



Deliverable No 4.7

# Policy Recommendations Report



Co-funded by the European Union's  
Rights, Equality and Citizenship  
Programme (2014-2020)



## Project Information

Project Acronym:	Transcare
Project Title:	Improving access to healthcare for transgender individuals
Agreement number:	881952
EU programme:	Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)
Project coordinator:	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Project website:	<a href="http://www.transcare.eu">www.transcare.eu</a>

## Document's Information

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Dissemination:	Public
Date:	June 2023

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## 1. Introduction

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) released a statement in May 2010, acknowledging that the expression of gender characteristics, including identities that do not conform to stereotypical associations of one's assigned sex at birth, is a widespread and culturally diverse aspect of human existence. The statement emphasized that such expressions should not be deemed inherently pathological or negative. WPATH is an international, multidisciplinary, professional association whose mission is to promote evidence-based care, education and research that supports a knowledgeable and respectful public policy regarding transgender health.

Transgender health care is a holistic inter- and multidisciplinary care between endocrinology, surgery, voice and communication, primary health care, reproductive health, sexual health, and mental health disciplines, aiming to support gender-affirming interventions (including puberty suppression, hormone therapy, and gender-affirming surgeries), preventive care and chronic disease management. The goal of gender-affirming care is to partner with trans and gender-diverse (TGD) people to holistically address their:

1. Social
2. Mental and
3. Medical health needs and well-being

while respectfully affirming their gender identity.

Regrettably, many societies worldwide continue to stigmatize gender nonconformity, resulting in prejudice and discrimination. Transgender individuals often face significant exclusion, stigma, and discrimination within healthcare settings, in addition to the prejudice and discrimination prevalent in society. Studies have demonstrated that transgender individuals consistently encounter health disparities and barriers related to their gender identity and/ or expression.

Providing care for transgender individuals offers an excellent opportunity to uphold principles such as accessible services without undue and unnecessary delays, the provision of high-quality care through effective collaboration and cooperation among various healthcare providers, and the recognition of the diverse needs of transgender individuals that reflect the range of needs associated with each patient's specific gender identity.

Creating an inclusive and non-judgmental environment where clients feel safe discussing their health needs is crucial when caring for trans individuals. Two fundamental principles that healthcare providers and staff should adhere to, are:

1. Respect the person's gender identity and use their preferred name, title, pronouns, and terminology.
2. Understand that a person's gender identity may not align with their anatomy. Provide medical care that affirms the person's gender identity, particularly when addressing health issues or providing treatments typically associated with a different gender.

Enhancing knowledge about the healthcare needs of transgender individuals enables healthcare providers to feel more comfortable in supporting their trans patients' general and gender-affirming medical, surgical, or psychosocial requirements, thereby promoting positive health outcomes for trans individuals.

### **Transcare: Improving access to healthcare for transgender individuals**

The project 'Transcare: Improving access to healthcare for transgender individuals' (Project Number: 881952) is a program co-funded within the framework of the European Program for Rights, Equality, and Citizenship (2014-2020). Its main objective is to inform, raise awareness, and educate healthcare personnel regarding safe, non-discriminatory access to and provision of healthcare services for transgender individuals. The project is coordinated and implemented by the MSc Global Health Disaster Medicine, School of Medicine, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA)). The project

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consortium consists of the University of Crete, School of Medicine - Clinic of Social and Family Medicine, Colour Youth - LGBTQ Youth Community of Athens, Positive Voice - Red Umbrella Athens, Orlando LGBT+, the Athens Medical Association, the Hellenic Medical Students' International Committee - HelMSIC, the AKMI Vocational Training Institute, and ReadLab - Research Innovation & Development Lab.

Transcare was designed to facilitate greater engagement of healthcare professionals with the realities and needs of transgender individuals and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills, ensuring a climate of trust that is essential for every doctor-patient relationship. The central goal is for healthcare structures to be staffed by appropriately trained personnel with empathy and understanding for diversity, thereby fostering an environment of acceptance and trust towards all individuals, regardless of their gender identity and expression. These structures should make transgender individuals feel secure and confident in the services they receive, enabling them to express their concerns freely, just like any other individual, on an equal and unrestricted basis.

#### Key Project Actions:

- Assessment of the healthcare system in our country (Greece). Our aim is to gather data to familiarize healthcare personnel with the diversity of identity and gender expression, as well as to document and highlight the experiences of transgender individuals in their interactions with healthcare services.
- Documentation of the experiences of transgender individuals through their interactions with healthcare services.
- Development of educational materials for healthcare personnel and organization of awareness-raising and sensitization activities for healthcare professionals, with the goal of improving the services provided to transgender individuals and ensuring their rights.

- Utilization of the educational materials for the training of new healthcare professionals from healthcare facilities across the country, contributing to the creation of inclusive healthcare structures that can understand the needs of transgender individuals and respond to them.

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## 2. Data

The research conducted within the framework of the Transcare-Improving access to healthcare for transgender individuals project aimed to record:

- The level of familiarity
- Attitudes and perceptions
- Educational needs of healthcare and psychosocial professionals, as well as students in relevant fields, regarding issues of gender identity and expression, as well as transgender identities.

Additionally, it aimed to:

- Highlight the experiences of transgender individuals with healthcare services.

The research findings:

1. Were utilized to create digital educational material targeting future healthcare and psychosocial professionals, with the goal of better informing them about transgender identities, the healthcare and mental health needs of transgender individuals, and enhancing their skills to provide more inclusive services.
2. Serve as a basis for developing policy recommendations to combat discrimination based on gender identity in the healthcare sector and improve transgender individuals' access to healthcare and mental health services in Greece.

According to data from the Transcare-Improving access to healthcare for transgender individuals research , obstacles identified regarding transgender healthcare exist at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels. These obstacles include:

- Discrimination by healthcare professionals.
- Lack of trained healthcare personnel in transgender healthcare.
- Absence of reliable and secure healthcare environments.



- Issues related to healthcare coverage and stereotypical approaches within the healthcare system for transgender health.

Based on the responses of the three groups (health professionals, students, transgender individuals), there seems to be an agreement regarding the need for education that will cover the following topics:

1. Basic concepts related to gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender characteristics.
2. Terminology and inclusive, non-stigmatizing communication.
3. Information concerning medical transitioning:
  - A. Transition procedures: the process followed to initiate medical transitioning and the services available to individuals.
  - B. Insurance coverage for procedures, medical protocols, potential complications, long-term effects, preparation, and support for individuals.
4. Existence of specialized healthcare needs, compared to cisgender individuals, especially for those who have undergone transitioning procedures.
5. Protocols and best practices for providing healthcare services to transgender individuals.
6. Contemporary scientific data related to gender identity.
7. Mental health issues:
  - A. Basic guidelines for supporting transgender individuals.
  - B. Gender exploration and coming out process.
  - C. Support and psychoeducation for families.
  - D. Transgender individuals on the autism spectrum.
8. Sexual and reproductive health issues.
9. Information regarding the legal framework: Legal recognition of gender identity and transgender rights, specifically within the context of healthcare services.
10. Prevention and combating of discrimination in the healthcare sector.

11. Recording of gender and name in medical records, examinations, referrals, and management of related issues during hospitalization.
12. Provision of services to transgender adolescents and family support.
13. Challenges faced by transgender individuals, particularly in the workplace.
14. Data and practices from other countries.
15. Organizations and specialized professionals providing services for transgender individuals to facilitate networking.
16. History of the transgender community in Greece and the current reality of transgender individuals.
17. Intersectionality and overlapping identities (e.g., LGBTQIA+ migrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ elderly individuals).

From the analysis of focused discussions with healthcare professionals in the public health sector (Policy Roundtables), five thematic areas emerged:

- Perceptions of transgender status.
- General perception of transgender individuals' access to healthcare services.
- Incidents of discrimination and violence against the transgender community.
- Professional experience in the field.
- Exploration of educational needs.

Two Policy Roundtables of Transcare were held under the coordination of the Medical Association of Athens, engaging representatives from public healthcare institutions and representatives from Civil Society organizations, aiming to develop policy proposals for the improvement of trans people's access to healthcare services in Greece.

On Friday, March 19, 2021, the First Policy Roundtable of Transcare was held. The key points of the discussion were the following:

- To guarantee trans people's access to health services, a multifaceted strategy is required.
- Discrimination based on gender identity and expression must be addressed through institutional and practical interventions.

- The provision of inclusive services to trans people depends on educating health professionals at all levels and increasing awareness of the issue.
- Comprehensive information on trans identities should be released by the media.
- Social services ought to offer transgender people and their families inclusive support services.
- The importance of trans people's active involvement in the planning and execution of interventions is emphasized.

On Thursday, July 14, 2022, the Second Policy Roundtable of Transcare was implemented. The key points of the topics discussed were:

- The necessity and intention to revamp the primary and secondary education systems regarding sexuality education by incorporating topics on gender identity and sexuality were emphasized. Additionally, the inclusion of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in university curricula was highlighted.
- The formulation of policies to ensure equal treatment of transgender individuals at all levels was deemed necessary. Detailed discussions were held regarding the systemic and educational gaps that hinder trans people's access to healthcare, such as instances of healthcare workers misgendering them, problematic use of diagnosis and pathologizing, and obstacles in obtaining prescriptions.
- Furthermore, various existing obstacles were mentioned, including the absence of insurance funds for gender-transition procedures, a limited number of suitable public departments resulting in appointment overload and delays, and a shortage of specialized healthcare professionals. Consequently, the need to establish specialized clinics for gender reassignment counseling, following the standards set by exemplary countries, was also acknowledged.
- The immediate upgrade of the entire healthcare system to align with the World Health Organization's new classification system, ICD-11, and the necessary adaptation procedures for accessing gender reassignment medical services were recognized as essential.

- The unethical and abusive practices that transgender people, especially minors, encounter when seeking and receiving psychiatric treatment services were highlighted. It was proposed that the Hellenic Psychiatric Association should take measures to ensure the appropriate training of its members in response to this issue.

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### 3. Recommendations

Improving access to care for trans individuals is a multidimensional issue that needs to be addressed at the social, political, healthcare, and research levels. The support provided should be sensitive to the local needs and identities of TGD people. Health care providers (HCPs) must understand the impact of social attitudes and norms, laws, economic circumstances, and health systems on the lived experiences of transgender and gender diverse people worldwide.

TGD people are often denied widely accepted rights in the context of International Human Rights Law: rights to education, health and protection from medical abuses, work and an adequate standard of living, housing, freedom of movement and expression, privacy, security, life, family. HCPs can play a key role in transgender rights advocacy, including the right to quality gender-affirming health care that is appropriate, affordable, and accessible.

Considering all the above, we adopt and strongly support the Health Care Principles recommended by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health:

- Promote empowerment and inclusivity. Work towards reducing stigma and facilitating access to suitable healthcare for all individuals who seek it.
- Respect diversity. Honor and acknowledge all clients and their gender identities. Avoid pathologizing differences in gender identity or expression.
- Uphold universal human rights, including the rights to bodily and mental integrity, autonomy, and self-determination. Ensure freedom from discrimination and promote the highest attainable standard of health.
- Involve transgender and gender diverse individuals in the development and implementation of healthcare services.

- Familiarize yourself with social, cultural, economic, and legal factors that may impact the health and healthcare needs of transgender and gender diverse individuals, as well as their willingness and ability to access services.
- Provide healthcare services (or refer to knowledgeable professionals) that affirm gender identities and expressions, including addressing distress associated with gender dysphoria, if present.
- Reject approaches that aim to convert or change an individual's gender identity and avoid any direct or indirect support for such approaches or services
- Acquire knowledge and training on the healthcare needs of transgender and gender diverse individuals, including understanding the benefits and risks of gender-affirming care.
- Tailor treatment approaches to meet the specific needs of clients, taking into consideration their goals for gender identity and expression.
- Focus on promoting overall health and well-being, not solely on reducing gender dysphoria, which may or may not be present.
- Embrace harm reduction approaches when appropriate.
- Ensure transgender and gender diverse individuals have complete and ongoing informed participation in decisions regarding their health and well-being.
- Enhance experiences of healthcare services, including administrative systems and continuity of care.
- Connect individuals with communities and peer support networks.
- Support and advocate for clients within their families and communities (such as schools, workplaces, and other settings) when appropriate

We recommend that the provision of healthcare services for transgender individuals should be also based on:

1. **Respect and dignity:** Treat all individuals with respect, dignity, and without gender-based discrimination.
2. **Informed consent:** Ensure that individuals have access to comprehensive and accurate information about available healthcare options and give their informed consent before any medical interventions.
3. **Affirmation and support:** Provide healthcare services that affirm and support individuals' gender identities, addressing their specific healthcare needs and concerns.
4. **Accessible and inclusive care:** Ensure that healthcare services are accessible to transgender individuals, taking into consideration their unique healthcare requirements and providing culturally competent care.
5. **Privacy and confidentiality:** Safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of transgender individuals, protecting their personal and medical information from unauthorized disclosure.
6. **Multidisciplinary approach:** Adopt a multidisciplinary approach to transgender healthcare, involving various healthcare professionals who are knowledgeable and experienced in transgender health.
7. **Non-pathologizing approach:** Avoid pathologizing gender diversity and instead recognize and respect gender identity as a natural variation of human experience.
8. **Advocacy and support:** Advocate for the rights and well-being of transgender individuals within healthcare settings and provide support in navigating societal challenges they may face.

9. Education and training: Ensure that healthcare providers receive adequate education and training on transgender healthcare to enhance their knowledge and skills in providing competent care.
10. Continuous improvement: Strive for continuous improvement in transgender healthcare services by actively seeking feedback from transgender individuals and incorporating their perspectives into service development and delivery.

These principles aim to guide the provision of healthcare services for transgender individuals, promoting their health, well-being, and access to quality care. We also recommend that HCPs should be aware of the following:

1. Respectful and humble communication with trans patients is crucial for achieving positive outcomes in consultations. Trans people often fear rejection, ridicule, or denial of service when disclosing their gender identity. Actively listening to their needs, referring them to relevant healthcare providers when necessary, and continuous HCPs education, can ensure the best possible medical care while fostering a collaborative and trusting relationship with trans patients. Creating a sensitive and inclusive environment facilitates more effective care for trans individuals. Some tips for respectful communication include: acknowledging that not all trans people are the same, understanding that it is inappropriate to ask personal questions about their transitioning process or genitals unless willingly shared, avoiding assumptions about their sexual history based on their gender identity, providing an environment where support persons can accompany the patient, using simple language and encouraging questions, and involving patients in the decision-making process through informed consent.
2. Maintaining privacy and confidentiality is vital, as trans people often fear discrimination and stigma. Adhering to a strict privacy and confidentiality protocols is essential, ensuring that a trans patient's gender history and status



remain confidential. Enforceable confidentiality protocols should be in place, and disclosing a trans person's identity status should be limited to those who explicitly require the information for care purposes. HPCs respective training is necessary to ensure confidentiality and privacy at all times.

3. The Informed Consent Model is a powerful tool in gender-affirmative care, allowing trans individuals to make decisions regarding their readiness for gender-affirming medical treatments. This model is based on trans people's self-determination and knowledge of their own needs and identities. It involves facilitating informed decision-making by providing access to information, discussing benefits and risks, and respecting the patient's autonomy.
4. Medical intake and sign-in forms should be adapted to allow trans patients to use their chosen names and gender markers. Offering an option for preferred/used names and genders can create a safe and dignified environment for trans individuals.
5. When it comes to names, pronouns, and salutations, it is crucial to ask trans patients directly and respect their preferences. To ensure that you and your staff address trans patients correctly, it is important to ask them politely about their preferred name, pronouns, title, and greeting. This conveys that trans individuals are not bound by the information on their legal identification documents. The patient intake form should include these details, which should be used in all discussions and referrals related to the patient unless stated otherwise by the trans person. It may be helpful to discreetly inquire if there are any situations where it is not appropriate or safe to use their chosen name and title, particularly if it reveals their trans status. The sex assigned at birth should be treated as confidential clinical information and should not be accessible to administrative staff. Although it might feel awkward, asking these questions with discretion and demonstrating respect is usually appreciated. For instance, you can ask, "How

would you like to be addressed?" or "What name would you prefer?" It is good practice to ask these questions to all individuals, not just trans patients, and consider including a preferred name option on your forms. In case of mistakes, if you use the wrong name, pronoun, or greeting, correct yourself discreetly and apologize if possible.

6. Accessing gender-specific bathrooms can be challenging for trans individuals who may not feel comfortable or welcomed in those spaces. It is important to let trans individuals know they can use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity and where they feel most comfortable. If feasible, consider having a unisex or gender-neutral restroom to ensure the comfort and safety of trans staff and patients. Additionally, ensure that your restrooms are disability-friendly, providing accessibility for wheelchair users.

Based on the above, an education program that addresses the educational needs identified by healthcare professionals, students, and transgender individuals should be created. The education program already proposed during the project "Transcare: Improving access to healthcare for transgender individuals" is structured into broad teaching units (modules), each of which incorporates specific lessons. Each lesson may also include individual lectures (units). In total, 4 modules, 16 lessons, and 76 lectures have been developed. The range of lessons per unit is from 3 to 5, while the range of lectures per lesson is from 1 to 8. In summary, the program covers the following topics:

1. Basic concepts and terminology: Concepts (characteristics/expression/gender identity, sexual orientation, terminology), gender transition (social, legal, medical), the transgender community in Greece (discrimination, invisibility, exclusion, hate crimes).
2. Access to services - challenges and consequences: (De)pathologizing of LGBTQI+ identities (history and current state), challenges (healthcare system

shortcomings, professional attitudes/perceptions, training needs, access to gender transition services), legal framework (recognition, discrimination, hate crimes/rhetoric, healthcare ethics codes, transgender rights), personal reflection (self-assessment).

3. Creating inclusive health services: Inclusive structures (inclusion and accessibility, information recording, use of spaces, visibility enhancement, best practices), communication (patient-centered care, communication skills, non-verbal communication, trust/empathy, interaction), inclusive services (reception, medical history intake, examinations, collaboration/information sharing with colleagues, guidelines), interconnection (importance of collaboration with LGBTQI+ organizations and specialized services, recording incidents of violence/discrimination, support, initiatives).
4. Specialized services: Mental health (stress, impact of discrimination, affirmative approach, transgender children and adolescents, guidelines), medical gender-affirming procedures (hormone therapies, surgeries, ICD-11, and access to services), sexual and reproductive health (trans individuals' needs, safe practices, reproductive issues and parenting choices, guidelines), intersectionality (definitions, challenges, best practices).

Furthermore, we recognise that - in accordance with the results of international research, as well as the findings of the research conducted as part of the Transcare project - to ensure that trans people have access to and are able to receive quality healthcare services, which respect and affirm their identities and take into account the unique health needs that they may have based on their identities and experiences as trans people, changes on a systemic level are also needed.

Our recommendations for change on an institutional level, specifically related to the provision of healthcare services, include:

- The immediate implementation of ICD-11 according to WHO guidelines for trans people’s access to gender affirming care from all Public Health/Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services, and the relevant update of diagnostic categories.
- The introduction of codes of ethics for all healthcare professions on a national level, protecting explicitly all LGBTQI+ people from discrimination and malpractice, and establishing clear disciplinary sanctions for professionals who do not abide by the code of ethics of their profession.
- A complete ban on conversion therapies, protecting all adults without the provision of “consent”, that cover all potential actors.
- Horizontal, compulsory training for all health/mental health and psychosocial support professionals in the public sector on current scientific data and guidelines for the provision of services to transgender people.
- Coverage of all medical transition expenses of trans people by public insurance, including any processes related to hormone-replacement therapy, gender affirming surgeries and psychosocial support (for those who wish to access such services before, during and/or after their transition).
- Access to assisted reproduction for all LGBTQI+ people regardless of marital status.
- Introduction of mandatory courses on all undergraduate health/mental health and psychosocial support faculties, on the provision of inclusive services for LGBTQI+ people.
- Establishment of affirmative gender identity services for transgender people in every health and mental health service according to contemporary scientific data, when they are directed to the National Health System. At the same time, updating and following up on the above for transgender children and minors (for the services that concern them).

Other recommendations for policy reform that are not explicitly on the field of healthcare, however affect the level of protection of trans people's rights and their access to inclusive and quality healthcare services:

- Update of the existing legal framework for the process of Legal Gender Recognition. More specifically we recommend
  - The introduction of a non-judicial process that is fast, transparent and accessible to all regardless of age, nationality, marital status, and without the provision of any medical, psychiatric or other assessments.
  - The expansion of gender options to include non-binary options such as other or blank.
- Complete decriminalisation of sex work, ensuring the protection of sex workers and their access to necessary healthcare services and treatment.
- Introduction of mandatory undergraduate courses on sexual orientation, identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, with the aim of providing inclusive and safe services.

## 4. Conclusions

Trans-competent health services ensure accessible pathways to all types of healthcare, including HIV, gender-affirming, mental health, and general healthcare, regardless of an individual's specific gender identity and sexual orientation.

Trans-competent care refers to healthcare that demonstrates both trans cultural competency and technical clinical competency. Trans cultural competency involves understanding, communicating with, and effectively interacting with trans people in a respectful, non-judgmental, and compassionate manner, in settings free of stigma and discrimination. Trans clinical competency refers to the demonstrated proficiency in

addressing the specific gender-affirming healthcare needs of trans people, as well as the application of prevention and screening tools for educating Health Care Providers on providing trans-competent healthcare is paramount.

Working closely with local trans-led community-based organizations can help in this regard. Actively listening to transgender people can increase knowledge, skills, and understanding of their diverse needs. Limited provider knowledge and disrespectful treatment can hinder trans people from accessing healthcare, leading to negative health outcomes.

Organizing sensitization training for HCPs or attending training on trans-sensitive care conducted by local trans-led organizations or global organizations like the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). Such initiatives can help HCPs gain skills in providing trans-inclusive health services. Utilizing resources that outline standards and guidelines of healthcare for trans people can also be beneficial.

For future initiatives in professional education and training for healthcare professionals and individuals working in any service, the focus should be on:

- Respecting the identities of intersex individuals
- Protecting confidentiality
- Enhancing compassion and communication skills among the healthcare providers
- Providing sufficient knowledge and information on specific healthcare issues related to trans individuals

## 5. Resources

Guidelines for the Primary and Gender-Affirming Care of Transgender and Gender Non-binary People by The Center of Excellence for Transgender Health. These guidelines aim to address disparities for transgender people in accessing primary health care by equipping primary care providers and health systems with the tools and knowledge to meet the healthcare needs of their transgender and gender non-conforming patients.

Blueprint for the Provision of Comprehensive Care for Trans People and Trans Communities in Asia and the Pacific by The Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTN), UNDP, Health Policy Project. The Blueprint offers comprehensive guidelines for improving health and human rights for trans people and trans communities. It is an accessible trans health reference document for trans community advocates, health professionals, policymakers, and those who design or deliver services to trans people.

Standards of Care (SOC) for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People, Versions 7 & 8 by World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). The WPATH Standards of Care provides clinical guidance for health professionals to assist transgender and gender non-conforming people with safe and effective pathways to achieving lasting personal comfort, to maximize their overall health, psychological well-being, and self-fulfillment.

Standards of Care by the Australian Professional Association for Transgender Health (AusPATH). The AusPATH Standards of Care offers clinical guidelines and tips for health professionals to ensure provisions of trans-competent and sensitive health care to trans persons. While developed for the Australian context, the guidelines offer some useful information for healthcare providers operating in other geographical contexts in the Asia and the Pacific region.

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# trans care

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE  
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