

ACTIVIST HANDBOOK

The journey to becoming an LGBTQIA Newcomers
Youth activist. Useful tips in starting up.



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About the activist Handbook

The activist handbook is developed for YOU - young LGBTQIA newcomers in Sweden who would like to organise yourselves. In this handbook, you can find our best tips and methods in order for you to do just that.

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**Get to know us, our
work and our history.**

What is RFSL Ungdom?

RFSL Ungdom is one of the largest LGBTQIA Youth organisations in the world, with over 2500 members. The organisation works with different issues related to young LGBTQIA people's living conditions through everything from specific service-providing projects to political advocacy. On the RFSL Ungdom website or through social media channels, you can take part in what is currently happening in the organisation. As a member of Newcomers Youth, you are just as much a member of RFSL Ungdom.

Here is a quick guide on how RFSL Ungdom works.

The Board | The organisation is led by a national board. The president of the board is the president of the whole organisation. The board runs the organisation on a day-to-day basis. Big decisions are made by the congress.

The Congress | The congress is a yearly meeting where all members get invited to participate and have the right to vote. During the congress, big decisions about the organisation's future are made. For example, to start working with intersex, asexual and aromantic rights and add them to the organization acronym.

The Districts | There are also local districts, each run by a local board. Anyone who is a member can start a district. When you and your friends run a district, you get money to arrange the activities you want. It can be everything from a fashion show to a movie night. You can contact the RFSL Ungdom national office to get more information on how to do this.

The RFSL Ungdom National Office | The employed staff of RFSL Ungdom work at the office. The physical office is located in Stockholm, but some staff members work and live in other cities. The staff are employed by the organisation and are working to fulfil the organization's vision through activities and projects. The staff's tasks depend on which projects and activities are currently carried out.

The Story of Newcomers Youth

In short, Newcomers Youth is a project of RFSL Youth for LGBTQIA youth, who are asylum seekers, undocumented persons, or newly arrived in Sweden.

The project's main focus is the well-being of our members. We have done a lot during the years, like arranging meeting places in different cities that include various activities. But also national activities, for example, camps and parties. Newcomers Youth's second focus is creating a better future for young newcomers. For that to happen, we use community-building methods and give a platform for our members to raise their voices and assist them in their activism.

But let us take you back to the start...

Newcomers Youth started with one meeting place in Stockholm in 2016. We wanted to create a space where our members could feel safety was the priority. For many, it was the first separatist place they had ever visited, and it was revolutionary for them to meet other youths in the same or similar situation as themselves being an LGBTQIA person and seeking asylum or being new in Sweden.

Before developing a concrete method or activity plan, respect and making everyone feel welcome were always the first steps. In every Newcomers Youth meeting, four basic principles are repeated: safety, confidentiality, group care, and self-care.

As time passed, the members began to express themselves, speak about their feelings, and offer each other support in a family-like manner. In collaboration with them, we were able to identify their needs and help them improve their living conditions, both individually and collectively. From personal coping mechanisms to reformed asylum systems, it addressed everything.

This became a process of strengthening identity and increasing knowledge about queer and asylum rights within the target group. At the same time, it was a learning process for the Newcomers Youth team: about the importance of intersectional perspective.

After establishing the safety principles for our meetings, we cleared a path and explored different methods and developed informal learning.

Making the members less vulnerable started with providing the right information.

We created both legal and mental health counseling within the Newcomers Youth and collaborated with other professionals working within RFSL Youth. These are generally the first needs that our members have. At least the easiest to identify, for themselves and the Newcomers Youth staff. They often come before their need for socialization or planning activism, with the ambition of making this world a better place.

After the first stage of providing individual services, we realised that our members wanted a more active role in the project's activities. The elements of non-formal education and group capacity building were achieved through the following settings within the Newcomers Youth: Peer-to-Peer Support Group, Activist Workshop, Activist Camp and Meeting Place. In their own manner, each of these activities responds to the members' needs for personal development, community building, queer empowerment, and social inclusion.

Newcomers Youth grew from being a service-providing project into an activist platform. Newcomers Youth will hopefully always evolve together with the members' needs and wishes and as a response to the political reality affecting young newcomers. The legacy of the project is that the members are given opportunities for individual and collective development and empowerment.

Newcomers Youth Activist Starting Kit

Reflections before starting your activist journey

Before beginning your activist journey, we want to encourage you to take a moment of self-reflection. See this as a moment of self-care and mental preparation for your future engagement.

We all have different motivations for becoming an activist. For the simple sake of a better world, for future generations, or to bring our lives a sense of purpose. Someone can also become an activist out of fear. Or even guilt. We encourage you to explain why you want to engage in this issue. And be honest, this information is only for yourself. We have found it very rewarding to make it clear to ourselves why we are doing this. It can also make it easier to set boundaries for yourself and others regarding the time and energy invested in your activism and engagement.

It's good to identify your own personal motivation. Is the issue very personal to you? If yes, and if your political engagement is directly linked with your personal situation, for example, asylum rights and yourself being undocumented. Expect this engagement to be much heavier for you than others who aren't or have no experience of being in your situation. Be careful of your energy, and don't pack your schedule too tight. Also, expect backlashes and periods where you can't put effort into your activism. This goes up and down. Don't be hard on yourself. And, of course, this goes for every activist. Always prioritize your health and well-being.

I want to become an activist because:

As an activist, I want to:

How much should I share and invest of myself?

Make a list of your own warning signs when it's time to break.

List the things that make you feel good and relaxed and will help you to deal with stress.

Below are a few recommended tips (Be Kind To Yourself)

- Know your limits and don't go beyond them. Avoid comparing yourself to others. For example, try to remember that the pictures people share on social media have been carefully chosen or filtered. And they often don't show what people's actual lives are like.
- Practice self-care – take time for yourself, and do the things you need to do to look after your mental and physical health. Don't be afraid of unfollowing accounts that make you feel bad about yourself.
- Notice what's not helpful to you, like tips that don't work or things that affect your self-confidence or self-esteem. Remember, it's okay to make mistakes. It's also important to forgive yourself when you do make a mistake.
- Keeping track of your achievements and things you're proud of. Repeat positive statements to yourself. For example, you could say, 'I am enough' or 'I am worth it's to yourself in the mirror every morning.
- Recognise and challenge your unkind thoughts. Try to do this by talking to yourself as you would to a good friend. You could ask yourself: 'How might someone else see this?', 'Is there anything that suggests this might not happen?' or 'What would I say to a friend who was thinking this?' Answering these questions may help you to think more rationally and calmly.

Wordlist

Are there any words that you don't understand?
Here we have explained some of the words that we often use.

It is important to note that this glossary list does not cover all terms related to asylum and LGBTQIA. Instead, it mainly focuses on terms you, as a member, may find in this activist handbook and other materials produced by Newcomers Youth.

On the basis of our own training and experience, we have explained the terms and the definitions. These definitions are only some of the possible ones, as language is fluid and constantly changing throughout history and space. Making the members less vulnerable started with providing the right information.

About LGBTQIA

LGBTQIA stands short for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/aromantic. It is an umbrella term that is used to refer to the community as a whole. To be LGBTQIA often means to challenge heteronormativity and rethink gender and sex roles.

- **Rainbow Family** | When it comes to LGBTQIA people, a family is much more than the people you grew up with or the people you live with. A rainbow family is a family in which one or multiple people are LGBTQIA persons. A family with children, an extended family, and a chosen family are all included in the term. The term isn't necessarily used by LGBTQIA people with kids to describe their families, but it's getting used more and more.
- **Lesbian or Gay** | means people who fall in love with or are sexually attracted to persons of the same gender as themselves.
- **Transgender** | If a person's gender identity is not the same as the sex assigned at their birth, that generally means that the person is transgender. If a person with a female gender identity is assigned as male at her birth, that person is a trans woman. If a person with a male gender identity is assigned as female at his birth, that person is a trans man.
- **Intersex** | A person born with characteristics (i.e., chromosomes, sexual anatomy or reproductive organs) that do not belong within the medical definition of female or male.

- **Queer** | A broad term that can mean several different things but basically is a questioning of the hetero norms. Many see their gender identity and/or their sexuality as queer. Queer can refer to a desire to include everyone's gender and sexualities or not having to identify.
- **Sexual orientation** | A person's sexual/romantic attraction to another person. The person's sexual orientation can be:

Heterosexual - being sexually/romantically attracted to persons of different genders than you (e.g., a woman attracted to men).

Homosexual - being sexually/romantically attracted to persons who have the same gender as you (e.g., a woman attracted to women).

Bisexual - being sexually/romantically attracted to multiple genders (e.g., a woman being attracted to women and men).

Pansexual - being sexually/romantically attracted to persons belonging to all genders.

Asexual - not being or very little sexually attracted to other persons.

- **Self-definition** | is how you identify yourself in the matrix of complex interpersonal and social roles. This term is very important for LGBTQIA people when it comes to identifying one's gender identity, sexual orientation, or pronouns.

Every LGBTQIA person has to go through a specific process of self-identification and self-discovery. This happens because the societal norms are still the hetero norms. So, the term is an important reminder that you always have the right to choose for yourself how you want to identify. Your self-definition can change over time, and you also have the right not to label yourself at all.

- **Non-binary** | Gender identity (person's perception of themselves) that is neither male nor female - it is a gender identity that is outside of men/women binary.
- **Gender** | consists of four different parts:

Gender identity (mental gender) - how you feel yourself to be. It is how you feel in your heart and soul. It doesn't have to match the way your body looks. People whose gender identity does not match the gender assigned

at birth can choose to change their body and legal gender. Not all trans people choose to do so.

Gender expression (social gender) - how you express yourself in terms of gender. This can be through clothes, body language, hairstyle, make-up, voice, or others.

Assigned gender (biological gender) - defined by the doctor based on internal and external sexual organs, sex chromosomes, and hormone levels.

Legal gender - how you are registered in the population register, your passport or ID card. In Sweden, there are only two legal genders, male and female. In some other countries, there are several legal genders.

- **Gender confirmation therapy** | Is a collective term for different methods of changing the body so that it conforms with gender identity. This could be, for example, hormone therapy, different types of surgery, permanent hair removal or voice and communication training.
- **Gender dysphoria** | A medical condition of distress that a transgender person feels due to conflict between their gender identity and assigned sex at birth.
- **Pronoun** | A type of word used when referring to someone directly (e.g., you) or indirectly (e.g., he, she, or they). Pronouns are always dependent on the language that we are using (the given examples are coming from the English language).

Using the right pronouns is especially important in relation to respect of persons' gender identities. A phenomenon that, for example, transgender persons often encounter is misgendering: using a wrong pronoun when we refer to a particular person, e.g., (referring to a transgender woman with "he" although that is not her pronoun).

- **Norms** | Are unwritten rules, ideas, and ideals that control how one is expected to be, live, and look. Norms are connected with power structures in society and can be expressed on several different levels. At an individual level in relationships and in social interaction, at an institutional level such as in the workplace or in welfare, and at a structural level such as legislation that creates a lack of rights or unequal conditions.
- **Hetero norms** | These are unwritten rules in society that describe the

- expectations on how a person should behave, live and look. These norms prefer heterosexuality over homosexuality and cis-gender over transgender identities. They affect everyone, and they set out rules, expectations, and ideas about gender, love, and sexuality. Heteronormativity demands that men are only masculine and women are only feminine. It restricts and prevents people from exploring and discovering themselves. This preference negatively affects anyone who does not belong to these categories.
- **Cis norms** | There are several norms that are related to the hetero norm. One of them is the cis norm, that one is expected to be a cis person. Cisperson is, very simply, the one who is not transgender. Quite simply a person whose body, legal gender, gender identity, and gender expression are linked in a linear way. A person who was born with a snippet and then got a "woman" registered in the population register, who sees and has always seen himself as a girl/woman and who other people perceive as a girl/woman is, for example, a cis girl / cis woman. "Cisperson" is a relatively new word. It is a word that is good to have as it describes people who follow the norm. Words are needed not only for those who break the norms but also to talk about those who follow the norms. Many cispersons have never even thought about having a gender identity.
- **Cisgender** | If a person's gender identity is the same as the sex assigned at their birth, it means that the person is cisgender.
- **Coming out** | A process of accepting your sexual orientation/gender identity and sharing it openly with others.
- **Homophobia** | Negative attitudes, actions and discrimination against homosexual men and women (gay persons). In the context of our target group, homophobic incidences and respective states' lack of protection from those are the main reasons why gay asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).
- **Biphobia** | Negative attitudes, actions, and discrimination against bisexual persons. In the context of our target group, biphobic incidences and lack of protection are the main reasons why bisexual asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).
- **Transphobia** | Negative attitudes, actions, and discrimination against transgender persons. In the context of our target group, transphobic incidences and respective states' lack of protection from those are

- the main reasons why transgender asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).
- **Queerphobia** | Negative attitudes, actions, and discrimination against queer persons. In the context of our target group, queerphobic incidences and respective states' lack of protection from those are the main reasons why queer asylum seekers ask for protection from another state (e.g., Sweden).
- **Xenophobia** | hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers or of their politics or culture.

About Asylum

According to Swedish Migration laws, you have the right to apply for asylum if you are in fear of persecution on the grounds of your sexual orientation, your gender identity, or your gender expression. Persecution may come from the authorities, other groups, or individuals in your home country. In Sweden, you can apply for asylum at the Migration Agency or at the national border. Your case will then be assessed individually.

- **Asylum** | The grant of protection from one state (e.g., Sweden) to a person coming from another state (e.g., Afghanistan) due to persecution that the person has suffered on the grounds of some factors. In the context of our target group, the main factor is their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- **The asylum process** | Refers to the different stages that an asylum seeker goes through, from the application to the final decision/refusal that a person receives from the Migration Agency.
- **Asylum seeker** | A person seeking protection from one state due to persecution that this person experienced in another state. Our target group consists of asylum seekers who are LGBTQI.
- **Undocumented person** | A person who does not have a legal right to reside in a country in which they are living. In the context of our target group, it is a person who did not get the grant of protection (asylum) from one country (e.g., Sweden). Regardless of that, this

- person decided to stay in that country (e.g., Sweden). Consequently, this person changed their status from an asylum seeker to an undocumented person due to not getting that country's protection.
- **Refugee** | A person who got the grant of protection (asylum) from one country due to persecution that person has suffered on the grounds of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social or ethnic group in another country. In the context of our target group, their refugee status is mainly on the grounds of them belonging to a particular social group (e.g., being a transgender person or a lesbian woman).
- **Migrant** | A person who moves from one country to another due to various reasons. In the context of our target group, leaving one country happens due to insufficient/lack of protection and violation of human rights that LGBTQI migrants have experienced.
- **Decision in an asylum case** | is when the personnel at the Migration Agency have made a decision on whether an asylum seeker can remain in the country or not.
- **Judgment in an asylum case** | is when the appeal has been reviewed, and the court of appeal decides whether an asylum seeker is permitted to remain in the country or not.
- **Refusal of asylum application** | means that a person has received the answer "no" to their application for asylum. This person is not permitted to remain in the country of refuge.
- **Appeal** | means that a person writes to an authority or a court to say that they do not agree with the decision made by that authority or court, and they want the authority or court to change the decision.
- **Residence permit** | means that a person has received the answer "yes" to their application for asylum. This person is permitted to remain in the country of refuge.

Other terms that you may come across

- **Activism** | In the context of Newcomers Youth, activism means defending human rights wherever they are threatened or violated, at whatever level. Newcomers Youth's activism is about reacting and trying to fight against the injustices, abusive treatment, violence, and discrimination that young LGBTQIA migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented experience in Sweden. To demand that they are treated with respect and dignity and to work towards a more humane, equal, rights-respecting society.
- **Activist** | The term activist refers to someone engaged in campaigning and advocating for social and political change. Persistence, creativity, commitment, and courage are some of the qualities that make effective activists. Activists believe in human rights, equality, and the right to justice. You don't need to be an expert to do activism. To create change, all you need is the desire to make a positive impact.
- **Privileges** | The term privilege usually refers to unearned benefits or hidden advantages offered to people based on their membership in a particular social group. People get privileges because of their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, geographical location, ability, and religion, to name a few.
- **Discrimination** | When people are treated differently, less favorably or unfairly, because of their identity, for instance, disability, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.
- **Racism** | It is simply the act of discriminating against someone or something based on their racial background.
- **Anti-Racism** | An active approach and practice that identifies, challenges, opposes and eliminates racism through changing attitudes and beliefs, policies, networks, and structures, in order to make sure power in society is distributed evenly. Among other things, people can practice anti-racism by supporting antiracist organizations and projects, participating in antiracism events, etc.
- **Minority Group** | Used to describe any group of people which is disadvantaged, underprivileged, excluded, discriminated against or exploited.

- **Disability** | Limitations of a person's ability in relation to what is considered to be the norm. There are psychological, cognitive and physical disabilities. A disability can be visible or invisible. A person has a disability; a person is not disabled.
- **BIPOC** | Black, Indigenous, People of Color
- **Intersectionality** | An analytical perspective that focuses on how identity categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality) overlap and create the power structures of superiority, subordination, discrimination and oppression.
- **Equality** | An indicator of fair treatment, opportunities, and outcomes across racial, gender, class and other dynamics
- **Diversity** | In general, diversity is defined as the range of human differences, including but not limited to racial, ethnic, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability, religious or ethical belief system, national origin, and political beliefs.
- **Inclusion** | By inclusion, we mean creating an environment where anyone, regardless of their background, is welcomed, respected, supported, and valued as a fully participating member including in decision-making processes.
- **Minority Stress** | Stress imposed on minorities (e.g., sexual, gender, racial, among others) due to discrimination and prejudices they face by the majority group in one society (i.e., white, heterosexual, and cisgender majority).
- **PTSD** | An abbreviation for post-traumatic stress disorder that falls within a frame of anxiety disorders. This condition is caused by a series (or one) of stressful and terrifying events that a person has experienced. Unfortunately, this condition is common among queer refugees who have been exposed to different sorts of violence, abuse and traumatic events.
- **Trauma** | In this context, trauma always refers to psychological trauma, which represents an event(s) that was stressful and distressing. The consequences of trauma include anxiety, fear, dissociation, and depression among others.

The activist's guide Methods & Activities.

Newcomers Youth's Community and Group Work Activities

In Newcomers Youth, community-building activities and group work were always the heart of the project. We firmly believe that a strong community is key to personal development and a starting point for feeling ready to do more extroverted activism. In Newcomers Youth, the process of building a safe space for our members started with the meeting place. Within the meeting place, we could test different activities.

Working principles | The working principles are developed together with the members. They cover both a safe physical location and a mental space. Confidentiality entails that all information shared within the meeting place, including those attending our meetings, is kept between the participants and the Newcomers Youth team. This is particularly important since many of our members are not publicly out as queer persons, and we want their process of coming out to be something that they navigate and decide about. Group care refers to respect for every member. We have zero tolerance towards any mode of discrimination, violence and harassment. Lastly, the self-care principle means that participants have an opportunity to express their needs and feelings, be it to leave the meeting place when they wish and when they need to be alone or to simply point out if something doesn't feel right within the meetings' setting.

Meeting Place | The Meeting Place itself is a group activity happening regularly. Here you can make friends, learn more about what it is to be new in Sweden, and get helpful information to make your living more manageable and fun. The Meeting Place has principles related to safety, confidentiality, group care and self-care. For every meeting place, we have a theme which is the main event of the Meeting Place.

There are seven rotating themes in the Meeting Place:

- **Activism and change-making** | This theme is aimed at familiarizing the members with their rights. For example, the explanation of rights to asylum, reapplying for asylum, LGBTQIA rights in Sweden, healthcare rights, or anything that might be relevant. During the Activist Workshops, we usually aim to make art, work on campaigns and explore different methods of activism.

- **Role Models & Contributions** | It is a contribution week where we ask members if they are interested in hosting the Meeting Place. By running the Meeting Place activity for the evening, the member is assisted by the coordinator and activity leader. Here we provide our members with the opportunity to realize their ideas, whether it is casual games and discussions or something they are passionate about.
- **Peer2peer Support Groups** | A Peer-to-Peer support group is an activity that has a form of support sessions for LGBTQIA migrants and asylum-seeking youth in Sweden. This week focuses on our members' mental health and gives the members an opportunity to explore different subjects together with other youths in a safe environment. See further description of the activity under "Peer-to-Peer Support groups" down below.
- **Community building** | This is a common meeting space for both Newcomers Youth members and RFSL Ungdom members from the local district. It is a way for our members to exchange experiences with other youths and organizations both internally and externally. We usually try to create community and do different activities that involve socializing and hanging out with each other, as well as going on sightseeing and focusing on cultural exchange.
- **Young Professionals Program (Job and career opportunities)** | As part of our endeavor to support the integration process into Swedish society and the Swedish labor market, we offer our members help in creating and writing CVs and personal letters. Additionally, we offer training for job interviews and information about educational and employment opportunities. We also invite external lecturers and potential employers to give presentations.
- **Building bridges (Collaborative exchange)** | Theme where we collaborate with a wide range of organizations and projects from both the profit and nonprofit world. During this activity, we provide useful and valuable tools and information from other professionals outside the organisation and invite other youth groups to participate in our meeting places.
- **The Storyteller (Living Library Method)** | When people tell stories, they are effectively engaging their audience into listening to them and empathizing with them. This theme provides us with an opportunity to understand others and change the way we look at those around

us. By giving us a glimpse into other people's lives and helping us bond as a society, empathy is key to bringing positive change. At Newcomers Youth, we use various storytelling techniques and methods. The living Library concept was developed in one of our projects called "Not Alone in Europe".

Peer-to-Peer Support Group | Peer-to-Peer Support Group is a group activity that focuses on mental health and dealing with stress. This is a separatist meeting place for members without the experts (legal and mental health advisors). They use their own knowledge and capacities to reflect on issues that commonly affect them as queer, asylum-seeking and young persons. As we often say in every Peer-to-Peer session, each of them is an expert on their own life, which is, of course, the basis of every Peer-to-Peer methodology. An element of non-formal education is implemented by having a group leader who shares the identity categories with the group, has completed a training course on peer-to-peer methodology and has knowledge on queer and wellbeing-related subjects. The Peer-to-Peer Session Group started by taking suggestions from the members on the topics they would like to cover. The Newcomers Youth team has put their reflections in specific themes, and so far, we have been able to cover fifteen sessions in the following order:

1. Identity, Home and Security
2. Homo/bi/trans-phobia
3. Xenophobia & Racism
4. Community and Chosen Family
5. Faith & Religion
6. Relationships & Dating
7. Sex & Consent
8. To be an Adult
9. Minority Stress and Microaggressions
10. Coping with Trauma and Depression
11. Gender Expression
12. Body Image
13. Coming Out
14. Toxic Positivity
15. Stress and Self-Care

Note that we do the Peer-to-Peer Support Group activities stated above at a yearly level in combination with other group activities. That means they are covered on a "one theme-one time-one month" basis. Depending on the dynamics of a particular group, they can be covered one after another (e.g., having a Homo/bi/trans-phobia session a week

after Identity, Home and Security without “interrupting” it with Activist Workshops).

Activist Workshop | Activist Workshop is a tool that helps us empower our members to be a factor of change, take space and act in relation to the cases they care about. In contrast to Peer-to-Peer activities, which focus on mental health, Activist Workshop activities provide information on queer activism, community organizing and social change. Through non-formal education facilitated by our group leaders and coordinator, we offer the members both theoretical knowledge on LGBTQI topics, as well as practical skills on “how to be” an activist and the ways of leading and participating in activist endeavors. Once again, the members chose the topics. We have done it at a “one topic-one month” level in combination with mentioned Peer-to-Peer Support Group activities. Some of the topics we have covered are demonstrations, activism through photography, storytelling, and digital campaigns. As you can see, all of these topics are various methods of activism that are explained theoretically by the Newcomers Youth team and implemented practically in the final stage of covering a particular monthly Activist Workshop-related topic. According to our experience, activism, in general, is particularly embraced by our members in a period when they want to make a change both for themselves and their community. The Activist Workshop activities have proven to channel not just their enthusiasm but also their anger and frustration in a healthy-like manner.

Activist Camp | Once per year, there is a group activity that involves the Newcomers Youth’s members from different parts of the country gathering for Activist Camp. In addition to spending time together in creative and casual activities, they have an opportunity to attend the workshops and lectures conducted by human rights activists and our national team of coordinators and group leaders. This is a space for planning and summarizing everything we have learned throughout our local activities. Lastly, intercultural relations are something that we nurture in our work, and we aim to respect and cherish everyone’s culture and tradition. In a period of five days the Activist Camp takes place; we use the opportunity to have themed dinners involving food from different parts of the world where our members come from, as well as organise evening hangouts with music that is popular in our home countries.

Performance Workshop | Our members have expressed a need for more art-related and creative activities once the setting has been established in terms of individual capacity building (legal support and mental health counseling) and group activities that focus on the group’s well-being

(Peer-to-Peer Support Group) and activism (Activist Workshop). In response to this particular request, we have created a performance workshop activity. It represents a set of workshops geared toward practicing and obtaining theatre and performance-related skills. Since our members are very enthusiastic about queer activism, these practices often include improvisations with activist elements as well as raising awareness of LGBTQI and refugee issues. Through dance, music and art, these workshops have become tools for healing and a platform for sharing personal stories. Our method of working with art and activism is called Creative Change, based on four principles: group dynamics, learning by doing, feedback & dialogue, and reflection. The Performance Workshops are run weekly, and they are run by our group leaders, as well as guest artists who visit our workshops after signing all necessary agreements related to confidentiality and respect of safety principles at the Newcomers Youth's meetings.

After participating in the performance workshops, Newcomers Youth members created a pride show, Beyond Borders, in which they told their personal stories through performing arts such as singing and dancing. This show was presented in Göteborg, Malmö, and Stockholm. As a result of NCY Creative Change workshops and performance workshops, our members have written a theater play script and actively participated in the production of the Newcomers Youth Music video: IF I HAD THE POWER.



Scan this QR code to watch the music video!

IF I HAD THE POWER! This is the voices of young LGBTQI refugees in Sweden. Share it and join us in the fight for equality and justice!

NCY's Individual support & counselling activities

The individual support activities and counselling sessions are urgently needed by our members and are performed by professionals within the Newcomers Youth team or within RFSL Ungdom. We strongly advise you not to give legal advice if you are not a lawyer or any kind of mental health support or consultancy. The only sustainable way to offer this kind of support is through a professional. An individual could suffer disastrous consequences if they take the wrong advice. Unfortunately, we have seen this happen many times. Often, it is not possible to hire a professional to work on a project. If that's not possible, we suggest you have lists of lawyers, mental health support lines, LGBTQIA doctors, etc. This will enable others to find the appropriate information and help.

Legal advice and follow-up sessions during the asylum-seeking process | In addition to being queer and young, our members are newcomers in a foreign country such as Sweden. Usually, they need to be made aware and fully informed upon their arrival of how both the legal and administrative system works in Sweden. What their rights are, how the asylum process goes, and to whom to turn in case they need help or assistance. The Newcomers Youth's volunteer lawyers and our migration policy expert have developed legal counseling as one of the services within our project. The newly arrived members can ask questions about their asylum application and get advice concerning their upcoming interviews with the Swedish Migration Agency. We are also happy to provide them with membership certificates where their case officers can see that they are members of the Newcomers Youth. Thus, they have started their integrative process in the queer community here. It is noteworthy that many of our members are asking for legal advice from our team not only when they are in the asylum process but also when they are planning to apply for asylum or to reenter the asylum process again.

Interview Training | Within the Newcomers Youth legal counseling, we also offer a certain type of counseling. Preparation for an asylum interview. In this meeting, you will be prepared for the coming questions regarding your sexuality or gender identity. The interview training is not a substitute for the regular lawyer's role, but since we know many lawyers don't have enough time for each client, the interview training is a complement and is often appreciated by both members and their lawyers. The lawyers volunteering at Newcomers Youth who offer the interview training are well experienced in LGBTQI cases.

Mental Health Support | The second central aspect of individual capacity building for our members is mental health counseling. In addition to the need for immediate legal assistance with their asylum cases. In the beginning, many members ask how to deal with their anxiety, sometimes even depression and the effects of trauma. In collaboration with the Pegasus project within RFSL Youth, the Newcomers Youth's members have had a chance to book the sessions with our advisors, who are specialized in offering support concerning mental health. Sometimes our members just need someone willing to listen and give them concrete guidelines in relation to dealing with everything that the past, present and uncertain future bring. In addition to mentioned anxiety, depression and traumatic experiences, the members often reflect on their experiences of violence and abuse. Thus, those individual sessions with the advisors do not have a form of therapy. They are considered a first aid – a space where someone is listening and where further help can be offered in terms of providing information about available psychological and medical services for asylum-seeking, undocumented and newly arrived youth in Sweden.

Transgender Consultancy | The Transgender Consultancy is aimed at our transgender members and those who question or want to know more about gender identity and gender expression. Transgender consultancy is a Newcomers Youth activity that has a form of a support session. You can ask everything that you need to know about transgender rights overall. It provides you with information about transgender healthcare, services available in Sweden, and support you can get in your local community.

Membership Certificate | In order to receive a certificate of membership from Newcomers Youth, you need to be an active member. The certificates are written by an asylum lawyer.

Internships for gaining work-related experience | Newcomers Youth are providing an internship program for members who are interested in working within civil society. We see the internship program as a stepping stone for members who aspire to a career as social workers, lawyers, project managers or within creative production mainly. The internship program is also an opportunity for the organization to recruit more newcomers to the national and local boards.

ADVOCACY WORK

What is advocacy work?

Any action that speaks for, recommends, argues for, supports, defends, or pleads on behalf of others is considered advocacy. .

The type of advocacy will depend on your situation and what sort of help you need. When someone helps you express your views and help you stand up for your rights, that person is called your advocate. Advocating for yourself means speaking up about the things that are important to you. You might also hear this being called 'self-advocacy'.

As we mentioned in the background chapter, Newcomers Youth started as a service-providing project for LGBTQIA youth with asylum experience. Over the years, we realized that many of our members' needs were depended on how the asylum system is designed. The most crucial element is that many of our members often had problems getting refugee status in Sweden because the Swedish Migration Agency did not believe them to be LGBTQI persons. The project was redesigned to work more with advocacy based on the legal expertise of the project's asylum lawyer and the experience of our members.

Here are our recommendations to help you get started.

Step 1: Knowledge is power

Personal experience | Your own personal experience can be crucial information and say a lot about social issues in general. However, we recommend you to base your activism on a general picture of the situation. The issue can be broad or very specific, but it is always a good idea to back your own experience with more people experiencing the same problem. Try to see your situation as an example of a general problem or a suggestion for a solution to a problem.

Newcomers Youth's knowledge base | One of the ideas of working with advocacy within Newcomers Youth was to create sources of information regarding LGBTQIA youth with asylum experience in Sweden. Among the sources created is our report I want to be free. Our parent organization, RFSL has also released two reports regarding the asylum cases of LGBTQIA asylum seekers.

As for other collections of sources, we recommend the SOGICA database. '*SOGICA – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Claims of Asylum: A European human rights challenge*' was a project funded by the European Research Council. It set out to produce the necessary evidence base for a more just and humane asylum process for individuals seeking refuge in Europe on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Step 2: Make a plan

The Newcomers Youth approach to advocacy work | As LGBTQIA youth with asylum experience, you have unique knowledge, lived experience, and insight into the possible needs of others in your situation. The general idea of conducting advocacy work was to create a platform for our members to be heard and taken seriously. Our experience is that the inclusion of certain groups in political forums, international conferences, and consultation rounds can sometimes be done for the sake of ticking boxes. It is important to create a platform that serves both for you as members of the target group and the stakeholders to whom the advocacy work is directed.

Who is speaking? | Our goal was always to be represented by the target group, but it was only sometimes possible. However, the methodology itself promotes the identification of those obstacles (e.g., loss of income, willingness to be anonymous, discomfort in public speaking) and ways to eliminate them. This analysis is beneficial to keep, even though you are a group of self-organized activists. Ask yourself questions regarding who is represented and who is not. Who is speaking and representing, and why?

Where to go? | In Newcomers Youth, we made an inventory of all the important national forums where civil society met the relevant stakeholders. These forums often change, however. Talk to people who know and ask around! Make your own list and get people to invite you. Organize meetings with potential stakeholders and inform them about the unique insight that you have, meanwhile emphasizing that there are only a few organizations that directly work with that group. Step in, take your seat at the table and have your say!

Other types of advocacy work, directed to the general public, are more open when it comes to creating a forum of your own through social media. Through these channels, you can often reach more people. But

remember that sometimes, in order to make real change, it is enough just to reach a few people - but the right ones. That goes for all kinds of political advocacy.

Gathering experiences | The idea of including a particular target group is to fulfill the specific needs of that specific group. After a while, you will see that the gathered experience and knowledge regarding the situation and conditions of the target group will become apparent. This particular target group is very specific. Since there are certain obstacles for international organizations, governments, and local authorities to access the information regarding the target group, your organization will be uniquely positioned to provide these stakeholders with information. The purpose of inspiring you to create an agenda for advocacy is to take advantage of this position.

Step 3: DO IT

The use of personal stories | You might want to use your own personal story as part of a political message. Sharing a personal story can also be a way to heal from trauma. You have to think it through carefully before doing it. We recommend you always be the one that benefits the most from sharing your story.

Examples of how you can benefit are:

As an expression of your personal activism, freedom, and empowerment. It can help you in the asylum process.

Receiving payment (money, entrance fee, costs for food and travel, etc.).

Ask yourself before agreeing to share personal stories:

- Will I be in danger if I share this personal story?
- Is there a possibility of making it anonymous if I want?
- Is the possible outcome of sharing it better than not sharing?
- Is it worth the risk if there is one?
- What is the context in which my story will be shared?
- What will they benefit from me sharing my story?
- What will I benefit from sharing my story?
- Will it be possible to draw back consent if I want to or need to?
- Are my story and I being treated respectfully, or am I being used as an alibi?

Benefits of cooperation and network of partners | In the national context where Newcomers Youth operates, LGBTQIA rights are non-controversial, and the trade benefits the stakeholders. Therefore, we are careful in the choice of co-operations and actions. For instance, if we are invited to be a stakeholder in a project where we cannot affect its outcomes, we never appear as an “approval stamp” in such a project. We recommend you also be aware of this.

The different kinds of partnerships

Civil society | Create partnerships with other civil society organizations to share an experience or strengthen the advocacy message. The partnership should benefit both parties and strengthen the fulfillment of your shared goals.

National Agencies | You can come up with possible ideas and present finished proposals. Our experience has been that many of the relevant national agencies want to hear the voices of our target group but don't know how to reach out. As an organization, you can be the crucial link in between. Have meetings together and listen to what information they lack and brainstorm how you can help them out. Remember that national agencies have no political power. They are funded by tax money which is budgeted by the government, but the government has no direct power over them.

National and local governments | Like the national agencies, the national and local governments often need and request the information you can provide regarding a particular target group. Be aware of not being used for political goodwill, though, and carefully analyse regularly what your organisation and especially the target group get in return.

Private sector | We have some experience when it comes to cooperating with the private sector. This part has never been closely linked to advocacy work. However, there are different risks to be measured before going into a partnership with actors of the private sector, especially if they are profit-based. The general rule of measuring how much you can achieve with how much they benefit of your cooperation with them applies here as well.

Newcomers Youth's Advocacy Activities

Magazine | The Newcomers Youth Magazine contains articles, stories and poems written by members. The idea behind starting a magazine was to create a platform for members to freely express themselves on a topic of their own choosing, like the asylum process, coming to Sweden, mental health, trans issues, integration and many other topics. We have also published photographs and drawings made by members. The magazine is sold on the webpage and generates project income.

Video Campaign | The video campaign "Om jag hade makten" was produced to give our members a voice. We felt that this group is often talked about by different actors within the field and the general public, but few people have actually sat down and talked with a young queer asylum seeker. One of the campaign films titled Two years Left was screened in SVT:s Morgonstudion.

Music video | The song If I had the power and its music video was produced in order to highlight the situation of our members for a broader audience, but also to create an anthem for our members. The singer Michael is also a member of Newcomers Youth. The lyrics are based on the stories and experiences of the members. If I Had The Power is available on all streaming platforms. The music video premiered during Stockholm Pride and has up until now over 60 000 views on Youtube.

Educations & Educational films | By having an employed lawyer in the project, we have had the opportunity to offer education on the topic of asylum to civil servants, lawyers, other organisations and the general public. The topic of asylum and LGBTQI is very complex and the legal regulations behind them are hard to understand. Being able to do our own research and cooperate together with RFSL has meant that Newcomers Youth has helped the whole organisation to become an authority regarding these issues. From physical educations to digital to educational films, made available for everyone to use.

Public speaking, panel discussions and consultancy | A big part of our advocacy work has been to share our insights and knowledge at different conferences, events and meetings. In these settings, the focus of our talks can vary. Examples of forums we have visited are the UNHCR conference on asylum and LGBTQI issues, SOGICA final conference, Council of Europe, Becoming a Part of Europe Erasmus Project, Stockholm Pride, West Pride, Europride in Belgrade, World Pride in Malmö / Copenhagen.

Pride Parade demonstrations | The big parade at Stockholm Pride has always been a big event for Newcomers Youth. We know that it is a big deal for many of our members to be able to visit Pride and especially the Pride Parade. In 2018 we arranged a demonstration in our part of the parade. It was a funeral where we protested against the unlawful deportations of young queers just because they weren't believed to be LGBTQI persons by the Swedish Migration Agency.

Events | The NCYC events had often coincide with Stockholm Pride. It has been a platform for members to perform in their own preferred medium. We have had everything from singing, dancing, runway shows to speeches. It has also been a way for the project to showcase our latest creations and news.

NCY Creates | NCYC is a Newcomers Youth clothing brand with specially designed empowering clothes. The idea behind NCYC was to create clothes with empowering messages, but that also highlights our member's need for support from the rest of the LGBTQI community and the rest of society. Buying an NCYC piece shows that you support Newcomers Youth's fight toward a better future for young newcomers. The profit goes directly into the project.

Dialogue with the Swedish Migration Agency | The Swedish Migration Agency has a mission issued by the government to work with LGBTQI issues. This mission includes cooperating with relevant representatives from civil society and especially LGBTQI organizations. Therefore, we proposed creating dialogue meetings with the Swedish Migration Agency and our parent organization, RFSL. The dialogue meetings focus on different topics and themes each time, and we hold meetings every other month. These meetings mean that we have a direct link to the Swedish Migration Agency to provide direct feedback on how the system works in reality. In this way, we can act as consultants. In exchange, the Swedish Migration Agency fulfills one part of its government mission and regularly receives accurate and relevant information regularly. The dialogue was established in 2018 and is still ongoing.

How to start?

Become a member

RFSL Ungdom is a democratic membership movement of, with and for young LGBTQIA people, where together we create change. As a member, you are fighting for a world filled with love and respect where all LGBTQIA young people are, live and express themselves as they want. Your commitment is needed in the fight for everyone's equal rights!

Everyone who is up to 30 years of age and agrees with our purpose and statutes can become a member of RFSL Ungdom. You can also become a member through Newcomers Youth if you are an asylum seeker, undocumented, or newly arrived.

To become a member is easy.

Just follow this link: www.rfslungdom.se/blimedlem

Start a district

First of all - check if there already is a local district where you live. If not? To start a district you need to be at least four people.

Follow this link to get more information www.rfslungdom.se/resursbank/ or email us at engagemang@rfslungdom.se

Start an activist group

To start an activist group you need to be at least two people.

Follow this link to get more information www.rfslungdom.se/resursbank/ or email us at engagemang@rfslungdom.se

Our toolkit!

Available at www.newcomersyouth.se

A collection of material produced by Newcomers Youth

Guidebook - Youth LGBTQ+ Asylum

A guide for newcomers youth meeting places.

Guidebook - Innovation Intellectual Output: 01

Developing youth work practices on refugee inclusion

Guidebook - Innovation Intellectual Output: 02

Innovative youth work and intersectional practices for YMRA

Guidebook - Peer To Peer

Plan, organize and facilitate support group sessions for NCY

Reports - I want to be free

Legal review of LGBTQI youth asylum cases and nine stories from NCY

Reports - Attention Detention

Interview study about young LGBTQI people in detention centers.

Magazine - Unheard stories

A glimpse into the lives of Newcomers Youth members

Campaigns - If I had the power

Campaign films addressing racism, homophobia, transphobia and other intersecting and discriminatory struggles within the Swedish Asylum System

Music Video & Audio - If I had the power

Anthem, Song & Music Video (Following the campaign Series)

Short film - Remember us

Three young asylum-seeking LGBTQ people meet at the Swedish Migration Agency, where a decision is made on whether they can stay in Sweden.

Educational film - Young and LGBTQIA in the asylum process

experiences from NCY members

Educational film - Why didn't you tell me?

If asylum grounds are submitted late



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