CASE STUDY

Invisible at Every Door: Supporting Young LGBTQ+ People of Colour in Brussels

Level 2 – Application | Module 5 – Intersectionality in Youth Disaffiliation | Belgium (Brussels)

Country	Belgium (Brussels-Capital Region)
Title	Invisible at Every Door: Supporting Young LGBTQ+ People of Colour in Brussels
Organiser / Provider	Youth organisation – composite case based on intersectional youth work practices in Brussels (fictitious)
Target Group	Young LGBTQ+ people of colour aged 16–26, facing simultaneous exclusion from both mainstream LGBTQ+ services and ethnic minority youth programmes
Theme / Focus Area	Intersectionality, compounding vulnerabilities, single-axis services, structural discrimination, positionality
Training Level	Level 2 – Application | Module 5 – Intersectionality in Youth Disaffiliation

1. Context & Challenge

A youth organisation working with ethnically diverse young people in Brussels began to notice a persistent absence in their data: young people who identified as both LGBTQ+ and as people of colour were almost entirely missing from their programmes — and from all other services the organisation referred to.

When workers investigated through street outreach and peer networks, they found that these young people were not simply hard to reach. They were actively falling through the gaps between two sets of services that each addressed only one dimension of their identity. Mainstream LGBTQ+ organisations in Brussels tended to be predominantly white spaces where young people of colour felt culturally invisible. Ethnic minority youth services, meanwhile, were often family-connected, community-based spaces where being openly LGBTQ+ carried significant risk of rejection or exposure.

The result was a group experiencing compound social exclusion — isolated from peers, estranged from family in many cases, and locked out of the very services that should have been available to them. Workers identified this as a textbook case of single-axis service design generating intersectional invisibility.

2. Intervention

Objectives

- Design a programme specifically responsive to the intersectional realities of young LGBTQ+ people of colour in Brussels
- Create a safe space that did not require participants to fragment or hide any part of their identity
- Build peer solidarity and community among a group who had often experienced profound isolation

• Connect participants to relevant support pathways (mental health, housing, legal) without re-exposing them to single-axis services
• Use the programme as an evidence base for advocating systemic change in service design across partner organisations

Programme Design

The organisation developed a 6-month tailored programme called “Full Colour”, with three core components:

Component 1 – Intersectional Safe Space (Weekly)

A weekly 2-hour drop-in space explicitly designed for LGBTQ+ people of colour. The space was co-designed by two peer ambassadors (young people with lived experience). No referral required. No registration form at first visit. Facilitated by two workers with different positionalities (one a queer person of colour; one a white ally).

Component 2 – Identity & Story Sessions (Monthly, optional)

Monthly optional workshops exploring participants’ full identities through storytelling, creative expression, and dialogue. Prompts were co-developed with participants. Sessions were not recorded and never shared. Participation was voluntary within a voluntary programme.

Component 3 – Practical Support Navigation

Workers mapped all relevant Brussels services for intersectional audit: which services were genuinely accessible to LGBTQ+ people of colour? Participants were connected only to vetted pathways. Workers advocated on their behalf with services that required adjustment to be truly inclusive.

Duration, Actors & Tools

• Duration: 6-month pilot programme
• Participants: 34 young people (aged 16–26) reached over 6 months
• Workers: 2 dedicated facilitators + 2 peer ambassadors (paid)
• Tools: positionality mapping exercise, intersectional service audit grid, peer ambassador model, anonymous feedback form (monthly)

3. Outcomes & Results

Outcomes were assessed at 3 and 6 months. Given the extreme vulnerability of the target group, the organisation focused on qualitative wellbeing indicators alongside participation data.

Indicator	Result (6 months)
Young people reached (previously no service contact)	34 young people over 6 months
Retention across all 6 months	71% of participants attended 4 or more months
Self-reported sense of belonging	91% reported feeling “fully seen” in the space (anonymous survey)
Connection to support services	19 participants connected to mental health, housing, or legal support

Peer solidarity outcomes	8 participants became informal peer supporters for others in the group
Systemic impact	3 partner organisations undertook intersectional audits of their own services following advocacy by the programme

4. Learning Points

1. Single-axis services create intersectional invisibility: Services designed around one identity category (sexual orientation OR ethnicity) will consistently fail young people who inhabit both. This is not a gap that can be closed by doing more of the same — it requires structural redesign.

2. The safe space must be co-designed, not designed for: The programme only worked because peer ambassadors shaped it from the beginning. Workers' assumptions about what the space should look like were repeatedly challenged — and this was the programme's greatest strength.

3. Positionality of workers matters enormously: The co-facilitation model, pairing a queer person of colour with a white ally, was not incidental. It communicated a visible commitment to intersectional understanding and allowed participants to relate to different dimensions of their experience.

4. No referral form at the first visit was transformative: Removing registration barriers at the point of entry significantly increased first attendance from young people with histories of institutional mistrust. Trust preceded administration.

5. Intersectional youth work has systemic advocacy implications: The programme's service audit revealed that most Brussels youth services were structurally inaccessible to LGBTQ+ people of colour. This data became the basis for advocacy with partner organisations — turning individual support into systemic change.

5. Reflection Questions

For individual reflection or group discussion

1. Think of a group of young people who are consistently absent from your programmes. Could intersectional invisibility — being poorly served at the intersection of multiple identities — explain their absence?

2. Map your own positionality: what aspects of your social location (race, gender, class, sexuality, disability) shape what you see and miss when working with young people? How does this show up in practice?

3. If you were to conduct an intersectional audit of your organisation's services — eligibility criteria, intake forms, referral pathways, physical space — what do you think you would find?

6. Transferability & Innovation

This programme model is directly transferable across all partner countries, where similar patterns of intersectional invisibility are documented among LGBTQ+ youth of colour, young women with disabilities, and migrant youth from conservative religious backgrounds. The key conditions for transfer are: at least one facilitator with lived intersectional experience; genuine co-design with the target community; and willingness to conduct honest service audits.

The innovative dimension is the dual focus: individual programme delivery and systemic advocacy. Most intersectional initiatives stop at programme level. This case demonstrates that

worker-led service audits can convert individual support work into structural change — a direct bridge to the advocacy focus of Level 3 of this training.

> ⚠ **Ethical & Data Protection Notice**
>
> This case study is a fictional composite constructed for training purposes. The target group — young LGBTQ+ people of colour — represents a real and highly vulnerable population. Practitioners working with this group must take particular care around: outing risks (never sharing a young person's LGBTQ+ identity without explicit consent); family and community safety assessment; and the heightened duty of confidentiality when identity disclosure could result in harm. GDPR requirements for sensitive personal data (including sexual orientation and ethnicity) apply in full.

7. Additional Resources

- Kimberlé Crenshaw – "The Urgency of Intersectionality" TED Talk (19 min) | ted.com
- Council of Europe – Compass: Manual on Human Rights Education, Chapter on Discrimination & Intersectionality | coe.int
- EIGE – Intersectionality Toolkit for Youth Organisations (free PDF) | eige.europa.eu
- Eurofound – NEET Youth: Gender and Ethnic Dimensions in Belgium (advanced report) | eurofound.europa.eu
- RainbowHouse Brussels – Resources on LGBTQ+ youth support in multicultural contexts | rainbowhouse.be