

Participants emphasised that the state frequently proposes, discusses, and passes discriminatory laws, positioning itself as the primary driver of 'anti-gender' politics. BLRFNT04 expressed feeling overwhelmed by the state's discussion of discriminatory legislation, noting the frequency with which new discriminatory laws are being proposed, discussed, elaborated, or passed by the state.

Along with the state, the **Church** was identified as a key player in promoting 'anti-gender' politics, often intersecting with **state campaigns for traditional values and opposition to Western influence**.²⁴ Various organised groups, including men's associations, anti-abortion groups, and far-right organisations, were also named as key actors in the 'anti-gender' movement. BLRFG1.3/INT04 cited effective 'anti-gender' organisations and alliances, exemplified by Matulya, a collaboration between the state [Ministry of Health], the Church, and the Family and Maternity Support Center. Matulya educates about the perceived threats of abortion and contraception. Their efforts led to the establishment of Belarus's first non-abortion zone in

²⁰ See for example ILGA Europe's annual review of the human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people in Belarus, available at: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/2022/belarus.pdf>.

²¹ Nikolayenko, O. (2023) 'Gender and repression in an autocracy: findings from Belarus', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, pp. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2023D000000011>.

²² Nikolayenko, O. (2023) p.7 'Gender and repression in an autocracy: findings from Belarus', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, pp. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2023D000000011>.

²³ Radio Free Europe (2024) Belarus Proposes Draft Law Against The 'Promotion Of Nontraditional Family Relations', available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-proposes-law-against-nontraditional-family-lgbt/32826074.html> (Accessed: 16 June 2024).

²⁴ belsat.eu (2020) 'These are our brothers and sisters. But we cannot approve of sin': Christians told about collecting signatures against LGBT values, available at: <https://belsat.eu/ru/news/eto-nashi-bratya-i-sestry-no-my-ne-mozhem-odobryat-greh-hristiane-rasskazali-o-sbore-podpis-ej-protiv-lgbt-tsennostej>, (Accessed: 4 July 2024).

Lahoysk in 2013. She said that while they as feminist groups were banned from displaying pro-feminist banners in public spaces, state-backed organisations display their banners nationwide.

Regarding LGBTIQ+ freedoms, most participants highlighted that diversity is inherently incompatible with an authoritarian regime, as diverse identities promote democratic values and threaten regime stability. As BLRINT01 said, “in a state where even basic human rights are violated with ease daily, anti-gender politics is a part of the same machinery”.

Participants had different perceptions of the timeline of ‘anti-gender’ politics in Belarus. Most believed that opposition to gender equality and freedoms has a long history in the country, with gender-based discrimination and homophobia prevalent at both state and societal levels. Some participants noted an intensification of state ‘anti-gender’ discourse and homophobic statements around 2010, linked to discriminatory speeches by President Lukashenka, who referred to gender equality as “rubbish from the West”, dismissing the draft law on combating domestic violence as a Western idea.²⁵ Other participants reported a rapid deterioration in gender equality and freedoms since 2018, marked by Lukashenka blocking a long-drafted law against domestic violence, which as BLRFG1.4/INT05 noted, created a climate of fear and uncertainty among women’s organisations and civil society in general.

With the state being the dominant driver of ‘anti-gender’ hostilities, activists shared frustration about the difficulty to affect the change on a state level. Many see the state as an institution resistant to change, or as BLRINT03 said, “operating in its own separate reality”. They described futile attempts in the past to collaborate with the Ministry of Health on improving gender-affirmative healthcare protocols. According to the participant, the existing procedure is outdated and restrictive, with the commission showing little interest in learning about trans rights or the experiences of trans people. The rigid binary thinking of the commission forces trans individuals to perform a specific narrative to pass evaluations, leading to trans people sharing ‘correct’ answers to stereotypical questions to gain access to healthcare. The same participant said the state was not receptive to their views at all.

2. ‘Anti-gender’ hostilities affect LGBTIQ+ people, feminists in different spheres of life

‘Anti-gender’ politics and its pervasive effects are experienced by participants across various contexts. They described that discrimination/oppression is not limited to the state, but manifests itself in different spheres of life.

Participants recalled different episodes of gender hostilities that they experienced in diverse spheres of life, to show that apart from the state, which is the main driver of ‘anti-gender’ discourse, there are also other actors and spaces fostering discrimination, oppression and marginalisation on the basis of gender.

Participants recalled experiencing hostilities in universities and medical institutions, citing episodes of academic silencing and shaming, and misinformation by healthcare providers. For example, BLRINT07, while writing her diploma on gender, mentioned eight gender identities, resulting in her ability to graduate being put under threat. The same participant detailed experiencing shaming in **medical institutions** by gynaecologists and obstetricians, where her diagnosis was mishandled, focusing on fertility rather than symptom management, in addition to which, misinformation was used to discourage her from even potentially considering an abortion. It was her ability to read and interpret medical articles available online

²⁵ Lukashenko Lambasts New Domestic Violence Bill, Belta, 5 October 2018, available at:

<https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-lambastes-new-domestic-violence-bill-115411-2018/>

in English which provided her with the opportunity to navigate misinformation and manipulation by healthcare providers.

Several participants said that they feel disturbed by a significant increase lately in funding for pro-life campaigns in Minsk, with more and more advertisements and materials appearing in public spaces and hospitals. BLRINT06 feels that this is an indication of an increasing investment in pro-life practices, and **fears that it is likely to be bolstered by future legislation**. She remarked that the state media perpetuates the idea that women's primary role is reproduction, discussing women's ovarian reserves on national television to foster guilt for delaying childbirth.

Sex-based rights groups, such as the Protection of Fathers and Children's Rights public association, which positions itself as a group which aims to enhance the social role of fathers and protect traditional values,²⁶ and masculinists groups, such as Men's State were mentioned as other actors driving hostility and intolerance towards gender equality. BLRFG1.3 recalled how her feminist initiative, as well as some others, experienced intimidating encounters with such groups. She said that these groups were exerting pressure on them through conversations rather than direct physical threats. These were “unpleasant, confusing encounters” aimed at intimidating them.

Participants also recalled diverse episodes of ‘anti-gender’ hostilities in the circle, where they would have expected to see support of equality and diversity issues. These participants were upset by troubling attitudes towards gender and diversity within **pro-democracy groups**. BLRINT01 mentioned that even within pro-democracy groups—referring to a social media chat—some members supported homophobic jokes made by the head of state, normalising ‘anti-gender’ discourses circulating in state media and political speeches. She was sad that inclusivity and equality were not yet seen by many as internal to a real democracy.

In a similar vein, BLRINT02 stressed that **gender equality and diversity should be seen as a test for democratic forces**, due to the manifestation of anti-feminism, misogyny, and homophobia within pro-democracy groups. BLRINT04 also shared that during the 2020 protests they, as a queer block in the demonstration, were afraid of **violence and hostility not only from police but also from protesters**: as “the ordinary protesters” marched, they were afraid of the police and of the armed forces. “When we were protesting, we [the queer block] were afraid not only of the police, but also of the protesters”.

Many participants who left Belarus felt upset that the ideas of democracy strongly supported by many Belarusians abroad do not see gender equality and diversity as integral components of such a democracy. For example, BLRINT02 said that conservative pro-democracy politicians in Belarus and abroad also promote discriminatory ideas; she mentioned Zinon Pozniak, a symbol of the Belarusian revival, who has made homophobic and misogynistic statements in his proposed new constitution for Belarus. His conservative views envision a future Belarus structured around heterosexual men and women, whom he believes will restore the nation's glory. The participant felt upset that despite his extreme views, he is seen as a centrist politician in Belarus and remains highly visible, frequently invited to diasporic events in Poland.

BLRINT02 said there was also gender bias in the organisation and framing of diaspora conferences. Participants told us that initially, event titles and logos used masculine language, reflecting the

²⁶ Protection Of Fathers' And Children's Rights is a public association in Belarus that advocates for the rights of fathers, especially in cases related to divorce, child custody, and family disputes. The organisation works to support fathers in maintaining their parental rights and responsibilities, as well as promoting traditional family values, according to their website www.zpod.by.

marginalisation of women in these events. The same participant shared that one such logo was eventually changed thanks to strenuous efforts by female colleagues, indicating the continuing resistance by activists to 'anti-gender' also abroad. Participants added that the underrepresentation of female speakers at such events also remains a persistent issue.

3. There is a fear of state repression against women and LGBTIQ+ people

Participants spoke about diverse repressive measures used against women and LGBTIQ+ individuals in Belarus and the climate of fear they generate. Targeted repressions of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, participants noted, creates an overwhelming climate of fear, and underscores the political regime's reliance on gendered violence to suppress dissent and enforce conformity.

Participants in the study discussed the various repressive measures against women and LGBTIQ+ individuals in Belarus, emphasising the climate of fear these actions generate. Following the 2020 elections, many activists **feared being arrested and sentenced**. As BLRINT06 explained, women and the LGBTIQ+ community have been vocal in political protests following the elections but also in anti-war demonstrations related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, there is a pervasive fear of possible repercussions. Many participants described the escalating fear as more women and LGBTIQ+ individuals faced criminal charges and imprisonment, driving many activists to flee the country.

Most participants said that this fear has intensified with impending laws penalising the promotion of 'abnormal' relationships, for example, the anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda law.²⁷ This legislation, similar to Russia's anti-LGBTIQ+ policies, is seen as a broad tool to target political activists and those defending human and queer rights. Participants feared that such laws would silence dissent and exacerbate repression. BLRFG1.3 said that they feared that this legislation's broad and ambiguous scope is expected to allow the state to target any activity as propaganda, silencing political activists and threatening those who defend human and queer rights, as well as those involved in issues related to childbirth, abortion, and contraception. Most participants fear that the anticipated anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda law will target individuals who have voiced any type of political dissent.

With this, one participant is particularly concerned because of the anticipated lack of solidarity in resisting such oppressive legislation. BLRINT02 said that she is afraid that most cis-gender heterosexual people would not object to the new law, assuming it doesn't concern them personally, unaware that "it will backfire against everyone" as an instrument of repression.

Participants also fear that the new planned discriminatory legislation has a potential to incite enmity and stigmatisation, specifically social stigma, and **risking more hate and violence against the LGBTIQ+ community**. Thus, despite state repression, LGBTIQ+ participants spoke about the general increasing (**fear of**) **violence** and anticipated these in diverse spaces. Growing anticipation of violence combined with the disbelief in the effectiveness of reporting abuse and seeking justice, were said to contribute to a feeling of powerlessness.

Participants highlighted that the **fear of reporting abuse** is particularly strong not only amongst LGBTIQ+ individuals, but also among women with children, as the latter risk their children being taken away by

²⁷ Another example that participants mentioned was the recently amended definition of pornography by the Ministry of Culture to include 'non-traditional sexual relations and/or sexual behavior'.

authorities.²⁸ All of the women with children in our sample noted fear of this possibility, BLRINT01 referring to it “as one of the worst possible psychological violence tools” used to intimidate and silence women.²⁹

LGBTIQ+ participants spoke about the futility of seeking police help, as it often leads to more harm from the authorities themselves. As BLRINT01 explained, should a queer person refer to police, they would have to explain in the first place why they are being stalked or harassed, and consequently be subjected to transphobia or homophobia from the police, including being exposed to police violence. Therefore, in their personal experience of being stalked and harassed during a prolonged period of time, they had to hide and withdraw from any public activity, even restrain from leaving the house, but avoided seeking police help. Several participants mentioned the use of repentant videos³⁰ and other forms of police violence, with BLRINT01 emphasising that police homophobia is a systemic issue in Belarus. As she said, it “cannot exist on its own”, it “is permitted by state policies and reinforced by conservative societal attitudes”.

Most participants conveyed a prevailing sense of pessimism, **the feeling that things are only getting worse and that there is little hope for a positive change in the near future**. As BLRFG1.1 explained, new oppressive laws are being enacted, and statistics on domestic violence are not publicly accessible, leaving the true extent of the problem unknown. Fear, once confined to politically active individuals, has spread to nearly everyone, with vulnerable groups suffering the most. The interviewee feels that there is no chance for change at the moment. She added that though previously they could influence men's organisations to some extent by filing complaints, such possibilities no longer exist.

4. 'Extreme anonymity' was discussed as a resistance and survival mechanism, and isolation as an effect of hostilities

Participants reported feeling isolated, powerless and unprotected when faced with anti-queer hostilities in Belarus. Financial difficulties and the need for extreme anonymity exacerbate this isolation.

Most participants spoke about prioritising the need to preserve anonymity, particularly following 2020, which has caused many to feel isolated and disconnected from the queer community. BLRINT07 said that prior to 2020 she participated in collectives, which used to provide space for reflection and healing. However, 2020 was a turning point when authorities began seeing such collectives as a threat, leading to their—both forced and voluntary—disintegration and causing many people to leave the country. The interviewee expressed fear of joining any offline group as of 2020, and added that these groups used to be a huge source of mental health support. Instead, she sought individual therapy as a protection strategy,

²⁸ Various reports testify document instances of officials separating children from parents deemed to lead an 'immoral life', abuse substances, or otherwise fail to fulfil parental responsibilities, thereby endangering their children. See, for example a report by a Civil Campaign Our House: Issues concerning the rights of children in Belarus's legislation, available at: http://ucape.eu/pdf/Issues_concerning_the_rights_of_children_in_Belarus_legislation.pdf (Accessed: 14 June 2024).

See also The Advocates for Human Rights, Belarus' Compliance with the Convention Against Torture, 31 January 2021, available at: <https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/res/byid/8080>, 12.

²⁹ Kruope, A. (2020) Belarus uses children to pressure dissenting parents: judicial harassment, threatened loss of custody, Human Rights Watch Dispatches, October 8, www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/08/belarus-uses-children-pressure-dissenting-parents.

See also: Khalip, I. (2020) In Minsk, the six-year-old son of the activists of "European Belarus" was taken to an orphanage, charter97.org, available at: <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2020/9/18/393672/> (Accessed: 7 July 2024).

³⁰ ‘Repentant videos’ are shot by the police showing the arrested persons who are forced to confess to their crimes and to repent. This is often done with the use of physical violence and torture. The videos are then publicly disseminated and used as propaganda. See, Zaborona (2021) How the Belarusian authorities use homophobia for repression, available at: <https://zaborona.com/ru/kak-belaruskie-vlasti-ispolzuyut-gomofobiyu-dlya-repressij/> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

avoiding situations that could endanger her. Despite this, she added, individual therapy does not compensate for the loss of collective support, leading to feelings of extreme isolation.

Participants said that they feel physically isolated and individualised in their experiences, given the inability to safely join support groups and communities, making it nearly impossible to care for one another. BLRINT03 said they feel the community's capacity for mutual care is very low due to the **trauma** from the events of 2020 and their aftermath. Many participants said that they have to rely on external networks (often abroad, but also online) to regain strength.

The possibility of physical gatherings for queer people in Belarus remains unclear. Those who organised events around 2020 shared that these events required balancing high-security measures against risks. By 2021, event locations were kept secret, and security was increased. 'Anti-gender' campaigners, including state and non-state actors, created fake profiles to pass security checks and discover event locations. Participants told us that they had to be constantly on high alert to keep the events safe for participants. BLRINT07 said that, prior to their decision to leave Belarus, only small gatherings of activists were possible to discuss ongoing issues and strategise.

Participants spoke about additional challenges they face as community leaders, where they have to bear the responsibility for the people they gather. BLRINT03 discussed the challenge of informing community members about the risks associated with organising events and meetings. Many community members are unaware of the surveillance, state threats, and potential dangers from various actors. The participant finds it difficult to balance truth-telling with the risk of increasing anxiety among members. The events of 2020, when many people were detained and arrested, exacerbated these concerns. The interviewee often struggles with how to inform people about potential KGB presence at events or the risk of data leaks to propaganda channels. The constant need to weigh high security measures against risks was described as exhausting.

The constant tension participants experience, the fear of surveillance, and potential threats have become exhausting. Some said that they feel paralysed by the precautions necessary to hold events. Resilience for many participants is in their ability to leave the country thereby physically distancing themselves from the tension for some time, while continuing activist work.

5. Participants described a variety of gender hostilities (including torture and imprisonment) they have experienced

Participants described a variety of gender hostilities, affecting women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and their allies, perpetuated through media and legal intimidation.

Participants detailed diverse gender hostilities experienced in Belarus, emphasising how both state leaders and media incite discrimination and oppression. This incitement has led to increased violence against queer people and a negative societal perception. BLRINT02 said, "it is almost like giving a green light to societal aggression". **Media hostility was a frequently referenced topic.** BLRINT02 said that as a woman she was furious, and tired, of being bombarded all her life with the messages that reproduction is women's primary role. The prevalence of unmoderated sexist, homophobic and transphobic speech on the national television and radio was mentioned by most participants. One participant, BLRINT02 spoke about being invited to a national radio station in the capacity of an expert, where she faced discriminatory comments with no moderation from hosts. She recounted being insulted on air despite presenting a well-researched commentary on a sexist advertisement, highlighting the lack of protection from hate speech in state and

social media. She said she was “struck to the core” and shocked that the station broadcast this stream of hate and insults without any moderation.

Participants find that defending queer communities endangers the defenders/allies. BLRFG1.4/INT05 described a situation where their organisation was involved in a minor court case (unrelated to gender issues). During a court procedure a men’s movement group intruded and accused their organisation of supporting queer communities and feminism. The participant said that it was presented as if defending queer people’ rights was something bad, resulting in members of the organisation having to justify themselves for helping and fighting for the rights of queer people or women, which, in her words, was not only “challenging” but also “demoralising”.

Participants spoke about the risks that human rights defenders, lawyers, and NGO workers face in defending abortion/LGBTIQ+ rights³¹, encountering accusations of spreading propaganda and loosely defined 'extremist' activities. BLRFG1.4/INT05 shared that her career in women's rights advocacy ended abruptly after being publicly accused of spreading propaganda, relating to a short educational video that their organisation produced about queer rights. This accusation, featured on national television, overshadowed years of work. She said in her experience such accusations in general instil fear in potential allies, deterring them from engaging in similar advocacy.

Participants who had experienced detention and imprisonment for peaceful protests shared harrowing accounts of human rights abuses and gender-based violence. BLRINT01 recounted her detention following participation in a peaceful protest, experiencing inhumane treatment and gendered intimidation during arrests, pre-trial detention, and imprisonment. She refused to confess to 'extremist activities' and faced constant pressure. Pre-verdict, she endured torture, such as confinement in overcrowded, smoke-filled rooms with poor sanitation, enforced (prolonged) sitting on hard surfaces, and punitive video surveillance.

Post-verdict, she was subjected to psychological and physical violence in prison, forced to work in unsafe conditions at a sewing factory with high disease transmission risks. Needles used for sewing were not sterilised, and basic hygiene was nearly impossible with limited access to sinks, toilets, and showers. Medical care was denied, and she was forced to work despite illness, leading to physical and psychological trauma.

6. Coordinated cyber smear campaigns target queer and feminist activists

Participants told us that there was a rise in organised 'anti-gender' hostility. Many spoke about the rise in coordinated cyber attacks against LGBTIQ+ and feminist activists in Belarus, highlighting the organised nature of such attacks and its severe emotional impact.

Most participants noticed the increase in hate speech and online smear campaigns against queer individuals and activists in Belarus. Many also remarked on the organised nature of 'anti-gender' attacks. Participants noted that these cyber attacks are not random acts of hate but coordinated efforts by specific, likely financially supported, groups. Those who have suffered from the targeting and smear campaigns observed that the amount of time put into researching, profiling and exposing individuals and their private information is significant, suggesting that it is unlikely to have been perpetrated by a single random individual, but rather entire groups/campaigns. Participants suggested that these groups conduct personal

³¹ Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, “Belarus: UN experts decry threats against women human rights defenders,” OHCHR, 2 November 2020. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26470&LangID=E>

profiling of activists, posting detailed information and pictures on social media platforms like Telegram and Twitter.

Another participant shared how negative media coverage of gender and sexuality related issues affects the work of her collective, engaged in providing sex education at schools. BLRINT03 said that, prior to 2020, sex education at schools was still “somewhat possible”, however difficult. There was a period when, on their Instagram pages, both personal and professional, more and more comments appeared, accusing them of aiming to destroy traditional values and calling for policies to stop pro-gender equality developments. As a result, teachers who previously collaborated with their organisation started refusing out of fear of punishment.

One participant, BLRINT03, shared that they have been very visible in public life in Belarus as a feminist and queer activist. They have cooperated with Belarusian independent media to write articles, reports, and provide expertise on feminist and LGBTIQ+ rights. Starting activism young, they have increasingly faced **violence**, both physical and digital, with more visibility. The more they appeared on social media and in the media, the more they encountered violence online. Sometime around 2020 they were subjected to intense smear campaigns on social media, with their personal data exposed, and were stalked and threatened in Minsk by far-right groups for almost a month. They recalled receiving death threats and threats of sexualized violence on social media, silencing them and making them feel there was no safe space to express themselves. The fear kept them from leaving their apartment, and they had to shut down some of their social media for a period of time. Other participants spoke about the existence of specific Telegram channels frequently posting content on reproductive rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and the enemies of the union state (Russia-Belarus), targeting individuals and exposing their personal information, sometimes leading to prosecution. These systematic campaigns, the interviewee emphasised, suggest organised efforts rather than individual actions.

Participants who manage online accounts dedicated to educational/gender related topics, are also confronted with online hate constantly. They spoke of resistance strategies that they use to navigate and deal with hate. For example, BLRINT04 shared their experience of moderating a TikTok account with queer and feminist content. They constantly confront hostile verbal attacks and have developed strategies to deal with online hostility. In terms of resistance, they mentioned one of their “favourite” techniques is responding seriously to mocking comments. However, personal insults and threats are monitored and immediately deleted, especially if they target/affect other readers.

7. Migration was discussed as an effect of hostilities, but also as a resistance strategy and a way of surviving

Most participants of our study left Belarus after 2020 due to their experiences of being arrested and/or the fear of this linked to their activism. Participants spoke about migration as an effect of gender hostilities and a way of surviving, not just an 'escape'. Abroad, new forms of marginalisation have emerged, such as financial struggles, migrant status, and the loss of pre-existing networks.

Participants discussed how leaving the country was a difficult choice for many, involving separation from family and ongoing worry—those who left continue to worry about the safety of their families. However, for many it was a necessity for survival and was discussed as a form of resistance. BLRINT01 spoke about how, having served her sentence following participation in the protests, she returned home to continued control and surveillance, receiving frequent calls and unannounced visits from law enforcement. She feared taking showers or baths alone, anticipating police raids. The constant tension, pressure, and intimidation led her to

believe it was time to leave, as more protestors were being detained. Similarly, many other participants spoke about the fear of being detained. The fear intensified as more and more civil society organisations were closed down and activists arrested. Many participants recalled how their travel was a difficult experience. BLRINT01 explained how the situation was further aggravated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which cut Belarus off from European shelter programs for human rights defenders due to non-recognised vaccines³² and flight restrictions. Ukraine and Georgia were among the few accessible relocation options that many participants took.

Several participants who relocated to Ukraine after 2020 faced difficulties conducting activist work for Belarus in Ukraine. Some participants shared how Belarusian and Ukrainian nationalist groups attempted to intimidate and frighten them within Ukraine, and financial struggles—many did not have much savings prior to relocating—further negatively shaped their experiences. However, existing connections with regional activists proved fruitful. Many relied on pre-existing connections in Ukraine and Georgia. This allowed some participants to continue their work remotely. Conversely, starting from scratch in Poland highlighted the challenges of building new networks. The war with Russia forced many to relocate again.

Participants recalled various gender hostilities, which persisted during different stages of immigration. For example, when crossing the border to Poland several participants recalled encountering anti-choice protesters and posters. BLRFG1.4/INT05 said that seeing anti-abortion activists and posters exacerbated the stress of fleeing.

Some participants who arrived in smaller European towns noted the presence of gender hostilities that were also there. For example, BLRINT04 found that her less conventional appearance caused difficulties both in Belarus and Europe. This therefore challenged their hopes and beliefs of Europe being a safe haven for gender equality and diversity.

Participants highlighted that immigration offered new possibilities, such as openly living their sexual and gender identities and filing legal complaints with confidence, particularly in Poland and Western European countries. However, it also exposed participants to additional vulnerabilities, including a lack of passport or citizenship rights that meant stark differences in legal status and rights.

Many participants did not have pre-existing networks in Europe and had to start building connections from scratch. Some participants said they felt **more discriminated against in Europe due to their nationality rather than sexual orientation** or gender identity. They found that many Europeans view Belarusians as part of the aggressor country, Russia. This made their experiences in the EU difficult and challenged imaginings of a 'free' Europe.

8. Strategies for queer and feminist activists in Belarus included establishing connections, continuing work abroad and caring for themselves and each other

Immigration, continued activism abroad, self-care, and mutual support have emerged as key strategies in the resistance of Belarusian queer feminist activists. Establishing connections with activists from regions with similar political contexts, such as Central Asia and the Western Balkans, is seen as vital for strengthening their efforts and fostering broader solidarity.

³² During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian Sputnik V vaccine was not recognised by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the regulatory body responsible for approving vaccines for use in the European Union. This lack of recognition meant that travellers from countries using Sputnik V, including Belarus, could not meet the vaccination requirements for entry into many European countries, limiting their mobility.

Migration, while forced by state oppression, is also a strategic form of resistance. Following the 2020 mass protests against the Lukashenka regime, many activists fled to countries like Poland, Lithuania, Georgia and Ukraine to escape persecution. Although relocation offers a degree of freedom, allowing activists to live openly and engage in advocacy, it comes with challenges, including financial difficulties—due to the forced nature of migration for many, there were no secure jobs and often no means of making a living—nationality-based discrimination, housing challenges, language barriers, separation from and ongoing concerns about the safety of friends and families, and the loss of established networks, loneliness and inability to return home due to the fear of repression. Despite these hardships, emigration remains one of the few effective strategies for protection against ‘anti-gender’ hostilities in Belarus. Although the challenges of being forced to leave were significant, many participants value the relief from the constant threats to their life and freedom they have faced in Belarus. Many spoke about the feeling of relative safety, and ability to rely on a “functioning legal system” as positive aspects of immigration.

Once abroad, resistance continues. The growing Belarusian queer feminist network has become crucial for resistance. Even from abroad, the network of queer feminist activists continues to organise protests, both physically and online, to demand justice for political prisoners and an end to state violence in Belarus.

Given current limitations with regard to political action, that is, the inability to protest in Belarus or engage in discussions opposing oppressive legislation, such as the impending anti-LGBT propaganda law, changing public perception through online media, such as YouTube and podcasts, is seen as an effective strategy. Many activists facilitate educational projects that focus on feminism, LGBTIQ+ rights, and activism. They publish articles, create digital content, and collaborate with international partners to share Belarusian queer and feminist perspectives with global audiences. Cultural events such as film screenings, art exhibitions, and poetry readings also play a key role in preserving and promoting their identity and cause.

Many participants emphasised the importance of helping others—those still in Belarus and fellow emigrants, often volunteering their time and efforts. These efforts vary based on participants’ capabilities. Some help financially, others offer childcare, still others help with arranging required documents in the process of immigration. Many people we spoke with spend hours and hours per day on a volunteer basis, helping others document abuses and file complaints. “I’m safe, I’m recovering, I’ve started to sleep peacefully at night,” said BLRNT04, a lawyer and human rights defender, who spends her nights studying difficult cases and giving people legal advice. She stressed that legal knowledge is a powerful resistance tool. As a lawyer and former political prisoner, she has used her understanding of human rights law to document violations and attract international attention to her case, and now she is helping others.

Mental health support was also named as a crucial element of resistance, especially for those suffering from psychological trauma post-2020. Participants stressed the need for mental health resources, though securing funding for such initiatives remains difficult. Self-care was named as yet another strategy: BLRINT03, who currently still lives in Belarus, spoke about switching to freelance work, and choosing private medical providers as some ways to feel somewhat distanced and protected.

Through these activities, the Belarusian queer feminist network continues its fight for equality and justice, striving to maintain international pressure on the Belarusian regime while supporting the LGBTIQ+ and feminist communities in exile. Several participants voiced their wish to expand this growing network internationally, particularly with regions sharing similar histories. It was suggested that establishing connections with activists in Central Asia, the Western Balkans, and beyond can provide practical support, solidarity and advocacy efforts. BLRINT03 said that current networking projects mostly involve Belarus-Poland and Belarus-Lithuania due to significant Belarusian migration to these countries; however,

expanding alliances with regions previously excluded from collaboration is seen by many participants as essential for broader solidarity.

Conclusion

We are tremendously grateful to all the participants who have shared their experiences in this study. The testimonies of Belarusian queer and feminist activists reveal three key aspects of their experiences and resistance efforts.

Participants reported diverse ‘anti-gender’ hostilities: LGBTIQ+ individuals in Belarus suffer from systemic discrimination and violence, exacerbated by state-sanctioned repression. Discriminatory legislation, like the impending anti-LGBTIQ propaganda law, fosters societal stigma and emboldens acts of physical and digital violence against the community. The state's hostile narratives, reinforced by both official media and organised online harassment, increase the marginalisation of LGBTIQ+ individuals. This has led to widespread fear, with activists facing severe limitations in their capacity to report abuses and advocate for equal rights.

Many have been forced into exile, where they continue to resist these repressive measures from abroad.³³ For many activists, migration is both a necessity and a form of resistance. Following the mass protests of 2020, heightened repression, mass arrests, and gender-specific reprisals have driven activists to flee Belarus, particularly to countries like Poland, Lithuania, Georgia and Ukraine. Although emigration is forced by circumstances, it also offers a way to not only escape persecution but also to continue the fight for gender equality. While relocation allows for greater personal freedom and safety, it comes with challenges such as lack of jobs and financial cushions, discrimination based on nationality, legalisation difficulties, separation from families and the loss of established (familiar) networks among others.

Participants spoke about continuing ongoing resistance abroad: Even in exile, Belarusian queer and feminist activists continue their resistance. The formation and expansion of the Belarusian queer feminist network have been crucial in sustaining this resistance. Through mutual care, solidarity, and practical support, activists help others rebuild their lives, advocate for LGBTIQ+ and women's rights, and raise awareness about the repression in Belarus. The network also plays a vital role in organising protests, participating in global feminist movements, and creating educational content to challenge stereotypes. These ongoing efforts not only maintain international pressure on the Belarusian regime but also foster a sense of community and resilience among displaced activists.

³³ The recent report highlights how the Belarusian government has systematically purged independent civil society organisations, forcing many to relocate abroad or operate underground.

Marin, A. (2024). *Situation of human rights in Belarus: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus*. Human Rights Council. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5665-situation-human-rights-belarus-report-special-rapporteur>

The report also highlights the arbitrary arrests and detentions of activists following the 2020 presidential elections, with tens of thousands of people being detained on political grounds. Many detainees face inhumane treatment, including solitary confinement, denial of medical care, and prolonged detention without access to legal representation.

Respondent Profiles

We asked the 18 participants to fill out a voluntary demographic form with open text boxes for each variable. 4 participants filled their voluntary demographic forms while 14 others were asked the questions directly during the interviews.

Table 2: Respondent profiles Belarus

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
Age groups	18	Most participants who indicated their age are between 25 and 34 (8 participants) or 35 and 49 years old (6), three were in the 50-64 range, we had no participants older than 65 and younger than 24.
Gender	18	The sample includes predominantly cis women (14). Three participants identified as non-binary and one as a cis man.
Sexual orientation / identity	18	Six identified as heterosexual, five identified as lesbian, two as pan-sexual, two identified as queer, one identified as gay, two did not define.
Country of origin	18	Belarus was named as a country of origin for all 18 participants in this sample.
Country of residence / legal status	18	At the time of the study, most participants (16/18) were residing outside of Belarus, with only two participants currently living in Belarus. 11 reside in Poland, two in Germany, one in Georgia, one in Switzerland, one in Sweden.
Racial / ethnic identity	18	In terms of ethnicity, most participants identified as Belarusian (11/18), with one identifying as Belarusian and Russian, one as white-passing with Roma roots, one participant identified as Slavic, four did not answer.
National identity	18	11 out of 18 participants named their national identity, and all identified as Balrusians.
Educational training	18	Most participants in this sample have higher education (11/18), 3/18 with professional training, four didn't specify.
Religion	18	Seven participants identified as Orthodox, one participant identified as atheist, the rest of the participants (10/18) did not name their religious affiliations.

Social class	18	One identified as upper middle class, one as lower middle class, all other participants said they could not define their class.
Dis/ability / chronic diseases	18	Two participants reported living with a disability.
Settlement type	18	Most participants (10/18) said they came from big town, three from medium size town, one from small town, four didn't say.
Anything else	18	Two people mentioned struggling with mental health issues. Four women emphasised how being a mother shaped their experiences.

Chapter 3: Exile

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Executive Summary

This case study examines the daily life experiences of exiles from Turkey and Northern Kurdistan who have been displaced by 'anti-gender' politics and now reside in Europe.

The participants recounted how under the AKP government, increasing 'anti-gender' and anti-feminist politics perpetuated by the media, religious institutions and social pressure from their families put significant pressure on LGBTQIA+ individuals, leading to harassment, abuse, and death threats.

These oppressive politics intersect with broader resistances against authoritarian state politics, compelling activists, politicians, and intellectuals to seek refuge in Europe. However, the migration journey and life in exile present ongoing challenges, including difficult migration processes, adverse conditions in refugee camps, and everyday racism.

In Europe, the loss of social status profoundly shapes the impact of 'anti-gender' politics on everyday life, with participants facing unique manifestations of this loss: from marginalised citizenship to professional displacement. Working in academia in Europe, exiled scholars are confronted with racism, precarious employment, and devaluation of their qualifications. Feelings of non-belonging and isolation are pervasive, exacerbated by anti-immigrant sentiments and integration barriers.

LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly trans women, face compounded marginalizations due to intersecting identities of race, gender, and refugee status. Participants who are also part of the leftist, pro-Kurdish movement, face multi-layered repression: LGBTQIA+ participants' struggles for freedom and human rights are intertwined with their experiences of racism and their refugee status in Europe.

Activists resist these challenging experiences through social media campaigns and transnational networks, yet mainstream LGBTQIA+ activism in Europe is experienced as exclusionary and dominated by cis white middle class perspectives, prompting the participants to create more inclusive, intersectional spaces.

Despite these challenges, they employ strategies to resist 'anti-gender' oppression, maintain their political agency, and navigate the queer immigrant experience through transnational networks built on solidarity. These networks are vital for sustaining activism and creating long-term support across borders, as participants continue to resist a broad spectrum of oppression even in exile.

Keywords: 'Anti-gender' politics in Turkey; exiles in Europe; LGBTQIA+ migration; transnational networks; resistance

Introduction

This case study report explores the lived experience of encountering 'anti-gender' politics and analyses the everyday resistance to those politics by Kurdish-Turkish communities living in exile in Europe.

It presents how 24 feminist academics, activists and public intellectuals negotiate and resist attacks on their identities, lives, politics and work in the field of sexualities and genders.

The report is based on the findings of 4 focus groups (with 20 participants, between 4-6 in each group) and 12 individual interviews (some of whom were in focus groups) with people based in Europe. They responded to the invitation to take part in the focus groups or interviews because they had experienced some form of 'anti-gender effects'. The sample was recruited through targeted emails to individuals and groups who might be affected (see [Table 3: Respondent profiles Exile](#)). This was followed by telephone calls/emails to encourage participation.

The study's participants include activists, academics, and intellectuals from Turkey and North Kurdistan who have fled to various European countries, such as Germany, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and Spain, as migrants and refugees from environments of oppression and violence, in part due to anti-feminist and 'anti-gender' politics that endanger their physical, social, political, and everyday lives. In this phase of the study, we focus on the effects of these 'anti-gender' politics and discourses on everyday life and how these effects might be influenced or transformed by the experience of crossing borders into Europe. 'Anti-gender' experiences continue through complex migration processes, illegal pushbacks, and poor conditions in refugee camps, along with everyday and structural racism in host countries. This shows how 'anti-gender' and migration politics and discourses intersect. Following an overview of the national context, the main findings are presented, summarising the main points that emerged from the focus groups and interviews.

Context

LGBTQIA+ Rights in Turkey: Oppression, Discrimination and Struggle

The history of LGBTQIA+ oppression and discrimination in Turkey is long, but key events such as the Gezi uprising in 2013, the June 7 elections in 2015, and the attempted coup in 2016 can be seen as turning points in the political landscape and the fight for human rights and freedom.^{34,35} When the AKP came to power in 2002, it was viewed in opposition circles in Turkey and Europe as a defender of "moderate Islam" or a guardian of democracy. Over the years, the AKP's divisive and oppressive politics have become more pronounced, targeting the LGBTQIA+ movement and Kurdish people in particular³⁶. This authoritarian, fascist regime was consolidated under the motto "the new Turkey", fueled by nationalist and Islamist ideologies³⁷. The foundation of this societal agenda is the denial of women's hard-won rights and the demonisation of LGBTQIA+ individuals under the guise of family protection. The 2010s saw the rise of the AKP's Islamist-conservative-authoritarian regime, which rejected gender equality with the slogan "strong

³⁴ Çetin Z. (2016, January) *The dynamics of the queer movement in Turkey before and during the conservative AKP government* (Working Paper, Research Group EU/Europe 2016/01), SWP Berlin. Available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/WP_RG_Europe_2016_01.pdf.

³⁵ Koylu M. (2015) *Türkiye'de LGBTİ haklarının durumu ve öneriler*. KaosGL. Ankara. Available at: <https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/2015de-lgbti-haklarinin-durumu-ve-oneriler.pdf>

³⁶ Arat Y, Pamuk Ş. (2019) *Turkey between Democracy and Authoritarianism*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁷ Babacan, E., Kutun, M., Pinar, E., & Yılmaz, Z. (Eds.) (2021) *Regime Change in Turkey: Neoliberal Authoritarianism, Islamism and Hegemony* (1st ed.). Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003098638>

family—strong society”³⁸ and enacted anti-LGBTQIA+ measures in response to the global surge of right-wing populism and 'anti-gender' movements.

A crucial turning point in the defence of the Turkish LGBTQIA+ community was the Istanbul Pride March. This march, with thousands of participants, provided a platform for the visibility and defence of LGBTQIA+ rights until 2015. When the HDP (pro-Kurdish political party) entered parliament as the third party in the June 7, 2015 elections, the AKP was unable to form a government on its own which led to the termination of Kurdish peace negotiations, the reinstatement of war policies in Kurdistan, and the targeting of all opposition media, NGOs, trade unions, and individuals³⁹. This strategy included limiting the sites of expression available to LGBTQIA+ people, outlawing Pride Marches and other public gatherings, and labelling LGBTQIA+ individuals as "terrorists" and inciting "perversion" in the media and among AKP leaders⁴⁰. The Directorate of Religious Affairs, nationalist-conservative groups, and partisan media have endorsed and reinforced the administration's discriminatory politics. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Directorate of Religious Affairs blamed HIV-positive and LGBTQIA+ individuals as the source of illnesses⁴¹.

Additionally, withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention dealt a serious blow to the women's movement and LGBTQIA+ advocacy in Turkey⁴². Women's rights and gender equality advocates saw this decision as a significant setback, leading to large-scale protests. Despite these protests and global responses, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention in 2021⁴³. The AKP justified this withdrawal by claiming the convention harmed social and family values and was used by organisations that normalise homosexuality. During this period, hate marches were organised with government encouragement⁴⁴.

The AKP's electoral campaigns have primarily targeted LGBTQIA+ individuals and their fight for rights, especially during election seasons. Conversely, the opposition has occasionally adopted 'anti-gender' rhetoric and failed to take a strong stand against these attacks⁴⁵. These extreme measures against people with marginalised gender and sexual identities have led to an increase in femicides, killings of transgender people, and hate crimes.

In this exile case study, 'anti-gender' is neither a term used to generally describe particular discourses and politics, nor used by participants in relation to their personal experiences. Experiences that might be described as 'anti-gender' are usually described by participants with specific terms such as 'transphobic,' 'homophobic,' 'racist' and 'anti-immigrant,' 'anti-feminist,' 'misogynist' and 'anti-queer'. Only one participant

³⁸ Kocamaner, Hikmet. (2022) The Politics of Family Values in Erdogan's New Turkey. MERIP Middle East Report. 288. 36-39.

³⁹ Human Rights Foundation Turkey. (2016) HRFT Treatment Center Report, 2016. Available at: <https://en.tihv.org.tr/treatment-and-rehabilitation-reports/2016-hrft-treatment-centers-report/>

⁴⁰ Yackley A. J. (2020, July 27) Turkey's LGBTQ community at risk amid rise in homophobic rhetoric. *POLITICO*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-lgbtq-community-risk-rise-in-homophobic-rhetoric/>

⁴¹

<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkish-ruling-party-lawyers-clash-over-cleric-comments-on-homosexuality-idUSKC N2291LD/>

⁴² Baytok C. (2021) The Istanbul Convention, gender politics and beyond: Poland and Turkey. Available at: <https://aramizda.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/012-The-IstanbulConventionGenderPoliticsandBeyond.pdf>

⁴³

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/why-turkeys-withdrawal-from-the-istanbul-convention-is-a-global-problem/>

⁴⁴ <https://bianet.org/haber/thousands-gather-at-anti-lgbti-rally-in-istanbul-267328>

⁴⁵ <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-elections-2023-lgbtq-recep-tayyip-erdogan/>

used 'anti-gender' as a theoretical and practical term to specifically address 'anti-gender' online discourses, spreading of misinformation and harassment strategies like doxxing.

Findings

1. 'Anti-gender' oppression was experienced in multi-layered ways in Turkey

Experiences of and resistance to 'anti-gender' politics and discourses in Turkey are linked to experiences of political repression, anti-Kurdish racism and lack of financial resources.

Our participants shared that **'anti-gender' and anti-feminist politics and discourses in Turkey have a severe, often violent impact on the daily lives of queer people in Turkey**. As our participants explained, massive state-led and media-led campaigns against LGBTQIA+ people in general, and LGBTQIA+ activists and politicians in particular, results in experiences of daily harassment, psychological and physical abuse, and even death threats from family members and colleagues. This not only decreases the possibility of being able to live an openly queer life but becomes a question of essential safety. Although daily life is often characterised by **self-censorship and self-policing in the public sphere**, being active in LGBTQIA+ organisations and finding ways to combat these experiences is prevalent. Queer activist and journalist Bawer explained:

The situation in Turkey, the LGBTQIA+ struggle there [...] for the first time in 2015, the AKP government started to directly attack the LGBTQIA+ movement in Turkey. Since then, it has been physically preventing the Pride March and banning the events [...] it is difficult today, but it was always difficult. You know, homophobic violence on the one hand, violence against LGBTQIA+s on the other hand, it was always like this, it has many forms.

All trans women participating in this case study are particularly affected by 'anti-gender' politics and discourses in Turkey, as they face repressive hypervisibility in every aspect of their daily lives, resulting in them running away from home at a young age with no financial resources. Discrimination on the labour market forces them in particular to turn to sex work, which in turn increases their experiences of police violence. **Discrimination in the housing market—as well as harassment and physical violence from landlords and neighbours—leads to homelessness**. Often having to work from home, this leads to the inability to work and further poverty. Trans woman activist Arat summed up how it is almost impossible to stay safe under these conditions, concluding, "I would have died if I stayed in Turkey". Trans woman activist Lila explained:

I was now caught up in this cycle. I experience the violence of the state, I experience it in the social sphere, I experience it in the bureaucratic sphere [...] I experience it in my personal relationships. I have nowhere else to go. I did not know what to do.

As feminist academics, LGBTQIA+ activists and public intellectuals critical of authoritarian state politics and discourses, all participants in this case study are also part of the leftist, pro-Kurdish movement calling for peace and democracy in Turkey. It became clear that the political repressions that ultimately lead to life in exile are experienced in a multi-layered, intersecting way, as 'anti-gender' discourses and politics in Turkey converge with anti-Kurdish authoritarian politics and discourses. This is seen in Kurdish feminist politicians Penaber and EXIFG2.3 who experience anti-feminism and misogyny in parliament not just because they are women in parliament, but because they are Kurdish women in parliament; as well as queer academics for peace who signed a petition criticising state violence against the Kurdish population in Turkey/Kurdistan like Egemen; and LGBTQIA+ activists like Arat, who was active in an Alevi-Kurdish socialist left movement, the

socialist women's movement, and the LGBTQIA+ movement and experienced multi-layered political repression as a result.

2. Exile is seen not only as a strategy for survival, but as a form of resistance

The impact of 'anti-gender' discourses and politics on everyday life in Turkey has led queer human rights activists, feminist politicians, public intellectuals and academics to flee to various European countries.

In Turkey, especially during the AKP government era, **rising 'anti-gender', anti-feminist politics and discourses have increased the pressure on LGBTQIA+ individuals in their daily lives, perpetuated by media, religious institutions, and families**⁴⁶. Through our case study, it emerged that the multi-layered experiences of 'anti-gender' politics and discourses in their intersection with resistances against authoritarian state politics become the reason for queer human rights activists, feminist politicians, public intellectuals and academics to flee to several European countries as a way of seeking refuge from the impact of those 'anti-gender' and authoritarian discourses and politics on everyday life in Turkey.

The end of peace negotiations between the AKP government and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) for the democratic resolution of the Kurdish issue, and the prolonged state of emergency following the alleged coup attempt in July 2016, have led to dismissals through statutory decrees (KHKs), the closure of oppositional media outlets and civil society organisations, and the unemployment of hundreds of thousands of people⁴⁷. In 2016, Egemen, for example, lost his position as a research assistant at the university because he signed a petition criticising state violence against the Kurdish population in Turkey/Kurdistan, and was furthermore threatened with prosecution. He explained how this political climate and his desire to live his sexuality more freely led him to apply for a scholarship for academics at risk in Germany.

The spiral of violence, which rose after the Gezi Park protests⁴⁸ and spread to all areas of society with the 2015 election defeat, has particularly targeted women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Gay left-wing politician and LGBTQIA+ activist Yazan recounted his experience of 'anti-gender' politics in Turkey as a reason for leaving Turkey and seeking asylum in Germany. He explained how media scrutiny and the spread of misinformation, leading to several death threats, made it impossible for him to live in his neighbourhood in Turkey. The policy of impunity, where those committing hate crimes are rewarded rather than punished, has empowered the perpetrators of femicides, trans murders, and hate crimes, causing people to feel unsafe and prompting migration from Turkey and North Kurdistan to Europe in search of a safer life⁴⁹. After speaking on behalf of a large LGBTQIA+ organisation on television, queer activist and journalist Bawer received death threats from family members who were previously unaware that he was gay. He explained how this led him to leave Turkey, stating:

⁴⁶ Çetin Z. (2016, January). The dynamics of the queer movement in Turkey before and during the conservative AKP government (Working Paper, Research Group EU/Europe 2016/01), SWP Berlin. Available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/WP_RG_Europe_2016_01.pdf.

⁴⁷ Dinçer H (2024). Bir Siyasi Davanın Anatomisi: Barış için Akademisyenler Vakası Egemenlik Gösterisi Olarak Dava ve Hakikatin Tersî Yüzü. *Mülkiye Dergisi*, 48(2), 403-434.

⁴⁸ Andaç-Jones, E. (2020). The Gezi Protests in Turkey: On Movement Spirit, Coalition Building, and Responding to Authoritarianism. *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 40(2), 87-95. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2020.0026>.

⁴⁹ Busra Nisa Sarac, Hafza Girdap, Nancy Hiemstra, (2023). Gendered state violence and post-coup migration out of Turkey, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 99. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102796>.

I mean, fleeing from a place where you don't feel safe, where you are threatened that you can no longer survive, where there are things that make you physically anxious [...] including the fact that there are political reasons behind these as well.

In this politically oppressive atmosphere, some participants, even if they were not direct targets of 'anti-gender' politics, expressed that they "couldn't breathe" and "didn't feel safe" and therefore decided to leave the country. Ezgi explained how, as a cis woman in Turkey, her experiences of daily harassment and being a victim of stalking coincided with her disillusionment in the aftermath of the 2015 Gezi Protests and the increasing criminalisation of political opposition. She explained how she and her partner "needed to catch their breath" and how short-term migration turned into a permanent departure from Turkey. The examples and experiences of 'anti-gender' that the participants shared illustrate how migration and living in exile is a last resort to the worsening living conditions and political climate for (left-wing) queer people in Turkey. Deniz described this experience:

But let me tell you this, being a dissident in Turkey [...] or being a minority. Understanding yourself, the way to do that is definitely through exile. So, at some point, even if no one imposes exile on you, life shows you that leaving is the best possible way to go.

As a result of these politics particularly targeting LGBTQIA+ activism, the women's movement, and oppositional academics, journalists, politicians, and artists, the profile of migrants from Turkey to Europe has changed⁵⁰, giving rise to a new group of exiles referred to as the 'new wave' or 'new exiles'. Unlike previous exiles, the new exiles have come not only for economic or political reasons but also as a form of resistance against 'anti-gender' politics.

3. 'Anti-gender' politics and discourses are experienced in intersection with anti-migration discourses and politics

How experiences of 'anti-gender' violence and oppression change once in exile in Europe.

Although exile in Europe is seen as a way to seek refuge from 'anti-gender' violence and political repression, **the migration routes themselves become a continuation of 'anti-gender' violence**. While some participants were able to use regular migration routes, others had to enter Europe through illegalised migration routes and refugee camps. Illegalised migration in this case study is characterised by experiences of pushbacks to Turkey, assault and sexualised violence at the hands of border institutions. Kurdish activist and writer Meral explained how her experiences of sexualised violence at the hands of the Turkish state were continued by the violence of the European border regime. Upon arrival in refugee centres in European countries, **the refugee experience of trans women is particularly marked by transphobic violence and racism**. Arat spoke about her experience in a Swiss refugee camp as follows:

In the camps, in the arrival camps, they humiliate you so much, they treat you so badly, they treat you like you're filthy, so you feel like a bug, so you think that at any moment someone will come and squash me with a spoon and take me away. It was a disgusting experience.

Experiences of invasive body searches and being housed according to the gender assigned at birth create living conditions of constant danger. Despite the seriousness of the situation being highlighted and formal complaints being made, trans women are still forced to live with cis men, which leads to physical violence and even attempted rape for which the trans women of this case study themselves are blamed.

⁵⁰Turkmen, G. (2019) "But you don't look Turkish!": The Changing Face of Turkish Immigration to Germany. Available at: <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/dont-look-turkish-changing-face-turkish-immigration-germany/>

When trans activist Lila tried to challenge these living conditions, she was confronted with uncooperative and racist administrators who told her to “learn and speak German first.” Several trans and genderqueer refugee participants emphasised that there is no real legal protection to rely on in refugee camps, which creates a sense of lawlessness, isolation and constant fear. As a cis queer single mother, Yasemin shared this experience, stating that there are completely different rules and order in the camp. She explained how there are no real legal consequences for situations like rape because the police do not cover refugee camps and the camp guards tell you to “sort it out amongst yourselves.”

Outside the camps, when asked about their experiences of 'anti-gender' oppression in the countries of arrival, **most participants spoke about how certain 'anti-gender' experiences have become less prominent in their daily lives, while experiences of racism, worries about their residency status and concerns about the rise of the far-right in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland dominate their daily experiences.** As trans activist Lila explained:

In Turkey I experienced as much humiliation as possible because of my trans identity, but here I don't experience as much discrimination because of my trans identity [...] But here [in Germany] there are very disturbing things happening because of my immigrant identity [...] I wonder, have I escaped the rain only to be caught in the hail?

This illustrates how **the intersection of racism, migration and 'anti-gender' politics creates new dimensions of 'anti-gender' experiences that cannot be separated from each other.** Only one participant highlights an overall positive effect of exile in their daily life: queer activist Bawer, who lives in exile in Spain, attributed this to the left-wing government in Catalonia, to the people supporting the Kurdish cause, and to experiencing racism mostly from people from other parts of Spain.

These experiences illustrate how 'anti-gender' experiences are complicated and sustained through the refugee experiences by specific migration policies, including illegal pushbacks at European borders and disastrous—often transphobic—conditions in refugee camps in Greece, Switzerland, and Germany, as well as experiences of everyday and structural racism in the countries of arrival.

4. Bureaucratic violence brings LGBTQIA+ migrants' and refugees' daily life to a halt

Bureaucratic procedures in the countries of arrival, in state institutions, in the health system, in accessing financial resources and in the residency process, both during the asylum process and after receiving their residency, were frequently mentioned by our participants.

We found that they experience challenges which result in them engaging as little as possible with the state and its institutions and social services to avoid further humiliation. For instance, **they do not seek financial support when they need it, and they hesitate to call the police when they face racist and anti-LGBTQIA+ attacks.**

For example, EXIINT07 had to wait 6 months before being able to apply for asylum in Germany, meaning he had to survive being illegalised in Germany in that time period. Similarly, queer activist Ercan explained, drawing on his experience in France, how the bureaucratic paperwork during the asylum process—which demanded proof of any information he provided about himself—is extremely emotionally exhausting. Although these practices, which participants define as “bureaucratic violence”, are simply accepted as a reality that “suspends” people's lives, in some cases, can put people's lives at risk. EXIINT07 shared an experience where he approached a queer refugee-friendly association for help, but they turned him down because he had irregularly migrated to Germany and had no legal status. Due to the fact that he could not access help, he was homeless for 6 months and almost died of hypothermia. Participants told us that the

continuation of these acts by the state, executed through associations ostensibly intended to support and provide solidarity to refugees, repeatedly re-triggers traumas. EXIINT07 criticised these organisations because he feels forced to re-traumatise himself in seeking support, and finds his experiences are not believed, concluding: "You're selling your trauma just to get help."

Trans women shared experiences where **bureaucratic violence and anti-trans discrimination collide**. Trans activist EXIFG3.4 spoke of how, as a trans refugee in Switzerland, it was more difficult for her to benefit from certain legal reforms regarding name and gender changes on official documents, as she was required to submit additional paperwork to what is demanded of Swiss citizens. The Kurdish trans activist and journalist Uli described the current trans law itself as transphobic, and explained how, during the process of changing her name and gender on official documents in Germany, she was not only confronted with transphobia, from the psychiatrists and judges involved, but also with racist comments.

Participants revealed a deep distrust and alienation in their relationships with the institutions they expected to offer support and protection. EXIFG1.3 discussed the intersection of racism and queerphobia in exile, recounting an incident where they and their queer friends of colour were harassed and threatened. The police were sympathetic to the perpetrators, highlighting the racial bias in the police response and leaving EXIFG1.3 feeling abandoned. Agender artist EXIFG3.5 avoids state and social services altogether to prevent further trauma. EXIINT07 shared a dehumanising experience with the police, leading to severe re-traumatisation. He described his exile as causing him to feel dehumanised, constantly under threat and unable to plan for the future due to bureaucratic pressures and existential threats:

To them, you're just a number [...] How can I live my daily life? I keep getting letters saying, "if you don't do this, we'll cut your money, we'll throw you out of the house." How can I dream of the future?

5. Migration to Europe frequently entails a loss of social status and career, especially for those who are trans

Loss of social status significantly shapes the impact of 'anti-gender' politics and discourses on everyday life.

Beyond the uncertainties, bureaucratic hurdles, and language barriers, one of the most striking consequences of displacement on the daily lives of exiles is **a loss of social status**. The study's participants represent a heterogeneous group, encompassing individuals from various professional backgrounds, social classes, ethnicities, and cultures, each at different stages of their careers. Therefore, the loss of status manifests differently for each of them. This ranges from being a marginalised citizen in one's own country, to becoming an asylum seeker/refugee in the new country and losing legal status in the eyes of states and institutions; from being a political representative of a people in one's own country to having no political presence in the new country; from being a representative of an organisation providing support and solidarity to refugee women to becoming a refugee woman oneself in need of that support and unable to receive it; and from having an established academic career to having no equivalent in one's new country and experiencing a loss of professional status.

The loss of status is particularly noticeable within academia. As an academic in exile, Raven explains how she experienced a great loss of status as an asylum seeker and faced racism in Germany. For example, her doctorate was questioned, she faced precarious working conditions in German academia, where she experienced short-term contracts, isolation, and the expectation to work through academic German. Speaking and teaching in English was not accepted as being sufficient by them. Similarly, despite having more international publications, projects, and achievements compared to many German academics, feminist academic Melek's mentor at the university tried to dissuade her from applying for the grants she

wanted, claiming that she couldn't compete with German academics. Arat, a trans activist, who wanted to continue her interrupted academic career, restarted her university studies in exile. She explained how, during a career counselling session, the counsellor did not ask about her qualifications and recommended that she become a ticket inspector on trains. She wants to leave academia and work as a nurse because, considering the multiple marginalisations she has experienced as a trans woman refugee, including ageism and the language barrier, she does not have the energy to fight for her right to exist in academia. She noted that if she were a cis woman, she would have stayed in academia. Addressing these structural problems, PhD student Egemen explained how his loss of status in the process of migration, financial insecurities, and the language barrier in Germany have a negative impact on many aspects of his life, as he no longer has any motivation to continue working on his PhD thesis and is, instead, working in a restaurant.

The effect of exile on the professional lives of our academic participants was especially significant as they lost the networks and environments for knowledge creation that they had meticulously built over the years. Many of them come from the field of social sciences, where their capacity to produce critical insights was suddenly disrupted, and they face the negation of their professional expertise. Melek added that:

If we were in Turkey, in our own universities, as associate professors, our students would be around us. I mean, we could intervene in faculty committees, various committees of the university, we would have channels to be both politically and academically engaged there, and we would have channels to push through.

Melek argued that what is experienced is in fact not just a loss of status, but also the deprivation of being a political subject, which then limits critical knowledge production in the countries of arrival in Europe. These experiences illustrate how, according to the participants, 'anti-gender', hierarchical geographies and migration are affected by multiple asymmetrical dynamics and how status loss is a systematic problem.

Loss of status manifests in different ways. Gay politician and LGBTQIA+ activist Yazan outlined that some public intellectuals receive a lot of resources and support in Germany, while at the same time everyone else is forced into a **"victim competition"** to show who has suffered the most. He gave an example of two exiled journalists, a cis male heterosexual public intellectual/journalist who gets hired frequently, in contrast to his friend who is a trans woman journalist that, despite all her efforts, is not able to find work with any publication. To escape these structural problems, avoid further exposure to 'anti-gender' and racist behaviours, and not constantly have to prove themselves, people develop different life strategies as a self-preservation reflex.

6. Life in exile is dominated by experiences of isolation and feelings of not belonging

As living in exile in Europe is a form of resistance to 'anti-gender' politics and discourses in Turkey, resisting 'anti-gender' politics is primarily understood as a way of enabling a sense of community, belonging, visibility and security in everyday life. Participants have been able to mitigate the impact of everyday experiences of 'anti-gender' politics and discourses to some extent through exile, but as they continue to be confronted with the intersections of 'anti-gender' and migration politics and discourses, feelings of isolation and non-belonging dominate life.

On the question of belonging, in the local contexts of Switzerland, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Spain, the participants have different experiences. Again, **it is the refugee status and the period of immigration prior to receiving a residence permit that promotes feelings of non-belonging and massive anxiety.** For example, queer feminist activist and single mother Yasemin feels safe in Switzerland, especially after receiving her residence permit. Queer activist Ercan has deep feelings of estrangement that even make him think of returning to Turkey, which would likely mean he would be imprisoned. Queer artist

EXIFG3.5, however, who has been in Europe the longest, explained that they feel a sense of belonging, especially since they are able to speak fluent German. They experienced an immense sense of relief after receiving German citizenship and described how they finally do not feel like they constantly have to prove themselves. Queer academic Egemen outlined how difficulties in accessing queer (migrant) networks affect his feelings of isolation, non-belonging and in-betweenness. Rising right-wing sentiments in Germany, as well as rising support for the AfD party, reinforce these feelings.

In Switzerland and Germany, Arat and EXIINT07 emphasise how **integration discourses play into these feelings of isolation and non-belonging**. Arat explained that as a trans woman she feels safer in Switzerland, but as a trans refugee she will never belong in Switzerland. The discourse around integration and anti-immigrant sentiment prevents her from being able to integrate into Swiss society:

I mean, I am very happy to be in Switzerland, let me say that from the beginning. But there is something in the migration system here. They always force you to integrate well, integrate, integrate. But they also do a lot of things to prevent you from being integrated [...] I know I will never belong here. And I know that they do not want me to feel like I belong here either.

EXIINT07 talked about the experiences of othering that mark his life as a gay man, belonging to several minorities in Turkey, now living in Europe. His intersecting exposure to racist and homophobic discrimination in Germany and Turkey, as well as the language barrier and integration discourse in Germany, mean that he does not have a safe space wherever he goes:

I [was dreaming of] going to Europe and that I will have a safe life there. But how could I know that when I came here, I would experience racism, I would experience homophobia [...] I know that even if I am 100% integrated, I would be an Ausländer⁵¹ for them. I mean, I was already an Ausländer for my family, I was an Ausländer at the school I went to, because I was half Armenian and half Kurdish, because I was gay in my family [...] I was always the other, my race, my sexual orientation, my femininity or my political view, you know [...] So there is no safe space for me.

It becomes clear that transphobia and homophobia, when intersecting with racism and integration discourses, can massively undermine the sense of safety and belonging in countries of arrival, which are among the main reasons for living in exile.

7. The struggle for agency in exile is characterised by continuities in resisting 'anti-gender' politics through various survival strategies

Developing different forms of resistance to 'anti-gender' politics, practices and discourses that participants encounter in their daily lives in exile emerges as a survival strategy.

The participants use different strategies to resist multi-layered 'anti-gender' experiences in Turkey and in exile, such as **community outreach, creating visibility online and filing formal complaints. They transfer and adapt the resisting strategies they know to the transnational space.**

The widespread use of social media that started during the Gezi protests continues to guide the participants in exile. For example, after experiencing transmisogynistic attacks in a refugee camp in Switzerland, trans activist Arat used her activist network in Turkey to put pressure on the camp's operator. Similarly, after

⁵¹ "Ausländer" means "foreigner" in German and is used as a slur for racialised migrants or people with so-called migration background in Germany, no matter the legal status, citizenship or actual history of migrating.

experiencing a transmisogynistic assault in the refugee camp, EXIFG4.6, a trans activist, and Agit reached out to their feminist LGBTQIA+ community via social media and started an email campaign to make the case known. More than 200 emails were sent to the immigration office condemning the assault.

Social networks and organisations can play a key role in supporting queer refugees. EXIFG4.6 explained the importance of resistance in the asylum process, how resisting the unjust conditions in the refugee camp is the only way to get rights implemented. She described how, as an LGBTQIA+ person and a woman in Turkey, she has always resisted through survival strategies, and that this is also necessary in the camps. After a transmisogynist assault in the German refugee camps, Lila tried to file a formal complaint but was refused assistance; she recorded her recollection of the assault, and contacted several refugee and LGBTQIA+ support associations. With the assistance of an association that helped her to find a lawyer, and after a long process, Lila was able to live in her own apartment. These accounts illustrate various ways of resisting the anti-trans refugee conditions.

It appears that being separated from their collective resistance networks pushes the participants to either collaborate with them via social media or to find individual solutions and create new paths for solidarity and resistance in exile. For example, Arat explains that in several situations, acting in solidarity with other cis and trans women and trans refugees through her personal activist resources was her way of resisting 'anti-gender' politics. **These forms of resistance have had both effects and counter-effects.** Arat's aforementioned action resulted in her being able to live in the family section of the camp and not with cis men. Similarly, the email campaign by EXIFG4.6 and Agit sped up their asylum process, allowing them to obtain residence permits. However, while waiting for their paperwork to be processed, they were sent to a more conservative canton in Switzerland where there was no trans healthcare, held at a deportation centre mostly populated by cis men, where they had serious fears for their safety; this felt like punishment for resisting or speaking out.

The limits of resistance and solidarity are often determined by the legal difficulties of being a refugee, such as travel restrictions due to lack of residence permits or passports, or the inability to access existing networks, which will be described in more detail in the next section. EXIF3.4 explained that her fears have changed in exile because of her refugee status. Wanting to avoid confrontation with the state leads her to refrain from activism. Overall, although participants in exile are confronted with various obstacles to resisting 'anti-gender', most participants find and create ways to resist, maintaining their political agency. On the other hand, **some participants, exhausted by the realities of the migration process, participate in less activism than before.**

8. Activism against 'anti-gender' in Europe is perceived as being dominated by cis, white, middle-class, gay and lesbian perspectives

The participants experience major difficulties finding their way into activism against 'anti-gender' politics and discourses in Europe. Participants shared experiences of racism, classism, anti-trans and anti-migrant sentiments.

Resistance to 'anti-gender' is made more difficult because of intersecting marginalisation. As a trans woman, a refugee and a woman of colour, trans activist EXIFG3.4 explained how upon arrival in Switzerland she wanted to participate in the organisation of the local Pride March. She was the only trans woman in the organisation team and they told her that she had to pay 250 francs to participate, although she is a refugee without funds. She explained that it was a cis- and white-dominated space, which led her to avoid participation in LGBTQIA+ activism in Switzerland. EXIFG3.4 said:

There was no trans visibility, the big [big city in Switzerland] Pride and so I was the only trans person. Then it came to the voting stage of some decisions. They told me that I could not

participate [...] I said, "I'm a refugee, I'm staying in a camp. I can't pay this" [...] it felt very wrong to me to pay 250 francs and have a say. There, I was faced with the whiteness of Europe [...] that dominant gay activism was something we criticised in Istanbul as well.

Queer activist Bawer shared his experiences of first contact with local Spanish-Catalan LGBTQIA+ activist groups. He expressed his frustration of being confronted with what he describes as very white and cis-centric views. Content with legal same-sex marriage and adoption rights, Bawer criticised the lack of solidarity with LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees. This in turn led Bawer to search for activist spaces created by queer migrants and refugees:

How is it that there are so many immigrants, but there is so much cis gay and lesbian-centred and white European-centred thinking [...] I said, "I can't do anything with them". Then I found migrant LGBTQIA+ people, you know, not specific organisations but groups, for example, I stopped going to the mainstream Pride march. I go to the march organised by migrants, the places where I socialise are usually migrant, LGBTQIA+ rights, where they go, there is an LGBTQIA+ refugee organisation there.

Working in an NGO project in Germany that aims to increase the visibility of LGBTQIA+ people with personal or family migration experience, activist EXIINT05 shares his impression that white gay and lesbian activists in Germany do not consider a queer migrant and refugee perspective as, according to him, they reproduce a narrative that there is no queerphobia and misogyny in Germany, especially when compared to the Global South:

Even queer activism in Germany, you can hear that there is actually not much queerphobia in Germany, that it is not institutional, especially among white, gay and organised people [...] Homophobia is interpreted [...] with a very binary view.

EXIINT05 explained how he feels like there is no support for him and no safety in white queer feminist anarchist spaces. He sees queer migrants confronted with deep-rooted white supremacist behaviour:

I lost my white German friends that I had gained here one by one [...] many times when I criticised the place where I lived because of the problems I was experiencing, they said that I did not deserve Germany, and this was usually the people I thought I would take refuge with [...] The criticisms I have made since I came to Germany, when I criticised what I saw and experienced, I was told that I had no right to do this as an immigrant, by white mainstream and immigrant-friendly people.

Our participants experience activist spaces as white, middle-class, gay and lesbian spaces, where they have major difficulties advocating for themselves. This in turn, can be interpreted as a dynamic that weakens activism against 'anti-gender' in Europe, and **seriously affects the health and agency of our participants.**

9. Solidarity networks are being built around similar intersecting experiences

Seeking community and solidarity in exile, academic, intellectual and activist networks are being built around similar intersecting experiences.

In response to the ways participants identified their spaces as lacking intersectional perspectives and being dominated by cis-white gay and lesbian, middle-class viewpoints, **there is a growing movement to create networks that amplify intersectional 'anti-gender' experiences and resistances.** One striking project is the transnational platform that queer journalist and activist Bawer created in 2020, specifically focusing on

LGBTQIA+ people in and from Turkey/North Kurdistan, to highlight different experiences that arise from immigration, as well as having a **transnational network** where people can connect over and write about queer, intersectional issues that are important to them. It has an English and Turkish website, and a space dedicated to queer literature; it publishes podcasts and Instagram Lives; and has contributions from Turkey, Germany, the US, and Spain. Bawer emphasised the need to create a supportive network that amplifies their voices and fosters understanding:

When we think about Turkey's migration in the last ten years, I mean, when we think about the stream of people that have left Turkey, the website has turned into a place where LGBTQIA+ and other migrants who have left Turkey can also find something for themselves [...] To amplify the voice of the people there, to amplify the voice of the people who migrated here [to Europe]. Because the immigration experience is a difficult experience for everyone, especially for LGBTQIA+ persons [...] We are trying to focus a little bit on these [...] On the one hand, there is a disconnect in Turkey. The people there do not know the lives of the people who have migrated, of asylum seekers. And they say that everyone who has left Turkey lives a very comfortable, wonderful life [...] So, there is such a tension, and on the other hand, right-wings are on the rise, all these discussions and camps are terrible experiences, especially for trans and non-binary refugees and asylum seekers [...] We are trying to figure out how we can voice these things, how we can amplify these experiences [...] Think of it like a spider web. To build a network. I think about how people can communicate with each other from a place that understands each other's issues, rather than through anger or resentment.

The majority of participants explained that they are active in or have sought out Kurdish-Turkish left-wing and/or queer immigrant and refugee spaces and associations, which can provide the sense of belonging that participants strive for. This becomes highly relevant to the question of an egalitarian solidarity practice. Activist EXIINT05 works in an NGO project in Germany that aims to increase the visibility of LGBTQIA+ people with personal or family experience of migration. He explained his experience of working with queer and trans refugees and migrants from Turkey, practising solidarity and power sharing in the form of sharing his—financial and social—resources and networks, which he has acquired through his work in the NGO project. He sees this as very important for actually being in solidarity in spaces where people have different privileges. Despite the changed and more difficult conditions caused by life in exile, **participants find transnational networks that make it possible to navigate the queer immigrant and refugee experience**. Intersectional approaches to activist networks become essential and the participants themselves use their lived experiences, knowledge and own networks to **establish long term solidarity networks on equal footing and across borders**.

10. Participants centre and create queer discourses rather than reacting to 'anti-gender' discourses

Instead of responding defensively to 'anti-gender' narratives, our participants emphasised that focusing on building and amplifying queer discourses provides a more empowering and forward-looking strategy for resistance.

Queer activist and journalist Bawer shared a specific resistance strategy that focuses on 'anti-gender' discourses online. He used the term 'anti-gender' to explain how it is harmful to LGBTQIA+ movements to only react to 'anti-gender' discourses. He used the concept of 'anti-gender' to explain that there is a difference between 'anti-gender' discourse online, specifically TERF discourses, and how it actually shows up as protest on the streets, and that we should not always react to 'anti-gender' discourse, but rather centre and create our own discourses.

Bawer is trying to centre queer discourses and perspectives with the transnational queer platform he has created. He emphasised that **coping with 'anti-gender' discourses also means to understand how they work, how they are funded and who is behind it:**

I think this is also the way to look at the anti-gender issue. I mean, it is necessary to understand the conditions that feed this. It is necessary to understand who makes money from this. It is necessary to understand what kind of a political economy revolves around it. I mean, these churches, these right-wing groups, anti-immigrant groups, I mean [...] they came together with a very clear plan. Therefore, we should reject their attempts to limit the discussion to their positions. [...] I say, we should not play by their rules [...] Rather, we need to draw them away from their areas and produce our own discourse. Otherwise, we will lose a lot of time and effort.

Bawer specified this resistance strategy to 'anti-gender' actions by emphasising that **taking 'anti-gender' contributors seriously would mean playing by their rules:**

We also try not to give too much attention to this online aggression. For example, they threatened me in Turkey, they sent mails to the institutions that give money to our website saying "you are giving money to this misogynistic woman-hater" and so on. Because I said trans women are women, that's it. After that, I said, "do whatever you want". I lived in Turkey as a Kurdish gay man for 30 years. I wasn't afraid of anything, am I really going to be afraid of you? Do whatever you want. But what the hell. So many things about my private life were put out there. It's outrageous. I don't think this is a political debate or a debate about demands. This is a bunch of racist, transphobic, LGBTQIA+-phobic right-wing extremists, I'm not going to take them seriously, let them say what they want. I have better things to do than sit and respond to them every day.

This powerful statement illustrates how Bawer, despite facing online harassment and the spread of misinformation about him, is **strategically preserving his energy**. While his platform seeks to create a sense of community and solidarity in exile around similar intersecting experiences, it becomes clear that he is trying to go a step further with this strategy against 'anti-gender' discourses. It is an **additional strategy of resistance** alongside the strategies described above, such as community outreach, creating visibility for experiences of violence, and the filing of formal complaints by the other participants in this transnational case study.

Conclusion

This case study focuses on the daily life experiences of exiles from Turkey and Northern Kurdistan, displaced by 'anti-gender' politics and now living in Europe. Participants in the study, who are also part of the leftist, pro-Kurdish movement for peace and democracy in Turkey, face multi-layered repression in Europe as well as in Turkey. **These intersecting oppressions highlight that freedom for LGBTQIA+ people is intertwined with their status as racialised people and refugees. Exile, intended as a refuge from 'anti-gender' violence, often extends these experiences through difficult migration routes and bureaucratic hurdles.**

During the AKP government's tenure in Turkey, rising 'anti-gender' and anti-feminist politics and discourses have significantly increased the pressure on LGBTQIA+ individuals. As the participants of this case study explained, **these pressures are perpetuated by the media, religious institutions, and families, leading to daily harassment, psychological and physical abuse, and even death threats.** The result is a **severe impact on the daily lives of queer people**, making it challenging to live openly and safely.

Our case study reveals that these oppressive politics intersect with broader resistances against authoritarian state policies, compelling queer human rights activists, feminist politicians, public intellectuals, and academics to seek refuge in various European countries. **This migration is seen as a way to escape the hostile environment in Turkey, but the journey and life in exile present their own challenges. 'Anti-gender' experiences continue through complicated migration processes, illegal pushbacks, and adverse conditions in refugee camps, along with everyday and structural racism in host countries.**

Despite these challenges, participants employ various strategies to resist 'anti-gender' oppression, such as community outreach, creating online visibility, and filing formal complaints. They adapt their methods to the transnational space, maintaining their political agency even in exile. Nevertheless, the activist venues in Europe that are dominated by cisgender, white, middle-class, gay, and lesbian viewpoints present extra obstacles, which diminish the efficacy of their advocacy efforts and have a negative influence on their well-being and agency.

Transnational networks offer crucial support, enabling participants to navigate the queer immigrant and refugee experience. **These networks, built on lived experiences and solidarity, are essential for sustaining activism and creating long-term support across borders.** To build on these findings, future studies could further explore how transnational solidarity networks can be strengthened to better support queer refugees and exiles. There is also more work to be done to amplify voices and experiences not covered by this case study, ensuring that those who should be part of these conversations are included in future research. Additionally, examining how host country LGBTQIA+ movements can become more inclusive of the experiences and needs of racialised and displaced queer communities remains a critical area for further investigation, both within the RESIST project and beyond. We extend our deepest thanks to the participants for sharing their stories, insights, and resilience, without which this work would not have been possible.

Respondent Profiles

This case study of people living in exile in Europe consists of four focus group interviews with a total of 20 participants, each with four to six participants. Additional in-depth interviews were conducted with eight of the focus group participants. Four more participants were recruited for in-depth interviews only. This transnational case study centres people from Turkey or North Kurdistan living in Exile across Europe. The following information about the participants in this case study is taken from demographic forms for 21 participants and, in 3 cases, from the interviews themselves.

Table 3: Respondent profiles Exile

Profile	No. of Respondents	Sample outline
Age groups	24	Most of our participants (13) are between 35 and 49 years old, followed by eight participants between 25 and 34 years old. Two participants were between 50 and 64 years old and one participant was between 18 and 24 years old.
Gender	24	The participants have different gender identities. 13 participants identified as women (five transgender women, nine cisgender women), eight participants as men (one transgender man, seven cisgender men) and three participants as genderqueer (two non-binary participants and 1 agender participant).
Sexual orientation / identity	7	Six participants identified as gay and/or queer, one participant as queer, 17 participants did not explicitly specify their sexual identity.
Country of residence	24	Most of the participants (17 out of 24) are living in big German cities, since a significant number of feminist and/or queer activists, academics and public intellectuals' migratory movements of the last one to two decades and their activist networks are located in Germany. In addition, four participants live in the French or German speaking cantons of Switzerland, one participant lives in Catalonia, Spain, one participant lives in the French countryside and one participant lives in a small town in the Netherlands.
Racial / ethnic identity	21	The majority of participants (14) are Kurdish and/or Alevi, one participant is Yezidi-Armenian and Kurdish, one participant is Laz and five participants are Turkish. Within our sample, it became clear that people who have experienced 'anti-gender' politics and discourses in Turkey/North Kurdistan and are now living in exile in Europe are predominantly marginalised ethnic minorities in Turkey who are also involved in left-wing pro-Kurdish movements.

Education Level	24	Almost all participants have a university degree, a significant number of them are the first in their family to have a high school and/or university degree. Only two out of 24 participants have only a high school diploma. This shows that we have a gap in our sample regarding people without higher education. However, to be able to go into exile in the first place requires contextual socio-economic privilege, which we suspect plays a role in our sampling.
Religion	18	Six participants identify as Muslim, nine as atheist or no beliefs and one as deist, the remaining eight participants do not specify their religious beliefs.
Social Class	10	All participants were irritated by the question about social class, often commenting that they no longer knew what to say about their social class due to their migration experience. 14 Participants did not specify their social class. Four participants identified as middle class, two as lower middle class, two as working class, one as upper middle class and one participant has indicated refugee as a social class.
Dis/ability	24	None of the participants have physical disabilities.
Settlement Type	24	Most participants (21 out of 24) said they live in a big town, the remaining three participants said they live in a small town.

Chapter 4: France

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Executive Summary

This case study report investigates the pervasive forms of attacks faced by feminist and LGBTIQ+ people in France, illustrating a continuum of violence that ranges from verbal and physical abuse to the fear and apprehension of potential attacks.

The French context is shaped by a historical legacy of Catholicism, colonialism, conservatism, and secularism, which permeates and informs the discourses and actions of 'anti-gender' movements. This report provides an analysis of the effects of, and resistance to, anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ movements, discourses, and politics in France.

Participants frequently reported insults, threats, and even physical assaults, both in public spaces and on social media, as a result of their feminist or LGBTIQ+ positions. These attacks are carried out by individuals or organised groups. While property damage was less commonly cited, cases of vandalism and threatening messages directed at offices or premises were mentioned. These movements appear to be complex, intricately woven into everyday discourse.

The role of media and political narratives was seen as normalising and, in some cases, encouraging stigmatisation and marginalisation, deeply affecting the daily lives of those targeted. Media and political rhetoric often sensationalises gender-related issues, further polarising public debate. Legal recourse appears limited, with challenges such as underreporting and lenient legal outcomes making it difficult for victims to seek adequate protection. As a result, many individuals adopt self-defence strategies or alter their behaviours to reduce exposure to risks.

One of the most significant impacts of these attacks is the persistent fear and anxiety felt by feminist and LGBTIQ+ people. An intersectional approach reveals how racism and sexism compound stigmatisation and isolation, even within these communities. The psychological effects are profound, often resulting in isolation, depression, and, in some cases, suicide. There are also professional consequences, as the lack of institutional support exacerbates these challenges. In educational settings, the impact is particularly noticeable, with efforts to address gender issues facing resistance. For instance, groups have formed to advocate for greater awareness of gender diversity in schools, but such initiatives face significant obstacles.

Despite these challenges, resistance remains a crucial force, with knowledge production identified as a key tool for countering prejudice and oppression. The report highlights the struggles faced by initiatives aimed at integrating comprehensive gender education. Efforts to disseminate knowledge and create safer spaces are essential in fostering inclusive environments. The concept of safer spaces is emphasised as fundamental to ensuring that individuals can thrive, free from both physical and political violence.

Finally, collective action and solidarity within these communities emerged as vital strategies for building resilience and advocating for rights. Participants stressed the importance of collective mobilisation and the establishment of robust support networks, both online and offline, as essential to resisting systemic discrimination and violence. Participants discussed various factors influencing their engagement and disengagement, particularly in relation to exhaustion. Their perspectives highlighted a continuum between

individual attacks and broader systemic, intersectional violence and oppression.

Keywords: Anti-feminist; anti-LGBTIQ+; France; systemic violence; queer-feminist resistance

Introduction

This case study explores the lived experiences of encountering 'anti-gender' discourses, mobilisations, and politics, and analyses their effects and everyday resistances in France. Notably, the term 'anti-gender' was not used by participants, nor did it resonate with how they narrate and conceptualise their experiences. Instead, participants framed their struggles within the language of 'anti-feminist' and 'anti-LGBTIQ+' discourses and politics. To remain faithful to their rhetoric and better reflect the specific forms these discourses take in the French context, we have adopted the terms 'anti-feminist' and 'anti-LGBTIQ+' discourses and politics in this study.

This report outlines how 30 feminist academics, activists, journalists, public intellectuals, and members of civil society experience, negotiate, and resist attacks related to their identities, lives, politics, and work in the fields of sexualities and gender. For further details, see [Table 4: Respondent profiles France](#).

The findings are based on data from four focus groups—with 15 participants, ranging from 3 to 4 per group—and 15 face-to-face interviews conducted with people from different regions of France. Participants responded to invitations to join focus groups or interviews because they had experienced various forms of 'anti-gender' hostility in their lives. Recruitment was done through targeted emails sent to people, communities, and groups likely to have been affected.

Following an overview of the French context, this report will present the key findings, bringing together the main themes that emerged from both the focus groups and interviews.

Context

'Conservatism' is an enduring feature of French society even though France has changed in relation to genders and sexualities since the seventies.

To understand what kind of experiences are faced by people and collectives targeted by anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses, movements and policies in France, it is essential to consider that a combination of historical and cultural contexts, political landscapes, social dynamics, international influence and recent debates shape these phenomena in France.

A history shaped by Catholicism, colonialism and secularism

France has a strong tradition of secularism, which is enshrined in the French constitution and is a fundamental aspect of French identity. This principle, known as *laïcité*, separates religion from the state and aims to ensure religious neutrality in public spaces⁵². This has sometimes led to tensions with religious communities, particularly around issues of gender and sexuality⁵³. Despite the secular state, Catholicism has historically played a significant role in French society and continues to influence conservative discourses, mobilisations and values, particularly regarding family structures, gender roles, and sexuality⁵⁴.

In addition, the historical legacy of French colonialism, past and present, in so-called overseas territories has also shaped contemporary social and cultural dynamics in France. These legacies contribute to ongoing debates and challenges concerning racism and discriminations, migration patterns, multiculturalism and

⁵² Rémond, R. (1981) *Religion et société en Europe: La sécularisation aux XIXe et XXe siècles*. Paris: Le Seuil.

⁵³ Scott, J. W. (2007) *The Politics of the Veil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁵⁴ Kselman, T. (2013) *Conscience and Conversion: Religious Liberty in Post-Revolutionary France*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

citizenship in contemporary French society⁵⁵. For example, France regularly debates the removal of the word 'race' from article 1 of its Constitution.⁵⁶ The word appeared in the government reshuffling of 1946, just after the end of the Second World War, with the aim of reaffirming the rejection of racism. In 2018, the National Assembly removed the terms 'race' and 'sex distinction' from the Constitution text.

The geopolitical context in the Middle East and the attacks in Paris in 2015 and Nice in 2016 have incited a firestorm that has been brewing for a long time, with a growing rejection and stigmatisation of Islam in France, fuelled by far-right movements⁵⁷. This trend has existed since the 1990s, exemplified by hijab/niqab bans, echoing the colonial 'unveiling' policies in Algeria⁵⁸.

The rise beyond far-right and the reconfiguration of conservative movements

Since 2002, there has been a notable increase in electoral support for far-right parties in France. One of the most well-known is the *Rassemblement National* (RN) which had 8 deputies in 2017, 89 in 2022 and 139 in 2024. It defends a conservative, security-oriented policy, particularly targeting immigration. In a country with an ageing population, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic and economic insecurity, such as inflation, fears and resistance to social changes can be exacerbated within the population⁵⁹. These voters, often from lower middle-class backgrounds, express fears of social downgrading and competition for access to public services. This insecurity reinforces their attachment to conservative policies aimed at protecting the existing social order. The racist dimension remains deeply ingrained and even foundational among these voters, as demonstrated by Félicien Faury's work (2024), which shows that concerns about immigration and security are often framed through racialised representations and a sense of cultural threat.

The conservatism of RN voters is partly driven by a desire to preserve a perceived social norm under threat. This norm includes traditional values and a certain social order, which voters feel is under pressure from both the top (economic elites) and the bottom (ethnic and immigrant minorities). Political parties like *Reconquête*, the *Rassemblement National* and *Les Républicains* have gained traction due to factors such as dissatisfaction with traditional parties, concerns over immigration and security⁶⁰, but also by promoting traditional family values and opposing what they call "gender ideology".

⁵⁵ Stora, B. (2009) *La gangrène et l'oubli : La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie*. Paris: La Découverte. See also Blanchard, P., Bancel, N., & Lemaire, S. (Eds.). (2011) *La fracture coloniale : La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial*. Paris: La Découverte.

⁵⁶ See LaBreck, A. (2021) Color-Blind: Examining France's Approach to Race Policy. Harvard International Review. Available at: <https://hir.harvard.edu/color-blind-frances-approach-to-race/>

⁵⁷ Mayer, N., Michelat, G., Tiberj, V., & Vitale, T. (2020) *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie. Année 2019*. Paris: La documentation française.

On the multi-scalar dimension of islamophobia, see also: Najib, K., & Teeple Hopkins, C. (2020) Geographies of islamophobia. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 21(4), 449-457.

⁵⁸ Sabrina Ahmed Ali, « Du corps politique au corps colonisé : chronique d'une domination orchestrée », *Aleph* [En ligne], 7 (4) | 2020. Available at: <https://aleph.edinum.org/2754>

⁵⁹ To Yuma Ando, Nonna Mayer, Vincent Tiberj, Tommaso Vitale, French political researchers, "conversely, the more [the person] feels a deterioration in their personal economic situation, the more likely they are to become intolerant and scapegoat minorities. This variable has gained increased importance in recent years, within the context of economic insecurity generated by the pandemic and, since the war in Ukraine, by the energy crisis and rising inflation" (Ando, Y., Mayer, N., Tiberj, V. and Vitale, T. (2023). Mesurer les préjugés racistes. Le regard des chercheurs. In: La documentation française, *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie*. Rapport pour la Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme (CNCDH), 171.)

See also Faury, F. (2024) *Des électeurs ordinaires: Enquête sur la normalisation de l'extrême droite*. Paris : Au Seuil.

⁶⁰ Faury, F. (2024) *Des électeurs ordinaires: Enquête sur la normalisation de l'extrême droite*. Paris : Au Seuil.

Movements such as *La Manif Pour Tous*, which emerged in opposition to same-sex marriage laws in 2013⁶¹, and *Le Printemps Républicain* a political movement founded in 2016 to promote secularism, rally against what they perceive as threats to the traditional family structure, often targeting trans* rights and gender equality initiatives particularly in the area of education⁶².

Educational reforms, debates and controversies

Efforts to introduce gender education into curricula have sparked significant resistance and debate. Media representation and public discourse around gender issues are highly polarised. Some media outlets and public figures promote 'anti-gender' rhetoric, framing the so-called '*théorie du genre*' (gender theory) as an external, often Anglo-American, influence that threatens French identity and social cohesion. For instance, recent debates over '*la théorie du genre*' have sparked widespread misinformation and fear-mongering, such as false claims that sexuality education, including masturbation, would be taught in nursery schools, influencing public opinion and policy⁶³.

There has been pushback against gender studies and related fields within French academia, particularly in the context of accusations like '*islamo-gauchisme*'⁶⁴ (Islamism), which accuses left-wing academics and researchers in social science of being associated with the values of political Islam, and the 'anti-woke' campaigns led by Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer in 2020 who argued that this is an 'ideology' that is "wreaking havoc"⁶⁵. This opposition reflects broader concerns about the influence of critical and intersectional theories in French institutions⁶⁶.

Challenges facing gender and LGBTIQ+ rights

France has made significant strides in gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights, including the law on parity between women and men in politics (January 2017); the inclusion of the right to have an abortion enshrined in the Constitution (March 2024); and the legalisation of same-sex marriage and adoption rights for lesbian and gay parents (May 2013). However, these advances have been met with resistance from conservative groups⁶⁷. French feminism has a complex relationship with 'anti-gender' discourses: while mainstream feminism often supports gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights, there are internal debates and divisions, particularly around issues like hijab bans, trans* issues, sex work and surrogacy⁶⁸. In this report, we use the term 'queer-feminist', to express the idea that feminism is against essentialism.

⁶¹ Perreau, B. (2020). *Queer Theory: The French Response*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

⁶² Paternotte, D. (2018). Unpacking oppositional success: The French laboratory. In *Varieties of opposition to gender equality in Europe*, pp. 154-171. London: Routledge.

⁶³ Kuhar, R., & Paternotte, D. (2017) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*. Rowman & Littlefield.

⁶⁴ Radio France. (2021) 'Ce que veut dire le terme "islamo-gauchisme" pour ceux qui l'emploient et pour ceux qu'il vise', *France Inter*, 18 février. Available at: <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/ce-que-veut-dire-le-terme-islamo-gauchisme-pour-ceux-qui-l-emploient-et-pour-ceux-qu-il-vise-1211090> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁶⁵ This was said during an interview on the radio station Europe 1, a trace of which can be found here: Durand, M. (2020, 22 octobre) "*Ce qu'on appelle l'islamo-gauchisme fait des ravages*", *dénonce Jean-Michel Blanquer*. Europe 1. <https://www.europe1.fr/politique/ce-quon-appelle-lislamo-gauchisme-fait-des-ravages-denonce-jean-michel-blanquer-4000366>

⁶⁶ Rabier, C. (2022) 'Savant-es et politiques contre l'«islamo-gauchisme»(2). *Le fantôme de Raymond Aron*, *Mouvements*, 112(4), pp. 36-47.

⁶⁷ Paternotte, D. and Kuhar, R. (2018) 'Disentangling and Locating the "*Global Right*": *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*', *Politics and Governance*, 6(3), pp. 6-19.

⁶⁸ Lépinard, É. & Mazouz, S. (2021) *Pour l'intersectionnalité*. Paris: Anamosa.

People advocating for gender and LGBTIQ+ rights face significant challenges. Reports indicate a rise of violence, highlighting the increasing hostility faced by the LGBTIQ+ community⁶⁹. Quantitative data reveals that in 2023, there were 4,560 reported incidents of anti-LGBTIQ+ attacks in France, a 13% increase from the previous year⁷⁰.

International influences: global 'anti-gender' movements and European Union dynamics

France is not isolated from global 'anti-gender' movements. Transnational networks and organisations, often with religious or conservative affiliations, influence and support local movements in France. These networks spread 'anti-gender' rhetoric and strategies across borders, reinforcing local opposition to gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights⁷¹. As a member of the European Union, France engages with broader European debates on gender and LGBTIQ+ issues. EU policies promoting gender equality and anti-discrimination sometimes clash with national conservative movements, adding another layer of complexity to the French context. This context helps explain the hostility to gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights, as well as the strategies and rhetoric employed by 'anti-gender' and anti-LGBTIQ+ movements.

Findings

1. Attacks against women and LGBTIQ+ people are pervasive

The research suggests that women and LGBTIQ+ people face a broad spectrum of attacks, ranging from verbal abuse to legislative measures aimed at restricting their rights. The repertoire of violence reported by participants is notably wide and appears to be perpetrated by both isolated individuals and coordinated groups.

These assaults seem to form part of **a continuum of violence** that includes attacks on both property and people, which under French law are classified as infractions, offences, or crimes. Participants often reported experiences of verbal harassment and physical violence, contributing to ongoing feelings of fear and anxiety.

More than two-thirds of participants (22/30) recounted having been verbally abused or insulted by politicians, far-right activists, or opponents at protests, in public spaces, or on social networks, due to their feminist or LGBTIQ+ commitments, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Half of the participants mentioned having received public threats, either on social media or at their homes, with threats to their physical integrity, sometimes extending to death threats. Five participants recalled receiving anonymous phone calls or letters at home, with one such letter including a miniature coffin. **Women in the study indicated that they were frequently targeted for their appearance and were threatened with rape.** Additionally, five participants had faced false accusations or public defamation, with serious charges such as complicity in terrorism.

Sylvie, one participant, reflected on the level of hate she encountered on social media, noting, "And I don't understand why there aren't moderating machines. When there are slutty words, bitchy words". This statement underscores **the extent of online abuse and targeting reported by participants.**

⁶⁹ SOS Homophobie. (2023) Annual Report on Homophobia in France. Available at: <https://www.sos-homophobie.org/rapport-annuel>

⁷⁰ See data of the Ministry of the Interior: <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/actualites/communiqués-de-presse/bilan-annuel-des-infractions-anti-lgbt-enregistreés-en-2023> (Accessed: 20 June 2024).

⁷¹ Forest, M., & Lombardo, E. (2012) *The Europeanization of gender equality policies: A discursive-sociological approach*. Palgrave Macmillan.

In addition to attacks on individuals, **damage to property was also a recurring theme**. Six participants reported vandalism targeting their associations, workplaces, or office premises. The most common forms of damage involved insulting or threatening graffiti on façades or the throwing of excrement at doors during the night. While destruction or intrusion into homes or premises seemed to be less common, such incidents, including some involving participants or their relatives, were still reported.

Physical attacks against individuals were also highlighted, with one in five participants recounting that they had been physically assaulted at least once. Enza, for example, shared: "I went through a fortnight of hell, threatened with death, whatever. And well, it went very far. And then it degenerated afterwards." Jake, a trans* man, also recounted:

I've been physically attacked in the street once or twice, two or three times even. Not beaten up, but hit with "dirty faggot", just the person passing in the streets. It was just a gratuitous physical assault, "you dirty faggot". It's pretty brutal when you're not expecting it.

Attacks on local associations by far-right groups are another concern, particularly in several large and medium-sized towns. Guy, a participant, testified: "We (Center LGBT+) were vandalised last year", while Annie C. noted: "So every time there's a political breakthrough on these issues, they're there on our doorstep, tagging, pasting, staging situations to alert public opinion." **These actions contribute to a climate of intimidation, fear, and permanent insecurity.**

Participants reported a **cumulative effect of these experiences, some of which have persisted over time and become part of daily life**. This situation is perceived as being exacerbated by media and political discourses that are seen to perpetuate or even legitimise such practices. Examples cited include accusations of '*Islamo-Gauchisme*' directed at academics or the framing of intellectuals as responsible for Islamic attacks. Additionally, participants pointed to the violent debates and political stances in the National Assembly on equality legislation as contributing to a broader context of systemic 'anti-gender' attacks.

2. On an intersectional ground, attacks converge, and so do collective struggles

French participants belonging to multiple marginalised groups reported facing specific challenges where different forms of discrimination and oppression interweave and mutually reinforce one another. This sheds light on the particular difficulties encountered by those with intersecting identities, illustrating how their multiple affiliations are negotiated and experienced within overlapping structures of social domination.

LGBTIQ+ people frequently encounter intersecting forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, and homophobia. FRAINT12 explores the intersections between racism and homophobia, indicating that **the effects of racism seem particularly profound and detrimental in his daily life**. He also pointed to the complexities of negotiating one's identity in environments where multiple forms of oppression intersect.

That's where the question of intersectionality comes in, if you come back to it, there's something [...] If we really think of an intersection, an entanglement of social relations of domination, that's precisely the problem. There isn't a me who is the racialised me and a me who is the queer me. Even if socially there is something organised like that, as if there were a unity between these two forces, or these two subjects within the subject, I don't know what. If I try to bring all that together, there are things that I experience specifically as a racialised, queer person. And not things I experience as a queer, things I experience as a racialised person. Because otherwise, there's a sort of cleavage and fragmentation. I think that's what's a bit crazy.

This testimony underscores the complexity of living with intersecting identities, despite societal pressures to separate them. Participants noted that oppressions are often interconnected and must be understood as such.

Additionally, some participants highlighted misunderstandings within feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities, which they found particularly painful. Oumaima, for instance, described how their immigrant background and participation in queer feminist circles in Paris made integration into these communities more challenging:

And here in France, there's actually, I think it's this thing, given that there's Islamophobia, given that there's a lot of racism and all that, it's a bit this thing of saying, in fact, you can't point the finger at these people, of being homophobic or of being this and that and that. I come from a Muslim background, but I'm not a practising or believing Muslim. But [...] I'm still perceived as a Muslim. And as a result, I think that poses a problem too. [...] And so in this "saying" thing, I think it's very complicated to deal with queerness and being racialised in the French context.

This participant described how the intersection of anti-feminist and anti-queer discourses contributes to feelings of exclusion, particularly when they are perceived as having to choose between being Muslim or queer. **She never feels in a sustainable position.** She expressed that Islamophobia is so prevalent that it seems impossible to be recognised as both. This reflects broader tensions between the racist elements of anti-feminist and anti-queer rhetoric.

Experiences of systemic discrimination, such as racism or antisemitism, were frequently recounted by participants, particularly those who are part of migrant LGBTIQ+ communities. This intersectionality leads them to reflect on various minority positions, whether they are directly affected or acting as allies. Moreover, **Islamophobia, antisemitism and xenophobia were often linked to other forms of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination and queerphobia.** As Rokhaya explained

This year with the abaya, I think there was a lot of that, wanting to go after young girls, considering that their dress was too long. So we've seen this in schools, with head teachers explaining to young women that they had to take off their tunics because they didn't conform. I think this has freed up the possibility for men in particular to tell women, or at least teenage girls, how they should dress. In a post #MeToo era, this is quite worrying. Because, on the one hand, we're told that it's important for women to be able to control their own bodies, but on the other hand, for some women, it's not up to them to define the conditions of their presence in the public space.

Therefore, it seems that rights are not for every woman.

Online harassment, too, reflects intersecting forms of discrimination, including racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Enza shared a particularly poignant example:

Where I was attacked, it was with insults. Islamophobic, obviously, with montages, well, an Islamic Barbie in place of a pubis, very sexist stuff, very Islamophobic stuff, anti-Semitic stuff. But I come from a Jewish communist background and I never in my life thought I'd be accused of all that.

Participants described the feeling that society consistently denies their existence. Familial rejection,

often linked to homophobia and transphobia, was a significant theme in their narratives, with many describing the profound psychological impacts of these experiences. As CC noted, this extends beyond verbal or physical attacks, affecting daily life in pervasive ways and contributing to feelings of displacement. These oppressive environments also seem to impact professional opportunities, as participants discussed challenges in the workplace.

Moreover, **anti-trans* policies were described as a significant source of stress and emotional difficulty for trans* participants.** FRAINT01 emphasised how the appointment of transphobic figures to government positions exacerbates these challenges, making advocacy more difficult: if you erase the concept, you erase the people. Supporting people who face these daily risks, including the threat of death, echoes the 'non-existence' of gender in far-right discourse.

The constant dehumanisation and denial of trans* existence was described as pervasive and diachronic, especially for trans* and racialised people. Yet, this dehumanisation appears to be a core element in the experiences of all those targeted by 'anti-gender' movements and rhetoric.

3. Significance of collective mobilisations

The importance of collective action appears evident in the context of grassroots movements and community solidarity, which are often viewed by participants as crucial in combating 'anti-gender' rhetoric and policies. Such collective efforts are perceived as essential in challenging systemic and intersectional oppression, while also advocating for more inclusive rights.

Solidarity and support from within the community appear to play a vital role in counteracting negative experiences. Leila, for instance, noted that "the positive backlash comes faster and faster because it's easier and easier to see that I'm being attacked, and people respond. So sometimes the wave of support outweighs the wave of hate." This suggests that **timely and visible support can help mitigate the effects of hostility.** When a community quickly rallies in defence of an individual, it not only counters the immediate negativity but also reinforces a sense of belonging and protection. Such rapid responses may be crucial for maintaining mental health, as Leila indicated.

Veronica also highlighted **the unifying potential of collective action,** stating: "Yes, that's why I think there's a link in oppression. Despite all the differences, there is this link. After all, I think the link that touches me the most is the link of working together."

This insight seems to reflect the shared experiences of oppression that transcend individual differences. In her words, this collective struggle appears to not only focus on resisting oppression, but also on **forging strong, empathetic connections among community members. Participants highlighted the importance of knowing that they are not alone in their experiences.**

In the context of **sex work,** Wanda, herself a sex worker, shared:

[...] we're a community of colleagues. We support each other. That's my way of protecting ourselves. It's about showing that there are a lot of us, that we're together and that, in fact, I'm not here on my own.

Her statement points to **the significant role that community solidarity plays in providing both emotional and practical support within marginalised groups.** In France, a mutual aid platform for sex workers has been developed to report inappropriate behaviour from clients, such as issues related to negotiation, violence, and humiliation. Through this platform, sex workers can communicate with each other

to share information about clients they have reported, ask about the outcomes, and make more informed decisions. As Wanda explained, “I used to jasmine them, on the Jasmine platform, which is a platform for mutual help and all that, where you can report customers.” This account highlights the collective strength and unity of sex workers, suggesting **that solidarity offers not only protection but also empowers individuals by reinforcing the idea that they are not alone in their experiences and struggles.**

This underscores the necessity of forming alternative communities where individuals can find peers who understand and share their experiences. Oumaima mentioned navigating the intricate web of loyalties between various stigmatised communities in France, particularly concerning Islamophobia, racism, and homophobia. They highlighted the complexities faced by individuals like themselves, who straddle multiple marginalised identities, **emphasising the need to find solidarity among similarly marginalised groups.** They said “And so, to stay in this thing of, well, in fact, you have to find people who are in the middle of things. So, look for racialised queer people, religious queer people.”

One strategy identified by participants involves sticking messages in public spaces. However, these feminist messages are frequently removed or covered up, as Michèle observed:

We stuck them up recently for our feminist actions, they came and pasted them back on. It's hellish, these are signs that are supposed to be for public speaking, and in fact they're just commercials.

The overlay on the message seems to indicate that feminist visibility is not always appreciated, particularly as this participant was prosecuted in her local context.

Finally, participants highlighted the strategic importance of collective visibility. They suggested that by demonstrating supportive bonds within their communities, they may be able to deter aggression and foster a more supportive environment.

4. You said justice? Ways of building protection are various, from legal recourse to self-defence

Participants reported concerns about inadequate protective legislation, limited institutional and financial support, and a poor legal culture, which, according to them, restrict their ability to access justice.

During discussions on combating discrimination, participants highlighted various legal measures and actions aimed at addressing legal obstacles and challenges. They underscored **the importance of actively engaging in the defence of equality and justice, even in the face of numerous barriers such as limited institutional support, financial constraints, and a lack of robust legal frameworks.** Additionally, they pointed to **the significant underutilisation of the legal remedies available.**

Rokhaya, for instance, shared her experiences regarding the inadequacy of protective legislation when attending public events. Despite receiving death threats and experiencing assaults, she noted that she has never been placed under protection. In one case, after filing a complaint and providing the name of her assailant, she explained that the individual was neither arrested nor questioned by the police. This situation, she suggested, illustrates a broader pattern of disregard for her safety as a Black woman and public figure.

Enza recounted her experience of public defamation and the institutional barriers she encountered when attempting to lodge a complaint. She noted: “You have to pay a deposit for that. And the university told me it would do it. They didn't.” **This lack of financial and institutional support hinders access to justice for many victims.** Similarly, Annie shared her ordeal of having her personal data exposed and receiving

threatening messages on her phone, with no follow-up from the justice system.

It appears that participants **adapt their behaviour** to protect themselves. Faced with inadequate legal support, **individuals have found alternative ways to protect themselves**. Many participants mentioned that they hide their identities or modify their behaviours in public to avoid offences and violence. Stéphane explained: "After that, we have protection and avoidance strategies. There are attitudes that we don't have. In fact, you don't kiss or hold hands with a homosexual couple anywhere. We're careful." **These self-imposed restrictions highlight the daily precautions taken to minimise risks and maintain personal safety in the absence of sufficient legal protections.**

In response to physical threats, some participants indicated that they have adapted their behaviour, with a few turning to **self-defence as a means of protection**. One participant, for example, took up combat sports to feel more prepared in case of an attack. She began with boxing and later progressed to MMA, seeking to ensure she could defend herself even in situations where she might be assaulted. Others mentioned relying on their networks and allies for support. FRAINT01, who is involved in the anti-fascist movement, spoke of **finding reassurance and protection through collective vigilance**. The association he is part of has implemented concrete protective measures, such as receiving information from anti-fascist activists about potential threats, such as being listed as targets, demonstrations, or planned actions, and ensuring that some members are ready to mobilise if he is attacked at work. This network, with its tactical and strategic knowledge of far-right modes of action, provides a vital layer of security.

5. Media and social media support a specific fiction

Media seems to play a dual role in shaping LGBTIQ+ and gender issues; the existence of targeted lists on social media has been reported by participants, affecting them in various negative ways.

Media plays a dual role in this context. On one hand, Eric suggested that **blacklisting marginalised voices reduces their visibility and influence**, effectively limiting their ability to disseminate their message. On the other hand, **media exposure can sometimes lead to defamation and sensationalism**. Enza, for instance, described how media coverage created a buzz that distorted public perceptions of gender issues. Gaspar noted that "on trans* issues, things have exploded," which he found "pleasant" in some respects, but he also expressed concern, stating, "I'm afraid of the reaction." This highlights the specific dilemma surrounding media visibility, where participants experience both satisfaction with increased visibility and fear of the potential conservative attack in reaction.

Participants expressed concern about how **the media shapes public opinion and contributes to prejudices, impacting their daily lives**. Alejandra pointed to the prevalence of hate speech in mass media, using BFM TV as an example. Furthermore, nine participants raised concerns about Cnews, a private media outlet with strong ties to the far-right, noting its significant influence on public debate, particularly regarding these issues.

Guy mentioned that many people, regardless of their political alignment, seem to be increasingly turning away from mainstream media, instead sourcing their information from social media, with all its accompanying excesses (the proliferation of misinformation, sensationalism, echo chambers, algorithm-driven polarisation, superficiality of content, and lack of verification). This shift raises concerns for him regarding LGBTIQ+ rights. Despite this, Aude observed what she referred to as a 'paradox' in media access: while media can sometimes appear both closed and open, there has also been a noticeable increase in access to platforms that were previously less accessible. She pointed to her appearance on *France 3* as an example of this expanding access, reflecting a change in media dynamics over the past decade. She expressed pride and satisfaction at having had the opportunity to convey her message about LGBTIQ+

exiles through this medium.

Michèle, meanwhile, expressed her deep outrage, recalling how she was "scandalised when [she] heard on the radio that CNews had counted abortions among murders [...] CNews, a television channel watched by many people [...]" This example underscores how media statements like these can have a significant emotional impact, particularly on feminists, as they can be distressing to hear. FRAFG4.2 also noted:

There are organised groups or there are speeches in the media [...] And that's something, it's a bit like playing chess. We might as well see it take root in individual consciousnesses in such a way that the men I know put things in place in their concrete, individual relationships, manage to politicise it and so on.

This quote highlights the participants' concerns about how public perceptions might be shaped by media narratives, and the fear that these narratives could influence others in ways that might negatively impact them.

Several participants mentioned the **existence of targeted lists on social media** created by 'anti-gender' collectives, which appear **designed to intimidate and silence** intellectuals, journalists, feminists, and LGBTIQ+ activists. **Some participants reported either being on these lists or fearing the possibility of being added to them.** Leïla described how these lists often include personal details, such as home addresses, phone numbers, and even information about partners or children's schools. Rokhaya mentioned being listed by far-right identitarian groups. The **practice of blacklisting** was perceived by participants as an attempt to silence them, both by limiting their access to platforms such as television and by exposing them to potential harm. Eric discussed the broader impact of this "blacklist logic", noting its detrimental effects on the visibility and influence of marginalised voices. FRAINT01 further referred to a list of trans* individuals published in the press, emphasising the ongoing threat posed by these targeted lists.

To ensure personal safety and mental health, many participants reported adopting **various online strategies, such as using pseudonyms or limiting their engagement on social media.** Some chose to disengage from social networks entirely to avoid harassment, while others actively block hateful comments. As Maëlle noted, "I don't want to manage social networks because I don't want to expose myself to that." Similarly, Leïla shared, "I'm doing it now, I'm blocking all the way. In other words, it's over now. You talk down to me, you're blocked."

This **proactive approach to managing online interactions** reflects a strategic effort to create a safer digital space. By setting firm boundaries, individuals can protect their mental health and reduce exposure to harmful content. Additionally, Nathalie employs strategies like **using pseudonyms** and limiting her participation in online debates to protect herself from personal attacks and negative emotions. This approach highlights **the need for self-protection in online spaces.** The use of pseudonyms can prevent doxing and other forms of targeted harassment, while **limiting engagement in contentious discussions** can help individuals avoid unnecessary stress and conflict.

6. Invisible and visible tensions coming from intersectional positions

Several participants noted the internal tensions within the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movement, particularly on issues such as the use of inclusive language and writing conventions, trans inclusion, and addressing racism.*

Understanding the internal dynamics of feminist and LGBTIQ+ social movements appears crucial to comprehending the effects of anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ movements, as these movements are often marked by internal tensions. Nathalie recounts her personal experiences of criticism and disagreement

within her former union, illustrating the complexity of relationships between fellow activists. Her experiences suggest **the internal tensions that exist within her feminist position**. These tensions point to the broader challenge of maintaining coherence in a movement that encompasses a wide range of perspectives and priorities, with **deep disagreements and generational and political divides**.

Regarding a self-defined 'feminist' journal, which has targeted their collective, Maëlle said:

they are part of a feminism which is extremely problematic and I realise it more and more. And in fact, just this choice of intersectional turn, as if, in fact, we were going off the rails of conventional feminism. Whereas intersectionality is feminism, in fact. So, already, there is a bad reading of what feminism is in general [...] This is a really big, big universalist rhetoric that is used to counter our work and delegitimise our work.

This quotation highlights the fact that this could be a 'good' and a 'bad' reading of 'being a feminist'. She goes further and highlights the fact that these tensions are also strategically maintained:

It's truly the trick of divide and conquer. This is exactly what is happening. And for now, that worries me a little because it's difficult to find areas that bring us together. And as a result, we feel that for once, they have gained ground. These anti-gender movements or these far-right movements or whatever their emanation, their manifestation and their ideological positioning [...].

This suggests not only the presence of conflict, but also **the strategic dimensions of these tensions within the feminist movement**. Participants pointed to the challenges of solidarity and the risks posed by external forces that seem to exploit internal divisions.

The French post-colonial context; "what is happening in Palestine", FRAFG3.1; and in particular the "Israeli-Palestinian context" (Maëlle), were mentioned several times in both the interviews and the focus groups as issues perceived as divisive, used by the media and politicians in order **to place intersectional feminist collectives and racialised people at odds with allegations of separatism, anti-republican behaviour, anti-semitism, or complacency with political Islam**.

Alejandra noticed:

I think that Islamophobia in France is mainly directed at women. I feel targeted by this anti-Arab rhetoric [...] My collar is slightly up, covering my face a bit. And then some old people come up to me and say that if we're in the land of freedom, I have nothing to be ashamed of covering my face. I say, "But it's cold out. I don't cover my face for religious reasons".

Then she adds:

And then **I feel concerned. Very concerned, yes, as a migrant**. We see immigration laws supported by hate speech about migrants. I think this affects [...] very intimate aspects of everyday life, the encounters we have, the things people say in everyday life.

Oumaima discussed the complexity of navigating loyalties within various stigmatised communities in France, particularly in relation to Islamophobia, racism, and homophobia. They pointed to the challenges encountered by people who, like them, inhabit multiple marginalised identities. This complexity was further elaborated when they said:

My homosexuality doesn't necessarily appear much in France, and it's not expressed much in

France because there's this fear of being symbolised and used by feminists or homosexual people who might be racist. I always say to myself that I'm also afraid of being the symbolic Arab, afraid of being used for that, and afraid of expressing myself.

These reflections underscore the discomfort and the fear of being exploited by people seeking to include the so-called 'symbolic Arab,' with participants expressing caution towards this kind of tokenism. At the same time, they report a feeling of estrangement and fear of expressing themselves.

Tensions have also been noted when well-known groups take a public stance. Following the denunciation of crimes of genocide in Gaza, several intersectional feminist associations were reportedly threatened with the withdrawal of their public subsidies. A participant mentioned that the #NousToutes collective, which receives no public funding, had been threatened by the Minister for Gender Equality with the potential withdrawal of financial support. This situation appears to reflect **the political and financial challenges faced by feminist organisations in sustaining their activities and defending stigmatised communities.**

7. Barriers to Gender Education

This case study illustrates the difficulties faced by initiatives aimed at integrating ambitious and comprehensive gender education.

Some associations appear to face significant obstacles in implementing prevention work in schools, according to a participant. One participant highlighted that Family Planning, a very active association offering training about sexist and sexual violence, gender discrimination, and sexual health, is reportedly facing **financial challenges**, exacerbated by the withdrawal of certain organisations. She also observed that the structuring of the 'anti-gender' movement relies on its growing financial resources and powerful relays. She added: "We can see that they are making progress, that they are structuring themselves, that they are financed, that they have resources."

Beyond the financial threat, there have been reports of attacks against Family Planning's efforts to provide prevention and sexual education activities, leading to bans and even death threats, according to Annie. She described how Vigilant Parents—a conservative and 'anti-gender' collective—**infiltrate parents' representatives' elections and actively lobby at the departmental level to disrupt gender education.** This opposition is said to range from attempting to ban classes to threatening teachers.

Challenges in understanding and accepting non-binary and transgender identities seem to persist. Stéphane, a professor, shared an observation on the atmosphere in his high school: a "left-wing", "very open" colleague spoke to him about what Stéphane characterised as Eric Zemmour's rhetoric on LGBTIQ+ issues. Stéphane also mentioned that his colleagues, working in what he perceived as a school with "aware" people, expressed concern that "they're bugging us" about trans* and non-binary people. Even in places where inclusion might be expected, there are issues around respecting trans* identities. This contributes to the creation of hostile atmospheres, and raises questions about trans*/non-binary inclusion in this high school.

In the specific context of medical education, Marie, a doctor, reported encountering 'anti-gender' discourse during her studies and expressed feelings of isolation because gender violence was not denounced. Working in the hospital was described as being in an environment where women were denigrated, and the prevailing models appeared to be those of the male and white doctor. This seems to reflect **the pervasive impact of sexist prejudice in higher education.**

Participants indicated that in the health field, the adherence to certain policies by professionals can lead to 'anti-gender' practices. FRAINT01 highlighted the use of pathologisation, which requires trans* people to meet doctors and psychiatrists in order to begin their transition process. For him, “this is an anti-gender policy”, the overall aim appearing to be to prevent trans* people from exercising self-determination, gaining access to rights, care, and social spaces. Resistance in this context included the production of recommendations for good medical practice and the development of training courses for healthcare workers to improve their awareness of trans*-identity issues. Challenges in understanding and welcoming non-binary and trans* identities persist, revealing underlying systemic issues in education and healthcare.

8. The impact of 'anti-gender' movements leads to personal and professional repercussions

Participants reported experiencing profound personal and professional repercussions, including mental strain, depression, job loss, and professional discrimination, along with challenges in personal relationships and societal rejection. 'Anti-gender' attacks contribute to long-term psychological distress and have significant implications for individuals' well-being, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life.

Many participants (70%) reported **experiencing feelings of isolation and rejection in response to attacks.** For example, Lucie shared her experience, stating, “I felt quite alone, because nobody defended me. I didn't have that thing on the networks of having accomplices or allies or people defending me. I felt very alone”. This sense of isolation seems to reflect the psychological impact of lacking a supportive community. Without allies or a network, individuals may feel abandoned and vulnerable, which can heighten the emotional toll of being targeted by 'anti-gender' rhetoric.

Oumaima reflected on the isolation resulting from her intersectional positionality and the attendant impact on her mental health, particularly depression. She said:

[...] it's also anti-gender, but in a way that [...] And I think that one of the arguments is also the argument that gender is a European issue and that it's not part of our culture, it's not part of our traditions, it's not us. My mother keeps telling me that I've been westernised. I've been living in France for ten years too [...] And as a result, I think that these experiences [...] lead to a kind of isolation from a social group to which I belong.

She clarifies how her immigrant background and membership in queer feminist circles in Paris further compound her sense of isolation, hindering her integration into these communities and exacerbating her mental health struggles. **People with multiple identities or who face conflicts of loyalty between the several communities to which they belong often encounter heightened isolation.**

The personal and professional repercussions of 'anti-gender' discourses, movements, and politics are profound, affecting participants both psychologically and materially. Participants described the **mental overload** and emotional strain resulting from harassment, particularly after their names were published in far-right media outlets. In this context, Oumaima reflected on the intersectional isolation she experiences, which contributes to depression and a sense of **psychological censorship.** Participants mentioned that these attacks not only reopen past traumas but also create new ones, perpetuating long-term psychological distress. Pinar shared her own experiences of repression, including unjust imprisonment, torture, and the ongoing threats and harassment she faces as a result of her activism, saying, “What doesn't kill me, hurts me,” highlighting that **hostility or attacks are never without affective effects.**

Professionally, the consequences for some participants can be drastic. Several participants reported

losing their jobs due to discrimination against their sexual orientation, while others mentioned facing unfair treatment and significant professional costs for expressing their gender and political beliefs openly. Jean-Loup recalled being fired simply for being seen leaving a gay club, while Rokhaya pointed out the material repercussions of speaking out against 'anti-gender' media and politics, which can lead to fewer job opportunities.

Beyond the professional realm, **the impact was described as extending to personal relationships and societal acceptance.** The pressure to conform to heteronormative standards was said to put a strain on personal relationships, while societal rejection and harassment were described as creating additional burdens. Threats received due to public speaking not only affect the individual but also cause concern for their families and loved ones, highlighting the broader societal implications of 'anti-gender' attacks.

Insecurity seems to permeate various aspects of life, as evidenced by Wanda's description of the emotional toll interactions with clients take on her as a sex worker. This continuum of stigma appears to create a feeling of insecurity that extends beyond the individual, affecting various marginalised identities, including LGBTIQ+ individuals, sex workers, female journalists, and left-wing intellectuals. Ultimately, **these attacks, and the atmosphere they generate, have profound repercussions on individuals' well-being, relationships, and way of life by leading to feelings of insecurity.**

In contexts such as sex work, the body is portrayed as playing a multifaceted role, embodying both vulnerability and the pride that comes from mastery and assertion. **The body can appear to be a place of vulnerability, susceptible to physical threats and attacks on appearance, as Wanda testifies, which exacerbates underlying complexities.** Respect for boundaries emerges as paramount, as Wanda explains, insisting on negotiating limits around monetary transactions and comments about her body. Conversely, respecting established limits appears to foster a sense of reconciliation with the body in sex work.

However, exhaustion, weariness, and discouragement were recurrently mentioned in the interviews. For example, most participants (80%) shared feelings of frustration at constantly having to educate others about subjects or issues they had known about for a long time. **The feeling of having to start from scratch, reiterate the obvious, and deal with the same ignorant or fallacious arguments was often seen as contributing significantly to a sense of powerlessness and exhaustion.**

9. Living in safer spaces to combat hostile environments to minorities

The notion of safer spaces appears to be fundamental for participants, in fostering environments where people can flourish without threat, violence or prejudice. Furthermore, the discourse on mobility and relocation is particularly relevant to participants living in hostile environments, reflecting the demand for sanctuary in a context of escalating hostility and violence.

Faced with a persistent fear of physical harm, several participants (6) reported **considering seeking asylum or migrating abroad** with their family members if the political climate deteriorates further; relying on their international network, their experience of working abroad, or even the fact that they already have a bank account abroad as a result of occasional professional activities. This reflection underscores the seriousness of the situation and suggests **the profound impact of 'anti-gender' rhetoric and policies on people's daily lives. It also indicates how the material and symbolic resources available can support this solution, as all the participants considering this option are from the upper class.**

FRAINT01 mentioned considering moving to Canada, despite his lack of familiarity with the country, which he perceived as potentially more protective due to the presence of colleagues there. Jokingly, he even referred to 'the planet Mars' as a potential refuge in response to the increase in threats. In the short term,

on a local level, he is seriously considering leaving his current region, citing increased exposure to the media and a desire to avoid emotional tensions, while aspiring to a less violent environment.

Seven participants reported using protective strategies such as regularly changing their itinerary, always remaining vigilant in public spaces, or declining any appointments or invitations. For example, CC described using peripheral vision to detect potential threats following a public attack. Additionally, Etienne's decision to hire a bodyguard during a trip abroad, following the recent attack on a colleague, illustrates the increased vigilance in response to perceived risks.

For Loa, a trans* woman, public spaces such as **the street and metro are experienced as hostile**. She said:

For me, it's actually the part of the population that refuses this emancipation of multiple gender expressions, particularly in the public space, because the discourse is "do what you want in your own home".

This leads the participants to different strategies. Sometimes, even in her **interactions with her partner's family**, FRAFG3.1 has had to deal with remarks that don't make her feel safe. She observed that "racism is actually very commonplace," especially in the social circles of a partner: "you wish you didn't have to carry it. But sometimes it's not the person directly, it's their family, their circle of friends."

In contrast to the desire to move, participants made **efforts to create safer spaces at the local level**. For example, Stéphane focused on schools, Alejandra on activist spaces, or Marie in health facilities catering to minority populations. These initiatives aim to **create environments sensitive to past trauma, in order to avoid the perpetuation of violence**. Marie, a doctor, highlights the role of mutual exchange in creating these spaces, stressing the need to challenge existing practices and promote inclusion.

10. Factors of Engagement and Disengagement

Several participants mentioned the importance of being active in the 'fight' as a response to the mental burden they face, as well as the factors that contribute to disengagement from the 'struggle'.

Participants expressed that they feel they have a place in the 'fight'. CC said, "What you go through keeps you going because you know that your struggle is just"; Eric echoed this sentiment, stating: "You know who your enemies are, they recognise you, and you know it's legitimate".

Participants shared their concern that the lack of resources significantly hinders the sustainability and impact of feminist and LGBTIQ+ organisations, exacerbating the burden on activists and contributing to their exhaustion. FRAINT01 noted that trans* organisations struggle to secure necessary funding, affecting their sustainability and impact. The challenge of obtaining grants hampers their ability to carry out essential programs and services, creating economic instability that presents a significant barrier to the long-term success of trans* advocacy efforts. FRAINT01 shared a wish:

I'm going to tell you that if there were plenty of money to subsidise what we do, it would clearly be great, really. Money to pay for the work we do, to sustain the activities we currently manage on a shoestring budget, to pay the people who work. At the trans* health space, we have the equivalent of between one and two full-time positions in terms of volunteer work.

Participants noted that financial difficulties hinder the sustainability of trans* organisations and limit their ability to advocate and support their communities. The lack of resources committed to equality and the fight

against discrimination was described as increasing the burden of activist commitments, often leading to exhaustion.

Participants expressed **concerns about personal and family safety, along with physical threats and violence, viewing these as significant factors that can end activist commitment, often resulting in feelings of guilt and withdrawal.** Concern for family safety, exposure, and pressure from loved ones, who may also come under threat, were highlighted as significant factors that can bring an activist's engagement to an end. The systemic erasure of gender⁷² and the subsequent vulnerability of trans* people were seen as highlighting **the deep-rooted challenges and traumatic experiences faced by activists. Physical threats and violence were regarded as decisive factors affecting the sustainability of activist careers.**

There is a broader sense of guilt about surviving when others have not, particularly among those providing care or support to patients or contacts who have committed suicide or been murdered due to transphobic attacks or femicide. FRAINT01 spoke of a desire to withdraw due to fear and the constant risk of death, which they experience daily. **"The reality of death exhausts me," he said, feeling "surrounded by death."** Being confronted with the deaths of trans* people, through murders and suicides, was described as deeply exhausting.

The impact of violence and threats can result in mental overload and disengagement from activism. For example, in the wake of an attack, FRAINT01 has stepped back, responding less to research and interview requests. He chose to remain anonymous when responding to journalists and has reduced his working hours, with plans to leave his position in a few months. He describes a mental overload, referring to it as an "obsession" with the forced visibility imposed on him. He says he became "disengaged" after the simultaneous attacks.

Conclusion

We sincerely want to thank all those who contributed their experiences to support this research.

Resistance and advocacy strategies against 'anti-gender' attacks take the form of navigating intersectional oppressions. Research highlights the various types of attacks targeting women and LGBTIQ+ people and underscores the interconnected nature of these oppressions and their intersectionality. Participants shared with us the impact these attacks have on their lives, particularly the feeling of existing in a hostile world. In response, they create inclusive environments and seek to collectively reflect on the intersectionality of struggles, particularly in the face of racism and violent policies against people in exile. These navigational strategies appear essential for the resistance and empowerment of marginalised groups.

The study highlighted the aggressions faced by women and LGBTIQ+ people, ranging from verbal harassment to legislative actions aimed at restricting their rights. The participants' narratives illustrate a complex network of intersecting oppressions, necessitating a nuanced understanding of how different forms of discrimination intersect and reinforce one another. A thorough discussion within Focus Group 3 revealed that recognising and addressing these intersections enables the development of more effective resistance and advocacy strategies. These collective efforts not only challenge 'anti-gender' rhetoric but also help people confront isolation and harassment.

While legal remedies are crucial, the lack of effective legal support has led people to adopt a combination of

⁷² This systemic erasure occurs through several means, such as the denial of legal recognition of gender identity, exclusion from healthcare services, delegitimising public discourse, lack of explicit legal protections, and restrictive school policies. Each of these mechanisms reinforces the invisibility and vulnerability of trans* people, amplifying the daily risks they face.

behavioural adaptations, self-defence, and community solidarity to protect themselves from discrimination and violence. Moreover, the interaction between media influence and intimidation underscores the urgent need for vigilance and proactive measures to ensure fair and accurate representation of gender issues associated with misogyny, transphobia, racism, and xenophobia. They promote education and solidarity, both at the local level and online. Collectively, these factors illustrate the multidimensional nature of the struggle for rights, their enforcement, and ongoing efforts to overcome complex obstacles. Participants told us that these challenges require a joint effort, which though thought of as not being not easy to implement but is yet desired by the participants, to cultivate environments where people with multiple identities feel valued. In the end, negotiating hostile environments demands of participants a multifaceted approach, encompassing both local initiatives to foster safer spaces and individual strategies for self-protection, as revealed by participants.

There is still much work to be done to further develop these findings and share more stories. This includes areas not covered by this case study and involving voices that ought to be part of these conversations. We hope these voices will contribute to future work within RESIST and beyond. Some areas that could build on this case study on France include significant research on the targeted effects concerning sex workers, people impacted by anti-abortion protests —including those outside clinics, broader 'anti-feminist' actions, and those affected by anti-immigration policies. Urgent research is also needed to explore the intersections of anti-racism, anti-immigration, anti-traveller, and class issues within the context of gendered, sexualised, and queer politics as they continue to evolve across France.

Respondent Profiles

We asked participants to fill out a voluntary demographic form with open text boxes for each variable. In the end, 22 participants submitted their voluntary demographic forms. We completed the information for the remaining 8 participants based on their self-identification during the interview/focus group. The variable 'parental status' was not covered by the voluntary demographic forms and is based on their narratives.

Table 4: Respondent profiles France

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
Age groups	22	The mean of the 22 participants indicating their age is 44. Participants are between 50 and 64 (10/30), 35 and 49 (9/30), 25 and 34 (8/30). Three participants are over 65 years old (3/30). Nobody in the sample fits into the youngest age group (under 25).
Gender	24	Almost half the participants self-identify as women or cis women (13/30). Five participants describe themselves as (cis) men. Four participants describe themselves as trans*, three trans* mens and one trans* woman. Two participants identify as non-binary. Six participants did not respond.
Sexual orientation / identity	27	Participants mostly identify as heterosexual (10/30), lesbian (8/30), and gay (6/30), one as bisexual, one as Pansexual when asked for their sexual identity. Three participants did not respond.
Country of origin	21	Half of the participants describe their country of origin as France (15/30). Other participants indicate Morocco (1/30), Eastern Europe (1/30), Latin America (1/30), Turkey (1/30), Madagascar (1/30), Switzerland (1/30) and nine participants do not answer.
Country of residence	30	Almost all of the participants describe their Country of residence as France (29/30). One is living between two countries.
Racial / ethnic Identity	28	In terms of racial/ethnic identity, most of the participants describe themselves as white (21/30). Other participants identify in terms such as racialised (6/30), Black (1/30). Two participants did not fill out the field.
National Identity	15	Half of the participants describe themselves as French (15/30). Other half did not answer. One said she has two national identities
Educational training	28	28 of the participants declare different universitarian degrees stating Universitarian, Bachelor, high educational level, PhD, Master, higher education, graduate etc. Two participants do not answer.
Religion	11	Most of the participants did not answer (19/30). Four participants described themselves as Muslim, four as Catholic, one as Jew, one

		as Atheist, one as Spirit.
Social class	29	Most participants indicated middle class (27/30). Two participants indicated working class (2/30). One does not answer.
Dis/ability	10	Only one participant declared a disability, without specifying details.
Settlement type	30	Most of the participants live in a big city (19/30) and medium sized city (8/30) and two on the outskirts of a metropolis. One person lives in a rural area.
Parental status	30	We know that 10 participants have children. For three participants we do not know if they have children. The remaining 17 participants, we know, do not have children.

Chapter 5: Germany

Stefanie Boulila (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts)

Executive Summary

Despite Germany's recent strides towards gender and sexual equalities on a legal level, several states have introduced a ban of gender-inclusive language in public institutions, including schools and universities. In the case study interview data, oppositions against the term 'gender' were therefore mainly associated with these so-called 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse, as well as with debates around minority gender identities. By the participants, these contestations were seen as an expression of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility.

With the ascent of the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD), participants identified 'ignorance' and a lack of knowledge not only as a breeding ground for far-right mobilisations but also for institutional erasure and interpersonal micro-aggressions. The participants reported deep concern about the rise of the far-right, the threat of funding being cut, parliamentary inquiries into political and civic education projects and the targeted disruption of feminist and LGBTIQ+ events. As a result of this, participants reported feelings of fear and helplessness.

Participants reported an increasingly hostile visibility of trans people in media debates and an intensification of both physical and online violence against trans people and their allies. Participants associated this shift with the debates around the recently passed Self-Determination Act (SBGG).

Various participants reported targeted attacks, due to their professional activities, activism or voluntary work, such as media controversies or online 'shit storms'. These attacks took place against educators, researchers, and counsellors working on LGBTIQ+ inclusion, anti-feminism, and abortion. Participants reported that they often felt alone in dealing with the effects of being targeted, even when attacks occurred as part of their employment. Various interviewees reported that they had to mobilise private resources to mitigate the attacks.

As a result, many participants reported retreating from the public sphere, including social media and publications, due to experienced attacks or the threat of them. Facilitating a democratic discourse that is safe for minorities to engage in was identified as an important and sustainable means of making mainstream society more resilient against far-right mobilisations. The participants also demonstrated an investment in political and civic education as an important means of combating discrimination and reaching mainstream society.

Media controversies were seen as a central arena where anti-trans hostility is fueled. Some trans participants reported that they also engage in public activities to create positive visibility in order to counter the negative images portrayed in media debates. Many participants also demonstrated an investment in coalition politics and a politics of solidarity, including the sharing of resources to combat anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility.

Multiple marginalisations, erasure, internal political divisions and an increasingly hostile tone were identified as threats to feminist and LGBTIQ+ community cohesion. The majority of interviewees were active community members and identified their communities as vital to mitigating both a hostile political climate

and experiences of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. Being in spaces where experiences and identities were validated rather than challenged was deemed important to the respondents.

Keywords: Germany; LGBTQ+; antifeminism; democracy; feminism

Introduction

This case study report presents the experiences of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility as well as resistances against these phenomena in Germany. It illustrates how 24 research participants encounter anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility in their every-day lives, what effect they have on their wellbeing, their work and their communities and what individual and collective strategies of mitigation and resistance they engage in. The report is written based on qualitative interview data from five focus groups and 13 individual interviews with activists, community leaders, academics, professionals working in health care, education, and equality and diversity, as well as members of the general public. They were recruited from across the country and responded to the call for participation because they have experienced organised forms of so-called 'anti-gender' politics, anti-feminism or anti-queer hostility. The sample was recruited through targeted emails to civil society organisations, feminist and LGBTIQ+ groups and individuals with a platform. Following an introduction to the national context, this report will outline the key findings that crossed the focus groups and individual interviews.

Context

In post-unification Germany, gender and sexual equalities are increasingly claimed as pillars of national identity. While this can be situated within broader liberalisations witnessed across Western Europe, there are distinct historical and social processes that are worth mentioning. Firstly, the unification of Germany challenged the traditional gender roles prevalent in West Germany⁷³. West Germany was dominated by the less egalitarian sole breadwinner model, while it was more normalised for mothers in East Germany to be employed. Secondly, the increasing articulation of gender equality and lesbian and gay rights as 'German values' in post-unification Germany has also been attributed to specific forms of racism that have, since the 1990s, framed migrants from Muslim countries and ethnic minorities that practise Islam as illiberal, patriarchal and homophobic⁷⁴, leading to the idea of German culture as egalitarian, liberal and progressive in the area of gender and sexuality (ibid.)

However, feminist and LGBTIQ+ gains have been hard-fought for by civil society in post-unification Germany. Germany has a longstanding tradition of feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements. The 2010s witnessed an increasing mobilisation around everyday sexism online (#Aufschrei), sexual harassment (#metoo) and intersectionality (#ausnahmslos). However, the regulation of abortion in the penal code (§ 218) remains a central concern for the feminist movement in Germany. Abortions can be sought within the first 12 weeks under the condition of seeking 'pregnancy conflict counselling'. This one-time counselling session is usually compulsory for those seeking an abortion regardless of whether the person has already taken a decision⁷⁵. Moreover, doctors were banned from 'advertising' abortions, which also included providing information on

⁷³ Böttcher, S. (2020) *Nachholende Modernisierung im Westen: Der Wandel der Geschlechterrolle und des Familienbildes*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung BPB, 15 October. Available at <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/316321/nachholende-modernisierung-i-m-westen-der-wandel-der-geschlechterrolle-und-des-familienbildes/> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁷⁴ Dietze, G., Brunner, C. and Wenzel, E. (2009) *Kritik des Okzidentalismus: Transdisziplinäre Beiträge zu (Neo-)Orientalismus und Geschlecht*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

⁷⁵ Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2024) *Schwangerschaftsabbruch nach § 218 Strafgesetzbuch*. Available at <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/familie/schwangerschaft-und-kinderwunsch/schwangerschaftsabbruch/schwangerschaftsabbruch-nach-218-straftgesetzbuch-81020#:~:text=Straflos%20bleibt%20der%20Schwangerschaftsabbruch%20auch,k%C3%B6rperlichen%20oder%20seelischen%20Gesundheitszustandes%20besteht> (Accessed: 1 July 2024)

their website⁷⁶, until 2022. In 2024, an expert commission, deployed by the Government, advised the decriminalisation of abortions with reference to constitutional and international law⁷⁷.

LGBTIQ+ movements have continuously pushed for recognition and access to rights. In 2024, during data collection for this report, the government passed the Self-Determination Act (SBGG), a law that makes it easier for trans, intersex, and non-binary people to change their legal name and gender by making a declaration to the registry office. In 2018, the civil status law was amended to include a legal third gender, the so-called third option: 'diverse'. In 2017, marriage was opened to same-sex couples, although the law of descent was not amended so that same-sex married couples still have to adopt their partner's biological child. In 2017, Germany included hostility against gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people in the terms of reference of their already existing national action plan against racism, aimed at the protection of minorities from discrimination⁷⁸. Important tools of implementation are civic and political education initiatives. Since 2022, the government has also been drafting a national LGBTIQ+ action plan together with civil society organisations that will be presented to parliament in late 2024⁷⁹. Most German states already have action plans against LGBTIQ+ hostility⁸⁰.

However, since the mid-2010s Germany has witnessed an increasing public support for the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD). The party has been identified as being supportive of anti-democratic positions and ethnic nationalism⁸¹. The growing success of the party has been attributed to its ability to mobilise middle-class voters of traditionally centre-left to centre-right parties.⁸² The AfD has repeatedly campaigned against LGBTIQ+ rights⁸³ while also mobilising the discourse of migrant homophobia. LGBTIQ+ organisations have been warning against what they identify as an increase in anti-queer hostility in public discourse as well as an increase in hate crimes across Germany⁸⁴. In the context of the recent debate

⁷⁶ Schulze A. (2022) *Aufhebung des §219a*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung BPB, 28 July. Available at: <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/511299/aufhebung-des-ss219a/> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁷⁷ Deutschlandfunk (2024) *Paragraf 218 StGB - Kommission empfiehlt, Abtreibungen zu entkriminalisieren*. Available at: <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/abtreibung-schwangerschaftsabbruch-paragraph-218-100.html#:~:text=Paragraf%20218%20StGB.Fr%C3%BChphase%20der%20Schwangerschaft%20zu%20legalisieren> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁷⁸ Zech, T. (2021) *Gegen das Gift*, deutschland.de, 23 November. Available at: <https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/leben/initiativen-gegen-rassismus-in-deutschland> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁷⁹ Regenbogenportal.de (2023) *Gemeinsam für ein queerfreundliches Deutschland: Aktionsplan „Queer leben“*, 2 August. Available at: [https://www.regenbogenportal.de/aktuelles/uebersicht/details/gemeinsam-fuer-ein-queerfreundliches-deutschland-aktionsplan-queer-leben#:~:text=Am%2018..Menschen%20\(LSBTIO*\)%20weiter%20voranzubringen](https://www.regenbogenportal.de/aktuelles/uebersicht/details/gemeinsam-fuer-ein-queerfreundliches-deutschland-aktionsplan-queer-leben#:~:text=Am%2018..Menschen%20(LSBTIO*)%20weiter%20voranzubringen) (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁸⁰ Lesben- und Schwulenverband LSVD (n.d.) *Welche Bundesländer haben Aktionspläne gegen LSBTIO*-Feindlichkeit?* Available at: <https://www.lsvd.de/de/ct/424-Welche-Bundeslaender-haben-Aktionsplaene-gegen-LSBTIO-Feindlichkeit> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁸¹ Pfahl-Traugher, A. (2019) *Rechtsextremismus in Deutschland: Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme*, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-24276-3>.

⁸² Pickel, S. (2019) *Die Wahl der AfD. Frustration, Deprivation, Angst oder Wertekonflikt?* In Korte, K.-R. & Schoofs, J. (eds.) *Die Bundestagswahl 2017: Analysen der Wahl-, Parteien-, Kommunikations- und Regierungsforschung*. Springer Fachmedien: Wiesbaden, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-25050-8_7, pp. 145–175.

⁸³ Lesben- und Schwulenverband LSVD (n.d.) *Die Homophobie der AfD - eine unberechenbare Alternative*. Available at: <https://www.lsvd.de/de/ct/426-Die-Homophobie-der-AfD-eine-unberechenbare-Alternative> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁸⁴ Bundesverband Trans* (2023) *IDAHOBITA: Langsamer Fortschritt angesichts zunehmender Gewalt und Anfeindung*, 16 May. Available at: <https://www.bundesverband-trans.de/idahobita-langsamer-fortschritt/> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

regarding the Self-Determination Act (SBGG), trans people have become particularly visible in hostile debates that not only stem from the far-right but also from some feminists⁸⁵.

In addition to these concerns, two states under conservative leadership have recently passed so-called 'gender bans' which prohibit the use of gender-inclusive language in public institutions including schools and universities. These governments have explicitly banned the use of symbols such as the asterisk or underscore, which are increasingly used in gender neutral language. This comes at a time when public institutions have increasingly been using typographic solutions, especially the asterisk to mark inclusive language.

Findings

1. Opposition to the term 'gender' is seen as an expression of structural inequality

The so-called gender bans in Bavaria and Hesse were seen as proof that anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility persist in Germany.

Bavaria and Hesse have banned the use of gender-inclusive language in public institutions, including in schools and at universities. Participants understood these politics against the term 'gender' and its conceptual implications not only as symbolic politics and struggles about meaning but also as a denial of trans identities. In particular, they saw opposition to the term 'gender' in German as an expression and site of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. The interviewees framed anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility as structural phenomena, meaning that they are present at both societal and state level. Organised targeting and attacks and erasure in public debates as well as public institutions were framed as expressions of these structural inequalities.

Politically organised attempts to 'undo' certain equalities, such as the 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse as well as threats and physical attacks towards individuals and organisations were named as an expression of structural anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. Examples of these politically organised attacks included not only creating media controversies and online 'shit storms' but also physical protests and targeted actions against organisations, such as protests in front of organisations that provide the state mandated 'pregnancy conflict counselling', and parliamentary inquiries against projects that provide civic education.

However, when speaking about experiencing anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility in their everyday lives, the interviewees listed **systemic and institutional erasure as central issues**, as the following examples will illustrate. This included, for example, being invisible in public debates, as our participant Stefan stated:

I had my legal gender changed to the third option [...] and that does not get represented in the public sphere. Almost everything or a lot is spoken in binary terms, and that's a bit difficult for me sometimes.

Lesben- und Schwulenverband LSVD (n.d.) *Trans*^{*}: Hype der Gender-Ideologie und Gefahr für Kinder und Jugendliche?* Available at: <https://www.lsvd.de/de/ct/6456-Trans-Hype-der-Gender-Ideologie-und-Gefahr-fuer-Kinder-und-lugendliche> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

⁸⁵ Bundesverband Trans* (2023) *Was sind TERFs? Oder: Warum manche Strömungen des Feminismus nicht für alle Frauen kämpfen.* Available at: https://www.bundesverband-trans.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Broschuere_TERFs_2024_web.pdf (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

Participants also noted the failure of public institutions and health care providers to recognise trans people or people with the legal gender 'diverse', as the following experience of a trans woman, Emili, illustrates:

(M)y health insurance just recently changed my gender entry to female. Not long ago, I received a letter on preventing cervical cancer [...] what about the prevention of testicular cancer or similar? Do I get a letter about that? I don't think so, because now I'm registered as female, like, some bodies are just not intended in our healthcare system and that shows on many different levels [...].

Moreover, the participants emphasised that they also **experience anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility through everyday microaggressions**. These were framed as interpersonal situations in which certain political ideas are reproduced, such as oppositions against the term gender, gender-inclusive language, pronouns, identities, or the idea that equality has gone too far. One participant (GERINT07) who curates a FLINTA space—German acronym for women, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans and agender people—commented on how her work is constantly ridiculed by cis men, and how hearing the same comments over and over again is tiring to her. She sees most of the men making comments presenting them as jokes, and although she does not read them as hostile attacks, they are annoying to her as they ridicule women's and gender minorities' experiences of everyday discrimination.

Across the case study, the data illustrates that besides the well-documented politically organised expressions of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility, participants in this sample also experience erasure linked to their identities. These material experiences result in them having to fight for recognition, often with public institutions. In addition, they experience interpersonal situations in which political discourses and oppositions against the term 'gender' are used to intentionally misrecognise or ridicule their identities and needs.

2. 'Ignorance' is seen as a catalyst for anti-feminist and anti-queer politics and hostilities

Participants see a difference between hostilities around anti-feminism and anti-queer politics, and what they frame as 'ignorance' and a lack of knowledge amongst the general population.

Participants identified ignorance, lack of knowledge, and the absence of sensibility amongst mainstream society as a breeding ground for anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ mobilisations. **Participants noted that they witness people repeating sensationalist media narratives uncritically**. For example Patricia and Sandra, who run a self-help organisation for trans people and their families, have observed how family members sometimes reproduce problematic narratives that they have picked up in the media, such as trans children are just imitating their friends, or the idea of trans identities as an infectious disease amongst youth. They feel a lot of people lack the knowledge to critically assess what they pick up, deeming education about trans issues very important, whilst also noting that there are very prominent ideologically motivated anti-trans activists in the media who are highly educated, such as psychologists and lawyers. They believe that those lacking the relevant knowledge can easily be baited when confronted with anti-trans activists who claim a medical or legal expertise.

Participants noted that the legal advances of recent years combined with **the increasing visibility of feminism and LGBTIQ+ issues might have led mainstream society to feel out of touch** with what could be perceived as a 'fast pace', fuelling the idea of equalities going too far. Rena, a diversity professional at a university, describes the following contradiction she witnesses in her role:

[O]n the one hand there is a strong awareness, which we also see among our students, that they just acknowledge with self-evidence that there are more than two genders and that they

can name them and that they think differently about sexism, which creates a sort of pressure, somehow, like: “we have already come a long way” and so on. And on the other hand, there seems to be a feeling of some people that they can no longer keep up with that or that it has gone too far and is over the top.

Participants felt that **the general public is more susceptible to far-right and conservative mobilisations** when they lack knowledge regarding queer issues and are unable to critically assess discriminatory ideas in public discourse, for example the ability to recognise opposition to gender-inclusive language and anti-feminist statements as being directed against gender diverse minorities. Pepe: “I have the feeling that many reactions against gender identities and gender diversity are coming from a place of ignorance.”

On the one hand, interviewees identified ignorance as an expression of ‘privilege’, of not having to worry about one’s gender recognition or hostility and violence in everyday life. However, participants also described mainstream society as being confused and unsure about gender and sexual diversity, in the sense that they do not oppose it, but they do not understand it, know how to speak about it and therefore how to behave appropriately towards minorities. They see this insecurity as a gateway towards outright refusal, or fear of using the wrong terms when speaking, for example, about gender diversity. One respondent—who curates a party for women, lesbians, intersex, trans, and agender people—mentioned that the inclusive language that is used in queer-feminist circles that are white-dominated and largely middle class is often not understood by those who do not follow political debates; the informant also connected this to social class and educational background. This lack of assuredness can also lead to a rejection of terms that are associated with queer-feminism, as GERINT07: reflects in the following statement:

[M]y mom told me, [...] that somehow a friend of hers really liked the concept and that she was following us on Instagram but also said to my mom like: “That’s a bit too much FLINTA for me”, and so on. And I was like, “What, what is she talking about”, it’s somehow too much, ranting about political issues, about unimportant details, and I think a lot of people, who have not confronted themselves with it [feminism] and who are not in this bubble, would perceive it that way.

Nevertheless, participants have empathy with mainstream society and feel that work could be done to make inclusive language intelligible to all.

3. LGBTIQ+ minorities fear the rise of the far-right

LGBTIQ+ participants worried about how to prepare for expected increased hostility and a potential rollback of rights linked to the far-right.

Several interviewees expressed concerns about the far-right party AfD, which was characterised as anti-democratic. Participants also felt unsettled by investigative journalists uncovering a secret meeting between members of the AfD, the formerly governing German Democratic Union (CDU) and right-wing extremists. **Worries associated with the looming ascent of the far-right, especially at state and national levels, included the threat of a rollback of rights.** The rise of the far-right is experienced by participants in very contradictory ways. One participant from Bavaria (GERFG3.3) noted that the Bavarian government recently granted funding for queer projects for the first time, while also pursuing an open anti-queer agenda such as stirring up controversies about inclusive language, ultimately moving to ban it. GERFG3.3 said: “There is this glaring ambivalence, the very dangerous simultaneity, the weaponisation of topics.”

Participants named the so-called 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse, implemented under the governing CDU/CSU party leadership, banning the use of gender-inclusive language in public institutions and schools, as evidence of the rise in anti-LGBTIQ+ hostility. Some also noted that these symbolic policies have an effect on them; several participants said that they experienced the Bavarian gender ban as an erasure of them as a person. Multiple participants also noted that they experience that teachers feel increasingly emboldened to voice their stance against gender-inclusive language.

Additionally, **participants said** that there is **an increasing public sentiment that is anti-feminist, anti-trans and increasingly racist**. In certain media outlets, narratives that participants accredit to the far-right are being repeated as 'common-sense'. The trans participants also noted that the recent debate in relation to the Self-Determination Act has created a hostile visibility for trans people, translating further onto social media where they witness increasingly hostile comments. Trans visibility was perceived as something ambivalent by the participants, on the one hand, as a state that is unprecedented, that opens possibilities, and that is a move away from erasure, but at the same time, as a risk that makes trans people 'targets'. Multiply marginalised participants emphasised that they also experience increasing hostility regarding disability inclusion and anti-racism. Participants underlined that the political situation in Germany is causing them to feel helpless and stressed, which for some of them materialises in mental health struggles and sleeplessness. Participants noted that a general feeling of fear has increased in feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Queer emigration was a common community narrative in the data. This narrative showed how distressed gender and sexual minorities are about a potential AfD government. Trans and multiply marginalised participants considered it a possibility that they would need to leave the country. Momo, for example, said: "[T]ogether with my partner I applied for a passport, because we thought that at some point we might need one." Contemplating migration and making preparations was seen as one of the few things that can be done in the current climate. SJB:

It just hurts so much hearing about the passport thing, because I hear it a lot. That people talk more and more about how to liquidate property and their possessions. And I would agree that the strategies right now should not be awaiting, but preparing what is going to happen. That's the activist thing about it I'd say.

A deep concern and fear surrounding the potential electoral successes of the AfD, as well as more hostile policies against LGBTIQ+ minorities, runs through the data. Participants expressed feelings of fear and helplessness, which in some instances resulted in mental health issues.

4. Trans people experience both hostile and positive visibility

Participants reported an increase in both visibility and anti-trans hostility from across the political spectrum, including from institutions who are not 'far-right' or invested in 'anti-trans' mobilisations.

The recent debate surrounding the Self-Determination Act (SBGG) was seen as a catalyst for both positive visibility and for hostility. **Trans visibility was experienced as ambivalent by the participants**. On the one hand, it was characterised as unprecedented and hopeful, but on the other hand, it was associated with fear of being targeted, as GERFG1.2 explained:

So, I do know that fear as well, but I do believe that lots of it is connected to the increasing visibility, which can absolutely have something positive, like it can be hard and frightening to be so visible right now, but there are also a lot of new possibilities that haven't been there before.

Cornelia, a trans activist and a public figure, recounted that she was shot at last year, this in addition to other physical attacks on her home. During her interview she noted that “the violence, especially for visible people, is highly complex and very diverse and very active, the rise of the far-right is definitely notable”.

Other interviewees observed that **anti-trans hostility exists outside of the right-left dichotomy**. The respondents referenced what they called ‘trans-exclusionary feminists’ who were seen as coming from ‘the left’. While some had direct experiences with feminists who mobilise against trans rights and inclusion, others indirectly encountered such arguments through media or referred to local anti-trans feminist and lesbian structures. Patricia, who is trans and runs a self-help organisation, was targeted by trans-exclusionary feminists on a social media platform where she is not active. Screenshots were sent to her by a friend. The attacks were very personalised: she was accused of “selling” “gender affirming surgeries” to children, and was intentionally misgendered throughout. She was particularly concerned and indeed nervous about the level of personalisation of the attack since, as the president of her organisation, her personal details, including her address, can easily be looked up. SJB, a lesbian participant, spoke about hosting a trans-inclusive lesbian event that was disrupted:

In the second year a group of TERFs signed up and intentionally blew up the whole event [...]. They attacked trans and nonbinary people who were attending with scripted actions. They played people off against each other.

Both trans and inter* participants noted that open opposition to their self-determination did not just come from the far-right and anti-trans movements; they have experienced it from institutional actors as well. GERINT12 recounted several instances in which public institutions refused to recognise their legal gender—the third option—for example, when they were refused a graduation certificate with their legal gender. GERINT12, part of a trans/inter/non-binary student group, recounts that the university president actively pushed back against the third option. It was only when they complained to the ministry governing the university that they were issued a correct certificate. GERINT12 has also had similar experiences when they were unemployed and had to engage with the job centre: despite providing evidence of legal gender recognition, job centre personnel repeatedly misgendered them, and called them by the name they had chosen not to use anymore. However, as they were dependent on the goodwill of their job coach, they were too scared to raise a complaint.

Another issue that emerged in relation to media representation was the question of how the trans community should be depicted. This theme also rendered visible some **tension within the heterogeneous trans movement**. Some participants felt that a focus on perspectives deemed ‘too’ critical or activist has the potential to alienate mainstream society and foster ‘polarisation’. They felt that the majority of trans people who seek social assimilation are underrepresented, whilst also recognising that these are the positive role models that mainstream society would relate to more.

5. People who are multiply marginalised are particularly vulnerable to anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility

The effects and fear of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility were particularly pronounced amongst interviewees who were multiply marginalised.

Participants who have been subjected to racism, are disabled or identified as trans, inter* or as lesbian were particularly vulnerable to anti-feminist and anti-queer hostilities. Physical attacks and fear of attacks curtailed the mobility of participants with disabilities. Josephine, for example, who is a disabled trans activist in a rural region, noted that she does not feel safe by herself in public:

I completely avoid public transport; I only drive my car if I need to go anywhere. For public appearances, for example, for meetings [...] I always have an assistant by my side, because without him I wouldn't be able to do it.

Many **participants who face multiple discriminations recounted how they often retreat to safer and smaller communities where they seek support and understanding.** Participants were vocal about racism and anti-trans hostility in various feminist and LGBTIQ+ spaces, noting that raising these issues with individuals in said spaces was difficult as this can result in accusations of divisiveness.

On a political and institutional level, participants noted that conflict regarding gender is not only experienced in the context of the right-left dichotomy, but is also evident in feminist and LGBTIQ+ politics and communities. GERINT01 noted: “[T]his left-right-story doesn't work for many situations anymore.” Participants cited racist stereotypes, especially around Muslims, that are also propagated by feminist and LGBTIQ+ actors and communities. Both institutionally and in LGBTIQ+/feminist community settings, participants noted that it was difficult to raise issues regarding intersectionality. For example, Momo, a diversity professional at a higher education institution, noted that taking into account how multiple discrimination works is sometimes framed as a threat to the achievements of gender equality. They said that there was a belief amongst some gender equality professionals that: “[...] intersectionality destroys everything, that diversity destroys everything [...]”. This experience was echoed by SJB, a lesbian community organiser who has increasingly experienced a rejection of intersectional and trans-inclusive perspectives, such rejection at times taking on very violent and organised forms. She has experienced this in white, cis-lesbian networks, noting that often it materialised around an inter-generational conflict; she felt that young people are rejected with ‘their’ ideas by older lesbian feminists.

Interpersonally, **interviewees facing multiple discrimination stated that they often feel erased by those around them** who are unable or unwilling to comprehend their experiences, as those experiences can complicate dominant narratives within their communities. Racialised participants in particular recounted the avoidance or withdrawal from certain social environments, specifically noting that the intersection of racism and sexism is often not understood, even in feminist and queer spaces. GERINT1.1:

I also went through a phase where I thought, well, I can't be in touch with any white Germans, because they don't understand these things, they don't understand the burden and they can't understand my life situation.

In addition to this feeling of not being seen, they recounted experiences of **microaggressions within feminist and LGBTIQ+ spaces** which also results in social withdrawal. Pepe said: “[...] so, I downgraded multiple, white, queer friends to acquaintances and no longer as friendships, because I realised that there was a lack of empathy.”

In relation to these experiences of feeling misunderstood and isolated within the broader feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities, participants repeatedly used the term ‘bubble’ to describe spaces where they feel recognised in their multiple marginalisations and minoritised identities; spaces where they felt that their identities were not devalued or questioned and where they are free to seek the intimacy of personal relationships to mitigate feelings of helplessness.

6. Participants were often left to deal with the effects of anti-feminist and anti-queer attacks on their own

Participants who have suffered organised anti-feminist or anti-queer attacks as a result of their work said they did not receive institutional support to mitigate the effects of these attacks on their own.

The nature of attacks experienced by participants ranged from online bullying and 'shit storms', to threats, media campaigns, litigation, disruption of events as well as physical violence. The targets of these attacks in the sample were politicians, authors, academics, and those working in civic education. Those who experienced the attacks said that they largely had to **rely on private resources to mitigate the effects of the attacks**. Although many were in employment and suffered the attacks as a result of their professional roles, they felt unsupported, reporting none to very little institutional support or safety measures from employers or funders. Interviewees experienced these instances as isolating and fear-inducing. One participant, GERINT08, who works in civic education described their situation:

(O)n a construction site we would all be wearing helmets to be able to go to work. Just like others are able to do their work without the fear of getting reported and of losing a lot of money because all of a sudden, the employer no longer has your back or something like that.

In addition, participants recounted fear of physical attacks, and described mixed experiences with the police.

Lena, an academic, spoke of an organised online attack on her new publicly funded research project. This situation was particularly challenging because it required her to have a conversation with her new employer within a few weeks of starting her new position. Although her line manager was sympathetic, the situation rendered visible that her new employer lacked processes for dealing with such attacks, a feeling echoed by many academic participants. Universities were characterised as being slow in their response, or as not responding at all. As a result, the research participants in the German sample recounted how they had to rely on personal resources to mitigate the effects of the experienced attacks, including **relying exclusively on their personal network for emotional support, and on personal financial resources to pay for security measures at home, or legal fees**, even when attacks occurred as a response to their work.

Moreover, various participants recounted how they withdrew themselves from public platforms, social media or publications as a result of the attacks. **Through withdrawal, participants felt they could avert future attacks**. Various participants described that the experience of anti-feminist attacks had a 'silencing effect' on them as the following example illustrates. GERINT08: "I try to get as little out there as possible, regarding publications or similar. I'm thinking about whether I do it anonymously or not. I silence myself. That's an effect." Participants negotiated the experience of being silenced and seeking retreat as a necessity to conserve their mental wellbeing but also as a form of defeat. One participant noted that they retreat from public arenas to conserve energy and try to focus on areas where they feel they can have an impact: their diversity work at their university. Momo: "So, I have definitely withdrawn from many public spaces, it affected me, and I tried to save the energy I had to do things, from which I think they have an impact." However, interviewees also expressed concern that this withdrawal means that queer people are forced out of public life due to increasing hostilities.

The theme of being left alone to deal with the effects of organised anti-feminist and anti-queer attacks runs through the case study data. Participants who suffered attacks as a response to their professional activities recounted having little to no institutional support to mitigate the effects of the attacks. This led not only to them relying on personal resources but also to employing mitigation strategies that have the effect of self-silencing.

7. Political and civic education initiatives are targets of organised attacks

Participants working in the field of political and civic education reported various forms of attacks against their organisations and projects through parliamentary inquiries, concerted media or online attacks, disruption of events and physical attacks on premises. Examples in our sample include opposition to public funding in various

parliaments, organised media and online controversies, targeting educators online as well as in-person disruption of events.

Several interviewees reported how they are concerned that the AfD systematically uses **parliamentary questions at the state level to target educational initiatives that focus on LGBTIQ+ issues or anti-feminism**. Such questions challenged, for example, why such initiatives are publicly funded. According to those participants who work in this field, such parliamentary inquiries have the effect of debilitating the work of political and civil society education initiatives. GERFG1.4:

(Th)is debilitation of work processes, the fact that we increasingly have to hide things that we used to be open about, just to avoid accusations and or potential consequences.

Alongside parliamentary questions targeted against projects and initiatives, participants were concerned about the political opposition to the Democracy Promotion Act, a new law which seeks to strengthen and institutionalise funding for initiatives and education against extremism, racism, sexism, and anti-queer hostility, amongst other issues.

Besides these parliamentary attempts to curtail education projects, the interviewees recounted how their organisations or themselves, as representatives, became targets of organised media attacks both off and online. GERINT08 recounted how the use of the term 'patriarchy' in a press release announcing their publicly funded project resulted in a media controversy and online 'shit storm'. Lena, who works for an online education project on gender and sexual diversity geared towards young people, has been targeted by large Twitter/X accounts that she identified as anti-feminist and 'anti-gender'. These accounts shared conspiracy theories about her support for trans children and accused her of personally conducting medical treatments on children.

The informants also reported **organised disruption of events**. Several interviewees have experienced anti-feminists strategically disrupting workshops that they facilitated under the pretence of being interested audience members. GERINT08 said:

And we had one participant in the seminar who, as we talked about what anti-feminism is, started to deny it, who also denied the existence of trans people to a trans person in the room and so on. And that was a way to argue against the existence of trans people, and not just like attacking the workshop leaders, but like an established move to use a clear line of argument that we know [...] So, I clearly set the boundaries and the person then left and said: "I wanted to go anyways, I'll leave now". And we also experienced that elsewhere. Like, they come, place [...] their anti-feminist arguments and when they did so and notice that they don't find a wide audience to support them, then they'll leave.

The interviewees have several strategies to mitigate such disruptions. One interviewee reported that when she gives guest lectures or seminars, she refrains from announcing them on social media. When she attends pride events with her Youth LGBTIQ+ project, she does not post this on social media until the day of the event in order to avoid organised protests.

Those working in political and civic education said that **they find solidarity and support amongst colleagues and people who are working against anti-feminism**. They also draw support from those communities and stakeholders they work with, who are grateful for the training and insights they receive.

8. Anti-feminist attacks threaten academic freedom, and universities lack processes to support academics who become targeted

Targeted anti-feminist attacks on gender studies scholars have curbed participants' academic outreach, negatively affected their well-being and have detrimentally impacted democratic culture at higher education institutions. The data revealed that universities in Germany and other European countries where the participants had lived previously lack policies and processes to deal with targeted attacks on scholars and lack processes that safeguard scholars and democratic institutional culture.

Gender studies scholars in the sample reported concerted attacks on their research projects, on themselves as scholars and on their impact initiatives. The interviewees listed litigations against them, having been targeted by large social media accounts and publications in media outlets that are aligned with the far-right. As part of these attacks, the affected scholars were ridiculed for working in gender studies, their research accused of being “unscientific”. **Participants reported being targeted by actors from outside of academia but also from within.** The ideological battle against gender studies was identified as being fought by some actors in the natural sciences and quantitative social sciences.

Academics who publicly advocate for dialogue and democratic debates at universities are vulnerable to organised mobilisations against them. Luise recounted being targeted after publicly criticising an event that was organised by her former employer, a university in another EU country, with a speaker who is internationally renowned not only for opposing trans rights but also for his anti-feminist views. She co-authored an open letter which demanded that the event would also include a speaker who counteracts those views. The celebrity speaker published the authors' names on his website and the story was picked up by right-wing media in the country where she worked, prompting letters and threats, resulting in the involvement of the police to protect her. The university sided with the celebrity speaker and as such Luise felt that they had not even engaged with her and her colleagues' critique. Luise was afraid and felt helpless:

It was quite horrendous and at that time I was still writing my doctoral thesis, so I was still at the beginning of my research career, I would say, and this somehow frightened me a lot. Yes.

Many of the interviewees reported a **retreat from science communication** due to previously experienced attacks and fear of attacks. This is detrimental as the academic respondents identified interdisciplinary dialogue and public debate as key strategies to counter attacks on gender studies from outside academia and within the academic community. GERINT01, who leads a gender studies centre, has been advocating for interdisciplinary projects between gender studies, biology, medicine and psychology as an avenue to move beyond simplistic biologism, which often serves as the vehicle for the denunciation of gender research both within and outside of academia. Moreover, all academic interviewees saw public engagement as a responsibility of their role as scholars and as a means to combat anti-feminist and anti-queer narratives in public.

Academics who work on the topic of gender, as well as scholars who publicly advocate for democratic debates have become targets of organised attacks. This has a negative impact on gender scholars' ability to engage in science communication and impact. The attacks have also been identified as a threat to academic freedom. In our sample, German universities mostly lacked processes and support for academics who become targeted. Institutional awareness and long-term policies towards equity and anti-discrimination were identified as important pillars of institutional resilience against both anti-feminism and mobilisations against gender studies.

All participants in academia wanted universities to be institutionally aware of anti-feminist, anti-LGBTIQ+ attacks. GERINT01 mentioned that their university's management takes actions to make the university more

diverse and equitable, which she also sees as an important pillar of institutional resilience against anti-feminist attacks. Some academics mentioned that their experiences led to their institutions creating processes to mitigate future attacks, for example, having been attacked in relation to her high-profile research project, and targeted by right-wing media, Ute was invited by her university to give a high-profile lecture as a sign of institutional solidarity. Participants advocated for processes and policies to deal with targeted attacks on scholars, and sometimes even supported their institutions in creating them, deeming such policies that safeguard academic freedom as important pillars alongside equality and diversity policies, such that academic freedom cannot be weaponised against minorities.

9. Participants are invested in political and civic education, democratic dialogue and positive visibility to make mainstream society more resilient

Participants stated it was important to address mainstream society in the work against anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility.

Participants engaged in public dialogue as an important means of engaging mainstream society in areas of contestation. Participants saw science communication, political education, and positive media representations as means of creating a societal dialogue. Some also listed confrontation, for example in the form of protest, as an important and legitimate aspect of gaining public attention, which then enables a dialogue about issues that have previously been swept under the carpet. However, participants emphasised that public dialogue has to take place in a way that is safe for minorities; the reported hostile visibility and attacks have led to many participants retreating from the public sphere. For some trans activists, staying publicly visible was an act of defiance; older activists argued that they had to stay visible to support younger trans people. Being visible in an adversarial climate was depicted as a double edged sword: whilst they recognise the precarity that it brings, they also feel a responsibility to more vulnerable members of the community as the following quote illustrates. Josephine: "(W)ho does it if not me? And if I leave and [...] stop holding up the rainbow flag, no one will do it. It forces me into this communication, and I do find that problematic sometimes." This shows that minorities consider their safety and wellbeing when engaging in public dialogue.

The interviewed academics were active in public education regarding queer issues, seeing such public engagement as part of their professional role even though it comes with risks. **Those working in political and civic education expressed that their ability to resist is contingent on political and institutional commitments**, especially in view of the financial resources that anti-feminist actors have access to. Educational activities that participants were engaged in included education projects in schools, but also free workshops and events for the general public. As inclusive language remains an important site of political contestation in Germany, various participants stated that they try to engage mainstream society in an accessible rather than alienating manner in order to counteract the ideological crusades against inclusive language.

While political and civic education are used by participants to protect them from ideological anti-feminist and anti-queer mobilisations, participants also expressed that they often feel helpless in view of media controversies targeting minorities. Participants were divided on the effect visibility has on minorities. While some emphasised the need to show mainstream society that minorities are 'normal' rather than 'radical' activists, others deemed protest an important way of gaining attention for issues that are otherwise not reported on.

10. Coalition politics, community and solidarity are important for resilience

Community-building, mutual support, and solidarity were mentioned as key practices against anti-feminism and queer hostility.

Various participants spoke about the relief of retreating to their communities, or 'bubbles', where their identities, experiences and values are not up for discussion, where they do not face erasure. Others argued that coalition politics are important, denoting the threat from the far-right and arguing that people need to work together in solidarity in order to resist politically.

For the mitigation of attacks, hostility and fear, communities were identified as particularly important. Being able to engage with others who are affected by the same forms of violence was seen as a form of support, as Lena, a participant who had been targeted by large social media accounts, illustrates:

I believe the most important thing was the exchange with people, who experienced the same things and it took me a very long time to find people, who also experienced a similar level of what I experienced because it is, I would say, definitely a difference, whether you once get a hateful message or whether you get it over and over again for years.

Others emphasised that these connections are instances of solidarity. Rosa: "I feel solidarity whenever I have the feeling that someone shares the same anger, the same resistance, yes, I think anger can be something positive." Community work and building networks were not only seen as a means to connect the participants to other people who share their experiences; some also appreciated being in a role where they provide comfort to other members of their community. Josephine says: "I received, I earned a title from my protégés. I am the provider of courage."

Coalition politics and solidarity within the queer community and with other marginalised groups also emerged as a theme of resistance. In professional settings, participants mentioned how sharing resources amplifies resilience. Participants emphasised the role of informal, cross-institutional networks. Building coalitions was also identified as an important strategy and participants also spoke about the risk of intra-community divisions that often materialised in the context of multiple marginalisations or alienated groups that are underrepresented. A politics of solidarity with other minorities that are curtailed in their self-determination, such as migrants, people of colour or disabled people, were identified as desirable. Several participants further noted that the LGBTIQ+ community in particular is still struggling to give more space to the issues of people who are racialised and migrantised⁸⁶.

Participants also mentioned that they observe solidarity and community cohesion being put at risk by an **increasingly hostile tone and mistrust amongst the feminist and LGBTIQ+ communities**, referencing power relations within their communities, as well as political divisions, as reasons for this. One trans participant said that she experienced more attacks from within the trans community than from the far-right, which shows her how divided the community is; this was exacerbated by the debate regarding the Self-Determination Act. Participants stressed that the community should work together, for example to ensure that non-binary people can get gender-affirming care on health insurance, which is not the case at the moment and has led to intra-community resentment towards trans people who can.

⁸⁶ This term has been used as an alternative to the notion of 'migration background' which has been criticised as essentialising and homogenising. 'Migrantised' marks the negative construction of migrants and those perceived as migrants. In the DACH region, the term also helps to render visible the specific experiences of those with migration experience, history (or projected history) in Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia, while racialised refers to people affected by post-colonial racisms.

Solidarity within communities, or 'bubbles', where participants feel validated in their experiences is deemed important to mitigate against not only attacks but also an increasingly hostile political climate. **Coalition politics, including the sharing of resources, is advanced as a strategy to support less powerful or visible groups.** However, participants also witness a lack of understanding of the position of those who are part of less visible groups or are multiply marginalised, of intra-community targeting and an increasingly hostile tone that endangers collective political action.

Conclusion

In the data, oppositions against the term 'gender' were mainly associated with the so-called 'gender bans' in Bavaria and Hesse—which banned the use of inclusive language in the public sector—as well as with debates regarding minority gender identities. To the participants, these controversies and contestations were seen as an expression of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. However, antifeminism and anti-queer hostility were not merely framed as intentional, ideological, politically organised or directed acts but as structural. This structural character of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility was linked to legislation, such as the criminalisation of abortion as well as institutional erasure, such as state institutions ignoring participants' legal gender 'diversity'. Moreover, dismissal and indifference towards feminism and LGBTIQ+ issues were also experienced by the participants as microaggressions. Participants expressed concern about how mainstream society is vulnerable to conservative and far-right mobilisations due to ignorance and a lack of awareness, especially in relation to LGBTIQ+ issues. They felt that recent legal gains and visibilities, epitomised through inclusive language, have alienated large parts of mainstream society who now feel insecure about how to speak about minorities or act towards them. This insecurity is seen as dangerous because it can result in opposition, such as the idea that 'equalities have gone too far' or that demands are excessive.

Participants are highly concerned about the rise of the far-right, especially about the electoral gains of the AfD. Trans participants and participants who are multiply marginalised expressed that they consider emigrating should a far-right party get into the Government. The mainstreaming of far-right politics was also mentioned as a concern, especially since the 'gender bans' in various states. In addition, trans people reported increasingly hostile visibility, which they also associated with the debate preceding the Self-Determination Act that was passed in 2024. Participants felt that the visibility of trans people is important but also ambivalent, recognising that it has also intensified the violence against trans people. In addition, participants who are multiply marginalised felt particularly vulnerable to anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. They reported retreating to communities where they did not experience erasure and felt recognised.

Various interviewees reported being attacked due to their professional activities or voluntary work. Those affected worked in academia, civic education initiatives and pregnancy conflict counselling. They often felt alone in dealing with the effects of being targeted, even when they occurred as part of their employment. Participants had to rely on their personal resources to deal with being targeted online or by different media. Some experienced physical attacks or litigations against them. What ran through the data was a disappointment at the lack of institutional support they received from employers or funders. Political and civic education projects, as well as academics, emerged as being particularly vulnerable to being targeted. Attacks against academics were identified as a threat to academic freedom and often led to scholars retreating from science communication, although they were all committed to facilitating an evidence-based public dialogue that can also help safeguard society against political mobilisations that abuse minorities. Universities were identified as lacking processes and policies to safeguard scholars vulnerable to attacks.

Participants engaged in public dialogue and education, where possible creating visibilities that felt safer to them. Participants feel particularly strongly about the role and potential of political and civic education as a means of counteracting anti-feminism and anti-LGBTIQ+ hostility. Positive visibility was identified as important to counter those negative images that can easily sway the parts of mainstream society that are not well informed about LGBTIQ+ lived realities. Coalition politics and a politics of solidarity were also deemed important to the participants. Multiple marginalisations, erasure, internal political divisions, and an increasingly hostile tone were identified as a threat to community cohesion. Otherwise, communities were identified as vital to mitigating a hostile political climate and experiences of anti-feminism and anti-queer hostility. Being in spaces where experiences and identities were validated rather than challenged was deemed to be important to the respondents.

The data of this study highlights further areas of research. These include empirical research into dialogue and conflict resolution within LGBTIQ+ communities as well as barriers to intra-community solidarity and transversal politics. It also highlights the need to better understand the everyday experiences of multiply marginalised feminist and LGBTIQ+ people in community contexts.

Respondent Profiles

The data for this table describing the sample was compiled from the participants' demographic forms. A total of 21 out of 24 participants completed and returned the form.

Table 5: Respondent profiles Germany

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
Age groups	20	The sample is spread across all age categories surveyed, with three quarters of participants (18 out of 24) aged between 25 and 64. Only one participant was younger than 25 and only one was older than 65. Four people did not answer this question.
Gender	21	The largest proportion of the sample was made up of cis people (10 out of 24), with a total of 5 trans people represented in the sample. Two non-binary people, two inter people, one inter-non-binary person and one genderfluid female person were also interviewed. Three people did not answer this question.
Sexual orientation / identity	21	In terms of sexual identity, around a quarter of the sample self-identified as queer (7 out of 24). A similarly large proportion of respondents described themselves as heterosexual (5 out of 24). Nine out of 24 people stated a different sexual identity (lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, bi-lesbian, hetero-lesbian) Three people did not answer this question.
Country of origin	16	Around half of the participants stated Germany as their country of origin (11 out of 24), with only five people naming another country of origin (India, Austria, Russia, Spain, Turkey). Eight people did not answer this question.
Country of residence	21	As expected, the vast majority of the sample (20 out of 24) stated Germany as their current country of residence. Only one person named Austria. Three people did not answer this question.
Race / ethnicity	17	Half of the sample answered "white" in this category (13 out of 24), four people gave a different answer (white-Hispanic, German with Indian background, PoC, Russian). Around one third of the sample (7 out of 24) gave no answer to this question.
National identity	17	Around half of the sample (12 out of 24) stated "German" as their national identity, three people stated something else (German with Indian background, German-Turkish, Spanish) and two people stated that they had no national identity. Around a third of the sample (7 out of 24) did not answer this question.

Education level	20	Two thirds of the sample (16 out of 24) stated that they had a university degree (university degree with no further definition (2), bachelor's degree (2), master's degree (7), PhD (5)). Only four people stated a different educational qualification (qualification to attend a university of applied sciences, diploma, and Abitur). Four people did not answer this question.
Religion	16	In total, only five out of 24 people stated that they had a religion (Catholic, Protestant, Christian). A further four out of 24 people stated that they were atheist. Two people defined themselves as agnostic, five people stated to have no religion and eight people gave no answer to this question.
Social class	17	Around half of the sample (14 out of 24) categorise themselves in the (upper) middle class. One person categorised themselves as bourgeois, two people placed themselves in the working class and around a third of the sample (7 out of 24) did not answer this question.
Illness	19	10 out of 24 people stated that they live with an illness, nine people answered with "no" and five people did not answer this question.
Dis/ability	20	Six out of 24 people stated that they live with a disability, 14 people answered with "no" and four people gave no answer.
Settlement type	21	The vast majority of the sample lives in a large city (19 out of 24), only two people live in a medium-sized city and three people gave no answer here.

Chapter 6: Greece

Anna Carastathis, Hekate Diakoumakou, Myrto Tsilimpounidi (Feminist Autonomous Centre for research)

Executive Summary

This case study Report explores how people living in Greece experience and resist 'anti-gender' politics in their everyday lives. Our participants are not, nor do they wish to be seen as, "passive victims" of these conditions; rather, they emphasised how they engage in daily resistances from their different positions. We spoke with **27 people**, 12 of whom granted us a semi-structured interview, whilst 15 took part in four focus groups.

'Anti-gender' is not a term that circulates widely in Greece. Some participants first heard the term from the RESIST researchers when invited to take part in the research; indeed, in order to conduct the research, we needed to translate the term into Greek (to our knowledge for the first time). Alternate terms our participants were accustomed to using to describe what we broadly refer to as 'anti-gender' politics in this report include: patriarchy, anti-feminism, anti-woke, discrimination, TERFism (trans-exclusionary radical feminism), fascism, biopolitics, eugenics, institutional femicide, genocide. Moreover, many participants face multiple, intersecting experiences that extend the meaning of 'anti-gender' beyond gender and sexuality: race, legal status, and class are particularly important in the findings that follow.

We found that whilst **virtually all participants experienced 'anti-gender' attacks**, some of them were organised and involved political actors, including elected representatives; that transphobic discrimination is institutionalised and structural and present in virtually all spheres of trans people's lives, compounding acute oppression; and that violence and the fear of violence are prominent in participants' experiences. Yet, throughout the research, the participants emphasise resistance, solidarity, and community. Everyday resistances in which participants engage include forming communities, "bubbles," and chosen families. Visibility is seen as a form of resistance; it is also identified as a risk or as making one vulnerable to homophobic/lesbophobic/transphobic attack, particularly in public space, in the family, or in camps—so-called 'Closed Controlled Access Centres', in which people seeking asylum are encamped. Migration is seen by some participants as a (personal) solution to escaping 'anti-gender' attacks, violence, oppression, and discrimination—both for people emigrating from Greece and for people seeking asylum in Greece. Whilst participants identify the far-right, alt-right, and the current government as sources of 'anti-gender' politics and discourses, they argued that 'anti-gender' ideologies are also present on the left and amongst some feminisms. Not only does 'anti-gender' not target all feminisms; but in fact, some feminisms reproduce 'anti-gender' logics and rhetorics. In particular, participants said trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF) is a definitive, if often occluded, aspect of 'anti-gender' politics. Rather than attributing 'anti-gender' exclusively to the far-right, participants spoke of it as a slippery discourse that sutures together what may otherwise be understood as opposing political positions. Specifically, they noted the emergence of "anti-woke mania" on the left, which dismisses feminist and antiracist struggles by reducing them pejoratively to 'rightsism' («δικαιωματισμός»). Manifestations of 'anti-gender' within supposedly progressive or radical social movements (including feminisms); racism and xenophobia; and the non-intersection of movements were seen by participants to undermine intersectional feminist resistance

to 'anti-gender' politics.

Keywords: 'Anti-gender'; transphobia; migration; violence; Greece

Introduction

In the case study on Greece, we report on the lived experiences of **27 people**, all of whom have experienced the negative effects of ‘anti-gender’ politics, combined with structural discrimination. We also discuss their resistances to these oppressions. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 participants and held four focus groups with a total of 15 participants. This case study Report first outlines the social context; then, it presents the findings about their concrete experiences that emerge from the participants’ words, amongst which are findings that show the frequency and intensity of ‘anti-gender’ attacks as well as the multiple resistances in which our participants engage.

‘Anti-gender’ is not a term that circulates widely in Greece. Some participants heard the term for the first time from the RESIST researchers when invited to take part in the research; indeed, in order to conduct the research, we needed to translate the term into Greek (to our knowledge for the first time). Alternate terms our participants were accustomed to using to describe what might broadly be referred to as ‘anti-gender’ politics in this report include: discrimination, patriarchy, anti-feminism, anti-woke, TERFism (trans-exclusionary radical feminism), fascism, biopolitics, eugenics, institutional femicide, genocide. Moreover, many participants face **multiple, intersecting oppressions that extend the meaning of ‘anti-gender’ beyond gender and sexuality:** race, legal status, and class are particularly important in the findings that follow.

Context

Greece is a postcolonial, ‘post-crisis’ society located at the periphery of contemporary Europe in the Eastern Mediterranean. A post-dictatorship society (1974–) and the site of one of the first proxy wars in the ‘Cold War’ era (1946-49),⁸⁷ Greece bears the legacy of the far-right’s control over the military and police forces.⁸⁸ The post-dictatorship (post-1974) period is widely viewed as a time of the reconstruction of democracy. This was also a time of flourishing social movements, including the autonomous feminist movement.⁸⁹ State feminism also emerged during this time.⁹⁰ The 1980s saw a series of political, legislative, and social changes.

⁸⁷ Gerolymatos, A. (2017). *International civil war: Greece, 1943-1949*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Stefatos, K. (2011). ‘The Psyche and the Body: Political Persecution and Gender Violence against Women in the Greek Civil War’. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 29(2), pp.251–277. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2011.0018> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

Panourgιά, N. (2009). *Dangerous Citizens: the Greek left and the terror of the state*. New York: Fordham University Press.

⁸⁸ Tsoutsoumpis, S. (2018). ‘The Far Right in Greece. Paramilitarism, Organized Crime and the Rise of “Golden Dawn”’. *Südosteuropa*, 66(4), pp.503–531. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2018-0039> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

⁸⁹ Vaiou, D. and Psarra, A. (eds.). (2018). *Conceptualisations and Practices of Feminism. Metapolitefsi and ‘After.’* Athens: Foundation of the Hellenic Parliament. [In Greek: *Εννοιολογήσεις και πρακτικές του φεμινισμού: Μεταπολίτευση και «Μετά»*]

⁹⁰ Varika, E. (2000). ‘Confronted by the modernisation of institutions.’ In Varika, E. (ed.) *With a Different Face: Gender, Difference, and Universality*. Athens: Katarti, pp.293–308. [In Greek: «Αντιμέτωπες με τον εκσυγχρονισμό των θεσμών» στο *Με Διαφορετικό Πρόσωπο. Φυλο, Διαφορά και Οικουμενικότητα*].

Pantelidou–Malouta, M. (2007). ‘State feminism, gender equality policies, and social perceptions.’ *Greek Political Science Review* 29(1), pp.5–39. [In Greek: «Κρατικός φεμινισμός, πολιτικές για την έμφυλη ισότητα και κοινωνικές αντιλήψεις»].

Abortion was legalised in 1986 (L. 1609/1986).⁹¹ Yet, in recent years, anti-abortion campaigns led by religious organisations have resurfaced.⁹² Greece is a society in which patriarchy is deeply rooted.⁹³ The state is not secular: the Greek Orthodox Church maintains financial, social, and political power, is seen to be aligned with the right, and members of the Church hierarchy have supported Golden Dawn.⁹⁴

Gendered violence, particularly intimate partner violence and femicide, is a central focus of the contemporary grassroots feminist movement.⁹⁵ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+)⁹⁶ people in Greece face routine **homophobia, lesbophobia, transphobia, and intersex-phobia**, ranging from violence to discrimination to social exclusion.⁹⁷ On September 21, 2018, the LGBTQI+ community was devastated by the killing of Zak Kostopoulos—an HIV-positive gay man who worked as a journalist and a drag performer (Zackie Oh!)—in broad daylight by civilians and police officers in the city centre of Athens. In the trial that ensued, the police officers were exonerated and only the civilians were found guilty of fatal bodily harm; they were released pending appeal, which they lost. On July 10, 2023,

⁹¹ Avdela, E., Papagiannaki, M. and Sklaveniti, K. (1986). 'Abortion: Chronicle of a Demand.' *Díni: A Feminist Journal* 1, 9-28. Available at: <https://notafeministproject.gr/timeline/1986/322> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Εκτρώση: Το Χρονικό μιας διεκδίκησης»].

Alexandra Halkias, *The Empty Cradle of Democracy: Sex, Abortion, and Nationalism in Modern Greece*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.

⁹² Mpampatzimopoulou, P. (2022). 'Abortions, the fetus and the attempted "social regression" in Greece.' *Feministika* 5. Available at: <https://feministika.net/ektroseis-embryo-koinoniki-opisthodromisi/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Οι εκτρώσεις, το έμβρυο και η επιχειρούμενη 'κοινωνική οπισθοδρόμηση' στην Ελλάδα»]

⁹³ Tsihiridou, F. (2022). 'On Honor and Palimpsest Patriarchal Coloniality in Greece, the Western Balkans, and the Caucasus: Anthropological Comparative Accounts from a Post-Ottoman Decolonial Perspective.' *Genealogy*, 6(73), pp1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6030073> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

⁹⁴ Once a political party, Golden Dawn is now recognised as a criminal organisation and is banned from electoral politics. Founded as an organisation that published a pro-junta magazine in 1980, the neo-Nazi party rose to prominence in the 2010s, mainly through its paramilitary wing's racist attacks on people racialised as migrants, and its blood drives and soup kitchens "for Greeks only" in the midst of the debt and austerity crisis. Golden Dawn entered Parliament in the 2012 elections, becoming third most popular in the 2015 elections. After the murders of Pavlos Fyssas, a Greek anti-fascist rapper, and Shehzad Luqman, a Pakistani farmer's market worker, an investigation into the party leadership ensued and charges were laid against them. The trial proceedings lasted 5 years with 68 defendants. On 7 October 2020, the Athens Court of Appeals found the leadership guilty of criminal organisation (as well as several other verdicts) and they were imprisoned. See Christopoulos, D. (ed.). (2014). *The 'Deep State' in Contemporary Greece and the Far Right: Police, Justice, Military, and Church*. Athens: Nisos. [In Greek: *Το «βαθύ κράτος» στη σημερινή Ελλάδα και η ακροδεξιά. Αστυνομία, Δικαιοσύνη, Στρατός, Εκκλησία*]. Psarras, D. (2012). *The Black Book of Golden Dawn: Documents From the History and Practice of a National Socialist Group*. Athens: Polis. *Η μαύρη βίβλος της Χρυσής Αυγής. Ντοκουμέντα από την ιστορία και τη δράση μιας ναζιστικής ομάδας*. Psarras, D. (2015). *Golden Dawn On Trial*. Athens: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. Available at: https://rosalux.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/gd_on_trial_web-1.pdf (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

⁹⁵ From 2019 until May 2024, the Greek Observatory on Femicide has recorded 115 femicides (using police statistics of intentional homicides of women as the outcome of domestic violence, as there is no legally defined crime of femicide in the Greek Criminal Code). See Greek Section of the European Observatory on Femicide (EOF) (n.d.). *Qualitative Data*. Available at: <https://femicide.gr/poioitika-dedomena/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Ποιοτικά Δεδομένα»].

For a comparison of official statistics versus monitoring by non-official sources (e.g., NGOs) see Mediterranean Institute for Investigative Reporting. (2024). *Femicides and violence against women in Europe*. Available at: <https://miir.gr/en/femicides-violence-against-women-in-europe/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

⁹⁶ In the report on the case study on Greece, we use the acronym 'LGBTQI+' (instead of 'LGBTIQ+', used in other Case Studies and the Transnational findings report) for consistency with the rendering of the acronym in Greek (ΛΟΑΤΚΙ+). The 'plus' sign is indicative of other sexualities and genders—including non-binary identity and asexual/aromantic identities—not explicitly mentioned in the acronym.

⁹⁷ Carastathis, A. (2018). "'Gender Is the First Terrorist": Homophobic and Transphobic Violence in Greece.' *Frontiers*, 39(2), pp.265–296. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2018.a698459> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

Anna Ivankova (Hernández)—a trans woman from Cuba who had been granted asylum in Greece and was a beloved performer at the trans club Koukles—was murdered in her apartment in central Athens. As fieldwork for this research was underway, a transphobic assault took place in Thessaloniki (March 9, 2024) involving between 150 and 300 young men who chased and physically assaulted two non-binary young people in the city centre during the Thessaloniki International Documentary Film Festival, where an LGBTQI+-affirmative feature called “Citizen Queer”⁹⁸ was showing.

The southeastern national border of Greece (with Türkiye) is one of the external borders of the European Union. Since 2015, hotspots—offshore centres processing asylum claims and detaining or geographically limiting people from moving onto the mainland—have been instituted under a special provision on five islands in the Greek territory.⁹⁹ **Systematic border violence**, including widespread use of sexualised and physical violence,¹⁰⁰ pushbacks,¹⁰¹ theft of people’s belongings,¹⁰² and conditions of encampment and detention of asylum seekers in so-called “Closed Controlled Access Centres” have been found to violate the basic human rights of people crossing into the Greek territory to seek international protection.¹⁰³ On 14 June 2023, the Hellenic Coast Guard allegedly attempted a pushback operation¹⁰⁴ causing the shipwreck of the *Adriana* vessel that cost more than 600 people their lives, including all of the women and children who were on board, “in the deadliest tragedy that comes as a direct result of a state’s actions in the recent history of Europe.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Thanopoulos, V. (2024). “We Won’t Leave It Like This”: What one of the victims of the homotransphobic attack in Aristotelous Square declares.’ *Antivirus Magazine*. Available at: <https://avmag.gr/den-tha-to-afisoume-etsi-ti-dilonei-ena-apo-ta-thymata-tis-omotransfovikis-epithesis-stin-pl-aristotelous-1/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Δεν θα το αφήσουμε έτσι»: Τι δηλώνει ένα από τα θύματα της ομοτρανοφοβικής επίθεσης στην πλατεία Αριστοτέλους]

⁹⁹ European Commission. (2015). Explanatory Note on the Hotspot Approach. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10962-2015-INIT/en/pdf> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹⁰⁰ Forensic Architecture. (2022). ‘Pushbacks Across the Evros/Meriç River: The Case of Parvin.’ Available at: <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/pushbacks-across-the-evros-meric-river-the-case-of-parvin> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹⁰¹ See Greek Council for Refugees. (2023). *At Europe’s Borders: Between Impunity and Criminalization*. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/documents/news/2023/03/at-europes-borders-between-impunity-and-criminalization.pdf> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹⁰² The investigation conducted by Solomon and El País revealed that “Greek security forces have stolen more than €2 million from refugees during pushbacks.” Malichudis, S. (2023). ‘The Great Robbery: During Illegal Pushbacks in Greece, Refugees are Robbed by Border Guards.’ *Solomon*. Available at: <https://wearesolomon.com/mag/format/investigation/the-great-robbery-during-illegal-pushbacks-in-greece-refugees-are-robbed-by-border-guards/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹⁰³ The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has repeatedly granted Interim Measures in cases concerning CCACs, as in the case of *A.R. and Others v. Greece*, where the ECtHR condemned the treatment of three asylum seekers in the hotspots of Kos, Samos, and Chios. *A.R. and Others v. Greece*. (2024). European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Appl. No. 59841/19. Available at: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-233120%22%5D%7D> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹⁰⁴ ‘Pushback’ refers to the documented systemic practice of border police, coast guards, and Frontex, the European Union border agency, of expulsion (without due process) of individuals or groups to another country. The Border Violence Monitoring Network has published a 3,000-page report in four volumes, drawing on testimonies impacting more than 25,000 people on the move, all of whom experienced the violence of pushbacks at EU borders. Border Violence Monitoring Network. (2022). *Black Book of Pushbacks, Vol. I, II, III, IV*. Available at: <https://left.eu/issues/black-book-of-pushbacks-2022/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹⁰⁵ #FreePylos9 Campaign et al. (2024). Joint Declaration: Justice for the victims and survivors of the Pylos state crime, Defence of Migrant Rights Across Borders Conference, Mytilene, Greece. Available at:

Findings

1. Virtually all participants had experienced verbal and/or physical attacks, ranging from abusive comments to physical assault

Online attacks and hate messages via social media about one's identity, political views, and/or activities were virtually universal in participants' experiences. But some participants had also experienced organised attacks, in some cases involving political actors, including elected representatives.

Attacks were perpetrated by various individuals and groups, including Members of Parliament (MPs) and government Ministers. For example, Georgia, a visual artist whose work “Flag” about femicides and domestic violence—shown at the Greek Consulate in New York City—was censored by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, was **attacked by “a far-right member of the Greek government.”**

He brought a copy of my piece [flag] to the Greek parliament and he said that “the flag is being ridiculed because it's been [...] painted [...] pink”, and that the only time when the flag is allowed to be painted red is when it's “stained by the blood of the male heroes of the nation.” So, the Minister of Foreign Affairs asked for my piece to come down [...] I ended up having to go and take down my work four days after the opening and actually the Flag piece was already taken out without me, taken down without my presence, and I received it folded inside a trash bag.

Participants experienced organised attacks. One participant (GRCINT06) spoke of his photos being circulated on the web; verbal attacks by far-right and alt-right actors, **including an MP of the governing New Democracy party**; demands for the participant's (GRCINT06) dismissal from his academic position and legal prosecution; hundreds of hate messages and death threats, which **expressed the violent desire to eliminate him**. He said:

GRCINT06: I was targeted precisely on the grounds of my profession, of my gender and sexual identity [...] of my field of study. This attack [...] drew a lot of [...] inspiration from my PhD, which was about BDSM, and I think it fit, because they had to do with an obviously ‘deviant’ person [...] having obviously ‘deviant’ research fields, who somehow teaches at the university.

Participants pointed to the **intersection of misogyny and nationalism** in some of the attacks they experienced. One participant linked this to violent hate speech targeting her in a “smear campaign on social media,” which accused her of being “a Turkish agent for Erdogan” and threatened sexual assault, poisoning her dogs, and burning down her house. “[I]t was horrible,” she said, “I have been psychologically damaged by it” (GRCINT08). The participant left Greece on the advice of authorities, and **couldn't return to her home for six months**.

Organised attacks by the far-right on cultural events were also a feature of participants' lives. Two participants, Scarlet and Harry, each discussed organised attacks by the far-right targeting festivals they were involved in:

Scarlet: At the L— Festival this year, we had received so many hate messages. Similarly, we also received an official complaint from a Municipal Councillor with V—'s party who denounced the organisation of the Festival and several people supported it, which, of course,

<https://captainsupport.net/freepylos9/defence-of-migrant-rights-across-borders-conference-joint-declaration/> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

entailed a fear of being targeted, of who is behind it [...]

Harry: Last year there had been an almost organised attack against comic artists [...] because Comic Con [Athens] banned an artist whose work glorified Metaxas' dictatorship [...] And some people who supported this artist [...] [who] shared the same ideology, they used social media and started attacking the festival [...] they began to slander us on Twitter, they had found our photos, and they were posting it with the comment "Comic Con paedophiles," but this had nothing to do with our identity [...] we were, like, "thank goodness they didn't realise we are also trans."¹⁰⁶

Receiving hate messages online, and experiencing **hateful social media environments** was common to all participants' experiences. These messages attack various marginalised identities as well as leftist, feminist, LGBTQI+-affirmative, and antiracist political stances. This hostile climate created a fear of being targeted, avoidance of social media, and even relief that attacks weren't worse—as Harry said above—as they would have been had the perpetrators realised "we are also trans."

2. Participants have experienced violence and the fear of violence

Our participants include survivors of violence. Various forms and agents of violence and the fear of violence were mentioned frequently by participants.

Violence was an everyday feature of some participants' lives. Cassandra, a trans woman with Palestinian-Syrian roots spoke of transphobic and, more generally, gendered violence as omnipresent: "And from my parents, the violence starts at home, also at school [...] in general we live in a violent society [...] we cannot avoid it, because violence is all around us. For me, just not being able to have your identities recognised is violence". Deniz, a Kurdish trans woman and LGBTQI+ activist who received asylum in Greece due to 'anti-gender' politics in Türkiye, continues to experience transphobic attacks in public spaces, particularly when she leaves the "zones" in which she feels safe, such as her neighbourhood, where she lives and works:

[T]here have been murders recently here [in Greece], so yes, I've been granted asylum and I'm staying here, but the attack and the fear that I have to go through is still the same in terms of my personal safety. [...] For example when I was walking [in Athens] people in the cars were honking, coming closer to me, assaulting me [...] I had an altercation in the park as well, a couple of people held me from the arms, both sides, and tried to hassle [...] it's kind of the same, my experiences here and in Turkey [...] these things are still happening here and in Turkey. [...] At that park I usually like to spend time in, get a couple of beers after work, but I think after this incident a kind of trauma has formed, I don't go there any more without any friends.

Participants discussed how **witnessing or hearing about violent attacks generates fear**. GRCFG2.2: "Influenced by the event that happened in Thessaloniki—¹⁰⁷I have a strong fear in my everyday life. To go

¹⁰⁶ Ioannis Metaxas was the fascist dictator of Greece between 1936 and 1941. Comic Con Athens made an exception to its stance of political neutrality due to the extent of the attacks, and explicitly opposed fascism.

¹⁰⁷ The participant is likely referring to the transphobic assault in Thessaloniki (March 9, 2024), days before the interview took place, described in the Introduction, during which as many as 300 young men chased and physically assaulted two non-binary young people.

out, to go for a walk, to come here, I will scan the faces of the people around me.” Fear of police violence limiting participation in political demonstrations was also expressed.

S.K.: I remember being scared to go to a demonstration, being very discouraged by police violence and the fact that it was during the lockdowns that repressive reactions by the police against women and femininities began to become more pronounced [...] there were also arrests of feminist associations.

One clear effect of violence that emerges through our research is that **people who fear being targeted will often change their behaviour** in order to avoid it.

Marachi: [You may] not be the person who has met physical violence, but you may have seen, say, how many of your trans brothers and sisters, how many of your non-binary mates, how many lesbians or how many gays have suffered violence [...] You may have internalised a form of policing, “oh, I should wear this and not the other in case someone says something”, or “I should be careful in the street not to hold hands with my girlfriend, e.g.” All this micropolicing that we do to protect ourselves, it is essentially a form of violence we have internalised and we deprive ourselves of our own freedom.

Another participant drew the link between the organised attack they experienced and avoiding demonstrations. GRCINT06: “After experiencing an organised attack: It took me a year to join a demonstration after that, so policing did work to be honest, I mean discipline worked, fortunately with an expiration date.” Fear was powerful but not all encompassing.

Violence is not totalising: as one survivor, GRINT06, put it, affirming queer life:

Thank goodness that I can be here talking with you, [I've experienced] many things, very threatening: I mean, I have been pursued by a man carrying a gun, a gun in his hand, I think the trick is to run fast and to know where to hide. [...] It sounds like it has often been abusive, and it was—because there had been many threats [...] but, at the same time, not enough to put a stop to the desire for life and the desire, you know, to devour all this amazing spectrum of experience, all the chaos of pleasure brought by queer life.

For this participant, as for many others in our research, the ubiquity and intensity of **violence does not extinguish joy and desire for queer life**.

3. Discrimination against trans people is institutionalised and structural in Greece

Trans participants of all genders, including non-binary people, experience structural and institutional discrimination in Greece. This was not a recent phenomenon associated with extremists.

Participants did not tend to use the term 'anti-gender' to identify phenomena, including recent, organised attacks by far-right groups and elected representatives. Instead, for most of the participants, these 'anti-gender' mobilisations have deep roots in institutionalised and structural inequality, which manifests in education, healthcare, employment, and public services.

Participants who are transgender, in particular, noted the limitations of understanding 'anti-gender' as a recent phenomenon owing to political extremists. As Vanesa pointed out, “[t]he fact you need 12 to 15 thousand euros to have [gender affirmative] surgery is not a work of the far-right [...] it’s a situation

consolidated in Greece.” **Trans participants reported discrimination is pervasive in schools, universities, health care, public services, workplaces, and law.**

Laws passed concerning Legal Gender Recognition (LGR; L. 4491/2017) and, more recently (2024), anti-discrimination protections for trans people in education, health, and housing are seen as positive developments. Yet, LGR is seen to contain elements of 'anti-gender' ideologies as they intersect with anti-migration ideologies. For instance, **LGR is not available to non-binary people and a clear procedure is not accessible to trans refugees or migrants**, even when they have been granted asylum on the basis of persecution for being trans. Even though LGR eliminated compulsory sterilisation and loss of parental rights as preconditions or consequences of legal recognition, trans reproduction and kinship is discouraged: “As a non-binary person, I don’t have much access to adoption. I mean, if I want [...] to apply to adopt a child, I’ll need to hide my non-binary identity,” said Marachi. Vanesa, a trans mother, had to wage a legal battle to maintain custody of her own child, when, after her transition, her ex-wife told her “to forget about the child.” A court case ensued, which Vanesa “lost at first instance because I faced a racist judge, who issued an extremely racist verdict; I won the appeal.”

The trans parent’s name is not changed on the child’s birth certificate (L. 4491/2017, art. 5), which means that they are effectively outed as trans in a range of situations, which compromises their right to privacy (guaranteed in the LGR law, L. 4491/2017, art. 6). Being outed as a trans parent exposes them to further transphobic discrimination and, potentially, violence. Vanesa remarked:

Why should my child have a father’s name, the name of a person who does not exist? Why should I [...] have to [...] show the court decision to any random clerk to prove that the person mentioned under “father’s name” and me, the person I am today, is the same person?

Harry described how he faced transphobia when accessing public services and health care: when he “went to have the anti-COVID vaccine, it was issued on my dead name,” which conflicted with his ID. When he was called to present himself to the conscription service:¹⁰⁸ “[r]eally, these people did not know, I had to explain [...] there was a guy there who [...] said, ‘you mean you have [...]’ and he did like [gestures pointing at his genitals].”

A clear procedure for LGR is not available to trans people who are not Greek citizens, who fall through the cracks due to **intersecting bureaucratic oppressions of legal status and gender status**. Cassandra explained the difficulties she faces in renewing her expired Palestinian passport at the Embassy in Athens, a process that does not acknowledge her gender identity as a trans woman and would require her “to appear with my deadname, of course, but not only that: with male presentation [...] they’re asking me to play a part that for me is so traumatic to re-enter.” Even in cases where asylum is granted on the basis of transphobic persecution, there is no clear pathway to LGR for trans refugees.

Trans people and gender nonconforming people are marginalised in the labour market, leading many, particularly women, to pursue work in grey and partly criminalised economies. Vanesa: “[t]rans women, we face more exclusion than trans men in employment, because there’s the stereotype that if you are a trans woman you have to be a sex worker.” Marachi, a non-binary teacher, shared that “I couldn’t come out [as non-binary or lesbian] in any job I had. Certainly not when I was working in schools, especially in Crete, I could not imagine that I could come out.” Non-binary participants shared experiences of employers using their dead names, and pointed out the “difficulty of even just writing your pronouns on your CV,” as Victoria Sebastian stated.

¹⁰⁸ Military service is compulsory for adult (cis) male Greek citizens.

4. Legislative change does not entail or reflect social change

The participants emphasised that the mere existence of formal rights does not guarantee these are realised in their lives, including through the discriminatory structures that were found to be oppressive.

Some recent legislative changes that participants said have positively affected the queer community include marriage (L. 5089/2024) and civil unions (L. 4356/2015) being extended to include same-gender couples; and, as discussed, Legal Gender Recognition (LGR) processes for trans people to align their documents with their gender (L. 4491/2017). However, the consensus that **legislative change is insufficient to bring about substantive equality**, is reflected in this year's (2024) Athens Pride theme: "A law is not enough" [«Ένας νόμος δεν αρκεί»]. Moreover, recent legislative acts that seem, on the face of it, to promote equality—such as extending the right to marry to same-gender couples—are viewed, in the context of the governing party's politics, with scepticism and suspicion as "pink-washing" and as reluctantly meeting Greece's obligations as an EU member state. Referring to LGR, Vanessa said:

A law is legislated [...] many times this is done in spite of the will of the ruling party, it is done simply because you're in Europe and they have to do so [...] There's a long way to go until this law is applied, an even longer way until it is properly applied, and until it's optimised. I mean good, we have legal recognition of our gender identity, we have our ID, but do we have our body? No.

Speaking about extending marriage to same-gender couples, GRCINT07 reflected:

I think people breathed a sigh of relief [with the new legislation], and it was very important. [...] On the other hand, the way in which these things were done, politically, was obscene [...] it effectively deprived gay men of obtaining a right to parenthood, and in essence did not protect the parenthood of transgender people either. [...] I was also very disturbed by the way in which this whole thing was discussed [...] It kind of pink-washed the government [...] it did what it had to do in order to exist in the European Union anyway.

Progressive legislation is viewed by participants as a consequence not of widespread social transformation or of political will; but, rather more cynically, as the result of legal decisions at the level of the European Court of Human Rights¹⁰⁹ and the government's desire to avoid fines and penalties imposed by the European Union for allowing ongoing legal discrimination.

Further, **regressive legislation is passed alongside progressive legislation**. Participants pointed to what came to be known as the 'Mandatory Shared Custody law' (L.4800/2021), a law passed by the New Democracy government **after lobbying from 'men's rights' groups, and despite protest by feminist groups**. As was discussed in one of the focus groups in our research, the misleading notion of 'parental alienation' was reproduced uncritically in the parliamentary and media debate surrounding the law on Mandatory Shared Custody, confirming the 'anti-gender' narratives of 'men's rights' activists, who claimed that sole custody awarded to mothers deprived fathers of time with their children, deprived children of time with their fathers, and resulted in 'parental alienation'. This legislative development came under scrutiny by feminist legal experts in Greece, particularly because it often forces children and ex-spouses who have experienced domestic violence to maintain contact with the perpetrator.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ See, for instance *Vallianatos and Others v. Greece* [GC]. (2013). European Court of Human Rights, Appl. No. 29381/09 and 32684/09. Available at: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=002-9224> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹¹⁰ According to the analysis of the Committee on Family Law and Consensual Joint Custody, a group of feminist legal experts, in their report to the GREVIO Committee, "[t]he judicial use of the concept of 'parental alienation' institutionally

Finally, **positive legislative changes were noted by participants as including 'anti-gender' elements:** for instance, in the recent reform of marriage, **lesbian, gay, and trans parents still face legal discrimination concerning their reproductive and parental rights.**¹¹¹

Harry: I feel that some things are progressing, say, the bill on civil partnership passed, the legal recognition of gender identity passed, [...] even though these laws were flawed and needed improving, it was something positive. But at the same time I feel as if not many things have changed [...] I don't see people's attitudes have changed much, I mean now you're hearing the same hate speech you were hearing back then [...] A part of the society wants to progress, but other parts want to return to the past if possible.

GRCINT06: The situation has indeed improved [...] numerous people [...] are openly queer, especially youth, at least in the cities [...] it is much easier to find information, it is much easier to find people like you, it is much easier to flirt, you have options, and rights [...] are progressing [...] And then a few years ago they killed Zackie at Omonoia, and a few years ago I went viral [laughter] for the wrong reasons, so I think that, still in Greece, it is not that easy; there is this everyday experience which reminds us that the letter of the law alone does not guarantee anything [...] It takes only a moment to find yourself turning from the subject of rights to the object of violence.

Whilst participants agreed that legislative change was important, it neither straightforwardly translates into, or indicates social transformation has occurred; nor is there any guarantee of its permanence or non-reversibility.

5. When asked to define 'anti-gender,' participants identified the far-right, the alt-right, the current government, and the Greek Orthodox Church

Several participants emphasised the interaction between structural discrimination and dimensions of 'anti-gender' politics that are institutionalised and represented by powerful social actors.

In participants' experience, 'anti-gender' "exists in the main societal structures, which may be mass media, the church, education, family, all these things somehow create it and preserve it" (GRCINT05). Participants critiqued a view of 'anti-gender', which assumes that it is a reactionary backlash against achieved gender equality and sexual and reproductive freedoms. They pointed out that, in a context where there hasn't

creates a new culture of degradation of women, misogyny and discrimination against women in the sensitive area of justice. In addition, it undermines the views of child victims of domestic violence who fear contact with perpetrators of domestic abuse, despite the obvious risks to both adult and child victims. Studies are already finding that allegations of so-called parental alienation are being used to deny allegations of domestic and sexual abuse, and that in many cases involving evidence or findings of domestic abuse, this evidence 'disappeared' when judges focused on this concept," Committee on Family Law and Consensual Joint Custody. (2023). *Report of the Commission on Family Law & Consensual Joint Custody, on the occasion of the 1st evaluation of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Greece, conducted by a delegation of the GREVIO Committee*. Available at:

<https://rm.coe.int/pdf-english-final-shadow-report-13022023/1680aa2e44> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹¹¹ For instance, the non-biological parent in a same-gender marriage does not enjoy the same rights as a man in a heterosexual marriage who is 'presumed to be the father' of children who are born during the marriage ('presumption of paternity,' τεκμήριο πατρότητας). Instead, the 'non-biological' parent in a same-gender marriage would have to legally adopt their child (who is only legally recognised to the 'biological'/birthing parent) in order to be legally recognised as the child's parent. Amnesty International. (2024). 'Greece: Bill on Marriage Equality is Emblematic Progress But Further Changes Are Needed to Ensure Real Equality for LGBTQI+ People.' Available at: [https://www.amnesty.gr/news/press/article/28010/ellada-ns-gia-tin-isotita-ston-gamo-einai-embλημα-tiko-prohorima-alla](https://www.amnesty.gr/news/press/article/28010/ellada-ns-gia-tin-isotita-ston-gamo-einai-embλημα-tiko-prohorima-alla-apaitountai-pei-paiterw-alla-ges-gia-na-diasphalistei-pragmatiki-isotita-gia-ta-LOATKI+-atomata) (Accessed: 5 September 2024). [In Greek: «Ελλάδα: Ν/Σ για την ισότητα στον γάμο είναι εμβληματικό προχώρημα αλλά απαιτούνται περαιτέρω αλλαγές για να διασφαλιστεί πραγματική ισότητα για τα ΛΟΑΤΚΙ+ άτομα»]

been a massive improvement in formal rights and equalities—let alone in everyday life—a clear distinction between what is structural oppression and what is ‘anti-gender’ could not be drawn. This is precisely because **state institutions in Greece have not reformed themselves to exceptionalise as ‘far-right’ the ‘anti-gender’ policies and politics they reproduce.**

As Vasilis explained, even in the absence of substantive gender and sexual rights and freedoms having been realised for all women and LGBTQI+ persons in Greece, there is nevertheless an ‘anti-gender’ discourse of feminism having “gone too far”: without the progress, a “backlash” has ensued anyway.

Vasilis: Greece is in the worst place because the [notion of a] backlash presupposes that certain serious steps [forward] have been taken. Here, the backlash is happening without these steps having taken place [laughter], without having completed these processes we are going backward.

Alexandra spoke of ‘anti-gender’ as a deceptively new phenomenon, as a way of “[r]e-branding of things we have been fighting for years [...] It is the monster we have been fighting until now, just more organised, more coordinated and with better PR [public relations].” Marachi stated that **‘anti-gender’ mobilisations are an attempt to distract people from a global crisis of capitalism** that has been unfolding since 2008: “the alt-right movement and the reactionary part of power has, essentially, been instrumentalising our bodies in order to create intensifying moral panic and to disorient people from the real problem, which is a crisis of capitalism.” Alexandra: “It’s easier to acknowledge that because you’re not X identity you don’t have a job, than to acknowledge [...] that we’re currently living in a broken system with huge unemployment. All of these messages use simple language, they tap into populism.”

Comparing ‘anti-gender’ to anti-immigration politics in Greece, Pati argued that “‘anti-gender’ is the lack of gender policies, not just the existence of policies.” She critiqued a common narrative that, despite the longstanding presence of immigrant communities, Greece lacks [migration] policies:

It’s not a lack of policies, it’s policies that are against immigration. Today, when a femicide takes place outside the police station,¹¹² whilst for years now we have talked about the issue and have articulated specific proposals of what should be done. It’s not a lack of politics, it’s anti-gender politics. By choosing not to act, you are doing politics.

The Greek Orthodox Church was also identified by participants as a source of “a lot of pushback”, organisers of ‘anti-gender’ campaigns or attacks, with a lot of influence over ordinary people in its constituency (Harry). Demetra referred to ‘anti-gender’ as “totalitarianism [...] with a more democratic guise,

¹¹² The participant is likely referring to the murder of Kyriaki Griva by her abusive ex-partner, who had been stalking her. He murdered her on 1 April 2024 outside a police station in northern Athens, from which police officers had turned her away, refusing to assist her in any way. When Kyriaki Griva requested a police escort back home that night, she was reportedly told that “patrol cars are not a taxi service.” Fallon, K. (2024). A Greek woman feared her ex-partner. He killed her outside a police station. Greece reckons with rising femicides as 28-year-old Kyriaki Griva becomes the fifth victim this year. *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/5/10/how-often-will-this-keep-happening-greece-reckons-with-rising-femicides> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

for example, in 2017 in Greece, when intersex was excluded, made invisible.”¹¹³ **Wealthy, powerful cis straight men** were identified as driving ‘anti-gender’ politics.

SK: Where I felt that I was being strangled: then, with the bill for so-called mandatory shared custody.¹¹⁴ [...] All this was done in the name of the “child’s interest” but basically it’s in the interest of the cis straight privileged family man, it’s anti-gender politics all the way! And it is no coincidence that from the Hellenic League for Human Rights to GREVIO¹¹⁵ and other monitors from abroad [...] it has been recorded as a stain [on its human rights record].

The protection and accrual of cis straight men’s privilege and entitlement is seen as a major function of ‘anti-gender’ politics. Yet, as we will see in what follows, ‘anti-gender’ politics are also seen by participants to be reproduced by certain feminist discourses.

6. Not All Feminists: ‘anti-gender’ actors do not attack all feminisms; indeed, certain feminisms (re)produce ‘anti-gender’ repertoires

Participants said ‘anti-gender’ politics are also present in trans-exclusionary feminisms and in “anti-wokeism” on the left.

Several participants mentioned how ‘Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism’ (TERF) is a definitive, if often hidden part of ‘anti-gender’ politics. Scarlet connected ‘anti-gender’ with the alt-right: “[t]he most dangerous form it takes, for me, is that which appropriates feminist elements or elements from identity politics.” She also identified TERFs as doing this: “TERFS have [...] adopted ‘gender sceptical,’¹¹⁶ which, I think, is along this logic of ‘anti-gender.’”

Participants noted that not all feminisms are targeted by ‘anti-gender’ actors. Certain feminisms—such as **those that define ‘women’ in biologically essentialist, lesbian- and trans-exclusionary, hetero- and white-normative terms**—actually promote ‘anti-gender’ views. Eleni elaborated:

[...T]he TERF issue is very crucial. [...] We’re seeing with great anxiety also in the Greek context that we have signed statements, which are not only outraging but also, sometimes, painful—at least for me—that defend the category “women, with all their biological and social

¹¹³ The participant is likely referring to Law 4491/2017 on Legal Recognition of Gender Identity, of which Article 2 on sex characteristics was proposed in the Draft Law, which also included Article 7, banning the performance of surgeries on intersex minors. However, “Article 7 *disappeared* when the Draft Law was delivered to the Ministry of Justice by the Legislative Committee and it never reached the Parliament for vote.” Five years later, the Greek Parliament passed L. 4958/2022, “which prohibit[s] IGM procedures and other medical treatments, fulfilling a core demand of the Greek and global intersex community for the protection of the bodily integrity and self-determination of intersex children” (Art. 17–20, *ibid.*). Pikramenou, N. (2022). ‘Prohibition of Intersex Genital Mutilation (IGM) Procedures on Intersex Children.’ Intersex Greece. Available at: <https://bitly.cx/hPoA> (Accessed: 5 September 2024), emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ What came to be known as the ‘Mandatory Shared Custody law’, L.4800/2021, was passed by the New Democracy government after lobbying and pressure tactics from men’s rights groups, and despite protest by feminist groups. See the previous finding and note 106 for details.

¹¹⁵ GREVIO is the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, who monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, widely known as the ‘Istanbul Convention’. See GREVIO. (2023). Baseline Report: Greece. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-s-baseline-evaluation-report-on-legislative-and-other-measures-/1680ad469d> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹¹⁶ Or, more commonly, ‘gender critical’.

characteristics." [...] It's clear that they're knocking [...] feminisms that have critiqued the category 'women' and its identification with the white, cis, middle-class woman. So, I think that these feminisms are at the heart of this war and they are feminisms in which the concept of gender has always been a contested field, it has always been an open field. And that complicates things. [...] We do gender studies not because we like or love the concept of 'gender'; but, precisely because it is a way of deconstructing gender. And I think it's no coincidence that TERFS also self-identify as "gender-sceptical feminists",¹¹⁷ right? That is, [as] feminists who don't want gender [...]

Another participant referred to how, in her experience, **racism and xenophobia** within white feminism undermine the agency of racialised women and queer people in their resistance of 'anti-gender' and patriarchal oppression on their own terms:

GRCINT09: I have two monsters to face. There is white feminism, and there is patriarchy in the place of my origin. [...] If I want to make my critique of patriarchal oppression in the place of my origin, then white feminism will insert itself to [...] use my oppression as a pretext to express its racist beliefs against us [...] I'm like, "shut up for a sec, if you want to talk about us, we will do it"; because patriarchy has been used quite a lot, as has the oppression of women and queer people face in Arab countries [...] it is a racist rant used by Europe, by white feminism.

Finally, participants identified **'anti-gender' ideologies as present on the broader left**. A common way of dismissing feminist and antiracist struggles on the left is to reduce them pejoratively to 'rightsism' (δικαιωματισμός). The term seems to be a loan from the French neologism *droit-de-l'hommeisme*; an English-language equivalent does not exist, to our knowledge. This is a class-reductionist position that assigns all oppressions that are gendered and racialised to the category of 'human rights'. As an antiracist feminist active in leftist politics, Pati encountered class-reductionist and anti-intersectional arguments on the left, which, she said, traffic in alt-right logics:

I'm very interested in what the political positions say of what we know as 'right' and as 'left'. The right has always had this conservatism, but the left has fallen into a trap of [human] rights versus classism, not seeing how these are part of the same oppressions. [...] From the right, there is anti-woke propaganda because it's in the ideology of the right [...] The anti-woke mania on the left is problematic. It had started with 'political correctness': there was an attack from all sides and derision and, like, "political correctness is not a solution but is oppressive." Even the left adopts alt-right evidence for arguments and we are in the position where we [have to] explain over and over again in simple terms.

Rather than locating 'anti-gender' firmly and exclusively on the far-right, participants spoke of it as a slippery discourse that sutures together political positions, which view themselves as being on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

7. Participants spoke about feeling isolated, trapped, suffocated, exhausted, burnt out because non-intersectional movements fail to address 'anti-gender' in its full scope

Participants face "intersectional disempowerment" ("the need to split one's political energies between two [or more] . . . opposing groups" to which one belongs, an experience specific to women of colour and other multiply

¹¹⁷ Or, more commonly, 'gender critical'.

*oppressed groups*¹¹⁸) in a situation of proliferating “sites of struggle” which is reinforced by a failure of social movements to address the various aspects of ‘anti-gender’ politics.

Pati, who identifies as a migrant woman, shared how “constantly receiving blows” and the separations between movements, which pull multiply marginalised people in diverging directions lead to exhaustion:

The sites of struggle are so many, and taking care of ourselves and of each other is so necessary because a [feeling of] exhaustion prevails [...]. Specifically, I think that in recent years in Greece, we have several collectives that articulate the issues, however, the blows we receive are so constant, so targeted, that I think they follow a shock doctrine¹¹⁹ against which you will not be able to stand up because it's so common on all fronts. [...] [E]very day, another demo. Especially when you are a woman who is an immigrant who also cares about the environment and you want to approach them intersectionally, what do you address first? So it's a kind of biopolitics. [...] I feel that I am personally at a point of exhaustion.

Alexandra emphasised that this “**burnout**” is, in part, a function of **non-intersectional movements that do not coalesce** with one another:

There were times when I worked endless hours, slept in the [organisation's] office and felt like I was digging a hole in the water.¹²⁰ The movements do not help each other and they don't understand that the goal is common and no human being is one identity, we are many. We haven't done anything since the other side is more united because for them we are one, one enemy. [...] [I]t is no coincidence that the burnout rates in activist spaces are huge; I, for one, in the last 5 years have gone through three [burnouts] for sure—or one in a row, I don't know if they should be separated [laughter].

Participants spoke of how needing to engage in **small, everyday resistances can lead to “mental fatigue”** as Victoria Sebastian put it:

There's the mental fatigue [...] of sitting down to work over and over again, and that this is repeated every day maybe, that you will be stigmatised by these people, they will comment on you, so you don't have the stamina to stand up for yourself [...] When I see some malicious comments [on social media] from people like that, while I would like to step in and speak my mind, a lot of times I don't, so maybe this is kind of like a defence.

Resistance was also seen to be undermined within leftist, feminist, and LGBTQI+ spaces when **interpersonal violence occurs within collectives**, as two participants explained:

¹¹⁸ Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), pp.1241–1299. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).

¹¹⁹ The participant is likely referring to Naomi Klein's book of that title, which became popular in Greece during the financial crisis (2008–). Klein analyses how neoliberal politics constituting what she calls “disaster capitalism” have been so successful in entrenching themselves all over the world. She argues that this is because they exploit moments of crisis, natural and socially-manufactured disasters, and war to push through a “shock therapy” (e.g. austerity, structural adjustment, debt, and authoritarian governance) at times when the people are too distracted or overwhelmed with surviving to protest or to effectively resist. Klein, N. (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

¹²⁰ An idiomatic expression in Greek that means labouring in vain and failing to bring about any result.

GRCINT07: A very important incident of gender-based violence took place in the political group I was in, and then we, the women, decided we would handle it, there were not even any queer people [...] and this resulted in a very strong reaction from the group's assembly: there was a cover-up of the abuse, and this was the end of my trajectory in the Left.

Marachi: I have been a victim of cancelling. [...] I really had nowhere to turn to, to ask for help, I didn't."

The data shows that **the feeling of having nowhere to turn** differentially impacts people who are excluded from straight social spaces, communities, and families. Moreover, it indicates that intersectional disempowerment affects multiply oppressed groups differentially.

8. Migration is seen as a (personal) solution to mitigate the negative effects of 'anti-gender' politics, both by people emigrating from Greece and by people migrating to Greece

For participants who identify as queer, lesbian, trans, and/or non-binary, emigration has figured as a solution to negotiating institutionalised homophobia and transphobia. It intersects with their experiences of unemployment due to the crisis, and diminished life chances due to institutional discrimination.

Greece is a society marked by multidirectional migrations.¹²¹ In this data, we found that **LGBTQI+ participants emigrated from Greece to other countries** in order to be able to experience and express gender and sexual identities and relationships, which were not deemed possible if they had stayed in the country. Harry, a trans man born and raised in Greece, shared what led him to emigrate to England:

Harry: I started coming out around 2009–2010, this took a while, and back then I wanted to transition but I couldn't, on the one hand I couldn't find any information nor support [...] so the only way out was migrating abroad, without having any plan [...] so I left and I moved to England, where I stayed for eight years and I transitioned there. [...] [I migrated] also because of the harsh financial circumstances, I couldn't find work as a freelancer anymore.

Economic necessity and the search for employment outside of Greece can also enable potential lives to be explored and lived. Marachi, a non-binary person, spoke of their experiences of migrating to Berlin:

Marachi: [The reason I migrated] was mostly the economic situation in Greece and the fact that I lost my job as a primary education teacher after the crisis. [...] What happened was magic because [...] moving to Berlin released the potential of what you can be and how you can do it, so [...] for the first time in my life I let myself free to be what I am [...] My gender expression, since I left for Berlin, has changed very much, just think that I was 30 years old and I had never cut my hair short, which I wanted to do since I was a child.

In our data it was clear that, at the same time as people emigrate from Greece to other countries to realise their gender and sexual self-determination, people seek asylum in Greece on the basis of persecution for Sexual Orientation Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC). They are fleeing extreme homophobic, transphobic, and lesbophobic violence in their countries of origin. Yet, **rather than**

¹²¹ According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), in 2022, "net migration is estimated at 16,355 persons corresponding to the difference between 96,662 immigrants and 80,307 emigrants" (p. 1), ELSTAT. (2023). 'Estimated Population and Migration Flows.' Available at: <https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/de3e26f6-9b77-d2e5-2ca3-e13bcafe482a> (Accessed: 26 September 2024).

reach safety, participants who are SOGIESC asylum seekers found that Greece and the EU expose them to continued endangerment as LGBTQI+ people in situations of forced encampment, whilst awaiting asylum decisions. Intrusive questions about sexual practices that violate privacy, and reliance on stereotypes consistent with ‘anti-gender’ views are common in asylum interviews. GRCFG3.4: “[I]n the interview, they ask you a lot of questions that sometimes you would not be comfortable to answer them, about your sexuality—deeply—about your partner, some things you don’t want to share with anybody.”

Participants told us how waiting several months for the decision of their asylum claim negatively affected them:

GRCFG3.4: Sometimes, we are tired of waiting. [...]for me, it’s been three months, still no decision. [...]it’s so stressful waiting for the decision, because you may think you waste your time and they’ll reject you, or they’ll give you a positive decision. All this, it’s always on my mind—I’m always thinking about it [...] I don’t know what is my fate [...]M]y friends, here, we are going through the same thing [...] we have similar stories [...]S]ometimes I’m thinking that the people in the asylum office don’t consider gay people or lesbian people that much—we are left out somehow.

Marceline: [B]ecause of what I experienced in my country, I did not explain my real story [to the authorities]. I met a friend [...] I told him everything, I spoke with him, he told me “no, you are in Europe, you have to say everything.” Because I don’t know the Greek system, I didn’t know if it’s the same thing as in Haiti, that’s why I couldn’t tell my real story [...] I don’t know what is going through the minds of the Greeks, because they change their minds every day [...] I’m always afraid. One day, the Greeks are going to deport everyone. That’s what I’m afraid of. Because I don’t have all the papers yet. [...] I have been waiting 12 months to do the [asylum] interview.

Some participants with Greek citizenship shared their “red lines,” which, for them, would trigger emigration from a country they have been seeing in a downward spiral for years. S.K. has been thinking of emigrating since 2019, with the election of the New Democracy government, currently in its second term:

with the renaming of the General Secretariat for Equality¹²²—that’s when I wanted to leave, because [...] I began to see women in the Ministry or in various positions who started promoting in many ways even more the “Greek family” and having children and all this totally heteronormative stuff. From the moment it was called “demographic policy,” I started to shudder inside. If the right to abortion is indeed banned I will indeed leave without a plan; each person has their own red lines. And this is a red line [for me].

If for S.K. **the looming threat of banning abortion** would be that red line, for Alexandra it would be the **reproductive oppression** and, more generally the “uncertainty” facing LGBTQI+ people in Greece:

Whether [‘anti-gender’ politics] comes from above or from below, it creates a lot of insecurity for me about the future. Where will I go to live? What if I want to have my own child? With my friends, we’ve started discussing whether it will happen here and in what context will it

¹²² It is not uncommon in Greek politics (or elsewhere) for Ministries and General Secretariats to be renamed after an election to reflect the new governing party’s ideology, as happened with the General Secretariat for Gender Equality in 2019, when it was renamed by New Democracy the “General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality” and relocated from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. In 2023, after New Democracy’s re-election to a second consecutive term, it formed a new Ministry for Social Cohesion and Family, including a “General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights” (with no reference to “gender”).

happen? Should we go to another country? Which country would this be? [...]t creates a huge uncertainty regarding what choices you have. It worries me: just because we have two or three laws here does not mean that we will still have them tomorrow. And we have examples [of that] and that scares me. It pressures and angers me that we have to be activists permanently, whether we like it or not. [...] And there is a cost to choosing not to say anything. This part makes me very angry.

What emerges from the data is that migration is figured as a way to negotiate stifling, oppressive, and dehumanising conditions that particularly target LGBTQI+ people and cisgender, heterosexual women. Moreover, as we saw earlier in this report, some participants had to leave the country because of 'anti-gender' attacks.

9. Visibility—particularly queer/trans visibility—was discussed in ambivalent terms by participants

The majority of participants view visibility as a form of resistance, and sometimes equate visibility with resistance. But visibility is also seen as taking a risk that can endanger one's safety particularly in public space, in the family, or in camps.

Visibility is seen as something utopian, yet to come, to arrive at. Public discourses are seen to give negative, objectifying, or dehumanising 'visibility' to LGBTQI+ people (that is, debates about our rights or existence) and are credited with increased hostility. For instance, Harry said that TERF rhetorics had "definitely" increased with greater trans visibility, "because more people learned that people like me exist."

Several participants mentioned how **parliamentary debates have traded on distorted representations of LGBTQI+ people**. The parliamentary and media discourses surrounding proposed legislation that, if passed, would rectify structural and institutional discrimination, were experienced as **objectifying and dehumanising** of LGBTQI+ people. During the debate surrounding marriage equality, Harry noted that parliamentarians made "many invalid claims, words which should not even be mentioned in the parliament." This dehumanising visibility means that participants seek to avoid violence and hate speech, including by limiting or avoiding media coverage of the issue entirely:

GRCINT05: To be completely honest I avoid them and I don't stay informed, because I wouldn't feel well then, so [laughter] [...] it scares me to know how much hatred there's in the world [...] All this debate about marriage, I deliberately didn't follow at all, because I knew that if I followed it I would simply listen to quite violent things every day.

Being 'visible' as an LGBTQI+ person was seen as especially dangerous by participants who are made to live in the Closed and Controlled Access Centres (CCAC) whilst applying for asylum. As Marcelline, a trans woman, explained,

There's a lot of discrimination if someone knows you're gay. In the camp, too, you pretend. You hide your identity. Also, in M-, which is a small town, it's very hidden, you can't be open. It's always [...] For me, it's not the same as when I was in Haiti; it's more open here. [...] There is no protection for people who are gay in the camp.

One lesbian participant shared that they use a strategy in the CCAC that they first employed in their country of origin, namely, "staying indoors" (or, remaining 'closeted') to avoid discrimination or violence:

GRCFG3.4: I'm using that strategy over here, until I know Greece is safe for me, maybe till I spend like, two years, three years, till I understand Greece, to know whether this place is not like where I'm coming from. I don't want to have the same breakdown I was having before. [...] if you are, say, gay or a lesbian and you are comfortable to come out, you should expect discrimination because not everyone will accept you, but if you want to stay indoors, you will stay indoors and this will help you, if you are not strong to come out, [to] let the whole world know that you are this person.

GRCFG2.3, a lesbian mother with Greek citizenship living in a city in Crete, uses the opposite strategy in her everyday life. She explained how **being visible as a family with two lesbian parents empowers her in facing heteronormativity and homophobia**:

"We exist as well, this formulation of a family." Choosing not to hide empowers you, if you stand strong in front of people, it leaves no room to talk about you. It's like standing in front of the other person with your body present and saying "I'm here." So, this stance is definitely resistance.

Related to the importance participants gave to visibility, several also expressed their wish that the current research will contribute to the empowering visibility of marginalised and minoritised groups who are targeted by, and resist 'anti-gender' politics.

10. Participants emphasised the importance of resistances, community, solidarity, and/or creating a "bubble" or "chosen family", particularly when facing 'anti-gender' attacks or hostile institutional contexts

In a hostile climate, and when facing attacks, the participants often referred to spaces of resistance, community, and relationships as what gave them strength to resist and to persist.

Participants spoke about structural discrimination, oppression, violence, and 'anti-gender' attacks through **the lens of resistance**. Eleni emphasised the importance of breaking isolation and resisting collectively:

I believe that in these circumstances—which are so suffocating—we need to see that the path is from isolation to collectivity. Many of us experience suffocating isolation inside institutions, outside institutions [...] and perhaps the answer to this is to rediscover the joys of killjoy feminism, but together, and to think that there is no vulnerability without resistance, because otherwise it's actually unlivable.

Whilst participants shared experiences of discrimination, violence, and attacks, they **emphasised their own agency**. As Cassandra shared:

I don't like to speak all the time about the negatives [...] what I can contribute, a more transformative speech, and more empowering, this is what it would interest me, a sort of a motivational talk [...] Because if I say only what they want to hear [...] and perhaps if I did so more doors would open to me, but they would be focused on the victim, and I don't find myself there [...] I've told my story, we understand it, I've told the difficulties, we understand it, but what I have to say through this, how I experience it, creatively [...] This is my true resistance.

The stakes in resisting are personal for people who experience attacks, in contrast to those who perpetrate them. Alexandra noted:

[W]e do activism for the identities we have. But he [the attacker] expresses his hate for identities he doesn't have. There is a different weight to trying for something that has to do directly with you—so, the defeats you face and the blows you take are heavy. They are personal. It also doesn't help with setting boundaries, because that's why we do more than we can, sometimes. For the identity I have, I want to have my rights, and this makes it difficult to set limits and the defeats are heavy.

Resisting oppression was seen in collective terms: participants expressed they were both supported by, and supported others in self-organised collectives and civil society organisations. Participants often referred to their activist groups or collectives, and emotional ties with other members as what gave them strength to continue and to resist.

Participants shared that they surround themselves with their friends, their chosen family, and people in their “bubble.” This is particularly important for **people who are rejected by their families**. GRCINT09: “I don't have a family any more, but I do have a family I created with people whom, you know, I consider family the people I've chosen to have in my life [...] I'm kind of in my own bubble with folks with whom I feel authentically myself, safe, cool.” Marceline, who had been shunned and rejected by her family, identified the friends she made through her collective as her main support: “every day I say—the people in this LGBT group are my family.”

Participants spoke about their identities with pride, as Binfish stated: “I'm a lesbian, and I'm proud to be a lesbian, yeah. Because after everything I've been through in my life, I still have the courage that I'm a lesbian, and I'm proud to be a lesbian.” As another participant (GRCINT05) succinctly put it: “How do I resist, um [...] by existing? [laughter]”.

Conclusion

This report is based on what **27 people** shared with us in the case study on Greece. They described the effects of ‘anti-gender’ politics on their lives, as well as how they engage in resistance. The findings presented in this report draw from their words and **seek to amplify their voices**. We are grateful to everyone who shared their experiences for the purposes of this research.

Virtually all of the participants had experienced verbal and/or physical attacks, ranging from abusive comments to physical assault. Online attacks and hate messages via social media about one's identity, political views, and/or activities were virtually universal in participants' experiences. But several had also experienced organised attacks, in some cases involving political actors. Participants have experienced violence and the fear of violence. The participants include survivors of violence, or they are in community or relation with survivors of violence.

The participants emphasised that **discrimination against trans people is institutionalised and structural in Greece**. Whilst laws passed concerning Legal Gender Recognition (LGR; 2017) and, more recently anti-discrimination protections for trans people in education, health, and housing (2024) are seen as positive developments, trans participants reported discrimination is pervasive in education, universities, public services, public space, workplaces, and the family. LGR is not available to non-binary people and a clear procedure is not accessible to trans refugees, even when they have been granted asylum on the basis of persecution for being trans.

When asked to define ‘anti-gender’—a term that is not commonly used in Greek—participants identified the **far-right, the alt-right, and the current government** as sources of ‘anti-gender’ politics and discourses. Cis straight men are seen as driving, and benefiting from ‘anti-gender’ politics, accruing privilege and

entitlement. The intersection of patriarchy and religion was also mentioned by participants, specifically Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and Catholicism. However, participants pointed out that **'anti-gender' is also reproduced on the left and within some feminisms**. Indeed, 'anti-gender' actors do not attack all feminisms in the same ways, as certain feminisms actually (re)produce 'anti-gender' repertoires: biological and cultural essentialism, trans- and lesbian-exclusion, racism and xenophobia. Several participants mentioned how trans-exclusionary radical feminism (or TERFism) is a definitive, if often occluded part of 'anti-gender' politics.

Migration is seen as a (personal) solution to mitigate the negative effects of 'anti-gender' politics, both by people emigrating from Greece and by people migrating to Greece. Particularly for people who identify as queer, non-binary, and/or trans, emigration has figured as a solution to negotiating institutionalised homophobia and transphobia, as it intersects with unemployment and diminished life chances due to structural discrimination. **Some participants had to leave the country after experiencing an organised 'anti-gender' attack**. At the same time, people seek asylum in Greece on the basis of persecution for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC). They have fled extreme homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic violence in their countries of origin, but rather than reach safety, **migration and border politics in Greece and the EU expose them to continued endangerment as LGBTQI+ people** in situations of forced encampment, whilst awaiting asylum decisions.

Visibility—particularly queer/trans visibility—was discussed in ambivalent terms by the participants. The majority of participants view **visibility as a form of resistance**, and sometimes equate visibility with resistance. But **visibility is also seen as taking a risk that can endanger one's safety** particularly in public space, in the family, or in camps. Visibility is seen as something utopian, yet to come, to arrive at. Public discourses that are seen to give **negative 'visibility' to LGBTQI+ people** (that is, **debates about our rights or existence**) are credited with increased hostility.

In this hostile climate, the participants emphasised the importance of resistances, community, solidarity, and/or creating a "bubble" or "chosen family"—particularly when facing 'anti-gender' attacks or hostile institutional contexts. Yet, resistance is undermined by 'anti-gender', particularly by those forms that manifest on the left, or within supposedly 'progressive' or 'radical' social movements, including certain feminisms. Participants spoke about feeling isolated, trapped, suffocated, exhausted, burnt out and facing "intersectional disempowerment" in a situation of proliferating "sites of struggle" as a result of non-intersectional movements failing to address 'anti-gender' in its full scope.

The case study on Greece is, to our knowledge, the first systematic attempt in this context to study how people targeted by 'anti-gender' politics experience their effects and engage in resistances. As such, further research is needed to amplify a diversity of voices, which are marginalised in public discourses. For instance, research is needed that centres the experiences of people who identify as intersex and/or Roma, two groups that are likely primary targets of 'anti-gender' politics in Greece—and elsewhere. Further research is also needed to illuminate the intersection between ableist oppression and the eugenicist dimensions of 'anti-gender' politics. Since this research only focussed on the experiences of adults (18+), future research could also address how young people and children experience the effects of 'anti-gender' politics and discourses, which seems particularly relevant since 'anti-gender' rhetorics often invoke the figure of 'the child' to gain traction and mobilise popular support.

Respondent Profiles

Although optional demographic forms were circulated to participants as part of this research, most participants (19) in the case study on Greece chose not to complete them; only 8 participants did. Thus, the below profiles are based on a combination of voluntary demographic information and self-identification during the interview/focus group.

Table 6: Respondent profiles Greece

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
Age groups	8	Participants ranged in ages from their 20s to their 70s. Of participants who indicated their ages on the demographic form, they are as follows: 1 - 57 years old 1- 44 years old 1- 34 years old 1- 33 years old 2 - 35-49 years old 1 - 40 years old 1 - 41.5 years old
Gender	27	Most participants in the research identify as cis women (13); four participants are trans women; four participants are non-binary people; two participants are trans men; one participant identifies as a cis man; two participants identified as queer or genderqueer; one participant did not identify their gender.
Sexual orientation / identity	27	Several participants are lesbians; some identify as queer, pansexual, bisexual, or straight. Other participants did not indicate their sexual orientation/identity on the demographic form or in the interview.
Origin	27	Participants trace their origins to Greece, Asia Minor, Kurdistan, Türkiye, Syria, Palestine, North Africa, Albania, Sierra Leone, Haiti, and western Europe.
Country of residence / legal status	27	Most participants are Greek citizens who live in Greece. Several participants have migration backgrounds: some emigrated from Greece, particularly during the crisis (2009-2018); others immigrated to or sought asylum in Greece and were recognised refugees, asylum seekers, or immigrants (naturalised citizens and precarious statuses).

Ethnic / racial identity	27	Participants identified as Greek, Albanian, Arab, Sierra Leonean, Haitian, Kurdish, white, Palestinian-Syrian.
National identity	8	Of those eight participants who filled demographic forms, six identified their national identity as "Greek", whilst two wrote "none."
Education level	8	Of the eight participants who filled demographic forms, one was a High School graduate; one had studied at University but hadn't received their degree; two were graduates of Higher Education Institutions (University); two have Master's degrees; and two have Ph.D. degrees.
Religion	8	Of the eight participants who filled demographic forms, seven indicated their religion as "none" and one "agnostic."
Social Class	8	Of the eight participants who filled demographic forms, two indicated working class; one "lowest" class; one lower middle-class (1); one "precarious, previously lower middle-class"; one "precarious"; two left the answer blank.
Dis/ability	27	Three participants identified as disabled.
Settlement type	27	Most participants (15) live in the capital city, Athens (population 3.1 million). Some (4) live on the island of Crete, in a small city (population: 179,302). Others live on Lesbos island, specifically, they are encamped in the Closed Controlled Access Centre at Kara Tepe (4). Two live between Berlin and Athens; one lives between New York and Athens; and one lives between Athens and Portugal.
Parental status	27	Five participants are mothers, including single-parent mothers, trans mothers, and lesbian mothers.
Occupation / Work	27	Occupations of participants include: visual artist, teacher, researcher, academic, nurse, doctor, journalist, musician, actor, cook, sex worker, playwright, student; two have been candidates in elections.

Chapter 7: Ireland

Kath Browne and Órlaith Hennessy (University College Dublin)

Executive Summary

Ireland has made significant strides in legal and social changes regarding LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex and Asexual, plus) and gender equalities. In the past decade, two referendums were passed, with over two-thirds of the population voting for same sex marriage and abortion rights. To explore the effects and resistances of 'anti-gender' mobilisations in Ireland, the Irish case study spoke with 40 participants, who took part in 6 focus groups and 12 interviews.

This LGBTQIA+ 'trajectory of progress' is seen to be coming to a halt by participants who identified attacks on themselves and organisations on the basis of their genders/sexualities. A quiet institutional anti-sex work agenda was also observed, through intra-community anti-sex work policies and attacks, amongst other strategies. These factors were seen as increasing in the previous five years and as being driven by those who were presented in the media as having "reasonable" concerns and/or being "respectable people". Ongoing anti-sex work government legislation and stances within feminist organisations; racist attacks within queer communities; and classed differences have prevented some from experiencing positive change as a result of such strides..

The reported effects of these attacks are significant: on physical and mental health, employment, families and relationships. Those working in organisations found that resources were redirected away from supporting marginalised people towards dealing with the attacks. There was a subsequent loss of funding from donors and others, who were also targeted and contacted about their engagements with these organisations, leading to a fear for the survival of key organisations.

Resistances to these attacks included visible protests, and being visible and vocal in everyday spaces, in the media and on social media. Friendships, solidarity, and coalition building created and enabled resistances, and supported and empowered those who were subject to attack.

The Irish state, politicians, and institutions were seen as supportive of those who had been attacked; politicians did not widely adopt anti-trans, anti-LGBTQIA+ or anti-abortion policies or rhetoric, according to research participants. This was not true for sex work. Irish culture was also seen as enabling resistance to attacks by people being known to each other and a distance that offers for some a "respect" for people's space. Personal relationships made a difference: a key act of resistance seen as improving lives was "having the chats": conversations that enabled genuine concerns to be aired, questions to be asked, and mistakes—particularly in terms of terminology—to be made.

The case study on Ireland established that organised, ongoing, and recently exacerbated targeting and attacks of LGBTQIA+ people—especially trans people—and organisations is commonplace. Sex workers were noted as being institutionally excluded through state policies and some feminist organisations' positions on sex work. These experiences had significant effects on individuals and support groups. Resistances ranged from protest to having open, at times difficult, "chats" with friends, family, and strangers, as well as conversations between organisations and with those who sought to genuinely engage.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+; anti-sex work; attacks; dialogue; resistance

Introduction

This case study report explores the lived experience of encountering 'anti-gender' politics—including discourses and movements—and analyses everyday resistances in Ireland.

It outlines how 40 academics, activists, public intellectuals and members of the general public experience, negotiate, and resist attacks related to their identities, lives, politics, and work in the arena of sexualities and genders.

The report is written from the findings of 6 focus groups—with 28 participants, in groups of between 3 and 7—and 12 individual interviews with people based in Ireland, mainly LGBTQIA+ people. The sample consisted of LGBTQIA+ people and allies, LGBTQIA+ organisations and those who work with sex workers¹²³. They responded to the invitation to participate in focus groups or interviews because they experienced some form of 'anti-gender effects'. The sample was recruited via targeted emails and calls to individuals and groups that may be affected; for details, see [Table 7: Respondent profiles Ireland](#). Following a synopsis of the national context, including the terminology used in this Irish report, we outline the key findings which bring together the main points that crossed focus groups and interviews.

Context

Ireland has changed significantly in relation to genders and sexualities since the end of the 20th century.

The Republic of Ireland is a postcolonial context, with six counties remaining within the UK as Northern Ireland. Following a war of Independence it became independent in 1922, after which there was a civil war. It is governed by a parliamentary, representative democracy. It is a 'neutral' country in terms of international warfare, with a history of conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 20th century. It joined the European Economic Community in 1973. Its economy has moved from farming and tourism, towards a high tech economy with low tax for corporations. In 2008, Ireland was heavily affected by the global financial crash, receiving economic bailouts. This has had ongoing reverberations not least in relation to housing.¹²⁴ Healthcare in Ireland is delivered through both a public and a private system, with ongoing issues regarding public access to healthcare and long waiting lists for services.¹²⁵ Since the founding of the state, Ireland was a country of predominantly emigration out of the country, but is of late experiencing increasing inward migration¹²⁶ both from within the EU and more broadly. This in-migration was for the first time a focus of

¹²³ Ethical approval was not granted for payment of participants and therefore sex workers will be directly included in the next phase of the research.

¹²⁴ Kitchin, R., Hearne, R. and O'Callaghan, C. (2015) 'Housing in Ireland: From crisis to crisis', *NIRSA Working Paper Series*, 77. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2566297>. (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹²⁵ *Ireland Health System Information* (no date) *World Health Organization*. Available at: <https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/countries/ireland> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹²⁶ Gilmartin, M. (2015) *Ireland and migration in the twenty-first century*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

significant electoral attention in 2024¹²⁷, though direct provision—the system for housing asylum seekers—has been critiqued for some time.¹²⁸

Throughout the 20th century, Ireland was regarded as a ‘Catholic’ country with the Catholic church and the government exerting significant control over lives and politics around sexualities, genders, and reproduction.¹²⁹ This included the criminalisation of homosexuality, the incarceration of unmarried pregnant women, the banning of abortion, hetero-patriarchal access and limitations to medical and health care, control of education, state recognition of—and associated financial benefits for—married couples, restrictions on women working, and a constitutional assertion around a woman’s “life within the home,” which remains from the first constitution in 1937.¹³⁰ A referendum in 2024 around the removal of this clause to replace it with language around care was defeated by 74% with public opposition from feminist and disability groups as well as those who were opposed to the removal of “woman” from the constitution.

Ireland’s membership in the European Union, alongside economic transformation based on a low tax regime and multinational corporations setting their EU bases in Ireland, has significantly changed, and been changed by, the sexual and gendered landscapes of what can be termed a ‘New Ireland’. This change has been both as a result of LGBTQIA+ and feminist activism, including winning legal cases at EU level, as well as a push from organisations who sought liberal tax and social regimes for their profits and the attraction of employees. Since the 1990s, changes have included the decriminalisation of homosexuality (1995), the establishment of employment rights, and anti-discrimination legislation based on legally termed ‘protected characteristics’. This followed a number of court cases, activism and significant contestation by governments and institutions. The passing of the 2015 referendum introducing marriage equality, and the 2018 referendum removing the constitutional ban on abortion, fundamentally shifted the Irish context in terms of sexualities and genders.¹³¹ These were accompanied by the passing of the Gender Recognition Act in 2015, which allows self-declaration of gender identity without a certificate from a medical practitioner; this put Ireland ‘ahead’ of other countries in terms of legislative change concerning gender recognition.¹³²

¹²⁷ Cox, J. (2024) Politics watch: Migration challenge dominates debate, June elections in spotlight, BreakingNews.ie. Available at:

<https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/politics-watch-migration-challenge-dominates-debate-june-elections-in-spotlight-1624648.html> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹²⁸ O’Rourke, M., Quilty, A., Barron, M., BeLonG To, Conrad, K., Walshe, É., and Sullivan, M. (2013) ‘Roundtable: Are We Queer Yet?’ *Irish University Review*, 43(1), 12–54. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24576810> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹²⁹ McAuliffe, M and Kennedy, S (2017) ‘Defending Catholic Ireland’ in Kuhar, R and Paternotte, D (eds.) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilising against Equality*. Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 133–151.

¹³⁰ O’Donnell, K., O’Rourke, M. and Smith, J.M. (2020) ‘Editors’ introduction: Toward transitional justice in Ireland? addressing legacies of harm’, *Éire-Ireland*, 55(1), pp. 9–16. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/eir.2020.0000> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹³¹ Neary, A. (2016) ‘Civil Partnership and marriage: LGBT-Q political pragmatism and the normalization imperative’, *Sexualities*, 19(7), pp. 757–779. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715616943> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

Browne, K. and Calkin, S. (eds.) (2020) *After Repeal: Rethinking Abortion Politics*. London, England: Zed Books

Tiernan, S. (2020) *The History of Marriage Equality in Ireland: A social revolution begins*. Manchester University Press.

¹³² Dunne, P. (2021) ‘The Law Concerning Trans Persons in Ireland’, in I.C. Jaramillo and L. Carlson (eds.) *Trans Rights and Wrongs: A Comparative Study of Legal Reform Concerning Trans Persons*. Springer Cham, pp.491–512.

Despite this ‘progress’ and significant changes in the past decades, Ireland’s education system remains predominantly within Catholic patronage (89% of primary schools¹³³ and 48% secondary schools¹³⁴); a significant number of hospitals are also under Catholic patronage (12 of the 18 private hospitals;¹³⁵ seven public hospitals are under Catholic Church ownership, with a faith-based element in the governance of additional hospitals¹³⁶); healthcare for trans people is the lowest ranked in Europe,¹³⁷ with a three to three-and-a-half year waitlist for a first appointment with the National Gender Service—the only gender identity clinic in the country¹³⁸—which, however, does not offer gender affirming surgery. Ingrained anti-sex work positions are a key feature of feminist organising and national politics. The campaigns to win both of the aforementioned referendums have been noted as appealing to certain—white, middle class, gender normative—groupings in Ireland, colloquially known as the ‘million in the middle’, to the exclusion of others, such as those who do not fit the ‘good’ same-sex couple image (including trans people) or who seek the ‘wrong kind’ of abortion. There are also ongoing limitations to abortion legislation and associated access to reproductive healthcare.¹³⁹

Sex workers are seen as ‘victims’ legislatively and socially, with norms positioning people in this profession as in need of protection. The current legislation criminalises the purchasing of sex and paternalistically seeks to ‘help’ sex workers. This is seen as part of the ‘New Ireland’ that supposedly ‘protects’ women.¹⁴⁰

As well as the limitations of ‘progress’ in terms of LGBTQIA+ inclusions, more public reactionary contestations are becoming apparent. The contestations of a ‘New Ireland’ that are discussed in this report also encompass protests at libraries for LGBTQIA+ inclusive books, anti-trans actions and mobilisations, and anti-LGBTQIA+ actions. There have also been increasing anti-immigrant mobilisations, through protests, media coverage, political agitation and government responses. In November 2023, a violent anti-immigrant riot took place in Dublin, involving a series of acts of arson, assaults, and vandalism by crowds in the city

¹³³ Kennedy, D. (2023) *Can a diversity of patronage be achieved in Irish schools?*, RTE.ie. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2023/0426/1378983-ireland-school-patronage-education-citizens-assembly/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹³⁴ McGuire, P. (2019) *Patron bodies: Who really controls your child's school?*, *The Irish Times*. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/patron-bodies-who-really-controls-your-child-s-school-1.3871501> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹³⁵ Boylan, P. (2022) *Catholic Church role in health and schools can no longer be funded by State*, *The Irish Times*. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2022/11/22/church-ethos-and-role-in-healthcare-or-education-can-no-longer-be-funded-by-state/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹³⁶ O’Sullivan, T. (2019) ‘The contribution of religion to Irish Healthcare’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 108(431), pp. 288–297. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/stu.2019.0047> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

¹³⁷ *Trans Health Map 2022: The State of Trans Healthcare in the EU - TGEU - Transgender Europe (2022) TGEU*. Available at: <https://tgeu.org/trans-health-map-2022/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹³⁸ *Waiting times* (no date) *National Gender Service Ireland*. Available at: <https://nationalgenderserviceireland.com/waiting-times-3/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹³⁹ de Londras, F. (2020) ‘“A Hope Raised and then Defeated”? the Continuing Harms of Irish Abortion Law’, *Feminist Review*, 124(1), pp. 33–50. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0141778919897582> (Accessed: 24 July 2024).

McCartan, A. (2022) ‘Geographies of LGBTQ+ Activisms: Ireland After Marriage Equality’, doctoral thesis, University College Dublin. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/13245> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

¹⁴⁰ Murphy, D. (2022) ‘SWAGS: Sex Workers and An Garda Síochána—Reimagining Sex Work Policing in Ireland’, in T. Sanders, K. McGarry, and P. Ryan (eds.) *Sex Work, Labour and Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp. 121–147.

centre. These contestations occur alongside the ongoing issues with Ireland's asylum provision—direct provision—and the experiences of LGBTQIA+ migrants in this system¹⁴¹.

Terminology used

Throughout the case study report on Ireland, we refer to attacks and targeting around genders and sexualities, mostly LGBTQIA+ people, and do not use the term 'anti-gender'.

This report works across gender and sexualities to explore the effects of attacks that mainly target **LGBTQIA+** people and allies as well as the treatment of sex workers. LGBTQIA+ is used to represent the broad Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (plus) communities, recognising that this term does not encompass all identities or lives. It is the term recognised as inclusive in Ireland.

Whilst we used the term **'anti-gender'** in the recruitment for this research, we qualified this by using terms such as 'anti-feminist', 'anti-LGBTQIA+', and 'anti-trans' to make the research relevant to those in Ireland. When asked about the term 'anti-gender' in the research, **it was clear that it had mixed meanings and little significance for people, and was not widely used.** Some Irish academics use the term 'anti-gender', whilst others do not. It does not have a shared meaning (or use outside of academia); further, 'anti-gender' was seen as inaccurate by participants and as not grasping their experiences. It is not used for or related to the attacks people experienced. Some, however, did like it, finding it to be a useful term that allows for solidarity and global connections. Therefore, throughout the report we do not use the term 'anti-gender'; but rather, we refer to attacks and targeting around genders and sexualities, predominantly LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers. This focuses on the organised mobilisations that seek to contest the supposed inclusions of 'New Ireland'.

When we are referring to 'effects' and 'resistances' in this case study report, we are referring to those who are variously subject to anti-trans, anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-sex work, and anti-abortion mobilisations, which can often be simultaneously racist, anti-immigration, classed, patriarchal, and homophobic. The report's focus on 'mobilisations' is key: this distinguishes between individual attitudes and acts of discrimination and aggression—although these can be emboldened through these mobilisations—and **attacks that are organised, targeted, and intentional around sexualities and genders.**

Findings

1. In Ireland, there are targeted attacks and threats against LGBTQIA+ people

Attacks on individuals ranged from direct physical attacks through to social media 'pile ons'. Key to the mobilisation of these attacks was the media, often presenting anti-trans and broader anti-LGBTQIA+ positions as being from "respectable people" who have "reasonable" concerns.

LGBTQIA+ people in this study spoke of being **physically attacked** and receiving threats of physical harm, as they left events or were on their way to work. IRLFG1.1:

There's not very many people that can understand the experience of walking towards work and turning a corner and seeing a group [of anti-LGBTQIA+ protesters] [...] holding banners [...] about you [...] I had a bad run in with them, where it got physical.

¹⁴¹ There is important work being done on Ireland's system of direct provision and its effects on LGBTQIA+ lives (see for example <https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/entities/publication/8be6bffc-b3a4-410b-9b60-c1088b81f665/details>; and https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10894160.2023.2230108?casa_token=MlqLySgmRDwAAAAA%3Awomvxdlc43oEGKOWtDLMzX2mcB0jpx3ZufibXkSTOWCdWPgNWkixdmxi8oW1b43CfdATbqYwiaUO_A

People who care for those who are attacked, said that these attacks are regular: they occur frequently, or as Julian said, not “as infrequently as I would like”. These attacks are felt by people beyond those who directly experience them; they are attacks “on all of us”.

Participants who are public figures, including those who lead prominent NGOs, particularly trans people in feminist organisations, were often subject to **ongoing targeting**, such as threatening counter-protests and violence at events. Some received warnings from the Garda Síochána (Irish police) about safety, which made them fearful, as these attacks were being taken seriously by the state. They experienced direct threats to their homes and families, including death threats delivered to home addresses, and partners being named in letters to their work to indicate knowledge of personal circumstances.

Media stories targeted organisations and individuals, and amplified anti-trans and more broadly LGBTQIA+ narratives. This created a lack of safety for those who participated in this research, increasing the possibilities of an attack on them. These media representations also fuelled the everyday harassment people experience. “If trans stuff is in the news it's not good news”, IRLFG1.1 said, such that queer people are “scapegoated” and “positioned” as “not what it means to be Irish” (IRLFG1.3).

Complaints from ‘the public’ and work colleagues were cited by participants as a regular feature of daily life for LGBTQIA+ people and allies whose identities/positions are well known. The threat to employment or professional standing through these work-based complaints was heightened for participants by the antagonisation of people through anti-trans or anti-LGBTQIA+ comments at work events and meetings.

Social media attacks were experienced as prolific, regular, and consistent, creating a negative everyday experience for those who use social media. This was particularly the case for those who are trans/LGBTQIA+ or allies who posted supportive content on sex work, feminist, pro-choice, or LGBTQIA+ issues. The attacks used similar phrases with specific social media accounts employed to regularly attack individuals, revealing them to be organised and targeted. These attacks were linked to and exacerbated by media stories against participants or groups with whom they identified, and at times escalated offline in the form of hate mail, including death threats, resulting in the cancellation of events or moving them online due to safety concerns. Even where people carefully curated their social media feeds or avoided being directly targeted, colleagues and others would mention the content in conversation with them, such that they could not avoid it. For one participant, her physical encounter with library protestors was posted on the protestors’ Facebook group and despite reporting it, it was not removed (IRLFG1.1). This means that the attacks can be sustained through social media and morph into new forms of attack in online and offline spaces.

What were termed “**reasonable**” concerns by seemingly “**respectable**” people were said to be fueled by the media, named as being key to convincing those who may not be aware of, or involved in, these issues to adopt anti-trans, anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-immigrant, and anti-sex work positions. There was a difference recognised between those who lack understanding and awareness and those who act in intentional ways using what are framed as “reasonable” concerns that are difficult to identify and name. Those acting intentionally were seen as being more easily believed by the wider public and creating a panic around trans people that, as Leighton said, infects:

very kind and reasonable people with, like, nonsense [...] She [their mother] [...] was giving me all these concerns that just weren't real [...] and I'm like, “you're a nice person, and you're not negative, and you're smart”, like, this is insanity.

This panic infects people’s “good intentions” (Paula). This is a particular concern in Ireland where the 2015/2018 referendums were read as being won on the basis of shared stories, empathy, and wanting to

be kind. “Respectable people” with “reasonable” concerns are therefore key to societal acceptance and inclusion, not least in media content.

2. Participants spoke of organisational targeting and intra-community attacks

LGBTQIA+ organisations spoke of being subject to sporadic and distressing attacks. Those who worked with sex workers saw embedded anti-sex work positions in state institutions and women's organisations. Those who perpetrated anti-trans, racist, and anti-immigrant attacks were also to be found within LGBTQIA+ communities.

LGBTQIA+ and trans-specific organisations as well as civil society groups who work on LGBTQIA+ issues experienced significant and orchestrated attacks, which for some are constant. This happened in the media, on social media, by email and over the phone, and physical threats were sent to workplaces; threats to staff; raising complaints with regulators; raising child safety concerns around trans children; and targeted harassment online. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to the organisations and funders of the organisations were cited by participants as taking significant time, and as “exhausting”; FOI requests were addressed not only to the organisations themselves, but also to their funders. Media requests to organisations were fraught with danger: journalists were seen to be trying to catch out representatives by manipulating stories with the aim of creating a controversy, and/or framing individuals and organisations in negative ways. Those who work for organisations could not avoid these attacks, as they became part of their work life.

In regard to schools, participants who worked in youth services told us of orchestrated letter-writing campaigns and leaflet drops outside supermarkets, schools, and churches aimed at dissuading schools from running anti-bullying/equality campaigns or to challenge the Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. These campaigns directly named LGBTQIA+ organisations and said that they “turn” children trans. This increased the level of harassment of those organisations and it was recognised that this sought to prevent their work in schools. Pride flags have also been ripped down and homophobic and transphobic slogans graffitied on school grounds.

Within healthcare settings, trans participants spoke of their limited access to services that support them. Those who worked in the sector spoke of professionals reiterating anti-trans talking points and a “reluctance to engage in anything that might be gender diverse or embracing of gender” (John).

Anti-sex work policies and practices are embedded in the Irish state and its structure. Participants who work in the area noted that sex workers are not supported by those Irish women’s organisations who are supportive of trans people. It was noted that this position fails to account for trans sex workers and that these organisations operate within an understanding of sex work as violence against women and as inherently exploitative. Paying for sex is criminalised by law, leading to issues well established in the international literature, and more recently in Irish studies. This includes targeting sex workers with ‘welfare checks’, interactions with Gardaí and a lack of support services.¹⁴² For academics and support organisations who work with sex workers, this is exacerbated by a lack of visibility. Those who spoke publicly about sex workers’ rights said they were subject to attack in the media and on social media, experienced career challenges, and limited or no access to funding. Anti-sex work activism was for some in our study put on a back burner to return to, and is seen as an unfinished and important area for Irish feminists to address.

¹⁴² Murphy, D. (2022) ‘SWAGS: Sex Workers and An Garda Síochána—Reimagining Sex Work Policing in Ireland’, in T. Sanders, K. McGarry, and P. Ryan (eds.) *Sex Work, Labour and Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp. 121–147. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04605-6_6 (Accessed 24 July 2024).

“Even” with those who were presumed to be allies and within “leftwing” groups, participants felt that “you are never far” from anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-sex work attitudes (Sorcha). For example, for some academics, the attacks on LGBTQIA+ people were seen as being conceded to, through the sanitisation and desexualisation of queer spaces. Similarly RC felt that ‘anti-gender’ discourses were leading LGBTQIA+ people and allies to make “concessions”, becoming more reticent to strongly defend trans access to healthcare: “they are pushing us more to the centre, or more away from what they see as radical, and I think that that is a really dangerous space to be in.”

Trans people and their allies have **encountered anti-trans groups** advocating for cis women’s rights. LGB discussions and spaces can be anti-trans, although participants said it was more common for LGBTQIA+ services and spaces to be trans-inclusive.

Within **LGBTQIA+ communities, racism and classism were identified and seen as “more troubling” than in the broader society**, because of the expectations participants had of these communities being inclusive of marginalised groups (John). Pradeep described being the queer brown face of a visibility campaign, with the result that he was then subject to racist and anti-immigrant attacks and isolation from queer communities. These attacks meant spaces to explore identities, desires and sexual possibilities were closed off from him.

3. For those who are racialised, classed and gendered in Ireland, intersectional attacks and multiple marginalisations shaped their experiences

Racialised participants and participants with migration backgrounds experience attacks on intersecting levels. Working class communities are particularly targeted for anti-immigrant and anti-trans mobilisations. Lesbians and lesbian organisations were assumed to be anti-trans and were targeted by individuals and organisations—mainly outside of LGBTQIA+ communities—who sought their support. Conversely, those who hold intersecting positions of privilege can feel insulated from attacks.

Racialised people and migrants in Ireland and multiply marginalised participants experience attacks and threats in multiple forms. Their experiences of attacks throughout recent decades, including those outlined in this section, challenge the assumptions that equality had been achieved in Ireland or that there was a ‘golden age’ around the 2015 and 2018 referendums.

Participants spoke of a “swing” between anti-immigrant and anti-trans attacks, with sudden moves from one to the other in the media. For trans people with migration backgrounds, this means the attacks have been constant. These attacks are a “new weight” (Pradeep) for those who had moved to Ireland and were racialised, and had also experienced attacks in their countries of origin. The idea of Ireland as a ‘safe place’ contrasted with their experiences of racist, anti-migrant, anti-LGBTQIA+ attacks.

Racialised people who were the target of attacks said that they feel at risk of more negative reactions; as Helen said: “I don’t want to get, like, a lot of racist abuse as well, on top of the anti-woman abuse.” Where attacks are personalised and where migrant status or racialisation is targeted, it is felt that families can be more at risk. Seeking a low profile and avoiding visibility were strategies participants used in an effort to protect not only themselves, but also their families. Their self-protection mechanisms included avoiding protest marches or not performing other acts of solidarity or resistance due to feelings of vulnerability because of their racialisation, migration status, and age.

LGBTQIA+ organisations, which were under attack by anti-LGBTQIA+ actors and organisations, were also experienced as white-dominated. Recognising that these organisations were under attack, participants of colour also noted that the attacks and targeting can be exacerbated where intersectional

experiences are not accounted for. Where brown and black people are not represented in leadership positions, on boards and elsewhere, white perspectives, needs and priorities were seen to dominate.

Participants in **working class communities** experience the effects of these attacks on their entire communities and families. These communities are increasingly targeted by anti-immigrant groups and also anti-trans rhetoric, including during electoral campaigns, meaning that those attacks were felt more acutely in these communities, as various discourses circulated amongst family and friends. Whilst not unique to working class communities, participants said that their community leaders were not equipped to offer the solidarities particularly around trans issues. They said that community leaders had brought communities together during the 2015 and 2018 referendums on same-sex marriage and abortion, but that this was not being seen in regards to anti-immigration and anti-trans mobilisations.

Lesbians and lesbian organisations were falsely presumed to be allies for gender critical groups.

They were approached by people seeking to propagate anti-trans rhetoric and to develop anti-trans organisations in Ireland. Those who approached them were often perceived by participants as not being part of LGBTQIA+ communities. Participants were approached and seen by others as “the haters”, “the anti-trans people” (IRLFG3.4). Presuming lesbians to be anti-trans, which was inaccurate in this case study, is an effect of the mobilisations against trans rights. Namely, it assumes lesbians are allied with those who are anti-trans, including straight women and men. By assuming that their lesbian and feminist activism is anti-trans, their trans inclusive organisation and allyship that extended for decades was overlooked and negated. In response, participants and their respective organisations were public about their trans inclusive positions, which then led to anti-trans attacks and targeting.

In contrast to those who identified race, class, age, and gender as having an effect on their experiences of attacks and targeting regarding gender and sexualities, were **those who understood themselves as privileged by these intersections**. These were men, women, cis and trans people who variously saw their whiteness, gender, age, physical profile (height and build), able-bodiedness, current class status, secure employment, work colleagues and environment, and support from social networks as protecting them from the intense impacts that others experienced. These participants felt that they could use these privileged positions and influence to speak out against and resist the mobilisations and attacks.

4. These attacks have been on the increase since the turn of the decade

Personal and organisational attacks experienced by participants have increased significantly and have become targeted at individuals recently. This was unexpected for some; for others it was a continuation of older forms of discrimination. Participants expected that these attacks would continue to increase in the future.

Participants identified the **increase in attacks** as an effect of organised mobilisations against sexual and gendered equalities. They identified an “acceleration of a very specific and very violent kind of anti-trans and anti-queer sort of organising”, and that “that voice has become much louder” (Anne), having significantly intensified since 2018. Anti-trans mobilising was noted as having a significant uptick. This, it was noted, did not coincide with the passing of gender self-recognition five years earlier, in 2015. Participants said the attacks were often not seen as a problem, and that this was especially the case where they are presented as “reasonable” concerns by “respectable people”. In the current Irish context, this increase in attacks demonstrated to participants that people who hold anti-LGBTQIA+ views are now “more emboldened” (Paula). The effects of the spread of discourses and ideas were apparent where they “have talking points now where they didn't have before” (Gordon).

For participants, attacks have **increased in quantity and frequency**. Those in the research noted that where attacks on social media used to be “occasional” for those who are public figures and/or post on social

media regarding topics such as gender, sexuality, feminism, migration and sex work, they are now daily. The attacks have also **increased in personalisation**: whereas once, as Sara said, they targeted communities as a whole—such as trans or LGBTQIA+ communities—they are now trained on individuals. Participants who are academics spoke of increases in students who take issue with university lectures particularly when they involve trans guest speakers or the discussion of trans issues.

Nevertheless, the level of attacks are **not understood by participants to be on the same scale of the UK, USA, or Eastern Europe**. Yet participants worried about the complacency of locating anti-trans mobilisations 'over there' (rather than 'here' in Ireland), or seeing Ireland as exceptional in terms of 'far-right' and anti-immigration political parties. This was particularly concerning for those who increasingly feel the direct effects and see this as growing and intensifying substantially.

There was **surprise** amongst those in the research **when they directly or indirectly encountered attacks, targeting and mobilisations**. There was a recognition that the "easy" narrative of marriage equality (IRLFG6.1) was very different from the hostile culture around trans lives, genders, and bodies, which drives anti-trans attacks. People knew those who didn't agree with LGBTQIA+/trans lives existed, and didn't believe they had 'gone away'. Nonetheless they were surprised when it happened to them, or to those they knew. They read this as being because of the emboldening and intensification of anti-LGBTQIA+ groups and discourses.

For some of those who recently directly experienced attacks, they thought "those days were over" (Moninne) in Ireland. Ireland is a context where "it's become much easier to be a queer or a trans person [...], like undoubtedly to what it was even ten years ago" (Anne). The emergence of organised attacks were felt as upending this expectation of lives becoming "easier". This was experienced as an unexpected jolt and a direct effect of mobilisations against LGBTQIA+ communities, particularly trans people. For those such as Sean who had "fought the battles" of the 2015 and 2018 referendums there was a feeling that:

[marriage equality in Ireland] for many of us, it represented a new Ireland [...] There was a lot of excitement in the sense of a new world. I'm far less hopeful now [...] there has been [moves] to suddenly cast the trans community as being highly problematic [...] We thought that battle had been won. But I don't know if those battles can ever be won.

Those who had lived through these experiences saw continuities between then and now such that patriarchy, homo/bi/trans-phobia "have always been here" (Katherine). However, some participants who had more recently migrated to Ireland recognised the problems with the assumptions of "post-homophobia", "post-everything" (Julio), where people do not recognise the ongoing effects of discrimination or the organised attacks people and organisations are experiencing.

The attacks around gender and sexuality were expected by many in the research to increase into the future because "the foundation's already been built" (Kevin). They felt that Ireland was being readied for an increase in anti-trans mobilisations and there was significant fear that the progress achieved across LGBTQIA+ equalities was not secure.

5. There are ongoing residual effects of being targeted and attacked

People who are targeted suffer because of the ongoing and residual effects of these attacks on their lives. These include fear, physical and mental health effects, problems at work, and family and relationship pressures.

Kevin: The spectacle event scares me, but it's always the residual event afterwards, the one that gets quieter, that kind of festers there, waiting for its next time to kind of pounce, that's what scares me a lot more.

A key residual effect of attacks was fear. Participants found that the atmosphere that is being created means that random attacks by emboldened individuals are more possible alongside those that are organised. Most of them take various measures to reduce the likelihood of being attacked and targeted. This included office security, only going to work if someone was there to walk them to and from their workplace, avoiding certain places at certain times, and isolation for those who are scared to leave their homes. This fear played a significant role in how people use and move about in spaces. There was a worry about walking along certain roads in case of violence, cat-calling, and other attacks. Abusive letters and online attacks including death threats meant people were fearful of something more happening to them or their families. They spoke of an underlying feeling of being 'on edge'—that for some was never felt before—when walking in public, entering workspaces, lecture theatres, and other public arenas. Fears of complaints were apparent in professional roles as a result of being targeted and being visible.

Mental and physical health was damaged by the cycle of attack/fear which “takes a massive toll” (Han). Being subject to “relentless” attacks was “physically very, very, very tiring” (Michelle); “upsetting and difficult” (Martina); and “a challenge everyday” (Martina). Participants identified an acute level of stress in being subject to these attacks as they required significant emotional investment as well as time in order to deal with them. **The activists that had been targeted, despite significant experience of working in this arena and recognising the continuities between battles 'then and now', spoke of themselves as struggling with physical and mental health in ways that they had not previously during the decades of their work.**

Work, employment, and activism is also scaled back to avoid both physical attack and draining effects on emotional health and resources of being targeted; as Sara said, “I need my life back”. In academia, “contentious research” around sex work can be purposefully limited due to funding and to protect employment and standing. Those who are under attack through their work role find this affects their professional standing and their ability to undertake and retain their job. People who have been attacked can consider leaving roles and employment for safety and health reasons; as a result, highly qualified and extensively experienced people can no longer use their skills to support marginalised and vulnerable communities. There is a fear of loss of employment due to the attacks resulting in the person being “considered a problem, and then, do I become unemployed as a result eventually?” (Conor). There is significant pressure involved in staying in roles where there were direct calls for participants to be fired, which “can't not impact upon you, even though I tried to laugh it off” (Sean). Where employees were under pressure to ensure they provided the “right answer” (IRLFG5.4), they felt a responsibility to their colleagues, and even to “the existence of organisation” (Michelle).

Most participants **moderated or limited their social media and media interactions.** People feared being set up for ‘a debate’ in which their words could be twisted; they felt that they would be pressured to speak on areas they were not equipped to address. This left a void that meant anti-trans rhetoric, in particular, was left unchallenged. For those still on social media, although some immunity can be created for these attacks, the effects persist. Media and social media attacks can be harder to deal with as more people leave these platforms, resulting in fewer allies.

Due to the targeting of **homes and families**, some are newly cautious in ways they were not before, regarding who is allowed into their private spheres. This runs alongside dealing with attacks throughout evenings and weekends. There is a significant effect on relationships and family life when subject to these

attacks. For those who worked in the sector, this **lack of boundaries between work, social and home lives** meant they avoided certain topics, so they did not have to be 'on' all the time; but this also meant a lack of support and isolation. This was exacerbated by those who told us that they became **spokespeople for LGBTQIA+ rights within their families**. They were relied on for answers and they had upsetting things said to them. Their contact details were shared by family members and friends with others, including people they didn't know, so that they could be questioned about the latest media stories and events. Where anti-LGBTQIA+/anti-trans talking points come up at family events and occasions, in social spaces, and with others, they can pull away from family and friends, including vital support networks during the times when these might be most needed, because the person, or where they work, is being attacked. Participants avoided revealing their employer to new friends or revealing the extent of the impacts of the attacks in case their family worried about them. Friends were also not relied on to be a source of escape, to keep their attention away from organisations or incidents that were already receiving enough publicity. This meant **participants often felt unsupported outside of the work environment, even when they were subject to attack for doing their work supporting LGBTQIA+ people**.

6. Organisations and their work are detrimentally affected by targeting and attacks

Organisations subject to attack were significantly impacted in terms of their capacity to provide their services to those who need them, and in the effects on staff. Organisational funding has been impacted as funders are targeted and the area they are working in becomes 'controversial'. There is a fear for the organisations' survival.

Attacks on organisations had significant effects on their capacity as well as on employees where "you spend so much time [...] just trying to backpedal against it and probably not making any gains" (IRLFG6.1). When under attack, and because of the residual effects of these attacks, organisations said they have to focus their resources on dealing with them, including staff time, staff counselling, policy reviews, updates for physical safety, board meetings, preparing responses, engaging with Gardaí, and dealing with partners and funders. This was now something they dealt with on an ongoing basis as they anticipated the next wave of attacks and waited for "something more sinister" (Paula).

They reported that, being drained of resource capacity in countering ongoing attacks in these ways, there were also **fewer resources to focus on supporting vulnerable people** in their services who need them. This was made worse because the people they are supporting are also experiencing these attacks and require additional help to deal with them. Participants such as Moninne spoke of the effects on staff and those they support:

The target community that we're working with are affected by the rise in populism and [...] attitudes and behaviour that's homophobic and biphobic and transphobic and racist and sexist and all that kind of thing. It's had quite a big impact naturally on the people that we're working with [...It is] very upsetting to see how much they're [those within and outside the organisation] struggling and how much they're suffering.

The vitriolic responses and safety threats that participants' organisations received were not only dangerous in nature but harrowing for staff and service users, as well as for those who potentially needed their services. **Support groups became less visible** to keep people safe. Participants reported removing their organisations from social media, not advertising meetings or support groups. These would once have been on webpages and open for those who need them to find them. They placed fewer or no paid online adverts to support raising awareness for those who need the service, and to advertise fundraising initiatives. Those who needed support had to get in touch directly with the organisation to find details of venues, times and groups, rather than this information being publicly available for drop-ins. It also means choosing venues without visibility to public streets as the spread of media stories and "talking points" make random attacks

more of a risk. **Overall, participants told us that support and services are harder to access for those who need them.**

When organising events, organisers in the research told us that they were very aware of the **risks to attendees** and took measures to mitigate those risks, such as using private launches with specific attendance lists. This limits attendees to those who are known and the overall reach and awareness of activities that organisers would want to be very public and vocal about. Organising events regarding gender and sexualities can now involve liaising with the Garda Síochána, having a policing plan in place, and hiring security. Participants who organised events recognised that this can mean individuals or communities who have had negative encounters with security personnel or Gardaí, including in racialised or classed ways, may feel less welcome.

Individual staff and service users whose stories are key for social change were featured increasingly less often in public-facing materials. Yet, participants who work with vulnerable people recognise that their stories are the most effective when portraying the need for services and creating necessary societal change. Trans spokespeople were mentioned as being specifically targeted. For cisgender people who worked in LGBTQIA+ organisations, they recognised a tension between seeking to protect trans individuals and also not speaking for trans people.

Participants restricted, and were wary of, engagement with the media. Participants both wanted to challenge “false narratives” and put across expert views based on working with vulnerable and marginalised people. However, individual and organisational visibility came with heightened and increased risks. They outlined their dilemma: “do we respond and have a voice in that space, and give context to things, or do we risk that being taken out of context, or misrepresented in what we say?” (Michelle)

These limitations to events, media and public facing materials, and attacks on organisations and funders, meant that **they found their organisations and work were less attractive to potential funders.** The increase in the attacks meant that some corporate sponsors were seen as “getting scared” after the “honeymoon” period following the marriage equality referendum and the passing of the gender recognition act (Paula). This was leading to a decline in their resources and a reduction in opportunities to grow. Although it had yet to happen, those working in organisations saw these attacks as a threat to their existence and the work they do.

7. Resistances to organised attacks were apparent through visible and public actions that challenged anti-LGBTQIA+ attacks

Resistances to attacks included visible and public challenges; being present, “not going away”, and speaking to the media. Making space for joy was seen as critical to countering attacks.

Resistances to attacks take various forms and are built on and sustained through hope, to be ready to “deal with” what was seen to be coming (IRLFG3.4).

Protesting and counter-protesting were seen as a key way of publicly challenging the rise of organised attacks. These included counter-protests at libraries and appearances by anti-trans speakers from the UK, as well as at LGBTQIA+ protests and celebrations of Pride and Alternative Pride. Protest marches allowed participants to feel “part of something” (John), to feel safe, and to have a shared sense of purpose in “campaigning for the same thing” (IRLINT03). It was uplifting for participants who felt under attack when, for example, a large number of trans communities and their allies were seen to come out into the streets. Activists and organisations in Ireland also used boycotts of media outlets to address damaging media reporting.

People resisted in everyday spaces. This included turning up to work, being vocal in meetings, and making clear statements in everyday interactions regarding LGBTQIA+ rights, sex worker rights, and anti-racism. **Being present, being seen, and being a defiant presence** meant participants stayed in difficult and contentious situations for those who needed support. In workplaces, Katherine spoke of being “polite and brave” and the importance of “not going away”. Amongst those who stayed on social media despite regular and consistent abuse were participants making strong statements on LGBTQIA+, and particularly trans, inclusions. For academics, being visible and speaking on trans rights and sex work in the Irish context was a “little act of resistance” (IRLINT01). One academic we spoke with sought the “normalisation” of sex work in response to “the taboo and the stigma” that she found in her work with sex workers (IRLINT01). Resistances to attacks also included: *not* making complaints that would give more airtime to those who perpetrated abuse; applying for funding to study key areas including ‘anti-gender’; and publicly discussing work that could be targeted in public talks, academic spaces, or in the media. **“Not going away” and instead continuing as much activism and activity as possible weighed against the mental and physical effects and safety threats that participants experienced because they stayed.**

Countering attacks through media appearances and social media involved participants making counter statements, and promoting positive representations of trans and broader LGBTQIA+ communities and people, and sex workers. Activists deliberately engaged with gender critical/anti-trans actors to dilute their influence by “distracting” them from “spending time on someone who might have more vulnerabilities” as well as influencing those who might be reading or listening (John). However, some individuals, including participants who ran organisations, grappled with the safety risks. Most did not feel comfortable appearing publicly themselves or nominating others to do so, in ways that were possible before. This was also noted for sex workers. Countering the institutional narratives of the necessary harm of sex work, and of supposedly “protecting” sex workers in actuality meant that they were “under threat” in media and governmental spaces (Paul).

Making “space for collective joy” (El), including parties, creative outlets, support networks, alongside organising, building, and countering attacks, can mitigate the heaviness of organisational work, attack and the fear of attack (El). This included the LGBTQIA+ groups that were seen as effective and as offering community in tough times, creating visions of “what it should be like” (Kevin). Julian used community organisation as a way to resist and empower, by organising trans only events to “create a different world, a safer world, by changing people’s relationships with the world that actually exists”. Countering the suffering and sadness, Pradeep supported himself and others by creating a support group for people of colour to speak to others who had faced racism in queer Irish spaces, and homo-, bi- and transphobia.

8. Alliances, solidarities and friendships are key to resistances and to the support needed to survive

Intra-community alliances are important and mean that anti-trans mobilisations have not taken hold in key organisations in Ireland. Solidarity from other organisations and individuals provided vital support, with friendships giving critical, at times lifesaving, support.

Allies were found in multiple places, including with other queer groups and individuals, feminist and anti gendered violence organisations, library staff, and neurodivergent representative groups. **Intra-community alliances** were seen as key, as organisations worked across a variety of LGBTQIA+ groups, at times having to compete for funding. **Participants told us that the relationships developed between feminists and LGBTQIA+ people during the 2015 and 2018 referendums offered “strong foundations” (IRLINT03) for ongoing solidarities and shared actions.** These alliances contested anti-trans mobilising because of those who were involved in these campaigns. Participants reported that

the organisational structures developed through fighting the referendums had created relationships of trust across LGB, trans and feminist communities. This meant that Irish feminist organisations were playing a key role in *not* facilitating anti-trans attacks and threats. Trans people's presence in feminist organisations also lent itself to a continued support of trans rights. Similarly those who worked in Irish LGBTQIA+ media ensured that it was actively trans inclusive by not giving more attention to anti-trans activists or narratives.

Solidarity marches and support from NGOs, political parties and others outside of trans, LGBTQIA+, and sex worker organisations were identified and valued by those who were being attacked, or who feared this. Solidarity included support in numbers at events and protests, and everyday assistance. **Mainstream organisations were seen to have more weight** with the wider public than issue-specific organisations, in their public support of groups such as trans people and sex workers. Solidarity could be felt on marches and actions, though not directly related to sexualities and genders, but that referenced them. One example was Marches for Palestine that demonstrated pro-trans inclusions not only through flags and signs, but also through including trans people in the event. Participants valued venues that were provided for organisation; LGBTQIA+ book clubs and other events were organised even when libraries were under attack. **Library staff were commended for countering the restriction of library services and LGBTQIA+ books on behalf of LGBTQIA+ people.**

Coalition building was identified in the establishment of alliances for societal level changes. Organising across groups was seen as central to resisting anti-trans rhetorics and actions, and the growth of attacks and threats in these arenas. Coalitions were seen to be built on recent successful relationships in the referendums. The ideal for some participants would be to build coalitions to work against a broader threat of 'the far-right' including gender and sexualities.

Friendship provided care and support; for participants who had experienced attacks, it was often essential while they were taking place and in the aftermath, including caring for people physically and offering emotional support, and practical help such as walking people to or from work after an attack. Friendship affirmed participants' lives and identities in ways that they said would have otherwise been overwhelmed by their experiences. Friendships offered participants community and belonging. Faye, for example, described how her friends had embraced her trans identity when she came out to them. This was part of a general sense that she has "felt affirmed" in her identity far more often than she has felt "misgendered or not affirmed". Friendships also enable, bolster, and maintain resistances, such as through solidarity and the embracing of enjoyment and celebration.

9. Conversations and dialogues—"having the chats"—are crucial to creating better worlds for marginalised people in Ireland

Everyday conversations—"having the chats"—were core to resistance in Ireland, based on a 'gentle approach' that sought to invite genuine questions and concerns. They were not without costs to those who engaged in them. Naming abuse and those perpetuating it, and providing vocal support was valued alongside dialogue.

"Having the chats" was seen as a part of Irish culture predicated on Ireland's small population. Participants said that everyday conversations at work, home or social events were key to resistance. The personalisation of these conversations was understood as critical to limit the potential for attack within communities and to support those who had experienced them. One participant felt that the personalisation enabled by these conversations meant that "when you actually do know somebody, you can relate to them" (IRLFG3.4). For many participants this prevents othering and dehumanisation. By sharing personal stories and linking the conversations to known friends and family, participants generated empathy for those affected by the attacks.

Central to having conversations that can counter attacks and targeting was a “gentle” approach “that’s not going to alienate them by then making them double down” (Tom). Participants met those who have so-called “reasonable” concerns where they are, in order to “bring them to where I am”. (Kelsey). They avoided lecturing, being ‘pushy’ or being perceived as difficult. Participants saw danger in positioning trans people, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and anyone who is ‘woke’ as easily offended and defensive. They recognised that these approaches might push people with genuine questions away. Using a gentle approach sought to move friends, families, work colleagues and acquaintances away from antagonistic media and social media content, which was “telling them how needy and annoying and demanding and controversial LGBT people are” (IRLFG1.3). Catching people at critical moments meant that open discussions were possible before they became more strident and decided on their views.

Participants wanted to allow for the expression of doubt or curiosity. In the absence of this, there was “a real danger” (IRLFG3.2) of the attacks, discourses and attitudes taking further hold. Irish organisations had worked together to create specific, quiet spaces for other groups and organisations to ask questions, present doubts and learn in a way that was focused on dialogue. “Equipping our allies” (Moninne) was seen as avoiding fear, and developing understanding. It was perceived as central to developing the support needed to survive and thrive in the face of attacks. These conversations are contrasted with those who seek to ask questions for nefarious reasons: to waste time, or to gather information to be used against individuals and organisations, or waste resources.

Engaging in dialogue meant participants allowed space for conversations, for getting things ‘wrong’ and/or causing offence. Those who worked and ran organisations saw dialogue and open conversations as central to their role and the coalition building that enabled them to resist the attacks and targeting they experienced. This meant engaging in “really, really tough conversations” , including with those in feminist organisations to “find common ground” and avoid “cancelling” others (Moninne). These dialogues are seen as central to the capacity of organisations to collectively resist. In this context, participants recognised that “if we won’t talk to them, [name of agitator who is globally recognised] will” (Helen).

There are costs to this approach. People find these conversations difficult and challenging as they can encroach on their everyday lives as well as being part of some participants’ work pressures. Participants reported the increase in attacks, media reports and targeting as leading to them being asked questions by family, friends and in other social spaces, creating difficult moments in spaces that were, or should have been, supportive. Marie spoke about the “heavy” impact of the responsibility to have these conversations to support trans people and others. Certain trans and other organisations **did not want to engage in a dialogue based approach. Participants valued a “calling out” approach which was more vocal, although none saw these preventing “having the chats”.**

10. Irish state support and contemporary Irish culture allows for a more inclusive country that has not embraced attacks around genders and sexualities, but this is limited, as the Dublin riots highlighted

Irish state support and civil society groups, including feminist organisations, are seen as supportive of LGBTQIA+ lives but not of sex workers. Ideas of Ireland as exceptional, with anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-migrant views coming from elsewhere were starkly challenged by the anti-immigrant riots in Dublin in 2024.

The state and its institutions in Ireland are seen to be supportive of LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equalities more broadly. Ireland was reported to be an inclusive state, if not for sex workers, because of: changes in legislation; wins in the 2015 and 2018 referendums; a mixed race “gay Taoiseach” (Irish head of government, IRLFG3.4); and the advent of self-identification. Access to abortion is seen as a “settled” question and only being politically contested in regard to legislation to further enable access and the

restricting of protest actions around clinics. The presence of existing laws and policies, then, offer flawed but important safeguards (Alexander) and “psychological safety” for some (IRLFG3.2). This is coupled with institutional recognition and protections in state and private organisations for some LGBTQIA+ people. LGBTQIA+ organisations also told us that they had experienced support from state and other institutions, even when spurious complaints were made. Support from trusted organisations such as the Ombudsman for Children publicly supporting trans people, advice on safety from the Garda Síochána (Irish police), and government representatives being open to discuss the impacts of sex work legislation on sex workers were valued by participants. This access was directly related to a small Irish population, as compared to other jurisdictions, which allows for a political system that is “a more participatory democracy” with accessible public representatives (Katherine).

Participants noted that **Irish mainstream public representatives had not engaged with or perpetuated anti-trans rhetoric** and had not sought to create a political atmosphere that aimed to attack trans or LGBTQIA+ people. This was linked to the referendums, the successes of which enabled access to politicians and policy makers :they were available and open to be spoken to “plainly” about the dangers of these attacks and how to “inoculate” against them (IRLFG6.1).

Irish culture was understood as welcoming and open, particularly for LGBTQIA+ people. This was seen as different to other places, particularly the UK and the USA; it was connected to Ireland’s history and place in international peacekeeping. Attacks are seen as infiltrating from outside of Ireland and attributed to the influence and direct participation of actors particularly from England and the USA. Participants noted that in Ireland people can “hold differing opinions around stuff that are sometimes conflictual” (Moninne) and find “common ground” (John). This was linked to a refusal of a “domineering nationalist kind of view” because “we don’t believe we’re perfect” (Katherine). Participants felt part of the community in a country that is perceived as doing well within the “European context” (Michelle) with no “populist anti-trans political movement as of yet” (IRLFG5.5). Irish culture was seen as being composed of a small population, meaning people are likely to know those who might come under attack. This offers a quiet resistance to attacks through “innate decency” (Tom), people being “pretty sound” (‘sound’ being the Hiberno-English term for ‘decent’) because “average people” are allies (IRLFG5.5). Some participants felt a respect for people’s space, which means that the attacks do not spread, even though, as noted above, “respectable” and “reasonable” narratives are powerful. This is augmented by a widespread rejection of protests in residential areas, which are seen as an unacceptable invasion of space. This limits direct organised attacks on homes for some.

This view of Irish culture was challenged by the Dublin riots (November 2023), which opposed immigration. They act as a stark reminder of the ways in which quietness cannot be seen as only indicating acceptance. They also show that anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-immigrant views are not outside of Irish culture but remain a present feature:

John: We pretend all the time [that Ireland is exceptional] [...] of course there are loads of bigots and horrible people, and violent people in Ireland, and then it [Dublin riot] happened [...] and it was that kind of real, so I had a shock where I shouldn't have had a shock.

Julian: I was like, “fuck, I knew it, but now I know it”.

Conclusion

This report has shown that Ireland’s ‘trajectory of progress’ around sexualities and genders in the 21st century is seen to be coming to an end. This was directly linked to increased, personalised, and vitriolic attacks on the basis of gender and sexualities on individuals and organisations who worked in these arenas.

Attacks on individuals ranged from direct physical attacks through to social media “pile ons”. Key to the mobilisation of these attacks were the media and the creation of controversies such that “respectable people” voiced and could have “reasonable” concerns. Organisations were attacked through the media, phone calls, and social media. There were local protests at schools, as well as challenges to trans healthcare. This research supports others who have found that the positioning of sex work in a model of patriarchal violence and paternalistic care is embedded in the state and women’s and feminist organisations. This meant there had not been a significant change for those who work in sex worker organisations.

Those who perpetuated anti-trans, racist and anti-immigrant attacks were also within LGBTQIA+ communities. The attacks and their implications were shown to be exacerbated by social differences. Racialised people and migrants experience the attacks on intersecting levels. Those in working class communities felt that these communities are targeted for anti-immigrant, anti-trans mobilisations. Participants experienced a lack of leadership in this area that contrasted with solidarities shown around same sex marriage and reproductive rights. Lesbians have been targeted on the presumption that they are anti-trans. Those who hold various privileged positions can feel insulated from the effects of these attacks and their repercussions.

The increase in attacks was unexpected for some, whilst for others it represented a continuation of their experiences from the end of the 20th century. For all, attacks were seen as getting worse, with the prospect for the future that they would increase.

Individual people suffer because of these attacks in ways that mean they have ongoing and residual effects on their lives. These include fear, physical and mental health effects, problems at work, and family and relationship pressures. Organisations were significantly impacted in terms of their capacity to provide their services to those who need them and the effects on staff. Organisations’ funding have been impacted as funders are targeted and the area becomes “controversial”. There is a fear for ongoing survival of such organisations if attacks persist.

Resistances to attacks were varied and multiple, demonstrating resilience, solidarity and the desire to engage meaningfully. Resistances included visible and public challenges in protests, everyday public resistances at work, on social media and in the media, as well as “not going away” in professional settings. Making space for joy was seen as critical to counter attacks, mitigating their effects and creating support and resistance. Friendships provided critical, at times lifesaving, support to participants.

Intra-community alliances have developed from recent work around same sex marriage and abortion referendums, bringing LGBTQIA+ and feminist communities together, and providing a solid basis for ongoing work. These have meant anti-trans mobilising has been prevented from taking hold in key organisations. Solidarity from organisations and individuals who are not directly involved in LGBTQIA+ and/or sex work communities can be vital. These solidarities are made possible through coalition building built on dialogue and conversations within and outside of professional settings. Dialogue and conversations were based on a “gentle” approach that sought to invite genuine questions and concerns. They were not without costs to those who engaged in them, and calling out and vocal support was valued alongside “having the chats”.

The Irish state is seen as supportive of LGBTQIA+ lives, with civil society organisations, including feminist organisations, being trans-inclusive. Irish culture is also seen as allowing people to live their lives because of a small population that knows each other. However, ideas of Ireland as exceptional, and anti-immigration, anti-trans views as only coming from elsewhere were starkly challenged by the anti-immigrant riots in Dublin in 2024.

There is more work to be done to develop these Irish findings and a lot more stories to be told and heard. This includes areas that are not covered by this case study, and those who should be a part of these conversations; we hope these will be part of future work in RESIST and beyond. To name but a few areas of work that can build on this case study in Ireland: there is significant work to be done on developing research on the targeted effects that focuses on sex workers; those who are affected by anti-abortion protests, including outside of clinics and more broadly 'anti-feminist' actions. More research is urgently needed to explore anti-racism/anti-immigration/anti-traveller and the classed aspects of these gendered/sexualised/queer politics as they continue to emerge across Ireland. There is further work needed on the effects of the Gardaí, immigration services and other state enforcement, particularly from those directly affected by this system. The focus of this report is on the Republic of Ireland and how these processes operate within Northern Ireland is also an important consideration.

Respondent Profiles

These details are taken from 35 demographic forms. The numbers are not mutually exclusive so people can identify in multiple ways, for example as 'lesbian' and 'queer', and they are counted in all areas that they identified.

Table 7: Respondent profiles Ireland

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample outline
Age groups	34	25-34 years: 15 35-49 years: 8 50-64 years: 11
Gender	35	There were 19 people in the sample who used some variation of female/woman. This included cisgender, trans and unspecified. Eight said that they were male/man, and seven said that they were non-binary or trans non-binary. Note these categories are not mutually exclusive and people can identify across them.
Sexual orientation / identity	35	12 identified as lesbian, ten as queer, eight as gay and five as bisexual.
Origin	35	Most people (27) said that they came from Ireland, eight said that they had moved to Ireland from other places.
Country of residence / legal status	35	All participants lived in Ireland and/or had legal residency in the state.
Ethnic / racial identity	35	Almost all the participants (32) said that they were white/caucasian/Irish/white Irish. Three said that they had another identity.
National identity	35	Most of the participants (31) said that they were Irish, with four having another national identity.
Education level	34	Almost all (33) said that they had a third level education.
Religion	34	Most (26) participants said that they had none/'N/A' /atheist/agnostic. Four said they were lapsed/ex-Catholic or raised Catholic.

Social class	33	22 of the participants identified as middle class, with five saying that they had a working class background. Seven said that they were working class/low income.
Dis/ability	34	Six identified as having a disability.
Settlement type	34	Most (28) participants said that they lived in a big town.
Anything else	8	When asked if there was anything else important to who they were, participants included notes on being: autistic, neurodivergent, a nurse, a scholar, a killjoy, married, poly, a foster-carer, a vegetarian, a volunteer, a parent of LGBTQ young person, feminist, a visual artist, a writer, an activist; and having BPD, having anxiety,

Chapter 8: Poland

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Executive Summary

Poland's transforming socio-cultural landscape has witnessed across the years an intensified political focus on issues of gender and sexuality, which have become a battleground for a diverse spectrum of views and group interests. There has been notable persistence of conservative, and indeed hostile, stances towards gender and sexual equalities. To understand the effects and impacts of 'anti-gender' politics in everyday life of people in Poland, we organised four focus groups (FG) and 12 individual interviews. Recruitment of participants (33 in total) followed clustered sampling principles and snowballing methodology of reaching out to potential participants.

There are several different ways in which 'anti-gender' politics impacts the everyday lives of people in Poland. Common experiences are those of bullying and intimidation, and of systemic, institutional discrimination. Social media is a platform where much of the hateful language and attitudes are experienced. Public institutions fail to adequately address the issues of gender and sexual diversity. Oftentimes, officers and administrators lack language and knowledge to address individual cases; nor can they implement policies and regulations as these are largely non-existent.

The resulting effects include burnouts and depletions among participants, who highlight the high emotional costs of dealing with a discriminatory and hateful atmosphere on a daily basis. There are clear negative impacts on the mental health and general well-being of minoritised communities in Poland, the predominant target of the 'anti-gender' politics in Poland.

Other observed effects are fearful self-censorship, where people actively hide information about themselves to avoid self-exposure to potential discriminatory attitudes. There were also more grave instances of harm to bodies and property reported.

However, it was also noted that 'anti-gender' politics have produced some 'ricochet effects' such as greater social mobilisation for the queer-feminist causes, and that social attitudes are positively changing towards greater acceptance and support for minoritised groups.

People multiply marginalised and minoritised due to their intersectional positionalities are usually more adversely affected. Their gendered and sexual identities are oftentimes forced into secondary positions of consideration, when people are being put in a position of forced choices between multiple problems they face or are committed to changing.

Our participants navigate the impacts of 'anti-gender' on their lives in different ways: by shielding or withdrawing, or conversely, re-mobilising. A strong ethos of community support, mutual care and solidarity practices was also clearly pronounced as a common way of coping with the pressures of 'anti-gender' politics.

Keywords: 'Anti-gender' politics in Poland; queer-feminist mobilisations; mental health; hope and persistence; activism

Introduction

This case study report explores the effects of ‘anti-gender’ politics in Poland, recounting the lived experiences, effects, and coping mechanisms formed in response to it. The report builds on the data gathered from four focus groups and 12 individual interviews (33 participants in total). More information about sampling is discussed at the end of this case study report. Below, there is a short overview to contextualise the findings, mostly to benefit the reader who is completely unfamiliar with the Polish situation. Following this, there is a presentation of the emerging ten key findings, offering a glimpse into the broad range of observations that we draw from the gathered data. The report welcomes the reader as an opening exploration into the plethora of ‘anti-gender’ effects in Polish everyday lives.

Context

Poland has been on the radar of academic interest for an extended period of time, as the country's historical trajectory of developments in the last 30 years well exemplifies contemporary, semi-peripheral European struggles regarding identities, values, attitudes, ideologies, and policies. This period of the so-called ‘post-communist transformations’ has brought about rapid and significant changes in the economic, political, and institutional systems that organise everyday lives of people living in Poland. It has also been an intense period of social and cultural changes, such as the disappearance of old, and (re)emergence of new social stratifications and inequalities.¹⁴³ Notable differences in generational perspectives emerged in relation to the memory and experiences of living in the state-socialist period, in the 1990s, and through to the 2000s. During these last 30 years, gender and sexual minorities have often been victimised and scapegoated in the political battles over the shape and direction of Polish democracy.¹⁴⁴

2015 marked the beginning of the VIII Terms of Office of the Sejm—lower chamber of the parliament—and an eight-year rule of the conservative, right-wing, populist and nationalist Law and Justice—Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS—political party. This period of PiS ascending to power brought about intensification of ‘anti-gender’ politics,¹⁴⁵ although anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ politics can be traced back to the first anti-abortion laws from 1993, and subsequently firmly rooted a decade later in the early 2000s.

More recently, three elections in Poland in 2023/24 (PL parliamentary, local authority, and EU parliamentary elections) brought about a change of government, allowing centrist liberal parties to return to power and challenge the populist and far-right political appropriation of public space in Poland. This fragile shift of power—although PiS was not able to form the coalition government and retain power, it nonetheless remains the largest, single party in the Sejm—is also a reminder of the unpredictability of such political systems.

These eight years saw several political initiatives that negatively impacted Polish democratic and legal systems: interference with the judicial system that resulted in a withdrawal of some funding from the EU

¹⁴³ Gdula, M. and M. Sutowski, (2017) *Klasy w Polsce. Teorie, Dyskusje, Badania, Kontekst*. Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Zaawansowanych

Cześniak, M. and M. Grabowska, (2017) ‘Popękane polskie społeczeństwo jako pole badawcze – dane, fakty, mity’, *Przegląd Socjologiczny* LXVI, no. 3: 9–43.

¹⁴⁴ Żuk, P. and P. Żuk, (2020) ‘“Euro-Gomorrhah and Homopropaganda”: The Culture of Fear and “Rainbow Scare” in the Narrative of Right-Wing Populists Media in Poland as Part of the Election Campaign to the European Parliament in 2019’, *Discourse, Context & Media* 33: 100364.

¹⁴⁵ Graff, A. and E. Korolczuk, (2021) *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*. London: Routledge.

due to the breaches of the 'rule of law' principle; further restraints added to the already draconian anti-abortion laws; and attempts at passing local and regional so-called 'declarations of independence' from the 'LGBT ideology' (2019). Indeed, the so-called 'LGBT-free zones' controversy was widely reported both within the country and worldwide. Equally highly mediated and visible were Black Marches and All-Polish Women's Strikes against the anti-abortion laws in 2016/17 and 2020/21, which took place all over Poland. Here, an important context to note is that these protests were rooted not only in the metropolitan cities—the usual centres of social activism—but also in grassroots mobilisations in small and remote locations across Poland. Furthermore, transgender and nonbinary people asserted their visibility for the feminist cause at these events. In reaction to this welcome development, an influx of trans-exclusionary arguments from some (self-identified feminist) individuals and small groups has been observed on various social forums.

Participants indicated that 'anti-gender politics' is not necessarily a term that is often used in their everyday lives. In response to this, where suitable, a range of other terms (e.g. anti-feminism, transphobia, xenophobia, homophobia, etc.) is used in this report. Where 'anti-gender' is used, it is mostly deployed as an umbrella term: an analytical category used by the researchers as a short-hand to capture a variety of issues and describe a broad range of observed mobilisations, activities, discourses and regulations.

Findings

1. Finding the meaning of 'anti-gender' in Poland: Between practice and discourse

Participants experience what researchers term 'anti-gender' politics as an orchestrated, systematic, mobilisation of civil society and political actors who pursue homophobic, anti-feminist, transphobic, xenophobic, anti-intersectional, and anti-EU goals in the name of nationalist, (neo)fascist ideologies.

Where the term 'anti-gender' is used in Poland, it is used in its untranslated English form to describe political and social movements that use the English word 'gender' instead of using Polish word 'płeć', which refers to both gender and sex. The English word 'gender' is used by the conservative actors as the 'catch-all' scaremongering tool to instigate moral panics around changing social norms of genders and sexualities. As Luki notes, "these are also all sorts of ['anti-gender'] phenomena, ideologies, discourses that are acts of [conservative] resistance, simply resistance to modernisation and progressive egalitarian transformations."

Participants understand 'anti-gender' as an umbrella term that hides patriarchy, misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia and racism, anti-EU and anti-liberal attitudes, antisemitism, ableism, and broader anti-critical and anti-leftist attitudes. Most people do not use the term in practice, seeing it as a term used within policymaking, academic research, or the media, rather than a term or tool that they would frequently use in their own activism, work, or everyday life.

Some participants, including Jolanta and Kuba, note the importance of the Catholic Church, whilst numerous other participants point to the Law and Justice party and Ordo Iuris—an ultra-conservative organisation known for their religiously-motivated anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ politics—as actors notorious for being engaged in producing 'anti-gender politics'. One of the participants (Jan) attempted to cluster different aspects of 'anti-gender' politics into three segments:

So, three layers: internal, pseudo-academic; external, from the Catholic Church; and external, probably the strongest one - letters, interventions, words of the MPs and the regional governor. [...] The first layer [of 'anti-gender'] is the internal resistance dressed up in scientific, pseudo-scientific claims by naturalists, medics, doctors. [...] External is the [Catholic] church's resistance, but in my opinion, more [stronger] than external church's resistance in the [region]

are politicians. And that's why I sometimes think that this "anti-gender", it's an empty concept. These are men, male politicians, sometimes the female ones, they have no idea about anything. For them it is literally a power struggle.

Emerging understandings of 'anti-gender' experiences also connect to the increased visibility of transphobia—and to some extent, anti-sex work attitudes—across civil society groups and organisations. This shows a broader dimension of 'anti-gender' politics that is not restricted to the (far-)right and populist political parties and ultra-conservative CSOs. This is commonly referred to with the borrowed and not directly translatable, anglophone acronyms-concepts 'TERF' ('trans exclusionary radical feminism') and 'SWERF' ('sex work exclusionary radical feminism'). This was something particularly noted and expressed in the narratives of the younger—those in their 20s and 30s—generations of participants. Please see also [finding 4, 'Anti-gender' politics feeds into divisions within queer-feminist movements](#), where this issue is addressed.

2. Lived experiences of 'anti-gender' mobilisations have multifarious consequences

The experiences of transphobia, xenophobia, anti-feminism, homophobia, and ableism, span a broad spectrum of material, symbolic, and legal consequences.

Participants reported receiving hateful language and offensive communications as well as personal attacks entailing body shaming, especially on social media. There were death threats (Magda); other forms of intimidation and threats, such as an employer's illegal surveillancy of the private life of one participant (Malina); a delegation of the Ordo Iuris lawyers at meetings with employers, with a malicious intent of inciting a chilling effect among attendees (as perceived by Luki). Being ridiculed was also observed, directed especially at trans and non-binary people.

One participant (POLINT04) highlights that institutional discrimination is a common experience for trans and non-binary people, who regularly suffer the lack of systemic, formal, institutional solutions that would recognise gender diversity and accommodate needs of marginalised and minoritised social groups. The story of Kinga illustrates this well:

The court proceeding [required for legal transition] was in December last year, so it's been six months, and we got stuck while trying to create a profile in a national online system, we just couldn't create this online identity because something in the bank wasn't working. Finally, my ex-husband called the bank and tried to sort it out, and the IT people were down on it but we were literally told that our son should just leave that bank and go to another one. They just kicked him, you know. And it hit me because we are in the 21st century, we do heart and lungs transplants, we fly into space, you know? And they can't change the PESEL [national ID number], just the numbers for my son at the bank, so that he can create an online identity, which is needed for other institutions and so on. So that he can finally do these things [handle official matters online]. And you see, I just give up. Maybe it's not such blatant discrimination, but there are so many problems and so many obstacles for me and my child from the state, from institutions, that sometimes I just feel powerless.

In not succumbing to these negative experiences, participants were keen on stressing experiences of kindness, goodwill, and support received from people and workplaces in unexpected situations. For example, Wiktoria, when organising an Equality March in a place stereotypically seen as very conservative, or Karolina, when requesting the name change on the workplace systems for her transgender colleague, both said they were positively surprised by the understanding of other people and the help they received.

Participants also spoke strongly to the experiences of love and care received from individuals and groups in which they remain embedded. Magda's words show that an increased intensity of friendship and belonging were cherished experiences that helped participants to balance the negative experiences:

That it's a teaming up of all these people who are just in this besieged fortress [...] I'm also always trying, we've been trying for years with [name of the organisation] to build this activism just based on, you know, on trying to co-create some friendly, safe and open spaces and [...] to carve out a space for ourselves in this difficult reality, which we had and still have, scraps of a sense of security, a sense of community [...].

3. Negative effects of 'anti-gender' politics include social alienation, political disillusionment, and distrust of institutions

Effects of 'anti-gender' politics manifest themselves in a broad variety of ways, from emotional to physical, indicating the broad ranging scope and multi-faceted nature of 'anti-gender' mobilisations in Poland.

There is a notable effect of desensitisation, a sense of apathy and detachment among participants who feel overwhelmed by the constant struggle to navigate hostile social-political environments. These emotional and psychological states manifest in burnout—a common sensation for activists and others. Magda said:

Could something have been done about it or not? Whether you could have done something about it or not, but also - is that our role? No? Because it is for me, for example, in the context of this constant activist burnout and fatigue where [...] the chronic fatigue that we've been experiencing for many years. Or [...] just, well, sort of doing our own thing, too.

This connects to a disbelief in the possibility of significant, systemic change, as institutions remain resistant to reform. For example, the police force for Piotr "is unfortunately very anti on this subject [gender diversity] and I would very much like to fight for it to change. I won't fight on behalf of the whole company, though, but in my environment [police department] I think nobody particularly dares to speak up".

Such feelings are underpinned by disillusion and distrust towards public institutions and law enforcement forces, which are not only perpetrators but also victims of the 'anti-gender' politics. Niko observed that

[w]hen, for instance you are a doctor in an emergency room and a person after a rape comes to you [...] and you have no idea what to do with that person, because you haven't been trained, it hasn't been explained to you how to behave with a person after a rape, and it seems to me that this is also a very strong, strong effect of these anti-gender, anti-feminist movements, because it's as if women are not treated as people at all.

Participants' coping responses, for example to withdraw and emotionally distance themselves, are oftentimes normalised in the narrative as the expected status quo. This effect of 'anti-gender' mobilisations was also noted as a coping mechanism by some participants. We also heard of practices of self-censorship and self-silencing in workplaces where there is a permissive culture of discrimination and belittling of the equality struggles. For example, Kinga has consciously avoided talking about equality and non-discrimination, and has hidden information about her private life, to avoid potential jokes and smearing comments from colleagues.

As an effect of more extreme cases of 'anti-gender' attacks, people moved to another city to escape hostile pursuits against them (POLFG3.5); or moved out, motivated, not directly by specific events, but by general pressures felt in their earlier place of living.

The heaviness of the 'anti-gender' climate not only negatively impacts people's mental health as noted above, but can also lead to tragic situations. For instance POLINT04 reported knowing of cases when LGBTIQ+ people are alienated from their families, or take their own life.

4. 'Anti-gender' politics feeds into divisions within queer-feminist movements

'Anti-gender' politics have a negative effect on the queer-feminist communities in Poland by creating and feeding intra-community rifts, divisions, and nested exclusions.

The polarising effects of 'anti-gender' politics clearly emerge in the many narratives we gathered and are summarised in the words of participant POLFG4.3:

Anti-gender, for me, is an ideological offensive and this ideological offensive is happening in many countries; [...] all these various moral panics about imaginary threats to society, which in my opinion, serve to divide and polarise society. And a polarised society is better governed, easier to manage. So, for me, this "anti-gender" is an anti-emancipation, anti-liberation offensive [...].

Participants' feelings regarding polarisation ranged through sadness, fear, disgust, anger, but also curiosity at the emerging transphobic and sex-work exclusionary voices among former feminist activists and researchers. For instance, participant POLFG1.1 was surprised and angry that their former teachers and icons were later seen to be transphobic, which was incomprehensible to them. Ania had been

[...] increasingly observing with horror how in my own community, that is, the feminist one, there arise[s] such internal, community policies, transphobic or [...] policies, actions, attitudes, social positions directed against, for example, sex workers. [...] I observe how patriarchy enters our own heads and divides our own broadly defined women's movements.

On the other hand, Renata/Zaniczka notes clear double standards within queer-feminist communities with regards to intersectional inclusion of multiply marginalised and minoritised people (e.g. queer people living with physical disabilities). She notices empty proclamations of inclusiveness and awareness, which are not followed by actions and actual, practical solutions. She said there was

[a n]ormalisation of discrimination and violence against people with disabilities, and it's just applauded by politicians, by feminism, by activists, by minorities. Everyone applauds it politely because "it's impossible [to create accessibility]". Every Pride so far has had an after-party at a venue that was inaccessible to us. It's giving the message "don't come, we don't want you here". The LGBT festival has only been held once in an accessible venue. [...] See, if you are a person with a disability who has a need, has a strong need to belong. All of us want to belong.

Other notable divisions within queer-feminist communities that are intertwined with the effects of the 'anti-gender' politics relate to age and generational experiences, discussed further below.

5. Political and institutional attacks and delegitimisation of academic knowledge

There have been successful attempts by authority figures to interfere with academic freedoms and independence of research institutions.

We have gathered numerous examples of direct interference by political and religious figures—named by our participants as 'anti-gender' actors—in the functioning of higher education institutions (HEI).

Participants recounted that the effects of 'anti-gender' politics have been a permissive atmosphere for political extortion, unjustified influence, and intimidation at a structural-institutional level. The most striking examples given by our participants include Jan's report that "in our institution, the bishop can call the [Rector] and say what he doesn't like, and then the poor [Rector] wonders where to give way, how to go one step forward while taking a step back." In another case, Malina recalls practices of firing and hiring:

Well, because if you're the Rector's Plenipotentiary for certain issues, you can simply lose the position overnight. And such situations also occurred in Krakow after the Pedagogical University was taken over by people from the PiS party, and terrible things happened there. Rector's Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment was dismissed overnight for posting information on Facebook that the university will launch a support system for transgender people. And the very next day her position was simply taken away and passed to a person from Law and Justice.

Ania reported chilling effects of the intimidation actions: "[a] year later, my school [name] was featured in a speech by the Children's Ombudsman [Mikołaj Pawlak] because of the 'outrageous thing' of being highly ranked as an LGBT-friendly school, and the Children's Ombudsman sent another inspection to the school".

In other cases, issues of sexual harassment were suppressed due to the pressure imposed by certain actors, as shown in Luki's example:

And it was always the case that when there was a report [about sexual abuse], the potentially guilty person came with a lawyer from Ordo Iuris, because Ordo Iuris always sent their lawyers to support those who may possibly have problems later. And this usually ended in different settlements. Like, the case wasn't taken [to the court] at all, there were no committees related to sexual harassment, etc., but the case was somehow resolved or not resolved right at the top.

Other examples concern members of the Ordo Iuris setting up its own student societies at some universities, (reportedly) making maliciously intended, freedom of information requests, directed, among others, at offices for equality, diversity, and the protection of students.

On the positive side, participants noted the importance of the EU policies on equality and diversity in education, and research, development and innovation (RDI) sectors. Although not intended nor directed as counter measures to 'anti-gender' mobilisations, they nonetheless have a positive, buffer effect. These become concrete references and tools with which to fight against the effects of transphobia, anti-feminism, xenophobia and racism, or homophobia in HEIs.

6. Unexpected ricochet effects of 'anti-gender' politics include society-wide mobilisations in support of the queer-feminist causes

Ricochet effects strengthen the queer-feminist sense of belonging, going against the grain of 'anti-gender' politics.

Participants also noted some unintended effects of the 'anti-gender' mobilisations, most notably that they strengthened political mobilisation of the general population against political initiatives that manifestly curtail women's rights and the rights of people with wombs. The waves of Black Protests—named for the black-coloured clothing worn by protesters—and the All-Polish Women's Strikes were frequent examples of how not only queer-feminist groups, but broad swaths of society have mobilised against draconian anti-abortion laws introduced by the government coalition. The importance of these mass-mobilisations lies

also in their geographical coverage across smaller towns and cities, beyond the large, metropolitan centres, as noted by Ewa:

But when I compare my courage to that [of the] hairdresser who went out alone in the street in a little town's square, she is a hero to me. She is out there. As I tell you this, I'm shuddering, just how much she could risk by saying "Yes, we have the right to decide about our parenthood, our motherhood."

A related 'ricochet effect' is an increase of the self-organisation, volunteering, grassroots community-building initiatives among younger generations of adults, for whom these events were often the first steps in the queer-feminist activisms that they have continued ever since. Malina noted:

Despite the fact that there was a lot of this and anti-gender stuff going on, which also *de facto* raises awareness a bit, am I right? Because there's a certain reaction to it, more people are interested [...] I don't know, when I think about how there was a big demonstration in August after the arrest of Margot [non-binary activist] somehow I can also see the effects of that ['anti-gender' politics], that more people understood what police violence is about, that these are the kinds of things that are starting to become a mainstream issue.

Furthermore, participants have listed an increased visibility of the LGBTIQ+ topics in the mainstream media and popular culture as another example of the unintended effects of 'anti-gender' mobilisations. This is strengthened by the private sector business funding for LGBTIQ+ initiatives such as Equality Marches and increased symbolic support from public figures. Consequently, many participants have noted a growing cross-societal support along with changing social attitudes in support of feminist and LGBTIQ+ causes such as same-gender civil partnerships and legal abortion (Tomasz). Despite hateful attacks of the 'anti-gender' actors, Adam noted:

[...] everything that has led to this ['anti-gender'] radicalisation, the statements of politicians, the president [Andrzej Duda] who says that LGBT people are not human beings, the subsequent attacks, and for me, the grand finale of this clash—the situation with Margot¹⁴⁶—the effect is certainly a much broader visibility of queer, non-heteronormative and people who define themselves diversely when it comes to gender identity, as well as a much greater support, that is some great boost of tolerance, paradoxically.

7. Coping mechanisms: from withdrawal of activism to expressing rage

People affected by 'anti-gender' discourses and movements often cope and manage related effects by withdrawing from, or conversely, re-engaging their political mobilisations.

Across our data, participants have identified that a common way of dealing with stress and pressures associated with their dealing with the 'anti-gender' politics, is either to withdraw or to remobilise. People step back from the active engagements in social activism, or from taking clear ethical stances to fight 'informal' battles at e.g. workplace, as noted by Agata. This links to limiting the exposure to the overwhelming, negative stimuli of 'anti-gender' discourse by restraining one's practice of observing news

¹⁴⁶ Adam refers here to the arrest of Margot, a queer-anarchist, non-binary activist. This was widely reported in the media, stirring many social and political debates. Please see also the RESIST report on media and political discourses, where this case was analysed, RESIST (2024) *The RESIST Project. National and transnational reports on the formation of anti-gender politics*. Available at: https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/617/?key=547he6potvfpe1ur4w4edmxu9ah9s3

coverage, and by cutting down on social media use, as these platforms can be prime sources of hateful language.

For others, it was quite the opposite: 'doom scrolling' becomes a habitual action of following, observing, and reading through 'anti-gender' content in the name of 'knowing your enemy'. Wiktoría said:

But when I open the Ordo Iuris newsletter—because generally I think that one has to know their enemy, so I read the Ordo Iuris newsletter, but it's a wonderful experience. Because when you read the Ordo Iuris newsletter, you get the impression it's already so perfect in Poland, we're so going to conquer this world, and these fundamentalists are so poor, discriminated, oppressed, and they suffer so terribly. And so I think "well, gosh, I'd actually like to live in their world, where I'm so powerful and have these powers that they think I possess".

As noted in the quote above, paradoxically there can be something quite empowering in noticing reactionary moves of 'anti-gender' actors, as this confirms activist labour has not been wasted and rather has created a stir that may eventually lead to a social change. Another strategy that helps participants to manage the 'anti-gender' effects on their lives involves persistence, perseverance, and stubbornness in not giving up to the overwhelming sense of gloom. This is sometimes a complementary strategy to withdrawal and non-engagement, showing a spectrum of individual choices, and thus these should not be seen as in opposition to each other.

Some participants transfer their rage at the 'anti-gender' actors, into emotional fuel that sustains their engagement and activism. One of our participants, Margot, not only talked about this in one of our focus groups, but it could also be observed with her strong and uncompromising language in this respect. Experiencing and expressing fury and other emotions triggered by 'anti-gender' politics, helps guard against activist burnout. Agata captured this well:

I remember that one of the male publishers said to me "Is my material about scraping [offensive term for abortion] ready?". And now, when I talk about it, I also get such a [...] shivering with anger. I reacted and told him off at the time. I was shocked that he said that in public. Nobody else reacted. [...] I started talking to other female journalists, older and more experienced than me, who said "Well, yes, he's ridiculous, but that's the way it is and there's nothing that can be done about it". And I can see that it's changed now, how different the approach is, and that the solidarity of women looks different in editorial teams.

Agata talks in this quote about her own perseverance and anger at the silence and lack of reactions to the offensive comments at her workplace—a newspaper with country-wide readership—but also noticed changing attitudes more recently.

8. Coping mechanisms: mutual care, support, education

There is a strong thread of mutual care and solidarity, as well as proactive mobilisations and education against 'anti-gender' politics, as a coping mechanism, and as a way of organising for social transformation.

Participants frequently talked about mutual care and solidarity, building and reinforcing relationships as a way of managing the pressures of dealing with 'anti-gender' politics. These concern micro- and meso-level practices: respectively, reinvesting individual attention to friendships and reinforcing community building practices of mutual care and support. One participant (POLINT04) exemplified that these can take informal shape, such as walking people home or check-in calls upon arrival. More formally, this can take the form of

organising legal or humanitarian aid, such as housing for Ukrainian refugees during the war against Ukraine.

Furthermore, Piotr and many other participants underlined the unmet educational needs of society, hypothesising that people unwillingly perpetuate the transphobic or homophobic attitudes due to a lack of knowledge, or ignorance, rather than due to ill will. As Aldewicz noted:

I'm rather a positivist, that is, I'm for education, change, showing that this 'gender' is not scary, and that transgender people are just people etc. Familiarise them with it [these concepts]. And I'm convinced that most people, especially upon dealing not with a document, not with a number, not with work, but with a real person, will rather behave fine than not fine.

Moreover, participants pro-actively engage in reusing and remodelling available resources to right the wrongs affecting individuals who were targets of discrimination or bullying. This is often a strategic choice directed against habituated, institutionalised bureaucracies, and to support human-centric work. For example, where Higher Education institutions have, in many cases, introduced Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) for legal compliance, and not for greater gender equality, people use these *façade* policies to raise awareness about e.g. gender-based violence, piggybacking on the fact that the institutional echelons do not pay attention in their ignorance of the issue. Malina captured this well:

Well, we are so fortunate that we are great at avoiding different situations [...] and I really feel that we have a lot of autonomy and freedom and that [...]. They [university managers] don't take too much interest in us [case workers in the equality division] and because of that we can do what we feel is right and important.

In other cases, some participants have taken legal or administrative action to counteract the effects of 'anti-gender' politics, including using formal complaint procedures. For example, on social media, people mentioned actively reporting users and content as discriminatory and harmful. In some instances, this has been escalated to reporting instances to the police, when anti-discrimination provisions in Polish law can be made use of in defence of one's own wellbeing, however far from ideal they may be.

9. Inter-generational perspectives matter in considering the effects of 'anti-gender' politics

There is clear intergenerational support and cooperation in dealing with 'anti-gender' mobilisations, as well as of tensions and frustrations, emerging between different social cohorts in how 'anti-gender' is perceived.

There are some indirect effects of 'anti-gender' politics, such as intra-group, inter-generational differences in perceptions of community needs; urgency and priority of social actions; perceived level of radicalism and progressiveness; and latency of social activism. Those effects create tensions within queer-feminist communities, which comprise different age groups. For example, some younger participants (in their 20s and 30s) expressed disappointment and criticism at older groups of gay cis men (in their 40s and 50s): younger people tended to view the latter as not progressive enough and too normative in their activism. For example, Wiktoria said:

I feel like we're laughing about it in the LGBT community, that there's this group of 'boomers' [PL: dziadersi] who would basically want rights for cisgender gay men. And there's a group of absolutely queer people who want rights for everyone. And the 'boomers' [PL: dziadersi] don't necessarily like that. And there's, as I see, I see quite often in various discussions that there

are disagreements coming from those who are generally older, older than me, older than the youngest activists there are now, who are trying to slow it [the fight for LGBT rights] down.

On the other hand, another participant (POLFG3.5), as a voice of those in their 40s and 50s, exemplifies disappointment in younger activists, who are seen as replicating strategies from 20 years ago, when LGBT activism in Poland was emerging.

When George Lucas, a participant in his 40s, recalls a conversation with a 20-year-old person, he demonstrates generational differences in the evaluation of 'anti-gender' politics across the years. For him, it's a long-standing element of the Polish landscape, normalised in an everyday experience. For the 20-year-old person, the last few years were an unprecedented attack on democratic liberties that signal regression beyond what was in the past (i.e. in the early 2000s).

On the other hand, Luki's words below also point to another inter-generational aspect shared with us by many other participants:

When I see students, especially the freshers, I feel that there's, the change is coming, and the change will be [...] well [...] sharp. For it is, the change is happening faster, everything happens fast, I feel. Students have an idea, and they act and mobilise, they are not afraid to want. They go [for it]. Like, recently a sociology student society went to the Rector and demanded money, for they need it. Otherwise how are they to do things? And he gave them [money].

Luki's words are strengthened by the sentiment of the focus group conversation between Jolanta, Luki, and Ania, which showed clearly that there is also clearly named optimism and hopeful expectations from the older generations towards the younger people, perceived as significantly more open to gender and sexual diversity.

10. Intersectional positionalities: pragmatism vs. idealism of (forced) choices and solutions

Our participants are often forced into harmful choices, and in effect, there are clear tensions between idealism—of wants and preferred solutions—and pragmatism—of needs and available options—concerning people who are multiply marginalised.

Participants who navigate their daily lives across multiple positions due to the combination of their bodily abilities, identities, legal status, or racialisation—such as living with a physical disability, having experience of homelessness, living as a non-binary person, or having experienced migration—have pointed to numerous challenges they face in daily lives.

Those participants who are affected by 'anti-gender' discourses and movements due to their non-heteronormative gender and/or sexual identity, and are simultaneously being affected by other intersecting oppressions, often feel that gender and sexuality need to be deprioritised, in order to deal with the challenges presented by the other positionalities they occupy (e.g. disability), which becomes a source of frustration and discomfort.

Participants told us of feeling forced to make harmful, pragmatic decisions; choices related to the non-gender/sexual identities and needs are in consequence often prioritised as more urgent. So while the idealism of the desired change in norms regulating gender/sexual identities is important to participants, but in relation to the numerous challenges presented by the other identity positions they occupy, gendered/sexual identities are clearly sidetracked as 'secondary'. E.g. Niko stated that:

[...] when you don't have a sense of safety, a basic one, a bodily one, that nobody will, I don't know, hit you or rape you, etc., when you have nowhere to sleep at, when you don't have anything to eat, then you can't think about any form of greater ideas. So that's how I approach it.

Similarly, from the perspective of Renata/Zaniczka, in a world that is organised for the comfort of able-bodied people, and infused with heteronormative presumptions, people who live with impairments are systematically ostracised and socially debilitated, effectively forced into exclusion from the most basic and fundamental activities of queer-feminist communities. It is clear from our data that the effect of the ableist construction of gender/sexual identity and community, to the exclusion of disabled people, results in needs related to these aspects of our participants' lives being necessarily prioritised over desired solutions related to gender/sexual identities.

Effectively, 'anti-gender' politics not only antagonises society against non-heteronormative people, but forces people into difficult choices that become a zero-sum game, where some of one's needs are forcibly prioritised over others. This also spills over into the aforementioned intra-community divisions (finding 4), where 'anti-gender' aggravates and fuels the feuds. Again in Niko's words:

I don't like the idea of collaborating with transphobes or with SWERFs, it's not ok, but on the other hand I see how many people are still experiencing violence, and rape, and GBV [gender-based violence] and so on - just from the most ordinary incels and the most common right-wingers. [...] Although I also don't like the fact that topics that are close to me should be considered as 'red herrings'. But [...] well, I, my perspective is that it's possible to take money from transphobes as we're just doing in our organisation and spend it on something good.

Conclusion

Participants in the case study on Poland point to the misogynist, patriarchal, ableist, homophobic, and transphobic nature of 'anti-gender' politics that is systematic and institutional; these politics scapegoat, sacrifice and demonise the rights of cisgender heterosexual women and LGBTIQ+ communities for cynical political gains, or highly ideological conservative, far-right beliefs.

It is apparent to participants in this research that 'anti-gender' politics aims at hegemonic reappropriation of public space (facilitated by the exponential politicisation of public media, especially television), which has direct effects on society and individuals.

Experiences of attacks and intimidation; ridicule, online bullying, and hateful language, and institutional discrimination were reported by participants, often leading to burnout. At the same time, experiences of love and care, friendship, belonging and meaning were also reported, as arising in response to those negative experiences.

Participants noted some unintended effects of 'anti-gender' mobilisations, such as stronger civic mobilisation and active participation, intensified self-organisation, a growing sense of community belonging, and increased visibility of the LGBTIQ+ topics in the mainstream media, along with increasing expressions of allyship from public figures. Most importantly, participants noted growing cross-societal support for the feminist and LGBTIQ+ causes, despite the hateful attacks orchestrated by the range of 'anti-gender' actors.

Some of the identified strategies of coping and fighting for social change are: cutting down on social media usage; reinforcing individual relationships of support; mutual care within communities; strategic use of

various kinds of social, financial and cultural capital, or resources, against habituated, institutionalised bureaucracies to support human-centric work; detachment and apathy; withdrawal from public and political engagements; using rage and fury to fuel reparative work; and persistence and stubbornness.

A range of emotions related to how our participants feel in relation to both 'anti-gender' politics and queer-feminist resistances were expressed, including fear, excitement, disbelief, anticipation, insecurity, and hope.

This report serves as an introduction to the most striking findings from the second stage of the RESIST research project. There are other observations and issues that were shared with us, which merit further attention and analysis and many other narratives are yet to be woven: diverse dimensions and understandings of intersectionalities are needed, especially in consideration of 'anti-gender' effects in Poland; further thinking about the dynamics and work of ethnicity, nationality, cultural and religious identity—esp. vis-a-vis the concept of 'race' and racialisation, in the ethnically overwhelmingly homogeneous society, such as the Polish one; the various workings of economic, social and cultural capitals among our communities that produce privileges and discriminations; and the role of real and imaginary geographies in queer-feminist activisms—especially the 'metropolitan-provincial' dynamics.

Respondent Profiles

The case study on Poland conducted four focus groups (FG) and 12 individual interviews, amassing 33 participants in total. Recruitment followed purposive sampling strategy and snowballing methodology of reaching out to potential participants. Demographic forms offered 'open text' boxes. While all participants returned the forms, the majority filled them to a varying degree of completeness, most frequently left empty boxes are those related to social class, racial identity, and religion.

Table 8: Respondent profiles Poland

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
Age groups	33	Most of the participants are between 35-49 (17), and those between 25-34 (6) and 50-64 (3) forming the second and third largest groups. Other reported groups were: 18-24 (2), 65+ (1) and 4 answers were left empty.
Gender	33	Most of the participants self-identify as women or cis women (22) and men (6), and others as non-binary (2), transmasculine (1), queer (1), no answer (1).
Sexual orientation / identity	33	Majority identify as sexual minorities: bisexual (8), gay and lesbian (8), asexual (2), demisexual (1), no answer (2). 12 people self-identified as heterosexual.
Country of origin	33	31 indicated Poland and two Ukraine.
Country of residence	33	33 indicated Poland.
Ethnic / racial identity	33	Most indicated Polish (12) or gave no answer (11), followed by Polish and chosen various other ethnic groups (6), European (2), and Jewish (2).
National identity	33	Majority indicated Polish (20), followed by European and Polish-European (4), no answer (4), and various different identities (3) or none (2).
Educational training	33	Majority have higher, university education (28), four secondary, and one no answer.
Religion	33	Most of the participants identified as atheist, agnostic or chose 'none' (29). One identified as Christian and one as Roman Catholic, and two indicated other beliefs.

Social class	33	Most indicated middle class (15), gave no answer (7), or used other descriptions (7). Working class (3) and pensioner (1) were the other choices.
Dis/ability	33	The vast majority stated no disability (31), yes (1) and no answer (1).
Settlement type	33	Most participants live in a large city (21), in medium-sized cities and towns (8), countryside (3), no answer (1). However, 15 grew up in large cities, 13 in mid-sized and provincial towns, and countryside (3).
Anything else	33	Only four people chose to indicate something else: 'potential neurodiversity'; being academic; polyamorous; and having an activist experience.

The first cluster for FG1 was centred around activism and seven recruited participants all described themselves as activists engaged in the queer-feminist causes. We recruited primarily from towns and cities prioritising non-metropolitan locations, as in the recent years there has been an observable boost in grassroots self-organisation in these places.

The second cluster for FG2 was centred around academics, researchers, equality and diversity officers and administrators in the higher education sector. We have purposefully recruited from diverse and smaller academic institutions to capture a variety of institutional structures, policies, and practices relating to gender & sexuality equality.

FG3 and FG4 were designed as mixed, prioritising potential participants whose profession can be described as, broadly speaking, 'public intellectual', i.e. journalists, teachers, art-sector workers, doctors, lawyers, public administration and political figures. Regarding interviews, this sampling profile also applied for the recruitment of the individual interviewees.

Most participants from across all groups and individual interviews, perceived themselves as engaging in some form of social or cultural activism, understood broadly as a consciously self-reflective and ethically-minded standpoint taken in professional and personal life towards greater social justice and social change.

Chapter 9: Spain—Catalonia and Basque Country

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Executive Summary

In recent years, Spain has seen notable progress in feminist and LGBTI rights. Key legislative initiatives include the 'Trans Law', aimed at guaranteeing transgender rights, and the 'Solo Sí Es Sí' law, which redefines sexual consent to emphasise explicit agreement. Despite these advancements, persistent challenges remain. The rise of the far-right, with its Spanish nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-feminist, anti-LGBTI stance, has complicated the socio-political landscape. This report focuses on the experiences of those affected by 'anti-gender' revealing the pervasive impact of 'anti-gender' politics. It is based on 33 participants who participated in twelve interviews and/or four focus groups.

The political nature of 'anti-gender' attacks is identified as being deliberate and purposefully directed towards achieving political ends, such as asserting ideological beliefs and halting or reversing feminist or LGBTI-affirmative policies. This political violence is experienced as collective and as using violence and fear to achieve political objectives. It heavily affects public or visible feminist figures but also has a profound impact on society, especially those in marginalised positions. This highlights a continuum of violence and discrimination, which is intersected by racism, national minorisation, and fatphobia. Such attacks are characterised by being aggressive and are present both on and offline.

'Anti-gender' violence fosters a climate of fear, demobilisation, and withdrawal from public and online spaces, leading to an emotional toll and significant changes in behaviour, including the abandonment of activist spaces, self-censorship, and the creation of protective bubbles that, whilst offering safety, isolate activists from broader societal engagement.

The forms of active resistance span from boycotts of specific campaigns to digital protection strategies; from monitoring of 'anti-gender' politics and documenting attacks to initiating dialogue with the aim of convincing potential 'anti-gender' actors. Despite this climate of fear and attacks, some public figures remain committed and use their influence to resist and persist, using their influence as a reason to continue fighting.

Keywords: 'Anti-gender' politics; Catalonia; Basque country; emotional dimension; self-censorship; digital harassment; political violence; activism

Introduction

This case study report explores the lived experience of encountering 'anti-gender' politics, and analyses everyday resistances in Spain, specifically in Catalonia and the Basque Country.

It outlines how 33 feminist academics, activists, public intellectuals and members of the general public experience, negotiate, and resist attacks related to their identities, lives, politics, and work in the arena of sexualities and genders.

The report is written from the findings of 4 focus groups—with 21 participants, between 3 and 8 in each group—and 12 individual interviews with people who are based in Catalonia and the Basque country. They responded to the invitation to participate in focus groups or interviews because they experienced some form of 'anti-gender effects'. The sample was recruited via targeted emails and phone calls to individuals and groups that may be affected (for details see [Table 9: Respondent profiles Spain—Catalonia and Basque Country](#)).

Following an outline of the Spanish context, including the terminology used in this report, this report will outline the key findings which bring together the main points that crossed focus groups and interviews.

Context

In the past ten years, Spain has seen significant advancements in feminist and LGBTI rights. The feminist movement has grown stronger, with widespread protests and visibility. It has witnessed large-scale feminist demonstrations, notably the International Women's Day marches on March 8th, which have drawn millions of participants on the streets. Territorial differences make it difficult to generalise across the feminist movements that exist in the different self-governed regions; broadly, there are debates and divisions over sex work, trans rights and intersectional perspectives that imply internal conflicts. One of the main achievements of recent years is the advent of the feminist movement to institutions. While these are important advancements, persistent gender-based violence, social, political and economic inequalities, as well as ongoing discrimination and violence against LGBTI people remain. Moreover, the far-right presence in Spain has been notable. One of the most prominent far-right parties, Vox, founded in 2013, has gained increasing attention and support in national and regional elections; it is characterised by its Spanish nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTI stances, and has capitalised on issues such as immigration, nationalism, and opposition to Catalan independence to attract electoral support, particularly in regions where these issues are salient.

Since June 2018, the Spanish government has been led by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) under the leadership of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. His administration has established the Ministry of Equality, headed by Irene Montero from Unidas Podemos (2020-2023), which has been key in advancing feminist policies and legislation. The laws developed by Irene Montero have been crucial in advancing progressive legislation aimed at promoting gender equality and LGBTI rights. One of the most contentious issues has been the proposed 'Trans Law', which seeks to guarantee the rights of transgender individuals and streamline the process for legal gender recognition. It has sparked intense debates surrounding feminism and LGBTI politics. While proponents hail the law as a central achievement for transgender rights, transphobic discourses have raised concerns about its potential impact on women's spaces and rights. The 'Solo Sí Es Sí' (only yes is yes) law, which seeks to redefine the legal framework surrounding sexual consent, emphasising that only an explicit 'yes' constitutes consent, has also started heated discussions. It has been identified as a crucial step in

combating sexual violence and promoting a culture of consent, but it has also faced attacks from conservative quarters. From feminist perspectives, it has raised concerns about the potential unintended consequences of the law, mainly in relation to reinforcing traditional gender roles by essentialising women as victims of male violence, rather than fostering a more nuanced understanding of sexual agency and communication.

Recent political advancements in Catalonia, one of the regions where this report is focused, provide important context to this report.. The regional Catalan government has been under the control of left-wing coalitions such as Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC). During the last mandate (2021-24), the government created the Minister of Equality and Feminisms, led by Tània Verge. Through this Ministry, various initiatives and policies have been pushed forward to promote gender equality, on the one hand, and to combat gender-based violence, racism, and LGBTI-phobia, on the other. Barcelona has been governed by Ada Colau of Barcelona en Comú (2015-2023). Under her leadership, the city council has prioritised feminist policies, creating specific departments and council positions such as the Conselleria for Feminism, LGBTI and life cycle. Before this specific political period, there were some other landmark pieces of legislation, such as the Law 11/2014, known as the 'Law to Guarantee the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex People and to Eradicate Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia' (2014), considered to be one of the most comprehensive in Europe.

Findings

1. 'Anti-gender' is experienced as an old discourse with new forms

The concept of 'anti-gender' is not widely used, but identified through the effects on lived experience as something organised, aggressive, and overarching.

'Anti-gender' as a term is not widely used. Only some activists participating in international networks use it. From a more general public, it is mainly seen as an **anglophone concept**, emanating from **academic circles**. When asked about 'anti-gender' most of the participants answered similarly to Deli: "Anti-gender? I don't use it." Others, as ESPFG1.5, specified: "it sounds more like a very Anglo-Saxon concept." Núria situated it in a "theoretical field." Juliana said "anti-gender' is the most used concept in articles and everything. Like in the academy." Only one of the participants, ESPINT03, claimed the term 'anti-gender': "Yes, the term I use, the political term, is 'anti-gender' [...] which is the catch-all, that wonderful ghost that serves to attack sexual and reproductive rights."

However, the phenomenon itself is clearly identified and **resonates with their experience**. For Muntsa it is "a concept that I don't handle much in my daily speech, but the phenomenon exists". Historically, **'anti-gender' resonates with other time periods**, though the older participants situated current 'anti-gender' discourses and practices as softer than the situation in which they used to live under the dictatorship. For example, Rosa explained: "I take it well, but it's been many years of struggle. The Franco dictatorship era was much tougher. You would have been much more at risk too." 'Anti-gender' attacks are seen as **coming from a full range of ideologies**, from left to right, from institutions, organisations, family, in public spaces, workplaces and online. As ESPINT02 argued: "it is the tip of the iceberg of something wider [...] it covers the full spectrum."

One of the main distinguishing features is the **organised nature of 'anti-gender' attacks**, which is different from other forms of structural violence. However, the **difficulties of differentiating 'anti-gender' from sexism draw a continuum that interrelates different forms of violence and discrimination**. In this sense, the effects and resistances to 'anti-gender' appear as imbricated in the

everyday experience of sexism, LGBTIphobia and racism, making it difficult to specifically identify 'anti-gender' attacks from an approach that centres lived experience. As an example, from their experiences working with street sex workers, Laura confirmed that her organisation identifies “a relationship between the increase in violence against sex workers and the discourse of the [sex work] abolitionists who speak about these women from a hyper-deprecation perspective”. Additionally, ESPFG2.4, a mixed-race participant, explained the difficulty she has “of separating sexism from racism because when I receive it because of one axis, it also has a lot to do with the other one”. In this sense, the interrelation between everyday discrimination and 'anti-gender' effects, as well as among different axes of inequality, is a central feature in relation to the lived experience of the effects of 'anti-gender'.

An important characteristic linked to the specific effects of 'anti-gender' politics is the **aggressive nature of such attacks**. Most of the participants shared 'anti-gender' experiences underlining the aggressiveness with the following terms: Rosa, ESPINT02, ESPINT03 used the adjective “**aggressive**”, ESPINT03 the term “**belligerent**”, Muntsa specified “**virulent**”, Brayan “**violent**”, and ESPINT03 “**super violent**”.

Finally, '**anti-gender**' appears as the norm, as the everyday context, and not as an isolated attack strategy, revealing its persistence and overarching character. As Miriam said: “the structures of the organisations are like this [sexist, patriarchal, 'anti-gender'], you fight against it every day. The moments that come out of it are anecdotal or oases.”

2. 'Anti-gender' is lived as political violence

'Anti-gender' attacks are experienced as a form of political violence against those who show their commitment to feminist, LGBTI and anti-racist principles and/or practices.

Feminist activists, scholars, representatives and professionals have become **targets of violence, harassment, intimidation and discrimination** from 'anti-gender' actors and movements. One of the central findings is that such violence is not isolated but motivated by political factors such as silencing feminist and LGBTI voices and undermining feminist and LGBTI struggles.

Juliana, who suffered heavy political violence, reproduced a dialogue she had with her brother summarising that 'anti-gender' is **directed towards visible defenders of feminism**: “My brother told me ‘if you were in your house shutting up, this wouldn't happen to you’. So, violence for me from the 'anti-gender' movement, it's for activism. I see this as very clear.” Similarly, Tània, a participant with political responsibilities stated that:

How political violence is exercised directly or especially against the most visible women, against those who make feminist policies. At this point we could understand that the attacks were not personal, that they were purely political.

Likewise, a feminist organisation in Barcelona, which works closely with sex workers, observed that they do not receive 'anti-gender' attacks because they are not particularly visible. Alba explained: “We are people who continue to be very much on the edge [...] but we see ourselves being very much on the sidelines. We are a small group, it is not a challenge to certain people who could attack us.” In online spheres, it is seen as political violence to be targeted just for being “women with an opinion,” stated ESPINT02.

The political nature of 'anti-gender' attacks is also identified as **being deliberate and purposefully directed towards achieving political ends**, such as asserting ideological beliefs and halting or reversing feminist or LGBTI policies. As the following findings show, this political violence is **collective**—involving parties, organisations and diverse groups—and **uses violence and fear** as a strategy to achieve political objectives. It heavily affects public or visible feminist figures but also has a profound impact on the society, especially those that are in marginalised positions.

As a symbolic example of the levels of the conflict, participants perceived the situation as a **war**. Irantzu said that she talks about it “in epic terms, about war. So they are like a faction. An enemy”. Irantzu and ESPINT02 argued that “It is a cultural war, totally.” As a consequence of it, some participants frame 'anti-gender' activists as adversaries which should be attacked directly, as ESPINT02 put it:

You come to the conclusion that their position is an ideological position that they know perfectly well the consequences it has [...] There is no pedagogy possible, you have to go to 'kill with a needle' even if it means adding more fuel to the fire.

However, this violent phenomenon is not only suffered by those who develop or defend feminist politics but also by those members of society who would potentially benefit from gender-egalitarian policies, such as quotas. As ESPFG2.3, a firefighter, explained in relation to the reaction to the women quotas diversifying the strongly masculinised body of firefighters “a war is being prepared against the women who will enter the fire department.”

3. Online violence and threats of violence are central to 'anti-gender' experiences

Insults, death and rape threats, and doxing are the everyday online dimension of 'anti-gender' attacks.

Political violence against feminist activists is conducted in many different ways. One of the most persistent and widespread is in the form of **online attacks**. Roger said he doesn't think he knows “anyone in the LGBTI community who hasn't been in a situation where they use social media at some point [...] It has always reached this 'anti-gender' extreme right of the networks.” The attacks include **defamation, insulting, sending unsolicited porn images, rape and death threats**, among others. Insults were reported as being the most common form of attack, often reaching high numbers. As Núria explained, “I do remember once I made a tweet pro-, I don't know, trans, feminist or something [...] and someone retweeted one of these and then I had, I don't know, 500 people there insulting me.” Beyond the insults, activists that have a greater visibility are the target of constant and more violent attacks. Juliana explained that she has been the target of 'anti-gender' online attacks in in her country of origin while she was a candidate for a leftist party. They sent her “photographs of mutilated, murdered people [...] they pasted these types of figures of women killed by traffic and placed them in emails.” Irantzu also complained, “no one understands what it's like to open the phone and be insulted every day”. For years she was “receiving photocalls, videos of children performing fellatio, people singing to me ‘Cara el sol’ [symbol of Francoist Spain]” and, as many others argued too, “of the insults they call me, 90% will include fat.” She also received death threats—“the next one, it's you”—and “death to the fat.”

This kind of violence is not only a result of voicing feminist positions but it is also the **result of denouncing other violences, such as racist ones**. In this case, Andrea, a journalist, reported a racist assault committed by the police, giving her view and tagging the police on Twitter. Then, Andrea received:

Thousands of messages on Twitter, on Instagram, by email, from all sides to the point that my cell phone was blocked, because of the number of messages and it was vibrating and could no longer cope, and with almost always the same photos, there would be four, five, six photos at most, of bodies of dead women in gutters and that was it.

On the same line, Miriam also explained a situation of a friend receiving messages stating that “if you let in the Blacks and the Moors they will rape, fuck you.”

Beyond Twitter, Irantzu, Andrea and ESPINT02 also pointed to **forums such as forocoches, burbuja.info, o racocatalà** where 'anti-gender' individuals have discussions dedicated to insulting public feminist figures and organise online actions against feminist websites. As an example, ESPINT02 found an online discussion where some argued that “they should rape her, whereas others argued no, because ‘she is ugly’; others, ‘this woman will never have children and the worst punishment is that her child turns out to be a boy.’” Andrea also explained that, when working for a feminist media collective, 'anti-gender' activists organised an action through one of these forums, plotting to connect en masse to their website to tear it down.

Another specific kind of attack is **doxing**. ESPINT03, who works for an association that participates in parliamentary debates as an expert group, explained that the far-right regularly asks her questions and records everything to then upload it to twitter. Andrea and Irantzu described the experience of having their home addresses, telephone numbers, and other personal data posted on networks. Some participants have also found that 'anti-gender' activists make fake profiles on social media apps, resulting in them receiving all kinds of unwanted messages.

4. 'Anti-gender' appears as physical violence across private and public spaces

Physical attacks and verbal abuse targeting feminist institutions, workplaces, homes, and public spaces were reported, with incidents ranging from intrusions and insults to threats and surveillance.

Physical attacks are directed at **headquarters of associations**, editorial offices of feminist media, feminist cafés, and even the workplace and home. ESPINT03, a member of a feminist association, reported that they “have entered the association. They have not stolen anything, neither cell phones nor money, they have just moved everything”, adding that, in their office that is open to general public, unknown individuals have entered and verbally abused the staff—with terms such as “paedophiles”, “pedophile faggots”, “children-killer”—noting that “this had never happened before in a history of 35 years.”

Workplaces are often the object of 'anti-gender' attacks, especially in the case of editorial offices, lobby organisations, sexual health clinics, or gender transition services. Whereas editorial offices and lobby organisations expect they will be attacked by more organised far-right 'anti-gender' activists, in offices open to the general public they also receive insults and threats from the general public. In a gender transition service, Rosa added attacks came “from parents of trans teenagers, by policemen, who are parents of a trans minor”.

On an **institutional level**, ESPINT03 referred to insults and threats from the far-right in the parliament, while Tània said that the far-right wanted to abolish the feminist departments. Roger remembered from his work for the local government “boycotts of 'anti-gender' activists shouting very loudly to hinder feminist policy presentations taking place.” On a more international level, ESPINT03 related being harassed “very hard in the hallways of the United Nations” by 'anti-gender' lobbyists.

Within the **feminist movement**, several participants also reported 'anti-gender' confrontations during political demonstrations, mostly with so-called 'Trans Exclusive Radical Feminists' (TERFs). Marina explained "we almost came to blows"; she has also seen graffiti stating that "feminist movement is fascist", "if my name is Manolo then you would let me in", and accusations that trans inclusive feminists are "traffickers or pimps". Muntsa and Barbara complained about paintings from TERFs at their feminist organisation's headquarters. Similarly in the Basque country, the trees in front of the women's house were wallpapered to protest against an event with sex workers, as Txurrus described.

Home is also one of the targets. As Miriam explained, her LGBTI intersectional flag was taken away from the window of her flat, while Núria is also afraid of putting her Catalan pro-independence flag on her balcony. Juliana shared that when she was receiving 'anti-gender' attacks, other activists' houses were graffitied or surveilled from the outside.

But even in situations in daily life some participants perceive 'anti-gender' in **public space**. Andrea experienced "being in [the city] at night and having someone come and give you trouble for an article that you wrote, and isolate you in a corner in a very threatening way". Iñi noted that the 'anti-gender' backlash has an effect over his ordinary life in public space, receiving insults or 'anti-gender' comments on a regular basis.

5. The emotional dimension of 'anti-gender' effects

A general sense of fear of attacks and harm runs next to the exhaustion of dealing with 'anti-gender' in everyday life.

The threat of actions has an emotional dimension that is crucial to understand the scope of 'anti-gender'. This emotional dimension is relevant in itself, as it is connected with wellbeing and mental health, but also because it has clear consequences in relation to changing behaviour, specifically regarding political participation.

The emotional effect is mainly related to **fear**. It is framed as the fear of being insulted, blamed, of losing one's job or job opportunities, losing funding, facing legal consequences, or being physically harassed. Participants in the research also fear becoming the targets of more serious attacks. For example, a feminist lawyer said that, if they want to hurt her, they know who she is, and they can do it in a sophisticated way. In ESPINT03's association, they fear physical attacks in their sexual and reproductive rights service. Iñi, who already suffered attacks, fears it in a specific way: "In my case it is physical aggression. Earlier in my militancy, my experience was very crossed by the fear of prison. And now it is more crossed by physical aggression." Parents are also conditioned by this fear; both fear for their relatives' safety, especially children, but also fear of losing rights to their children, as Alba explained: "the 'anti-gender' policies in other countries have awakened certain fears in me in relation to parenting with another woman."

Tiredness is another feeling that appears as central. It is expressed as a sensation of fatigue and exhaustion of having to argue, explain, or face attacks on a daily basis, as well as tiredness from reporting crimes with no advancement. Indeed, fear in itself is perceived as tiring, too, as Laia explained that she was tired of always being in "hyper alert modus". One of the effects of this pervasive feeling is related to the time, energy and resources that the resistance to 'anti-gender' demands. As an example, Núria referred to subtle 'anti-gender' discourses in her organisation: "many of us let our guard down due to fatigue, because there comes a point where in order to participate in any political space that is not explicitly feminist, you have to leave aside certain feminist issues."

Moreover, exhaustion also has the consequence of the cost of opportunity. As Barbara said: “it forces you to put the energy in one place when you could put in another.” ESPINT02:

Reactionism creates fatigue, an intellectual fatigue. It creates a fatigue of saying that we are not moving forward. It creates a methodological fatigue, I no longer know how to close this debate once and for all.

These emotions lead to **discouragement, frustration and pessimism**, as Roger’s quote illustrates:

If you've been fighting for something for a few years and what you see is that the situation is going to the opposite extreme, it's very discouraging. You feel that everything is already lost and there is no new world.

In a positive sense, emotions such as **happiness and motivation are the effects of collective responses** to 'anti-gender' politics, which show the strength of the movement and the power of collective action. As Roger shared in relation to an in-person protest against 'anti-gender': “there was a very well organised and very massive response, it was a really motivating moment to continue with activism.”

6. 'Anti-gender' changes participants' behaviours: avoiding, moderating, and silencing

The actual change of behaviours that results from political violence involves avoiding certain places, leaving political organisations, moderating the discourse, and silencing.

This emotional effect creates a climate of widespread fear that leads to demobilisation, abandonment of certain spaces, and self-censorship in discourse and actions. According to Miriam, there is an “environment of fear, things that I did not have to measure before; things I decide not to do. Now I assess it more carefully.”

In relation to **demobilisation and abandonment**, activists with strong feminist profiles have left many of their spaces of activism in social and political movements, parties, and institutions. Leaving these spaces is partly due to not wanting, or being unable to sustain the situation of constant attacks and criticisms within the movements themselves, as Natàlia, Núria, Miriam and ESPFG1.5 explained. Another factor is the discouraging political environment caused by the presence of 'anti-gender' actions against their spaces of participation, as Roger outlined. The abandonment of spaces is also related to the workplace for those with jobs directly related to activism that had been facing attacks, for example in Andrea’s case. Fear, both as a general state and as a result of previous attacks, is also what led activists like Juliana to “begin to distance myself from the movements”. As Diego argued, “I’m not in the frontline of activism anymore”; Juliana: “I had to get away from activism because I was left in depression and I didn’t have the support.” Others collectively left international feminist spaces due to transphobic views aired there; in the case of ESPINT03, it was because “it stopped being a safe space”. Rosa Maria, a trans woman who was involved in a left wing party, left the party when she was told that “for the next municipal elections they would not support trans people on their lists.”

Another space where this **change in behaviour is observed is online**. Leaving social networks entirely is one of the most evident effects. As ESPINT03 argued, “I don’t make myself visible at all. I had Twitter. I haven’t used it again. I had Instagram. I immediately made it private and then closed it.” In cases where online spaces are not completely abandoned, one of the clearest effects is the moderation of discourse, which involves modulating their participation to avoid certain reactions,

adopting a low profile, avoiding direct confrontation, or not sharing any information related to gender issues or activism. This modulation of discourse not only happens in online spaces but also in other spheres. In the university context, it affects the way in which research projects are presented: research has to be “TERF compliant” in order to be approved in some fields according to ESPFG1.7/INT01. The same happens with institutions in the way new feminist public policies are presented and how political events are prepared. In relation to cultural performances, artists also modulate their discourse, depending on the environment in which they are carried out.

The change of behaviour produced by the 'anti-gender' attacks also materialises as an **individual and everyday self-censorship**. This involves avoiding certain spaces because of the fear of being attacked, passing, not wearing certain clothes or political symbols in public space, not showing affection in public spaces with a same gender partner, or even not going topless on the beach.

7. Self-defence and solidarities as responses to face the lack of protection

The absence of legislation and policy frameworks to protect those vulnerable to 'anti-gender' attacks reinforces the need for autonomous forms of self-defence and solidarities.

The pervasiveness of the effects is also due to the feeling of **institutional abandonment**. Specifically, in the case of defenders of defenders, whether they are individuals with institutional responsibilities, lawyers, lobbyists, or members of associations, they find themselves without resources or support for their protection. As ESPINT03 argued “the government offered us support from lawyers. They came here one day and that’s all they did.” The same happens in Parliamentary meetings, where their interventions are posted online by the far-right party, with their names and networks when according to ESPINT03 “the Parliament should be protecting us.” Also on an institutional level, representatives complained that there is no governmental support for public figures that lead feminist departments at different territorial levels. The same occurs within political parties and organisations, where they also experience abandonment. ESPINT03’s claim was clear: “we need resources and support.”

The relationship with the **police** is another clear example of the lack of institutional support. The police’s inability or unwillingness to handle complaints, meaning that a report may be dismissed, not pursued, or that there would be no follow-up. As Irantzu stated:

My phone number, car’s licence and ID were on Twitter for three weeks. Not even [feminist lawyer could] get them to remove it for three weeks. So when people tell you to report [...] You’re not going to tell a girl to report. There is a naivety with that.

The lack of trust in police is a common feeling, especially for those that have strong links with political organisations. As Irantzu argued, “being Basque and coming from the context from which I come, the last thing to do is to go to the police, because you already know that the police are evil.” Roger stated that he fears the police more than the 'anti-gender' groups.

The **lack of a legal framework** is seen as problematic not only due to the lack of institutional support but also due to the lack of a conceptualisation that contributes to understanding 'anti-gender' attacks as political. As Irantzu argued: “we still haven’t developed a political, feminist response to digital violence. People tell you not to look at your phone, which is a bit like telling you not to wear a miniskirt.” The consequence of this lack of protection is feeling more vulnerable and **having to face such attacks in an individualised way, or with close groups**; as Andrea stated: “we

protect each other.” This includes seeking support from friends, colleagues, fellow activists, therapists, lawyers, or feminist international organisations.

The precarious support from the state and institutions also leads individuals and organisations to **defend their own autonomy**. Even if it’s a public health institution for trans people, changes in the government could potentially affect the centre. In this sense, Rosa, a medic at a trans health service, stated that “It will be saved if the trans community defends it”, showing a lack of trust in institutions and public servants. Along the same lines, Alba, from an association that works with sex workers, argued that:

Our political legacy has to do with the self-organisation of the people who are part of our community, it has to do with trying to promote spaces of autonomy and management, so that if support ever fails, even in improving the lives of people in the worst situations, people would have self-defence strategies.

8. The creation of bubbles for liveable lives

The creation of bubbles is seen as a main strategy to live livable lives, even though they are more a dream than a reality.

This lack of protection and the general emotional environment of fear of attacks lead to the creation of bubbles, that is, **safe spaces where they can live without having to face 'anti-gender'** in places of their everyday life. As ESPFG1.7/INT01 argued, “I’m more selective in the spaces I go to [...] It helps me in my day to day, to be safer, to be calmer or happier” and as ESPFG2.4 said, “I have unconsciously created bubbles in all aspects of my life, partner, friends, work [...]”. The university is also seen as quite a safe space too, especially for those that work within friendly environments. In this sense, it is the creation of such “transfeminist bubbles”, as Güneş argued, that prevents them from experiencing the effects of ‘anti-gender’ politics. Moreover, these bubbles not only protect from ‘anti-gender’ attacks, but also from other forms of discrimination, as ESPFG2.4 explains in relation to the creation of spaces where she feels safe regarding multiple forms of discrimination. The creation of such spaces can be seen both as a **chosen way of resistance**, according to Diego, as a way of trying to be “as happier as possible [...] doing activism on a personal, family, friends level [...] and not in the front line of activism”; but **also, as a need**, for example, for Irantzu: “the consequence of this [‘anti-gender’ discourses and attacks] is that I have to live in a bubble. It’s not a choice. I need to live in a bubble.”

Bubbles are created as physical and social spaces in which to feel safe. In this context, territorial and linguistic diversity, and internal conflicts, also give the opportunity to create such bubbles, where **language is seen as a form of protection from attacks**. As Iñi specifies: “in Euskera Twitter there can be debates about feminism [...] but I would never receive transphobic aggressions there.” In this sense, Catalonia and the Basque Country are seen as places where ‘anti-gender’ discourses are weaker than in the rest of the state; participants specifically situate the origins of trans-exclusionary feminist discourse in Madrid. In Barcelona, the transphobic discourse within feminism is identified in the example of people arriving to the city en masse by bus to counter-protest marches such as the 8th March, as Barbara explained. They also came to denounce a feminist trans inclusive summer school Barbara was involved in: “Barcelona is the city of sin. It’s the brothel city that needs to be cleansed. That’s why they come from all over the state to change it.”

However, sometimes these **bubbles also explode** or are not the supposed safe spaces they were imagined to be. This has to do with the pervasive character of ‘anti-gender’ politics, which permeates

everyday spaces. This implies that 'anti-gender' discourses or attacks can be also found within the family, workplace, leisure spaces, among friends or even in feminist activists' spaces. In relation to **family or partners**, losing these spaces as bubbles is seen as one of the most painful situations, as ESPINT02 illustrates:

If I can endure the shit, the shitstorm that I endure publicly, it is because I consider that my family space and my friends' space is a safe space [...] but when you start to see that these ideologies start to penetrate your space [...] you say, "now where do I go to take shelter".

Along the same lines, when 'anti-gender' penetrates into **political spaces** built upon trust, the effect is much more intense. As ESPINT03 said, "feminist colleagues and activists for 25 years, with whom you have shared spaces, then attacking you for the trans or sex work issue with absolute belligerence and brutal violence [...] they are completely broken relationships." Rosa went further, explaining the effects of the recent changes in the feminist movements, especially in relation to the transphobic views of parts of them: "it's like my life, isn't it?, but they [TERFs] can call themselves feminists and [...] I have been very much in an identity crisis."

The creation of bubbles is also seen as **problematic as a long term strategy, as it creates spaces where there is no contact with other perspectives**. As Rosa Maria suggested: "[i]nside this bubble, every opinion we get from others, we see it as transphobic, homophobic, lesbophobic. I think people need to just listen." This links to the position of Tània, Laura, Alba, Mikel and Abel, who advocated for engaging in dialogue and putting forward convincing arguments to people who hold 'anti-gender' views, instead of solely living within bubbles.

9. People create many forms of organised resistance: from the local to the global

The forms of active resistance span from boycotts of specific campaigns; using digital protection strategies and alarm or panic buttons; monitoring of 'anti-gender' mobilisations and documenting attacks; to initiating dialogue with the aim of convincing potential 'anti-gender' actors.

Forms of resistance mainly consist of collective actions directed towards stopping 'anti-gender' campaigns such as improving feminist political formation, organisation, network establishment, and development of specific strategies for facing concrete attacks.

Specific actions may, for example, take the form of **boycotts of specific 'anti-gender' campaigns**, such as the campaign organised by HazteOir, which saw a bus with transphobic posters travel around Spain. The response to this was both institutional, in the form of an official banning of the bus in Catalonia, as well as an autonomous action to boycott it. Even though there were other collectively organised actions against 'anti-gender' campaigns mentioned, they were in the minority when compared to the range of other types of defence strategies created, often at an individual level.

Everyday micro-strategies are more common in relation to digital violence. In order to minimise the attacks, activists and professionals develop multiple tools and actions such as silencing, blocking, or ignoring certain profiles, accounts, and messages to avoid receiving or having to read certain messages. **Security in the digital realm** also involves securing accounts, stored information, and personal data in sometimes very robust and complex ways, as Laia explains. Another form of implementing security measures is the protection of private spaces with **alarms or panic buttons** installed at homes and feminist associations.

Resistances also take the form of autonomous and collective actions, based on **sharing knowledge, strategies, information, and resources**. The following quote is an example of that from ESPINT01:

We made a very short document [...] in which we answer questions that people have asked us and then we answer them [...] in a pedagogical way so that everyone can understand. Now every time we have a situation like this we send this document which is something we think is accessible.

This is mainly directed towards trans-exclusionary feminists within the movement in order to oppose their discourse, but such strategies are also developed in relation to 'anti-gender' groups belonging to the far-right. For example, ESPINT03 explained that they **attend 'anti-gender' conventions**, to keep track of attendees and content and "then we share all that among the feminist movement, which is thousands of people from all over the world"; based on this information they know the next strategies of 'anti-gender' actors. Another kind of resistance is **proving political violence**, which involves the collection of evidence of this violence. However, reporting to police has proven to be less successful as reporting often is without consequences.

Dialogue and pedagogy are also resistances, in the sense that such practices are aimed at deconstructing 'anti-gender' discourse. It can be done in the form of debunking disinformation; training emergency responders (firefighters, police); training at schools. Alba explained in terms of trainings for firefighters:

There has been a forgetfulness of how to accompany or how to interpellate men without attacking them directly and [of men] feeling not quite fully reactive to feminist policies.

10. 'No pasarán'. Public figures persistently resist

Feminist public figures face persistent attacks but remain committed and fearless. They use their influence to resist and persist, rejecting victimhood, and see their influence both as a cause of attacks and a reason to continue fighting.

In this context of political violence, the commitment to feminist, LGBTI, and anti-racist struggles marks a difference in relation to other kinds of resistances that are enacted. Those that have a position of power, influence, or representation experience 'anti-gender' attacks in a very persistent and violent way. However, they are also conscious of their position of power and the responsibility that goes with it. As a consequence, some participants situated themselves in the position of **warriors**, such as Irantzu: "one thing they say in the art of war is don't allow your enemies to join, don't make it easy for them. Be whatever you want because they will never love you." Others also used metaphors related to war to express how they feel, for example ESPINT02:

If you want to position yourself in the public sphere you have to be a person with hard skin and you have to go like Daenerys from Game of Thrones, you have to bring out the dragons and let them burn everything.

Similarly, Tània a political representative expressed that:

The trench is us [...], all of us feminists, all entities that work for emancipatory policies wherever we are. But it is now that the war is being fought. We can be very pacifist, but if we lose our common sense, we lose our rights.

These convictions also imply a **reduction in fear**, having had the experience of hitting 'rock bottom'. In Irantzu's words: "I have nothing to lose. I am not afraid to go up against the police, Marlaska, Pablo Motos, or their damn mother, because I have nothing to lose." Public figures such as ESPINT02 also reported **becoming accustomed to violence**: "I'm sure that the attacks I've suffered, for another person would have meant a Vietnam [an extremely violent and complex conflict] and for me it's a normal day." Or Carla who explained that "It only happened to me once, that they organised a hate campaign against me. And I went to get eyelash extensions, girl." From Muntsa's words we can see that the commitment and political consciousness is linked to a **collective sense of struggle that provides strength and determination**: "No pasarán. You won't be able to get me down. I won't let this speech hurt me." Long trajectories in activism, as in Rosa's case, also led to a perspective of permanent struggle and determination: "I don't mind going to jail. I've known it since I was 18. It's for a good cause." Activists with visibility and political representatives such as Irantzu, ESPINT02, and Tània emphasised that they "can't afford" to be silent in online forums. ESPINT02 explained they "can't afford to disconnect" because they **see themselves as "references"** or that they feel that it is expected that they react in some way: "being on Twitter is not just a work thing, if it's not a thing to say, if women can't hear we are there, what an example you set for the rest of the women then." In this sense, they spoke about **the power and influence** they have as one of the causes of the political violence they suffer but also as a reason to resist it. Irantzu argued that "I have 78.000 followers on Twitter, which is double the number of the inhabitants of my town. It's the only space of power that I have. People don't want me to mess with them on Twitter."

Conclusion

These findings highlight the persistent character of 'anti-gender', the emotional and psychological effect on activists, and the broader socio-political context shaping these dynamics. Significant advancements in feminist and LGBTI rights have been accompanied by an intensification of the aggressiveness and belligerence of 'anti-gender' rhetoric. This evolution is marked by key inflection points and the entrance of feminist movements into governmental structures, along with the rise of far-right political entities like VOX.

The emotional and psychological impacts of political violence are profound. Activists frequently report feelings of fear, exhaustion, and a sense of discouragement. The normalisation of violence against them, both online and offline, creates an environment where the threat of attacks is a constant shadow. Digital platforms play a dual role as both a space for empowerment and a battleground for political violence. For many activists, social media is the only space where they wield significant influence, amplifying their voices and connecting with broader audiences. However, this visibility also makes them targets for harassment and threats. The pressure to maintain an active presence on these platforms, despite the risks, highlights the precarious balance between leveraging digital power, or professional reputation and safeguarding their well-being.

The role of institutions is also a crucial point. While some governmental bodies and legal frameworks represent significant advancements towards gender equality and LGBTI rights, there remains a pervasive mistrust of institutions among activists, fueled by a lack of support, potential financial cuts, and the perceived complicity of some institutional actors in perpetuating 'anti-gender' or their inaction against it.

Another dimension is the intersectional character of 'anti-gender' violence, specifically in relation to racism, fatphobia, and national identity. Activists suffer the effects of 'anti-gender' as an interrelation

of multiple dimensions, as well as related to other everyday forms of discrimination, which also reveals the broader societal structures that underpin political violence.

In response to the pervasive nature of political violence, activists employ a range of strategies to resist. These include self-censorship, creating safe spaces and bubbles, and modulating participation in public discourse. While these strategies provide some sense of safety and calm, they also show the limitations and sacrifices involved in maintaining visibility and influence in a hostile environment.

'Anti-gender' also fosters resistance. The collective sense of struggle and solidarity among activists provides strength, hope and even enthusiasm of activists participating in transfeminist struggles. The forms of active resistance include: participating in institutions; boycotts of specific campaigns; digital activism; monitoring 'anti-gender' activists and documenting attacks; dialogue with, and attempting to convince potential 'anti-gender' actors.

Future research could investigate the relationship between 'anti-gender' violence and everyday discrimination, particularly how it intersects with other axes of oppression such as racism, fatphobia, and nationalism, among others. The inclusion of more diverse voices in terms of origin, ethnicity, age, and location—drawing from other parts of Spain—would be necessary to understand this phenomena too. Additionally, the emotional and psychological toll on activists, especially the long-term effects of digital violence, needs further study, alongside the strategies activists use to cope and resist. Furthermore, future studies could assess the effectiveness of institutional responses to 'anti-gender' rhetoric and violence, identifying gaps in legal frameworks, institutional support, and activist-institution relations. Finally, examining the strategies employed by feminist and LGBTI movements could provide insight into how these movements navigate a hostile environment while resisting them.

Respondent Profiles

We asked participants to fill out a voluntary demographic form with open text boxes for each variable. All 33 participants completed their voluntary demographic forms. The variable parental status was not covered by the voluntary demographic forms and is based on their narratives.

Table 9: Respondent profiles Spain—Catalonia and Basque Country

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample outline
Age groups	33	Most of the participants are between 35 and 49 (15/33) or 25 and 34 (12/33). Three participants are between 50 and 64 (3/33) and over 65 years old (3/33). Nobody in the sample fits into the youngest age group (under 25).
Gender	33	Most of the participants self-identify as women or cis women (25/33). Six participants describe themselves as (cis) men. One participant identifies as non-binary and another participant as trans non-binary.
Sexual orientation / identity	31	Most of the participants identify as bisexual, pansexual, non-binary or sexual dissident / bisexual (12/33) when asked for their sexual identity. Others identify as lesbian (7/33), heterosexual (6/33) and gay/sissy or faggot (4/33). One participant is self identified as Transbutch and another one as queer. Two participants did not respond.
Country of origin	31	Most of the participants describe their country of origin as Spain (12/33), others as Catalonia (8/33) or a mixture (2/33). Other participants indicated Basque Country (6/33), Galicia (1/33), Brazil (1/33), Turkey (1/33) and two participants did not answer.
Country of residence / legal status	32	Most of the participants describe their Country of residence / legal status as Spain (17/33), Catalonia (5/33) or Basque Country (5/33). 5/33 indicated a mixture between Barcelona, Catalonia, Basque Country and Spain. One participant does not answer.
Racial / ethnic identity	27	In terms of racial/ethnic identity, most of the participants describe themselves as white, Caucasian and/or Catalan (21/33). Six participants did not fill out the field. Other participants identified in terms such as gypsy, Latin, mixed or socialised as Turkish (6/33).
National identity	30	In terms of national identity, most of the participants describe themselves as Catalan (14/33), Basque (8/33), Spanish (3/33). Two wrote 'none', three did not respond. Other participants identified as Murcian/Catalan/Spanish, Brazilian and Galician (one each).

Educational training	33	32 of the participants declare different universitarian degrees, Bachelor, high educational level, PhD, Master, higher education, graduate etc. One participant wrote Vocational training.
Religion	30	Most of the participants identified as atheist, agnostic or simply say 'none' (27/33). One participant described themselves as non-practicing Catholic, another one as Christian and another one as Umbanda. Three participants did not respond.
Social class	33	Most of the participants indicate working class (13/33) or middle class (8/33). Some state higher middle class (4/33) or lower middle class (2/33). Other responses refer to class as: privileged working class, lower class, sociologically, middle class, politically, working class.
Dis/ability	33	The vast majority states not having any disability (30/33) and those who do refer to mental health issues or chronic illness.
Settlement type	33	Most of the participants live in a big city (15/33) and medium sized city (12/33). However, there are also participants from villages (5/33) and rural areas (1/33).
Parental status	33	Most of the participants do not have children (23/33), a few have children (7/33) and for others we don't have the information (3/33).
Anything else	6	Asked for anything else, a few participants referred to: Trans guy/man/boy, Euskera speaker, activist since they were 13 years old, transfeminist, defender of defenders, and feminist.

Chapter 10: Switzerland

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Executive summary

Switzerland has recently enacted legislative changes in the realm of gender equality, largely as a response to social movements advocating for these reforms. Extending hate speech laws to cover sexual orientation and legalising same-sex marriage are some of the examples that mark progress. Both laws faced opposition through popular referendums but were supported by a wide majority of the voters. Other topics remain heatedly debated, both in parliamentary processes and in the media, with significant opposition, for example the introduction of a third gender option in official records. Despite considerable support for the legislative changes in public referendums, 'anti-gender' mobilisation manifests itself strongly in Switzerland, with the right-wing SVP party campaigning against what it calls 'gender terror' and right-wing media fuelling hostility by associating gender ideology with threats to freedom, to moral values and to minors.¹⁴⁷ Far-right extremist groups have disrupted events like Drag Story Time, opposing 'gender ideology'¹⁴⁸; and existing reports indicate a rise in hate crimes targeting the LGBTIQ+ community, with transgender individuals being made particularly vulnerable to verbal harassment, physical assaults, and social media attacks.¹⁴⁹

Participants in the case study on Switzerland reported various ways in which they experience 'anti-gender' politics in their everyday lives and described heightened fears of physical violence and increased precautions at public events. The effects of 'anti-gender' politics were also discussed in terms of online hate, which is reported to be prevalent, with participants regularly receiving hate emails and threats. The constant exposure to online hostility forces many to take breaks from their personal and professional online presence. There is a significant fear that online violence could translate into physical attacks.

Activists and professionals working on gender issues reported feeling pressure in light of growing hostility, leading to self-censorship and careful preparation for public appearances. Negative media coverage and the rise of 'anti-woke' and conspiracy theories undermine advocacy efforts by attaching negative connotations to human rights activism, contributing to emotional distress and burnout among pro-equality activists. Effective resistance strategies against 'anti-gender' rhetoric include

¹⁴⁷ Washington, O. (2023) Warum hat die SVP ein Problem mit der Gender-Thematik?, srf, available at: <https://www.srf.ch/audio/samstagsrundschaue/warum-hat-die-svp-ein-problem-mit-der-gender-thematik?id=12393943> (Accessed: 11 July 2024).

See also the result of the RESIST project on 'Anti-gender' politics in Europe: the RESIST Project (2024) Ergebnisse der Schweizer Fallstudie. Available at: https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/576/?key=2mhb8162vosolmu9l9lv33nhsrg3m2 (Accessed: 3 July 2024).

¹⁴⁸ Glaus, D. (2022) «Friedlicher Aktivismus» als blanker Hohn srf, available at: <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/aktionen-der-jungen-tat-friedlicher-aktivismus-als-blanker-hohn> (Accessed: 11 July 2024).

¹⁴⁹ Hate Crime Report (2023) Pink Cross, LOS, TGNS, available at: https://www.pinkcross.ch/unser-einsatz/politik/hate-crime/hatecrime_bericht_2023_de.pdf, (Accessed: 3 July 2024)

fostering political alliances; enhancing solidarity and friendships; raising public awareness through education and patient dialogues; seeking supportive cultural contexts; and prioritising self-care and safe spaces to preserve mental health and ensure the resilience and sustainability of advocacy efforts.

Keywords: Hostility; online harassment; fear; solidarity; support, Switzerland.

Introduction

This case study report explores the effects of 'anti-gender' politics in Switzerland and discusses how individuals navigate, confront, and resist assaults on their identities, lives, politics, and work within the spheres of sexuality and gender. 31 participants in Switzerland took part in four focus groups—with 21 participants in total (3-7 per group)—and in 12 individual interviews with people, two of whom participated in a focus-group before also taking part in an interview. Participants were recruited through targeted emails; please see [Table 10: Respondent profiles Switzerland](#) for more details.

The report starts with an overview of the national context and then presents key findings from the focus groups and interviews. The study includes people with diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Participants are involved in various gender-related fields such as activism, academia, state equality bodies, sexual health and education, politics, sex work activism, trans activism, queer/LGBTIQ+ counseling, anti-racism, drag, and online activism. Their rich insights illuminate a wide range of experiences with 'anti-gender' mobilisations in Switzerland.

Context

Switzerland's semi-direct democratic system blends representative and direct democracy, granting significant power to its citizens. This system relies on two main mechanisms: the popular initiative and the optional referendum. The popular initiative allows citizens to propose constitutional changes. If a proposal gathers 100,000 signatures within 18 months, it is brought to a national vote. This mechanism enables citizens to directly influence the legislative agenda, bypassing parliamentary procedures when there is enough public support.¹⁵⁰

The optional referendum permits citizens to challenge laws passed by the Federal Assembly. If 50,000 signatures are collected within 100 days of the law's publication, a national vote is held to accept or reject the law. This provides a check on parliamentary decisions, ensuring that contentious issues can be decided by the eligible electorate rather than solely by elected representatives, putting pressure on elected politicians to reach a "socially acceptable" result that could find a majority in the public, resulting in ambiguous influence on the human rights struggle.

Thus, this system has significantly impacted the progress of gender and sexual equality in Switzerland. Women's suffrage is a notable example, as women only gained the right to vote in federal elections in 1971 due to the requirement of a national referendum, where the male electorate repeatedly voted against it until the 1970s.¹⁵¹ Some cantons lagged further, with Appenzell Innerrhoden granting women the right to vote only in 1991 after a federal court decision.

Many gender-related issues in Switzerland have thus been decided by popular referendums, most recently marriage equality (accepted in 2021), and the extension of hate speech laws to cover sexual orientation. While both topics were supported by over 60% of the voters, there remains significant opposition to gender rights issues in Switzerland.

¹⁵⁰ Linder, W. and Mueller, S. (2021) *Swiss Democracy: Possible Solutions to Conflict in Multicultural Societies*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, p.p. 127-151. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63266-3>.

¹⁵¹ Linder, W. and Mueller, S. (2021), p. 99.

Previous research by the RESIST project indicates that the counter-positions to gender and sexual equalities in Swiss parliamentary discourses often manifest not through open opposition, but through technocratic or legalist arguments.¹⁵² RESIST research also showed that the right-wing and conservative media fuel hostility to diversity and inclusion issues by framing 'gender ideology' as a threat to freedom of speech and by associating trans and LGBTIQ+ activism with 'wokeism' and 'cancel culture'. Common narratives include the protection of minors from 'early sexualisation' and the perceived dangers of gender-affirming care.

Reports by other civil society organisations, such as the Transgender Network Switzerland, have noted high levels of transphobic content in Swiss media.¹⁵³ The annual Hate Crime Report published by LGBTIQ+ NGOs raises alarms about a noticeable increase in hate crimes targeting the LGBTIQ+ community over the last few years, with incidents of violence and discrimination reported across various regions. Notably, these crimes often included verbal harassment, physical assaults, and social media attacks, primarily directed at transgender individuals and those perceived as non-conforming to traditional gender roles.¹⁵⁴ Apart from that, organisations involved in gender equality projects, such as Santé Sexuelle Suisse, report regular confrontations with 'anti-gender' and anti-abortion movements, indicating that sexual and reproductive rights are also affected by 'anti-gender' mobilisations in Switzerland.¹⁵⁵

Findings

1. Media and politics appear to be the main channels of 'anti-gender' politics

While the term 'anti-gender' is not widely recognised in Switzerland, participants identified its effects through various hostilities. They noted a growing resistance to progressive movements like anti-racism, feminism, and struggles for queer and trans rights. Media and politics emerged as primary arenas for these mobilisations, with misinformation fuelling fear and hostility. Participants also highlighted that the current hostilities are shifting from the far-right to the political centre and are often framed as concerns for young people.

Even though the term 'anti-gender' is not widely used in Switzerland, participants in the study recognised its implications based on their encounters with various hostilities. Instead of using the term 'anti-gender,' participants observed a growing resistance to progressive movements such as anti-racism, feminism, woke culture, and queer and trans rights, reflecting a broader opposition to equal rights, often expressed through the concept of backlash, anti-feminist, anti-queer, anti-trans hostilities.

¹⁵² The RESIST Project (2024) Ergebnisse der Schweizer Fallstudie, available at https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/576/?key=2mhb8162vosolmu9l9ly33nhsrg3m2

¹⁵³ Kraus, J (2021) Keine Ruhe Geben, available at: <https://www.equality.ch/f/Membres.htm> (Accessed: 16 June 2024).

¹⁵⁴ Hate Crime Report (2023) Pink Cross, LOS, TGNS, available at: https://www.pinkcross.ch/unser-einsatz/politik/hate-crime/hatecrime_bericht_2023_de.pdf, (Accessed 3 July 2024).

¹⁵⁵ Rohner, S., Weiss, C. (2023) *Sexual Health and Rights under pressure: resistance and challenge*, MMS Bulletin #167s, available at: <https://www.medicusmundi.ch/de/austausch-und-vernetzung/veranstaltungen/mms-fachtagung/sexual-hhealth-and-rrights-under-pressure-res/> (Accessed: 20 June 2024).

Key themes that most participants associated with 'anti-gender' mobilisation in Switzerland included opposition to inclusive language, sex education, moral panic around trans issues, and sex work. Trans-exclusionary feminism was highlighted as a significant form of 'anti-gender' hostility. However, it was noted that the targets of these hostilities are not fixed, but shifting.

Media and politics were addressed by most participants as the primary arenas for such mobilisations. Religious circles, particularly evangelists, were also noted for their opposition to gender equality and attempts at conversion regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.

Misinformation emerged as a critical factor in fostering hostility. Media and political narratives sensationalising topics such as sex education or transgender issues were discussed as key factors in fostering hostility and fear even among previously uninformed or neutral individuals. Most participants expressed their frustration and concern over the spread of false information and the resulting public confusion. As Alex noted: "I always notice when I haven't spoken to my mother about [LGBTIQ+/trans issues] for six months, how the newspaper discourses have come in".

Some participants, such as Momo Regen, noted that hostilities to equality and diversity have deep historical roots and are driven by societal and cultural dissent, while others noticed an increase in organised opposition to equality and diversity in recent years.

Participants from the German-speaking parts of Switzerland pointed to a longer history of organised resistance to gender equality in these regions, referencing attacks on gender studies as early as 2010, which intensified in 2015–16. This contrasts with the French-speaking areas, where such debates appear less prominent. One interviewee recalled opposition to gender studies as an example of 'anti-gender' politics dating back to 2010, marked by mutual criticism between the discipline and right-wing populist policies: gender studies academics criticised right-wing politics, which in turn portrayed gender studies as an unscientific discipline and its academics as disconnected elites (SWIINT06). Alex pointed out that these debates originated in Germany and travelled to Switzerland, manifesting in discourses about "elites who want to dismantle gender from the top" and "academics in their ivory tower who lost contact with reality".

Other participants identified the 2019 feminist strike as a turning point, suggesting that increased visibility of feminist and queer issues triggered a backlash. The COVID-19 pandemic and related conspiracy theories further fuelled 'anti-gender' narratives.

Several participants also noted, that while the 2021 marriage equality campaign sparked hostile discourses, current hostility is expressed without extensive debates and has shifted from the far-right to the political centre, **becoming more socially acceptable** and often presented under the guise of concern for young people. The recent campaign by the right-wing Swiss People's Party highlighted the political significance of these movements, as voiced by many participants.

2. 'Anti-gender' led to heightened fears of physical violence and necessitated increased precautions

Generally, most participants felt that hostility has been increasing in recent years, manifested as fears and anticipation of physical violence.

Violent attacks **from right-wing extremist groups** at feminist or queer events, as well as the hostile rhetoric of **masculinist/incel** movements on social media were said to contribute to the general

hostility towards equality issues and lead to a **heightened fear and pressure amongst people targeted by 'anti-gender'**. As Mo said:

At events where I had no fear at all in Switzerland—queer events—that something could happen, I now go with an uncomfortable feeling, e.g. at Drag Story Time. A few years ago, I never had the feeling that something would happen when I went to a queer event.

The discussions highlighted a rise in hate comments and security threats during events such as Pride parades, leading to heightened police presence and emergency protocols. Increasing fear has resulted in a loss of 'naive confidence' among community members, as illustrated by participants' experiences of discomfort and their **anticipation of violence**.

Another participant shared how, following their public condemnation of a recent homophobic verbal assault of a lesbian journalist,¹⁵⁶ she, and members of her collective reacted with fear whenever the doorbell rang in their office. The large number of hate emails they receive makes them fearfully anticipate that the assaults could materialise in real life. As Alex said: "But if digital hatred in its smallest measure turns into physical violence, then we are living very dangerously".

Despite noting growing concerns, this participant said that, as a cis lesbian woman, she felt less targeted than trans and non-binary people. The anticipation of physical and verbal violence among the trans participants was expressed particularly acutely. As SWIINT03 said:

It's as if we're collectively going through things together. But personally, I don't experience it very badly. But it weighs on me to know that at any moment, I can experience it.

Other trans participants confirmed this heightened feeling of fear and anticipation of violence. 'Anti-gender' politics has a significant impact on transgender and gender-diverse individuals. One participant, Luna, emphasised that 'anti-gender' politics is often perceived as a rhetoric, or a discourse, whereas it is **more than just a discourse**, and should be seen as something that has tangible effects on trans people's lives, leading notably to a higher prevalence of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts amongst young trans people. Another participant further confirmed that increased visibility of gender identity issues has heightened the risk of direct violence for some groups (Urs Vanessa).

Furthermore, participants reported experiencing **mixed feelings towards the police**. Some felt that police violence against feminist and so-called 'unauthorised demonstrations' has increased, citing examples like the feminist strike on March 8, 2020, where protesters were trapped by police on a bridge for several hours without water or access to toilets (Alex). Conversely, during certain events—such as a counter-demonstration to right-wing extremist targeting of Drag Story Time for kids in Zurich—the presence of police was said to provide a sense of security against potential attacks from right-wing extremist groups.

¹⁵⁶ Swissinfo (2023)

<https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/society/far-right-essayist-jailed-in-switzerland-for-homophobic-remarks/48855206>, (Accessed: 8 June 2024).

3. Online hate and targeting were reported as prevalent in Switzerland

Most participants reported experiencing online hate and targeting, highlighting the significant role masculinist groups play in spreading hostile rhetoric, often transnationally. Constant exposure to online hostility is mentally draining, forcing many to take breaks from their personal and professional online presence to protect their well-being.

Direct attacks on individuals and organisations are commonplace, with many participants reporting that regular hate emails and other threats are sent to their personal and professional accounts. One participant mentioned that their organisation maintains a dedicated 'hate mail' folder in their mailbox to manage the influx (SWIFG1.6). A German scholar was even cited for having a specific mailbox on their website solely for hate emails, which people utilised.

Most of these attacks, participants observed, are transphobic and misogynistic, noting that much of the hostile rhetoric seems to be 'recycled' from media and social media coverage in the United States, UK, and other contexts.

Participants shared personal experiences to illustrate the intensity of online hostility. For example, Jade, an activist using Instagram to denounce violence, recounted being targeted and harassed by far-right men. After reporting a cultural venue with cases of sexual abuse, Jade received messages from white cisgender heterosexual men asserting they would continue to frequent the venue. Some of these men followed Jade's feminist accounts but still sent violent messages whenever, as they believed, they felt threatened. Jade also faced harassment having added they/she pronouns to her account page.

Participants specifically remarked on **the rise of masculinism on social networks**. Emmy, who engages with various age groups, expressed shock at the regressive views young women hear from their male peers, such as "women should stay in the kitchen". Emmy believes more engagement is needed to counteract these views, though a lack of funding and resources pose significant barriers. Sam also noted the rise of ultra-masculinist discourse on social media, describing it as a "bubble" that fosters radicalisation within certain circles.

Similarly, Adèle talked about the constant exposure to masculinist content on social media, emphasising how discourses idealising the past or promoting group-belonging are commonly used by masculinists. As she says, confronting this content is almost inevitable, especially on platforms like TikTok. Alex also shared how she recently spoke publicly about gender-inclusive language—which she defines as a 'very dividing theme'—and afterwards receiving direct emails and messages on her Instagram account. Another participant, SWIFG2.6, reported how being a gay and racialised person leads him to receive racist and/or homophobic comments on social networks.

Participants expressed **pervasive fear that online violence could materialise offline**, adding to their stress and fatigue from constant exposure to hostile content. This fear has led some to withdraw from personal and professional online activities to protect their mental health.

In addition to threatening, intimidating, and discriminatory content, participants also described encountering specific trolling tactics designed to consume activists' energy and time. For example, SWIINT09 spoke about dealing with trolls, who repeatedly ask detailed questions to exhaust and frustrate activists. These trolls exploit the organisation's values of being willing to inform and educate, asking for detailed answers over and over again to intentionally waste resources. While

some participants avoid engaging with such trolls, others, especially in state institutions, feel compelled to respond, wasting valuable time.

Generally, participants expressed **an ambiguous relation to social media**: on the one hand, it provides a platform for marginalised voices to gain support and speak up. For example, Luna mentioned that in Switzerland, figures like Anna Rosenwasser¹⁵⁷ would not be as well-known without Instagram. At the same time, she said that the impersonal nature of online interactions makes it easier for people to engage in hate and discrimination, which she, as a trans woman, has experienced extensively. However, she also acknowledged experiencing violent attacks on the street.

4. The pervasiveness of 'anti-gender' rhetoric: from public discourse to personal interactions

'Anti-gender' rhetoric disseminated by the media—including online platforms—and political discourse permeates everyday life, participants reported encountering hostility in diverse and often unexpected settings.

Participants concurred that 'anti-gender' rhetoric is far more pervasive than media portrayals suggest. As Sacha observed, "The far-right, they're just more vocal". Participants stressed that, arising from these dominant sources of 'anti-gender', hostile discourses **trickle down into everyday life**, leading to unexpected confrontations and aggression, often in "close" familial, professional or friendships circles.

For instance, Granaina recounted a casual lunch with a long-time friend that escalated into a contentious exchange, with her views as an individual and professional advocate for inclusivity being aggressively challenged. Similarly, family gatherings emerged as anticipated battlegrounds for hostile discussions. Alex described the difficulty of countering hostile narratives within her family:

My mother now shows a very conservative attitude towards trans people or simply repeats what she hears in the media, which is primarily anti-trans. She lacks the education and sensitivity to recognise this as trans-hostile reporting. It's challenging for me to counter her, even though it's part of my professional work.

In another example, S.N., involved in the ballroom scene, also noted that 'anti-gender' discourses predominantly arise from politics and media, which he referred to as 'bourgeois spheres'. In his opinion, people in the ballroom scene are often removed from these circles, and yet encounter anti-queer, anti-trans, anti-feminist hostilities through family, religious institutions, and other community interactions. On a different level, the same participant—with a background in natural sciences—also noted the presence of 'anti-gender' discourse in natural sciences, particularly biology, and being regularly confronted amongst their former study and work colleagues with 'anti-gender' discourses reaffirming the gender binary in the name of 'natural science'.

Many participants pointed out that occasionally, individuals with leftist political views, including self-identified feminists, also perpetuate 'anti-gender' rhetoric, particularly through discourses that victimise or deny agency to sex workers and trans people (Granaina). Some participants referred to

¹⁵⁷ Anna Rosenwasser is a well-known queer feminist activist, well-known through her social media activity, who got elected to Parliament during the 2023 federal election for the Socialist Party.

these individuals as 'reactionary feminists', noting their promotion of anti-sex work discourse and victimisation narratives in relation to sex workers and trans people.

Intra-community targeting was also reported. Participants involved in sex work activism shared that even those in precarious environments, who are themselves affected by 'anti-gender' politics, can propagate hostile messages from dominant 'anti-gender' actors. SWIINT03 recounted witnessing a trans sex worker being harassed by her cis colleagues, and expressed sadness at seeing 'anti-gender' hostility reproduced within marginalised social groups. As an activist, she highlighted the complexity and difficulty of combating 'anti-gender' politics in such environments.

5. Contested competence and professionalism: advocating for equality and diversity while navigating hostility

The increasing hostility towards issues of equality and diversity has created significant challenges for activists, gender studies researchers, civil servants, and others involved in these areas. Participants reported experiencing fatigue, heightened scrutiny of their public image, a need to use more simplified language, and a struggle against the negative framing attached to their (paid or unpaid) work.

Many participants shared that they meticulously prepare their words for public events, anticipating potential attacks and being acutely aware of constant surveillance. This environment has fostered hyper-vigilance and a "latent pressure" among activists. As SWIINT09 expressed, the fear of potential attacks looms even in the absence of any direct incidents:

And it's so difficult, it always exerts latent pressure—and that's what I'm getting at—at the consequences. That means that here, we haven't yet experienced any attacks on our work [...] But we don't know when that might be.

Widespread online hostility has caused significant emotional distress among participants. One participant, a trans woman who is a trans rights activist, questioned her ability to continue her work, contemplating whether a different job might alleviate some of the stress from constant exposure to online hate. SWIINT03 reflected: "Would having a normal job, not being in the field, help me more? Because then, when it comes to social networks, I don't get involved".

Negative media coverage has also impacted advocacy efforts, with **fears of not being heard** and the rise of 'anti-woke' and conspiracy theories undermining the credibility of the LGBTIQ+ community. As one participant, SWIINT03, involved in providing gender trainings, noted, there was a period of increased interest among professionals in equality and diversity trainings, followed by a period when the influence of 'anti-woke' themes became pronounced:

There were professionals who came to us, who wanted to be trained, to understand better, to do better. And now, there's a bit of a turnaround. Because people are saying to themselves, this is woke stuff, it's going too far, they want to replace us all. But not at all!

Participants spoke about how 'activism' can be framed in a negative way, and how they have to counteract pre-existing negative images of their work as "too radical", "too militant", "unprofessional" and are forced to "justify" what they are doing. Abdurahman for example said that in their association they strategically clearly state their job title or level of study of the people involved to prove their legitimacy and to "erase this perception they have of the LGBTIQ+ movement". In a similar vein, Manu

shared that in training sessions, they emphasise that it's okay to make mistakes, such as unintentionally misgendering someone, to counteract the 'we can't say anything anymore' discourse.

Other strategies that activists described using in response to hostile discourse is to simplify their language and control their public image. For example, some participants involved in educational projects have chosen to appear “less militant” to avoid backlash. Sacha described their organisation as framing itself as “politically committed” but not “militant” to avoid backlash and possible financial cuts. In a similar vein, Adèle added:

But that, I find, is the whole dimension between fantasy and reality. There's a lot of fantasy about what's going on, and I regularly, if not all the time, at the conferences or training courses I give to professionals, I get lots of people saying “but in fact it's not at all militant, it's very measured what you're bringing”. But that's the reality. What you see is what clicks in the media, because it's much more media-friendly to say “we're transitioning young people”, but then when I explain to people that, in fact, on average, they take about 22 months to get endocrinologist treatment, because that's the average in French-speaking Switzerland, they [the audience] say “but in fact it's fine”.

Another participant, (SWIINT06), a gender studies scholar, avoids terms that could trigger strong reactions—for example ‘patriarchy’—as she knows such terms are likely to be picked up on and can lead to strong negative responses. In contrast to other sciences, she considered that gender studies “can always be attacked”, because people do not understand what it is about, or they feel they already know it all, and because any critical discourse to power structures can be disqualified as “ideological”. She feared that even her research could be disqualified as “ideological”, especially if related to her political engagement, and as a result actively avoided posting content related to her research on her political channels, to avoid her political engagement being misused to undermine her academic work.

Lorena also recounted a recent controversy which led to **fear of potential funding repercussions for their association**. A women-only jam session was organised by a jazz association, which faced far-right attacks and media scrutiny, with resulting political attempts to ‘re-discuss’ funding of the association. She felt angered that the discourse centred on men's feelings of exclusion rather than the event's positive impact on participants, and that the fear of losing the funding dominated the discussion.

Academics also spoke about carefully weighing their words for public appearances, anticipating a wave of hate or harsh criticism. Additionally, participants highlighted a lack of support from universities in protecting individual academics from political attacks, as Momo Regen noted, and academic freedom in general..

6. 'Anti-gender' politics complicates allyship and hinders complex discussions

Hostile 'anti-gender' rhetoric complicates activism, fosters divisions, and hinders meaningful discussions within affected communities.

Participants underscored that a climate in which the opposition to gender and diversity issues is becoming more pronounced complicates activism and allyship, while continuing with activism is requiring higher levels of commitment. It was suggested that some may abandon activism altogether, feeling that their efforts are futile against the opposition, which they view as stronger, meaning that those who persist might need to take extended breaks to maintain that activism.

Activists in some communities, such as intersex communities, feel particularly affected. As Urs Vanessa described, the prolonged struggle against pervasive hostility is frustrating, with progress often feeling slow and insignificant. They expressed their feeling of discouragement when learning about parliament's decision last winter to turn down a bill to better protect intersex kids from unconsented operations:¹⁵⁸

And if you're active in the community and fight for rights, it's an enormously long battle against windmills.¹⁵⁹ Enormously frustrating. With very, very, very, very small steps forward. And there are a lot of people who stop activism because of that, because it's no use, what can I do, they're just stronger. And the people who go through with it like I do, they suffer too. And for the last two years [...] before that, I didn't have to, I had to take two months off every year for the last two years so that I could keep going.

Apart from the fatigue and emotional exhaustion of activists, it was also remarked that the **fear of backlash** causes tensions within LGBTIQ+ circles. Some LGB individuals distance themselves from trans and non-binary minorities, fearing that backlash against these groups might extend to them. As Jade said, this 'not claiming too much' narrative feeds into a reluctance to advocate strongly for rights, perpetuating internal divisions and weakening collective efforts: "In fact, it's a fear. As trans people are more victims than if we associate ourselves with them, we'll be more victims by extension".

Other participants noted the presence of trans-exclusionary LGB people within some circles, and that their organisations were confronted with demands to exclude trans issues from their agendas. In a similar vein, SWIINT03 pointed out what they consider a lack of support for transgender individuals and collectives, by formerly equally marginalised groups:

People no longer want to be associated with problems, especially gay men, who have come a long way. It's true that their situation has come a long way, they're a little more comfortable, a little more integrated into society, and it's less and less of a problem in itself [...] less of a concern compared to being a trans person, you see.

One more negative effect of hostile 'anti-gender' discourse is that it often oversimplifies gender-related topics, **making nuanced discussions difficult**. For example, S.N. said that topics like regret and post-transition dysphoria are challenging to address within the trans community due to fears of feeding into 'anti-gender' narratives.

You can regret it. And that's okay. [...] Certainly, it can be very stressful. [...] It's an emotion that we can deal with well in society. And we can't even talk about that. Again, it serves this anti-gender theory or the idea that you can force trans people to make the right decision.

In a similar vein, the focus on the corporal dimension of gender by 'anti-gender' movements makes it hard to discuss the complex interplay of gender identity and expression, as these discussions risk being weaponised by hostile groups.

¹⁵⁸ Information on the parliamentary decision regarding the motion "Improving the treatment of children born with a variation of sexual development (DSD)" can be accessed at

<https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefft?AffairId=20233967>

¹⁵⁹ In German, "fighting against windmills" is an expression used to describe endless fights with little rewards (since the windmills will keep moving despite one's best efforts).

Other participants highlighted divisions within the feminist community, which became particularly evident in the context of drafting the new gender equality law in Basel. The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ issues in the new law triggered acute reactions from some corners of the feminist movement—some fearing a dilution of limited financial and personal resources for significant issues, such as wage-equality, while some trans-exclusionary discourses were also heavily mobilised. Several participants mentioned that attempts at dialogue failed from the outset, as the discussion quickly became polarised. However, the subsequent commission discussions provided a valuable learning experience: it became clear that a well-informed, differentiated discussion, protected from media attention by confidentiality rules, could lead to constructive outcomes. One participant in particular added that the assumption should not be made that opponents share the same knowledge as proponents and there must be a willingness to educate.

7. Participants unveiled the impact of misinformation in the media

The impact of misinformation and manipulation in the media was a central theme in the research. According to participants, media, including social media, serves as one of the primary vessels for perpetuating 'anti-gender' rhetoric.

Misinformation and manipulation in the media, particularly social media, have emerged as pivotal issues in discussions surrounding 'anti-gender'. Participants share personal experiences, shedding light on the effects of biased media coverage on trans, intersex, and queer communities. Sacha spoke about journalistic responsibility and transphobia. She highlighted issues within journalism, citing examples of transphobia disguised as 'truth-telling.' Some participants were upset seeing how some journalists insist on disclosing whether an interviewee is cisgender or transgender, regardless of its relevance to the topic at hand. This practice, Sacha noted, underscores a harmful obsession with gender identity that detracts from the actual discourse.

Several participants spoke about navigating misinformation in the media as a personal battle. Marianne reflected on the pervasive nature of misinformation and its impact on even the most supportive individuals. She remarked:

I realise in myself that I must keep fighting against being taken in by this zeitgeist¹⁶⁰ so that I don't fall into doubt myself. And because I know a lot of trans people and their stories, I can reassure myself. But I understand that people without personal experience with the topic can get insecure in their opinions.

She emphasised the need for continuous vigilance against this zeitgeist to avoid falling into doubt, particularly for those without personal connections to the trans community.

Another participant, Urs Vanessa, spoke about the poor quality of media coverage from the perspective of an intersex person. Their contributions to a TV documentary were heavily edited, leading to criticism from the intersex community and exacerbating the lack of visibility for intersex individuals. Similarly, Marius expressed frustration with media treatment of their interventions. They noted that rapid editing often leads to significant cuts, altering the intended message.

¹⁶⁰ Zeitgeist refers to the prevailing cultural, intellectual, and moral climate of a particular period in history. It encapsulates the dominant ideas, beliefs, and values that characterise and shape the social and cultural landscape of that time.

Another example of media manipulation that was discussed involved the Gender Studies department in Basel, where a workshop about sex toys organised by researchers was sensationalised by a local newspaper, leading to far-right complaints about the misuse of public funds and forcing women professors to publicly justify their work (Alex). Alex remarked how a single event was turned into a type of 'anti-gender' argument, intentionally undermining Gender Studies for "using people's money for such things."

Another participant, Valentina, expressed fear that misinformation and manipulation of public opinion by 'anti-gender' actors could further harm vulnerable groups, particularly LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers. The participant worried that they might face stricter scrutiny and reduced support due to budget cuts and gendered and racialised rhetoric, fueling economic insecurity among the public, thus framing queer asylum seekers as a financial burden.

8. The heavy toll of negative media coverage on activists' discourses and thematics

Activists in Switzerland face significant challenges as 'anti-gender' narratives saturate public discussions, forcing them to navigate misinformation about their topics, and simultaneously addressing the misinformation while keeping up with their core issues.

The negative coverage of certain topics imposes a significant burden on equality activists in Switzerland. Participants observed that 'anti-gender' rhetoric has saturated discussions with specific issues such as trans and non-binary identities, sex education, gender-inclusive language, and gender itself. This oversaturation drains the resources and energy of activists, diverting attention from other important matters.

Activists advocating for sex education in schools are particularly frustrated by the consequences of 'anti-gender' rhetoric. They face opposition from self-proclaimed 'concerned parents,' parliamentary interventions,¹⁶¹ and actions from anti-sex education groups. One participant from French-speaking Switzerland shared that these efforts even extend to legal actions, such as a recent criminal lawsuit for "inciting children to sexual activity" which was filed against educators in relation to a sex education brochure (SWIINT09). She noted that the lawsuit was ultimately dropped, and that the organisation chose to protect the educators who were targeted, by keeping them out of the spotlight and maintaining a low profile on the issue.

Due to the heightened focus on sex education in media and political discourse, participants said educators and organisations overseeing sex education are feeling pressured. This pressure leads to concerns about securing funding and causes some educators to resort to self-censorship to avoid conflicts. For example, educators often avoid mentioning topics like 'private parts,' masturbation, and gender to prevent backlash from religious and conservative groups. As SWIINT09 explained:

There are usually two themes: it's unimaginable to talk about masturbation in a sex education class [...]. That's one point. And the second point is everything to do with gender. [...] These movements attack both themes in the same way.

The interviewee noted that opposition often comes from diverse religious and conservative groups, resulting in heterogeneous 'anti-gender' discourses.

¹⁶¹ Please visit <https://theresistproject.eu/what-we-have-found/> to see the RESIST case-study findings for Switzerland, including parliamentary debates analysis.

SWIINT09, who educates professionals on LGBTIQ+ issues, noted that opposition to sex education frequently surfaces during their gender equality training to adult professionals. They often encounter participants who say, "I agree with you, but I don't think children should be taught that". Additionally, training requests sometimes ask to dilute the LGBTIQ+ subject within broader topics, such as general discrimination, to make it more acceptable to audiences.

Gender-inclusive language is another frequent target of 'anti-gender' discourse. The oversaturation of critiques has led some funding bodies to require its exclusion in project proposals. Abdurahman from SWIINT05 reported that a funding body explicitly requested applicants not to use inclusive language, citing concerns about comprehensibility and alignment with the French Academy's stance. This condition was viewed as discriminatory and obstructive for proposals involving gender minorities, creating uncertainty about how to proceed.

9. Trans and gender diverse people are most vulnerable to 'anti-gender'

'Anti-gender' rhetoric has significantly impacted trans, non-binary and gender diverse individuals, leading to more acceptable hostile discourses, and heightened fear and urgency regarding access to gender-affirming treatments.

Participants highlighted how media coverage of trans issues has grown increasingly negative since the pandemic, focusing on detransition and other adverse themes. This visibility fosters stereotypes and preconceived notions. As one participant, S.N., noted:

I think the increased visibility [...] has the advantage that more people can imagine something under the term trans. The disadvantage is that there are more stereotypes and more preconceived opinions. It's no longer simply "I perceive you as you are and it's just weird", but "see, you're trans and as a result you're x, y, z".

Participants particularly in SWIFG2 criticised sensationalist detransitioning reportages that often exclude input from gender professionals, resulting in misinformed public opinions. Sensationalism as a tactic exploits polarising topics, selling them as reliable to an uninformed public.

Hostile media discourses materially affect trans individuals' daily lives and well-being. One trans participant recounted the emotional toll of transphobic debates on television, which led her to seek counselling. She explained how media negativity made her more cautious about disclosing her trans identity, compelling her to adopt a cis-passing appearance to avoid danger, thus adding strain to her life (SWIINT03). She said she used to believe she was unaffected by such debates, and that the realisation of the significant toll it had on her emotional well-being was important.

Even those who haven't experienced direct abuse report a pervasive sense of insecurity and concern about potential transphobic encounters. This "community mental load" affects the overall well-being of trans individuals.

Several participants also addressed internal community pressures, as an effect of 'anti-gender'. For example, a trans activist noted that negative discourses pressure the trans community to fit specific identities, causing divisions between 'visible' and 'less visible' members. This division sometimes leads to a 'romanticisation of marginalisation'—Romantisierung der Marginalisierung—where those who fully medically transition are criticised as complicit in the system, despite having the right to make their own choices. In the words of one participant, S.N.:

And I think it ['anti-gender'] very much has this influence that you have to fit into a box again within the trans community [...] I think it leads to tensions. [...] Who is visible then? Are you visible and therefore openly suffering from this anti-gender debate or do you perhaps have a passing [...] and don't suffer from it.

Participants observed that hostile discourses have become more acceptable. As Alex pointed out, while some sexist remarks are less tolerated, attacks against trans people have become common, especially from far-right politicians and media. Dehumanising narratives against trans individuals are now more “sayable”, as she said, reflecting a troubling shift in societal attitudes.

Participants also pointed to the feeling of urgency in relation to gender-affirming health care as another negative effect of 'anti-gender'. The 'anti-gender' climate has heightened fear among trans individuals about losing access to gender-affirming care, causing increased stress and urgency to undergo medical procedures before they potentially become inaccessible. Valentina, who provides social counselling for LGBTIQ+ people, noticed that some trans people feel pressured to act quickly, fearing that gender-affirming care might soon be restricted or no longer reimbursed by the healthcare system.

At the same time, Marianne remarked that a shift in attitude is noticeable among professionals working with young people, particularly in schools and social work. Queerness is now a significant topic, but recent negative media coverage regarding trans-affirmative care has led to increased insecurity regarding what the proper professional approach regarding trans and non-binary youth should be, especially among psychologists. She observed a move from direct acceptance towards scepticism, with common complaints about the lack of parental involvement.

10. Navigating hostilities: strategies from equality activists

Facing increased hostilities, equality activists in Switzerland employ various strategies to navigate personal and professional challenges. Their approaches emphasise collaboration, coalition-building, and pragmatic responses to opposition.

Participants emphasised the importance of community solidarity as a crucial response to a hostile climate. This is particularly vital for smaller groups like intersex organisations. Unified support when speaking to the media is essential (Urs Vanessa). Another participant stressed the role of group efforts on social media to avoid individual targeting, thus protecting members and maintaining a united front (SWIINT06).

Forging political alliances with supportive politicians is vital for influencing legislative outcomes. Participants cited examples from Geneva, where alliances have successfully opposed proposals aimed at revoking equality laws or restricting healthcare for trans youth. One participant noted that 'anti-gender' rhetoric among some politicians is often strategic rather than genuine, suggesting potential for bridge-building even with conservative parties (SWIINT06).

Raising awareness and demystifying anti-woke and anti-trans issues were deemed effective strategies. Public platforms like festivals were preferred over individual discussions (SWIFG4). A participant working on masculinism highlighted the importance of training cisgender heterosexual men, particularly those in influential positions, to develop empathy and support gender issues (Gilles). Fostering dialogue between generations can bridge understanding. One participant shared a productive exchange with an older feminist who initially held prejudices towards trans people but eventually reconsidered her views (Luna).

Despite the risks involved in its use, social media was discussed as crucial for education and support. One participant regularly posts about trans issues, explaining concepts and addressing concerns from both the trans community and their families. When some cis women felt excluded by terms used in discussions about trans pregnancies (Gebährende), one participant explained the importance of inclusive language, emphasising that these terms are not exclusionary but inclusive of all people who carry children (Tani).

Several participants proposed rethinking or reclaiming terms like 'gender' to counter negative connotations. They suggested framing the discourse around human rights, emphasising the principle of "let people live". The goal is to equip people with the knowledge and language to support human rights decisions (S.N.).

To protect mental health, participants highlighted the importance of maintaining boundaries between public and private life. One participant emphasised the need for professional guidelines to protect personal information and emotional well-being in the face of hostility. She avoids sharing personal contact details and keeps her private life separate from her work, surrounded by supportive people (SWIINT09).

Participants suggested seeking cultural contexts that view gender more fluidly and connect it with other social inequities like racism, ableism, and classism. For instance, the ballroom scene and traditions from Judaism and Native American cultures offer valuable perspectives on gender identity (S.N.; Tani).

Despite the challenges, participants stressed the importance of not letting the 'anti-gender' movement marginalise them. Continuing their work, especially at the political level, and ensuring collegial support were seen as crucial. They emphasised the need to remain factual and counter arguments objectively, viewing information and education as key strategies, even in the face of constant opposition (Urs Vanessa; Tani; SMO). As Urs Vanessa said:

The question is always: how strong do we let this movement become and when do we start to counter it with factual arguments [...] This movement is not well-founded. Most people are simply against it because they are against it. [...] And then they start with some arguments and then you have to refute every argument they bring, using your knowledge, factually and soundly.

Through these discussions, it becomes evident that equality activists in Switzerland employ a variety of strategies to navigate hostilities. By building solidarity, forming political alliances, and maintaining personal boundaries, they continue to advocate for gender equality and human rights amidst growing opposition.

Conclusion

Participants provided detailed accounts of multifaceted and pervasive encounters with 'anti-gender' politics. Generally, 'anti-gender' politics is associated with right-wing populism—the 'recycling' of transnationally circulating discourses—and seen as a general opposition to progressive issues extending beyond the far-right, for example with trans-exclusionary feminists. Generally, participants suggested that 'anti-gender' rhetoric, although mostly prevalent in media and politics, **trickles down into everyday life, leading to unexpected confrontations and aggression.**

Participants reported increased **fears about physical safety at public events**, such as Pride parades, with some queer organisations even discussing emergency protocols in case of violence. On and offline harassment, including hate messages, has been common. Most participants have received hate messages to their professional and personal accounts, and there is a widespread **fear that online hate will turn into offline violence**.

It was pointed out that 'anti-gender' politics in Switzerland often focuses on topics like trans and non-binary issues, sex education, and gender-inclusive language. This puts pressure on equality activists and exposes certain groups to increased risks. **Transgender and gender-diverse individuals especially face a higher risk of physical violence**. In response, some participants feel pressured to adopt cis-passing appearances to reduce the risk of transphobic encounters. There is also a fear of losing access to medical care due to potential policy changes, creating a sense of urgency for some to undergo medical procedures before they become restricted or financially inaccessible.

Hostile discourses have infiltrated professional environments, causing tensions within LGBTIQ+ circles and hindering complex discussions on gender-related topics. Continuous exposure to hostile environments and the need to navigate them have taken a toll on the mental health of equality activists, leading to increased anxiety and stress. Many activists reported feelings of burnout due to the relentless nature of their work and constant opposition, and the need to take breaks from work to keep going. To avoid hostility, many individuals resort to self-censorship, avoiding certain topics or expressions of their identity in public and professional settings.

Effective resistance strategies against 'anti-gender' rhetoric include forming political alliances, fostering friendships and collaborations within communities, education, rethinking key concepts like 'gender' and their impact on the advocacy efforts, seeking supportive cultural contexts, and prioritising self-care and safe spaces.

Respondent Profiles

We asked the 31 participants to fill out a voluntary demographic form with open text boxes for each variable. 26 participants filled their voluntary demographic forms while 5 others were asked the questions directly during the interviews. To ensure varied perspectives, we aimed to recruit participants with diverse backgrounds. Here are some key characteristics of the Swiss sample.

Additionally, it must be mentioned, that many participants are professionally or voluntarily engaged in gender-related issues, including activism, academia, state equality bodies, sexual health and education, politics, sex work activism, counselling, trans activism, queer/LGBTIQ+ counselling, anti-racism, drag, online activism, and journalism/media work. This professional focus often shaped their narratives, with many discussing professional experiences more than personal ones. Despite efforts, some groups are notably missing from the sample, such as queer refugees and Muslim individuals. Consequently, the data does not provide insights into how these groups are specifically affected by 'anti-gender' politics, despite being regularly targeted.

Table 10: Respondent profiles Switzerland

Profile	No. of Responses	Sample Outline
Age groups	31	Most participants who indicated their age are between 25 and 34 (10 participants) or 35 and 49 years old (9), three were in the 50-64 range, two over 65, and one was below 24. The exact age was rarely provided, so that no clear average age can be calculated, but it would lay between 30 and 40.
Gender	31	The participants include 11 non-binary and trans individuals (incl. one identifying as Two-Spirit and one as queer), 13 cis women, six cis men, one intersex person.
Sexual orientation / identity	30	Among the cis men, five identify as gay, and one is a cis hetero man. Among the cis women, four identify as lesbians, three as bi/pan and the others as hetero (5). Non-binary and trans people have indicated a wide range of sexual orientations (pan, gay, hetero, queer, etc.)
Country of origin	29	Most of the participants indicated only Switzerland as a country of origin (18), while four indicated Switzerland and neighbouring countries (two Italy, two Germany). Three participants indicated Switzerland and other places (one Eastern European roots, one India and one Kenya/Somalia). France (1), Germany (1), Portugal (1) and Italy (1) were also mentioned as origins.
Country of residence / legal status	30	All participants indicated Switzerland as their place of residency. Most participants hold Swiss or European passports, and all are legally residing in Switzerland.

Racial / ethnic identity	26	In terms of racial/ethnic identity, most of the participants describe themselves as white or Caucasian (18), while another four indicated being of Swiss/German/central European descent. The sample also reflects racial and ethnic diversity, including four participants who identify as people of colour (PoC).
National identity	26	National identity was not a clear category for most participants and the ones who filled that category put the same answer as for their origins or their racial/ethnic identity.
Educational training	30	An overarching majority of the participants indicated higher education, 27 mentioning having attended university (six PhD, 10 with master, five with bachelor, 6 undefined university experience). One participant went to art school, one indicated having secondary education and one having no formal education diploma.
Religion	18	Religious affiliation was scarce, with most participants 22 identifying as atheist/agnostic/having no religion or not specifying any religious affiliation. One person indicated Jewish roots, while others identified with Catholic (4) or Protestant (3) churches, though around half of those indicated "not practising".
Social class	22	Most participants indicated middle class (13), higher middle class (5) or lower middle class (3), with only one participant stating upper class. The rest of the participants (8) left the field blank.
Dis/ability / chronic diseases	31	Most participants (23) stated having no disability or chronic disease. 7 mentioned chronic diseases, but few details were provided.
Settlement type	25	Most of the participants live in a big city (11) and medium sized city (8); however the exact qualification for Swiss cities remains blurry and many participants were unsure between both categories. There are also participants from small towns (1), villages (5) and rural areas (1). Many of the participants from smaller settlements are still professionally active in the cities.
Anything else	2	Two participants indicated being fat as an important aspect.

Chapter 11: Relief Maps

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Introduction

In addition to focus groups and interviews, data was collected using Relief Maps. Relief Maps is an online tool that enables the collection, analysis and visualisation of data. It includes a theoretical model for conceptualising intersectional inequalities from a spatial and emotional perspective and combines and integrates qualitative, quantitative, digital and spatial (GIS) approaches. Data gathering took place from February 2024 to May 2024 and 58 participants completed their own Relief Map through an online tool (reliefmaps.upf.edu) (for the composition of the sample see [Appendix 2, Table 11](#)). The Relief Maps were adapted for the RESIST project, and asked participants how they felt in different places of their everyday life, regarding the effects of 'anti-gender' politics related to their gender, sexual identity/orientation and other axes of inequality.

This tool allowed us to systematically collect data on the effects of 'anti-gender' based on spatial and emotional dimensions. Participants had to indicate the level of dis/comfort in the following places or spheres of everyday life: *Family, Home, Affective relations, Friendship, Workplace, Public space, Community, Social networks, Institutions, Educational spaces and Places of worship/faith communities*. Participants could also write about their experiences for each place or sphere and select from a list of emotions: *Acceptance, Frustration, Humiliation, Worry, Anger, Joy, Anxiety, Guilt, Empowerment, Freedom, Fear, Rejection, Safety, Loneliness, Tranquillity, Sadness, Shame*. Participants were also asked to classify the places or spheres in four types: places of oppression (places where one has a considerable experience of discomfort even if only caused by one axis), controversial places (where one feels discomfort due to one specific axis but that are a source of comfort or relief for another one), neutral places (where no axis is significantly accentuated) and places of relief (places that are sought or created because they provide release from some axis and generate significant comfort). No profile data was collected for ethical and data protection reasons.

Findings

The aggregate Relief Map (Figure 1) shows that participants experience different levels of dis/comfort depending on the places and spheres of their everyday life, and also that there are differences regarding the more salient categories. This shows that the effects of 'anti-gender':

- vary across the places of everyday life.
- are differently configured depending on the interrelationship among different axes.
- have an important emotional dimension that conditions the lived experience.

Specifically, it is systematically shown that place matters in understanding the effects of 'anti-gender' politics. The implications of the attacks and their prevalence are not the same everywhere, and participants have the ability to find or create places of relief. As the data shows (see [Appendix 2, Table 12: Characterisation of spaces in percent](#)), public space is the space which creates more discomfort, followed by social networks. Institutions and educational spaces also score very high as controversial places. Conversely, home and friendship are places where comfort scores highest, despite the problematisation some participants make, specifically in relation to the family home and

the loss of friendships due to ‘anti-gender’ discourses. More than half of the participants also consider affective relations as spaces of relief, although the qualitative data shows important discomforts in this sphere too. Private spaces like home and friendships, when they are chosen, are often seen as refuges, while public and institutional spaces are perceived as hostile, although all places and spheres are contested and the way they are experienced vary across the sample.

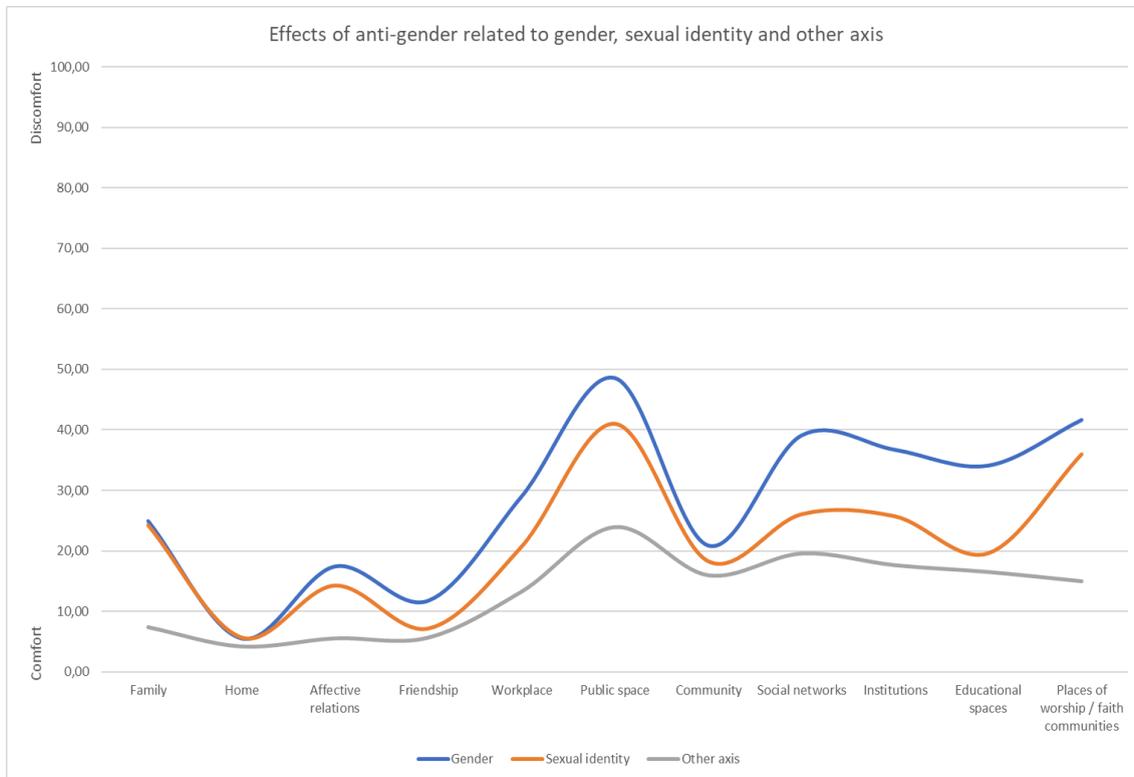


Figure 1: Aggregated Relief Map of all the participants

The research based on the Relief Maps highlights the interrelation between ‘anti-gender’ and structural sexism, the difficulty in separating gender and sexual orientation issues, and the emotional and spatial dimensions of ‘anti-gender’ experiences. In this sense, the spatial and emotional perspective allows a comprehension of the phenomena as less rigid or victimised, where it can be seen that participants navigate the different spaces of their everyday life, encountering different configurations of ‘anti-gender’ politics, as diverse actors and with different consequences for their lived experiences. As an important finding, the private/public divide appears as a reinforced and contested issue at the same time, which points at the relevance of contextualising the effects. Moreover, emotions play a significant role in both the experience and perpetuation of ‘anti-gender’ violence, underscoring the need for coordinated responses to protect and support affected communities. In this sense, it is important to consider the spatial perspective when analysing the effects of ‘anti-gender’, specifically in relation to the public/private dimension of it. In the same line, it is also important to analyse the role of emotions not only as consequences of ‘anti-gender’ discourses and politics but also as factors that can be productive of these, both in terms of how they reinforce and also configure the actions and resistances of the ones affected by them.

Appendix 1: Data Collection Methods

The findings of this report are based on qualitative techniques: focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Focus groups are a key method that taps into group dynamics allowing for shared narratives and stories and commonalities, as well as divergences, to emerge, creating in-depth data.

Data was collected between February and May 2024 through 9 case studies (Ireland, Spain: Catalonia and Basque Country, France, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Belarus, Greece, and a transnational study of people living in exile in Europe). Overall, 36 focus groups were conducted and 104 interviews were undertaken with a **total of 254 participants** (see [Chapter 1, Table 1: Overall respondent profiles](#)).

Focus groups and interviews across all case studies used a shared list of topics to explore and understand participants' lived experiences of the impact of 'anti-gender' discourses, tactics, and actions in various social spaces (for example: family, home, sexual and affective relations, friendship, work, and public spaces), as well as the impact of 'anti-gender' politics, discourses and actions on various aspects of everyday life. Whilst allowing for contextual differences, the data collection process in each case study covered the same topics and focused on areas of relevance. Given that the interview and focus group guides used were semi-structured, we did not work with a fixed set of questions to be asked in a specific order. Instead, as is standard practice in semi-structured interviewing, researchers followed participants in covering key topics in an order responsive to their experiences; this ensured that participants could speak about what they wished to. Researchers explored key areas and developed new lines of enquiry as they emerged, as is expected in qualitative data.

Participants were recruited from four key target groups: (1) activists; (2) academics; (3) public intellectuals; (4) the general public. Inclusion criteria were: (1) being affected by 'anti-gender' politics, discourses and actions; (2) being 18 years old or older; (3) agreeing to have data collected and summaries created; (4) being able to speak or understand the language of the focus groups and/or interviews or interpreter; (5) living in one of the eight case study countries or being a person living in exile in Europe. In some of the case studies, the focus groups were composed of a mix of the target groups—considering also that some participants identified with more than one category—whilst in others, the focus groups were divided based on the target group. Geographical location also defined how groups were organised across the case studies.

Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded when participants consented; these recordings were transcribed and summarised. Where participants did not consent to being recorded, such as in Belarus, notes were taken and summaries produced, which were then member-checked and their content approved by the participants. Participants could opt in to be named with their first names. We anonymised participants who did not opt in to be named using the following coding convention: country code, e.g. ESP, interview code INT01 for the first interview, and/or FG1 for the first focus group. The second number following 'FG' identifies the participant within the focus group. Participants were asked to optionally complete a demographic form and hand it back to the researchers with their consent forms. This was an opt-in and no participant was forced to complete it in part or full, or hand in the demographic form. This form is the basis of the respondents' profiles presented at the end of each case study report, and included age and an age range; gender; sexuality/sexual orientation; country of origin; country of residence/legal status; ethnic group/race; national identity; education level; religion; disability; and an open question.

Appendix 2: Tables - Overall Indicators Relief Maps

Table 11: Respondents per case study (Relief Maps)

Case study	N
Spain: Catalonia and Basque Country	16
Ireland	7
Poland	10
Germany	7
France	11
Switzerland	4
Greece	2
In Exile	1
Total	58

Table 12: Characterisation of spaces in percent (Relief Maps)

Space	Relief	Oppressive	Neutral	Controverted	I don't use it	Total
Family	31	9	24	36	0	100
Home	72	0	19	7	2	100
Affective relations	55	0	24	19	2	100
Friendship	72	0	19	7	2	100
Workplace	21	10	31	34	3	100
Public space	2	31	9	57	2	100
Community	19	5	36	33	7	100
Social networks	9	22	22	40	7	100
Institutions	0	22	29	45	3	100
Educational spaces	0	12	31	40	17	100
Places of worship/faith communities	2	31	3	9	55	100