



**Research Summary**

**GREECE**

**LGBTQI+ and Ageing in a  
Nutshell**

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## Executive Summary

This report provides a brief overview of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (hereafter LGBTQ) people in Greece since 1950. The report was produced as part of the project [TRACE – Tracing Queer Citizenship over Time: Ageing, ageism and age-related LGBTI+ politics in Europe](#), based at the [Centre for Social Studies](#), University of Coimbra, Portugal. As such, it summarises some important topics such as criminalisation, legal and social repression, the path to decriminalisation, and the role of the European Union and other processes of modernisation and democratisation.

By highlighting milestones such as legal accomplishments and offering a brief assessment of relevant statistical data, the report provides an outline of equality for LGBTQ people in Greece. Furthermore, a distinct emphasis will also be placed on topics such as age and ageing – with special attention being paid to ageing of LGBTQ people. This focus is particularly pertinent considering the contemporary prioritisation of ageing as a critical domain within governmental policies, research frameworks and the scope of this investigation project (Santos, 2022).

### 1. The Greek Context

Greece is a country in south-east Europe with an estimated resident population of 10,413,982 in 2023. It is situated on the southern tip of the Balkans, and is located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It neighbours Albania, Bulgaria, and North Macedonia to the north, and Turkey to the east. Greece joined the Council of Europe in 1949; it is an EU member country (1981) and a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1999). Although Greece joined NATO in 1952, it has a relatively recent history of dictatorship (1967–1974) which was imposed by a military coup. During this seven-year period, the country experienced a range of human rights abuses and persecution.

ILGA-Europe (2023) observes that Greece has made considerable progress in its legal and policy framework for LGBT people over the past decade, currently ranking among the best of the 49 countries surveyed. Nevertheless, both this and other reports indicate that hate speech and hate crimes remain a significant problem in the country, as well as the fact that many trans people continue to experience multiple forms of discrimination, financial hardship and struggle to meet their basic needs (ILGA-Europe 2023, RVRN 2021). It is noteworthy that, despite the advancement of LGBT rights in Greece relative to its neighbours, freedom of the press has experienced a systemic crisis since 2021. This has led to low public trust in the media, with Greece ranking last in the EU for this freedom (RSF 2022, 2023).

Greece exhibits one of the most rapid rates of population ageing among EU member states ([Statista 2021](#)). Notwithstanding the aforementioned rate, Greece lacks a national plan on ageing and a robust and efficacious welfare state capable of providing high-quality services for the population aged 65 and above.

## 2. LGBTQI+ People's Rights

Greece currently ranks 13th among the 49 countries surveyed by ILGA-Europe (2023). However, despite the decriminalisation of sexual practices between men since 1951 and the formation of the first homosexual groups in the late 1970s following the fall of the seven-year military junta regime, until a decade ago the Greek legal framework exhibited a long-standing negative attitude towards LGBTQI+ rights, which has had a detrimental impact on numerous aspects of life. These included the **public sphere** (censorship, legislation against vice, cruising, and sex work), **public health** policies (prohibition of voluntary blood donation, legislation on protection against venereal diseases, medicalised stigmatisation of those living with HIV, sex work), and **family rights** (no access). In addition to these factors, there has been a substantial long-standing precedent of **police brutality** against LGBT individuals, accompanied by a notable absence of accountability. Just a decade ago in 2013, at the heart of what is commonly referred to as the Greek financial debt crisis, ILGA-Europe alarmingly observed that "A wave of violence has left a negative mark on the year" (ILGA-Europe 2013). No doubt, the severe economic downturn has had a significant socio-economic impact, including increased unemployment, prices and social inequality, as well as reduced living standards, pensions and incomes. Greek neo-Nazi and other extremist groups have used the economic crisis as a means to launch racist attacks and target various minority groups, resulting in violence and threats against LGBTI activists and allies (ILGA-Europe Review 2013; Carastathis 2018).

A significant change in the legal rights of queer people was initiated with the enactment of the so-called "anti-racism law" pertaining to hate speech (4285/2014), which broadened the definition of the crime of racism, xenophobia and colour-based discrimination to encompass not only race and ethnicity, but also gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. The anti-racism law was amended in 2014 with the objective of aligning Greek legislation with the EU Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA that required member states to standardise their legislation and regulations pertaining to offences with a racist or xenophobic motive. In parallel with the implementation of the anti-racism law, a notable prevalence of violence against individuals on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender characteristics has been identified within Greek society (RVRN 2015, 2016, 2017). Alarmingly, incidents involving public officials have been reported, primarily in relation to acts committed against

members of the LGBTQI community in spaces designed to protect and safeguard their rights (educational spaces, public health services, police).

A decade after the enactment of the anti-racism legislation, notable changes have been observed in the legal rights of the LGBTQI, and Greece is among the EU countries that have developed and adopted a national strategy for LGBTI equality for the period 2021–2025. Notable changes include the introduction of legislation that establishes the principle of equal treatment, the introduction of civil partnerships, legal recognition of gender identity, the rights of intersex individuals to self-determination regarding their bodies and, most recently, same-sex marriage (for a detailed account, see the LGBTQI+ rights timeline). These changes are linked to European strategies, directives of the Council of Europe and rulings from the European Court of Human Rights, which provide a point of reference and pressure for activists, policymakers and allies to request institutional change on a national level. However, despite these advances, full standardisation with EU legislation has yet to be achieved. Provisions for LGBTQI rights are usually exclusionary, partial and incomplete (Sotiropoulos 2024). Selecting the most recent example, while the same-sex marriage law has been perceived as "an important milestone in the fight against homophobia and transphobia and a hard-won victory for those who have led that fight" (Amnesty International 2024), sadly it is not fully aligned with the objective of achieving equality for non-biological parents and does not recognise identities beyond the gender binary. The legislation does not facilitate access to assisted reproductive technology for same-sex couples, single men, transgender or intersex persons. Furthermore, the legislation does not address the issue of changing the name and gender of a transgender person on their children's birth certificate. The bill made towards the implementation of the National Strategy for LGBTQ+ Equality was welcomed by the international media as a significant development in human rights, marking Greece as "the first Orthodox Christian country to legalise same-sex marriage". In Greece on the other hand, it was adopted against the backdrop of a surge in homophobic and transphobic violence in the public sphere. This highlights as a matter of significant concern the ongoing prevalence of extreme anti-gay and anti-trans rhetoric, which is frequently articulated by religious figures, political leaders, and media representatives in the Greek news media (ILGA-Europe 2017; Kasapidou 2020; Pettas, Arampatzi & Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou 2022; Tsirbas and Zirganou-Kazolea 2024). There is a consequent emphasis on the necessity to address the issue of extreme homophobia/transphobia, which is frequently obscured under the pretext of "freedom of expression".

The following figures illustrate the country's score on LGBTI rights legislation over a 10-year period (2013–2023).



Figure 1: ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map 2013. Source [ILGA-Europe](http://ILGA-Europe).

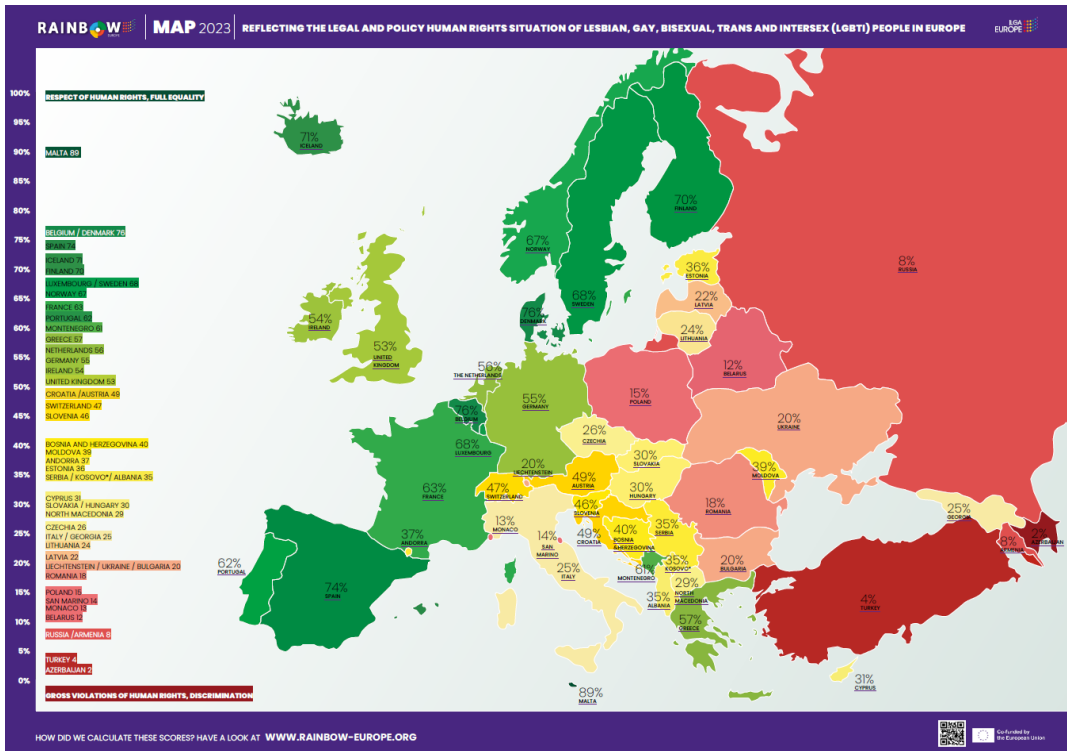


Figure 2: ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map 2024. Source [ILGA-Europe](http://ILGA-Europe).

## 2.1 Timeline of LGBTQI+ Rights

Date	Description
1951	Decriminalisation of sodomy between men. The legislation maintained the criminalisation in two distinct circumstances (Article 347): firstly, when an adult male engaged in sexual activity with a male under the age of 17, and secondly, when sexual activity was undertaken for financial gain. In contrast, Article 347 set a different age limit for heterosexual intercourse, establishing the age of consent at 15 years.
1976	Formation of the Greek Liberation Movement of Homosexuals (AKOE).
1977	Lusitania Theatre (Athens). Trans sex-workers publicly protest against police brutality and the "venereal diseases" bill.
1999	The 2734/1999 Law for sex work. For the purposes of issuing a certificate of profession, the Law makes use of the term "persons" in place of "women" in reference to sex workers.
2014	The anti-racism legislation was revised to render intolerant speech a criminal offence, extending the scope of its application beyond the previously established parameters of race, nationality and religion (as set forth in Law 927/1979). The amended legislation now encompasses additional forms of hate speech, including those based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
2015	Civil partnerships for same-sex couples (no parental rights).
2015	Repeal of Article 347 (1951) that resulted in equalisation of the age of consent for sexual intercourse (15 years)
2016	Law (4443) against discrimination in labour and employment. LGBT discrimination is not prohibited by this law in areas including social security, healthcare, social benefits, tax concessions, education and access to public services.
2016	Third gender option on birth certificates (court decision).



2016	No medical operation required for the legal change of gender (court decision).
2017	Law on the legal recognition of gender identity. The law imposed an obligation of celibacy: in order for a person to make a legal gender recognition, they must be unmarried or divorced. Additionally, parental consent is no longer a sufficient criterion for minors between the ages of 15 and 17. Instead, a positive recommendation from an inter-ministerial committee is required.
2018	Law on child fostering (applying to same-sex couples in a civil partnership).
2019	The repeal of Article 361B in the Civil Code, which previously prevented the exclusion of individuals from accessing goods or services based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, descent, religion, disability, sexual orientation, identity or gender characteristics.
2021	First National Strategy for LGBTQ+ Equality.
2021	Four trans women prisoners transferred to women's prisons (decision of the Secretary General for Anti-Crime Policy).
2022	Ban on conversion therapy practices
2022	Depathologisation of intersex gender characteristics.
2022	Ban on surgical and other medical interventions on intersex infants and children.
2022	Abolition of the ban on blood donation by gay donors.
2023	PrEP became available for HIV-negative persons at high risk of exposure.
2024	Same-sex marriage.
2024	Joint adoption by same-sex couples (in the context of same-sex marriage).



### 3. Ageing

The rights of older people in Greece are protected under the general concept of human rights. The law states that elderly individuals are not discriminated against and upholds their rights to freedom, dignity, and fair and equal treatment. Article 21[3] of the Constitution promotes the provision of special healthcare for all citizens and adopts exclusive measures to safeguard the youth, elderly, disabled, and impoverished. In other words, the Constitution recognises old age as requiring protection and identifies older citizenship as a group susceptible to discrimination.

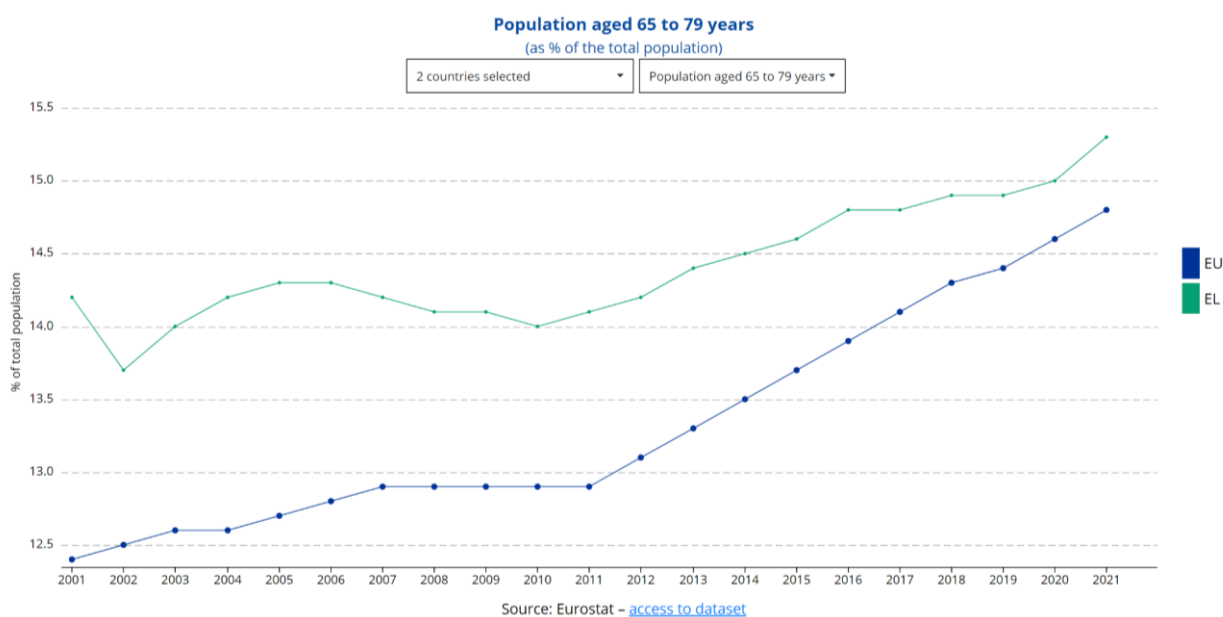
Despite being signatories to the Madrid Action Plan on Ageing, the country has not yet implemented a National Action Plan. Ageing in Greece is often associated with concerns about the ageing population and demographic challenges, as well as the perpetuation of pro-natalist discourses and practices (Halkias 2004; Paxson 2004; Athanasiou 2006; Kantsa 2013). In accordance with this, the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, which was established in 2023, understands ageing through the objective of *addressing the demographic issue of an ageing population* (Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs 2024). This perpetuates the notion that older individuals are merely recipients of social welfare and dependents, rather than active members of society.

State policies for older people in Greece remain divided into three main areas: pensions, health care, and long-term and short-term care structures for social support (see timeline below). However, the "hard" Europeanisation mechanisms characterised by fiscal austerity and internal devaluation, namely the memoranda signed during the so-called Greek debt crisis, led to the retrenchment of the Greek welfare state (Economou 2018) and particularly affected the dismantling of public care structures catering for older people (Karl 2018). Furthermore, the retirement age has been extended to 67 years, successive cuts in pensions and salaries have been implemented, and the financial support measure for the social solidarity allowance for pensioners (EKAS) has been cut. The absence of state structures has led to families often assuming the role of primary and preventative service providers, thereby filling gaps in the absence of state provision. The situation of older individuals in crisis-stricken Greece has once again brought this issue to the fore. It has been observed that co-housing arrangements between older individuals and their children's families became increasingly common, with grandparents playing an active role in family caregiving, and providing economic support particularly through their pensions (Kostakiotis and Trakas 2014).

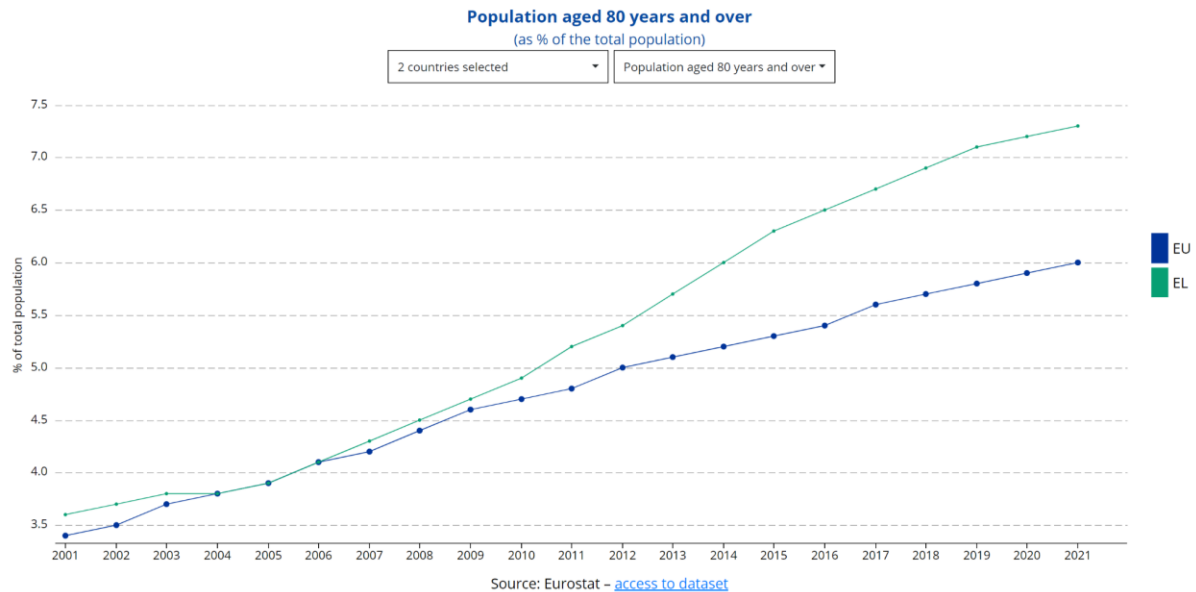
During the COVID-19 pandemic, age was a critical element in the reorganisation of the social sphere (Katz et al. 2021), while older people in particular were in the spotlight, as they were considered vulnerable to the new virus on the basis of clinical and epidemiological data. In the Greek context, the COVID-19 pandemic not only highlighted the pre-existing weaknesses of care systems, but also underlined the popular perception of ageing. The term "older people" has been used to describe a group of individuals who are assumed to share a fixed identity and a set of characteristics that are believed to

be inherent to them upon reaching the age of sixty. In this context, vulnerability is perceived as a structural characteristic of individuals over the age of 60, primarily associated with the physiological decline associated with chronic diseases, underlying medical conditions, and cognitive impairment. In other words, an age-based "biologisation of vulnerability" was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chalkidis 2023). This emphasis on age vulnerability solely in biomedical terms, which was prevalent in Greek state policies for people over 60 years old and societal perceptions about older people, not only falsely homogenised older people but also masks the fundamental, structural issues that shape the onset and experience of ageing and old age, namely poverty, social inequalities and marginalisation (Katz et al. 2021).

The following images illustrate the proportion of the older population in Greece and the progression of longevity in the last 20 years.



**Figure 3.** Population aged 65 to 79 years from 2001 to 2020 in Greece (green) compared to Europe (blue). Source: [Eurostat](#). [Accessed 26-07-2024].



**Figure 4.** Population aged 80 and over from 2001 to 2020 in Greece (green) compared to Europe (blue). Source: [Eurostat](#). [Accessed 26-07-2024].

### 3.1 Timeline of Older People's Rights

Date	Description
1973	Law "On measures for the protection of the elderly and chronically ill persons".
1977	Foundation of the Hellenic Gerontological and Geriatric Society.
1982	Pension for uninsured elderly persons under Law 1296.
1984	Establishment of Open Protection Centres for the Elderly (KAPI).
1985	The Housing Assistance Programme. The Organisation of Welfare Benefits & Social Solidarity (OPEKA) provides housing benefits to single uninsured and financially unstable elderly individuals over the age of 65, as well as couples of uninsured and financially unstable older persons who lack housing and reside in rented accommodation.

1995 Law 2345 on organised care services provided by social welfare agencies and other provisions. Provides a specific regulatory framework for institutional care provided to the elderly by nursing homes.

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1996 Social Solidarity Allowance for Pensioners (EKAS). EKAS was abolished in 2016 under pressure from the IMF.

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2001 Definition of the conditions for the establishment and operation of the Day Care Centres for Older Persons (KIFI).

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2005 Law 3304 on the application of the principle of equal treatment in the field of labour and employment regardless of racial or ethnic origins, religious or other beliefs, disability, age, or reproductive orientation.

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2006 Law 3500 on combating domestic violence provides a specific legislative protection framework for any family member who may be subjected to violence, including older people. Moreover, the provisions of this law apply accordingly when the perpetrator works for a social care institution and the act is committed against a person who receives the services of that institution.

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2016 Law 4387 for the Social Solidarity Allowance for Uninsured Seniors. The Social Solidarity Benefit for Uninsured Seniors is granted to uninsured citizens. The granting of the above-mentioned allowance concerns cases of senior citizens (over 67 y.o.) who do not qualify for retirement.

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2016 Law 4443 prohibits discrimination in labour and employment. The list of illegal grounds for discrimination was expanded to include age (among race, colour, national or ethnic origin, descent, religion or belief, disability, chronic condition (illness), marital or social status, sexual orientation, gender identity or characteristics). Not applicable to benefits provided by public systems or comparable public systems, including public social security or welfare systems.

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2017 Organisation and development of a National Pilot Programme for the Prevention and Health Promotion of Older Persons – IPIONI.

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2018 The "In-House Assistance" programme is implemented by municipalities' relevant department units and is permanently staffed. The aim is to improve the quality of life and to support the independent living of the elderly without them being separated from their familiar space.

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2020 Approval of the Organisational Framework for Sport for All Programmes and Events. The programme specifically aims to promote "sport and physical activity in the third age".

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2022 Ministerial Decision 27866 entitles women aged 50 to 69 to free breast cancer screening mammograms with a prescription.

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2023 Establishment of the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family with the aim of promoting policies for gender equality and solving the demographic 'problem' and the ageing of the population.

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## 4. LGBTQI+ Meets Old Age

There has been little research on the experiences of older people themselves and existing literature is overwhelmingly focused on heteronormative experiences. Accordingly, no statistics are available for the LGBTQI+ population over the age of 60. Despite the absence of statistical data, the Transgender Support Association's (NGO) empirical evidence indicates that a considerable number of older trans individuals are confronted with the imminent threat of eviction or reside in housing that is unsuitable for their needs. Furthermore, they are frequently denied admission to public nursing homes (Baskozou 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Transgender Support Association implemented a programme through the Council of Europe providing financial support and housing for trans people over the age of 50. Previously, the association has accommodated more than eight transgender individuals, including refugees, in its offices (Baskozou, 2021: 24). Remaining in the spectrum of activism, Proud Seniors Greece, an LGBTQI+ support group for people 50 and over, has since 2015 brought attention to the issue of ageing in the queer population. The group was established to address the need for a support network for an older trans woman. It has continued its activities ever since, working with members of organisations that specialise in LGBTQ+ older people's issues, including 50plus Hellas, AGE Platform Europe, Roze 50+, De Roze Poort, ILGA Europe, Trans United Europe/Trans BPOC European, TGEU, Right Side NGO, EL\*C (EuroCentralAsian Lesbian \*Community).

The activities of both the Transgender Support Association and Proud Seniors highlight the issues of poverty, housing and access to medical and care systems. Documented incidents of persecution of trans and gay older people by church nursing homes, soup kitchens and hospices (Baskozou 2021; Efsyn 2019, 2023) highlight the risk for LGBTQ older people living in poverty or social exclusion of being mistreated in church settings due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. In any case, these incidents are related both to the long-standing opposition of the Orthodox Church of Greece to LGBTQI+ rights and its support for conversion therapy carried out by clergy (see Orlando LGBT+ 2024), and to [Eurostat](#) reports that one in four Greeks faced the risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023.

The [Report on the National Strategy for LGBTQI+ Equality](#) (2021) represents the first official reference to the country's queer ageing population (pp. 42–43).

## 5. What's Missing?

What is absent is a systematic approach that elucidates the ways in which intersectional discrimination affects LGBTQI+ older people. The potential synergies between intersectionality and the life course offer promising avenues for advancing our understanding of unequal ageing, particularly with regard to health and care structures, poverty and housing. For example, a topic worthy of further investigation through the lens of queer ageing is Law 4443/2016, which states that sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, and gender characteristics are not included in the legislation on equal treatment in the scope of health and social welfare. Given that LGBTQI+ individuals tend to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity within the broader healthcare structures in fear of been subjected to discriminatory treatment (Giannou 2017), it remains at stake to gain a deeper understanding of how Law 4443/2016 extends to the protection structures for older people, such as nursing homes, and the specific effects on older people living with HIV and older trans people. An additional case in point is the legal status of sex work in Greece, which renders it impossible for sex workers to work legally (NSWP 2019) and thus access the pension and health system. In consideration of the long-standing exclusion of older trans women from all professions except sex work, examining housing vulnerability in Greece through a queer ageing lens demands an intersectional analysis of the long-term effects produced by the constant labour rights denials, marginalisation policies, moral panics and police violence that sex workers, and older trans sex workers in particular, have been subjected to over the course of their lives.



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