

Key messages:

- Non- or only partly covered trans* health care contributes to health inequality.
- Regarding trans* people, European countries need to strengthen human-rights based access to gender-affirming health care.

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Trans* people's access to gender-affirming health care: A European comparison

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Background:

Trans* people's life satisfaction is correlated with established legal frameworks for gender recognition and access to trans*-specific health care (Transgender Europe [TGEU], 2021). TGEU's guidelines to human rights-based principles of trans*-specific health care highlight bodily integrity/autonomy, free self-determination of gender, quality, specialized and decentralized care, and the right to determine reproductive paths as important pillars of gender affirming health care. We conducted a policy comparison across Europe regarding access to gender-affirming health care to assess how adherence to human rights-based principles could be strengthened.

Methods:

We compared access to health care across four main domains: legal framework (e.g., legally recognised genders), insurance coverage (e.g., out of pocket costs), access barriers (e.g., legal requirements to access gender-affirming surgery), and health care offers (e.g., hormone replacement therapy). Criteria were developed in guided brainstorming sessions. Three researchers rated 28 countries across 28 items based on available policy documents.

Results:

The majority of European countries prescribes a medicalised gender-affirming process rather than a self-decided process. Psychiatric diagnosis is also required in most countries to access gender-affirming health care. Gender-affirming health care is partly financed by statutory health insurance in most of the countries. Not all countries authorise full gender-affirming health care. Especially where statutory health insurance-covered gender-affirming health care relied centralised on single outpatient clinics or hospitals, waiting times between 6-24 months are found.

Conclusions:

Many European countries fail to fully comply with TGEU's guidelines to human rights-based principles of trans* health care. Given the negative impact of access barriers on life satisfaction, European countries should target these shortfalls in ensuring gender-affirming health care.