

# “THEY KNOW WHAT WE DON’T:” MEANINGFUL INCLUSION OF LGBTIQ PEOPLE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Executive Summary

June 2024

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## Purpose

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This report explores how the humanitarian system is responding to the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people during humanitarian crises. It seeks to document progress, highlighting positive and promising practices from an array of emergency contexts and organizations, while also exploring challenges that can inhibit meaningful change. Our intended audiences are humanitarian workers and decision-makers at all levels of the humanitarian system, including front-line workers implementing responses at country or regional levels, coordinators and managers at global headquarters, donors who fund interventions around the world, and LGBTIQ activists who have been relentlessly pushing for change and could use support to identify entry points for advocacy.

The story we present is complex. On the one hand, a cumbersome humanitarian bureaucracy coupled with hostile sociocultural, legal, and political contexts appear to both stall and complicate meaningful reforms toward LGBTIQ inclusion. On the other hand, there are promising examples of humanitarian organizations and actors striving to improve outcomes for LGBTIQ populations—through partnerships and coordination with LGBTIQ organizations, proactive outreach to LGBTIQ communities during crisis responses, the development of LGBTIQ-sensitive toolkits and guidelines, the revision of organizational policies, and more. By consolidating the fragmented actions of humanitarian efforts in diverse crisis contexts, this report provides examples of how meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion can and should be undertaken, which, we hope, will inspire action more broadly across the sector.

# Approach and Methodologies

7 crisis case studies  
written collaboratively  
with LGBTIQ CSOs

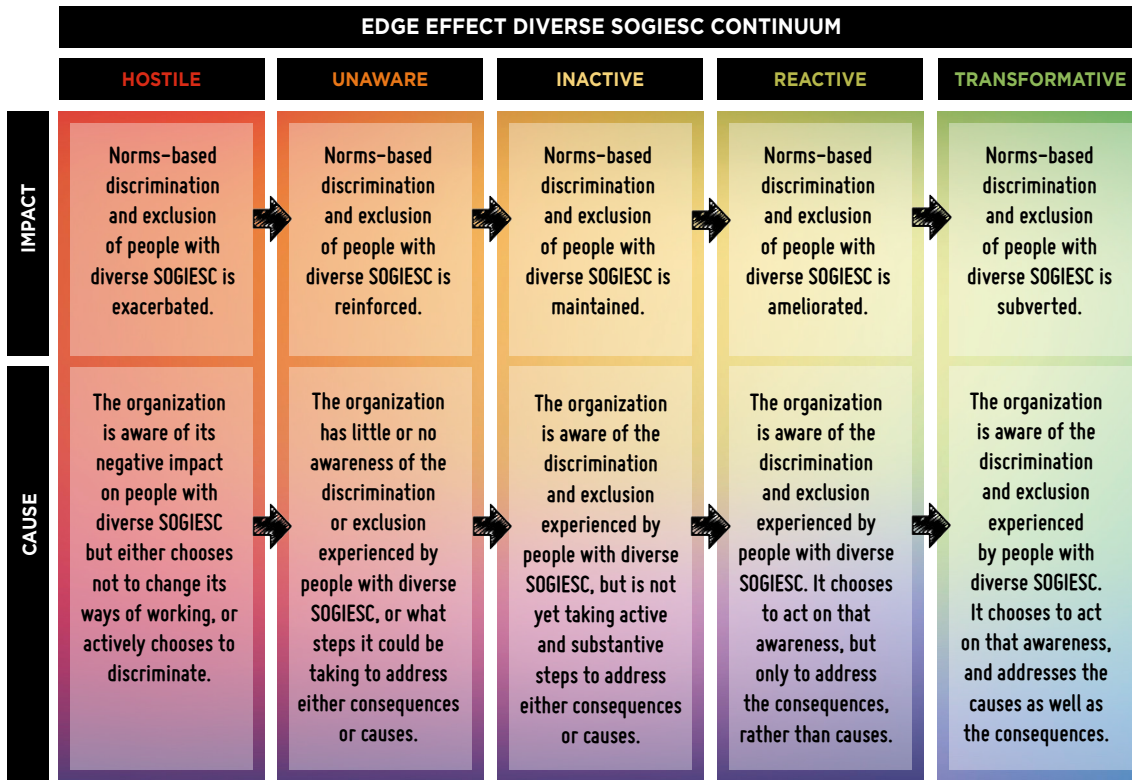
10 in-depth interviews  
with country-level INGO  
staff participating in  
the case studies

14 in-depth interviews  
with headquarter-level  
INGO representatives

Our findings, analysis, and recommendations are derived from research that Outright International and Edge Effect undertook between February and December 2023. Three distinct activities comprised our mixed-methods approach:

- i. An extensive review of academic, gray, and programmatic literature pertaining to inclusion and reform within the humanitarian sector;
- ii. In-depth key informant interviews with representatives from 13 different humanitarian international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies, and one humanitarian inclusion consultant; and
- iii. The development of seven case studies, each of which is comprised of interviews with national and local LGBTIQ civil society organizations and staff from international humanitarian agencies, spanning Colombia, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, and Ukraine.

Our research tools and analytical frameworks were derived from Edge Effect's Diverse-Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Continuum, the Diverse-SOGIESC Partner Appraisal Tool, and the Diverse-SOGIESC Rapid Assessment Tool. These frameworks plot the progress of organizations along a continuum of "hostile" (actions that actively reinforce marginalization and discrimination against LGBTIQ people) to "transformative" (actions that proactively address both the symptoms and causes of LGBTIQ marginalization and discrimination).



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## OUR RESEARCH IS ORGANIZED ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES OF INQUIRY:



## KEY FINDINGS

Below are the key findings and considerations for humanitarian practitioners, donors, and activists seeking to make meaningful and sustainable progress toward achieving better outcomes for vulnerable LGBTIQ populations in humanitarian settings.

## FROM THE LITERATURE

### **1 LGBTIQ people face unique challenges and vulnerabilities in times of crisis.**

Pre-emergency violence, discrimination, and marginalization are often amplified when armed conflict or other disasters strike, and the support networks upon which LGBTIQ people usually rely can be shattered. Additionally, LGBTIQ people are often forced to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity out of safety, which can render their suffering invisible. Humanitarian efforts can be unaware of these realities, which may result in relief activities that actually reinforce marginalization and suffering.

### **2 LGBTIQ inclusion is integral to wider reform agendas within the humanitarian system.**

The terms localization, participation, decolonization, and accountability have all become deeply embedded within the humanitarian lexicon—but the genuine transformation that sees power shift more directly into the hands of communities most impacted by crises remains elusive. Meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion involves working alongside, financially supporting, and uplifting the voices of LGBTIQ groups in crisis zones. LGBTIQ groups’ stated priorities and needs should guide humanitarian response.

### **3 Narratives about LGBTIQ inclusion being “too hard” are commonplace, stalling action within humanitarian organizations.**

The literature cites numerous barriers to meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action. Challenges such as hostile legal environments, lack of data, sociocultural perceptions, and community invisibility may complicate inclusion efforts. Humanitarian organizations also often use the assumption that such challenges make inclusion impossible to avoid pursuing inclusive change.

## GLOBAL READINESS: FINDINGS FROM HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

### **1 Although evidence of growing momentum and sincere commitment behind LGBTIQ inclusion efforts at the headquarters level of many humanitarian organizations exists, these top-down mandates often fail to translate into adequate implementation.**

Well-meaning interventions from headquarters may feel misguided unless staff members everywhere are involved in developing setting-specific inclusion strategies. Senior decision-makers play important roles in advancing organizational policies and practices, but these mandates must be balanced with the differing realities of each context.

2

**Many organizations are advancing LGBTIQ inclusion in country offices that are “ready,” as evidenced by the development of inclusion guidelines, toolkits, and safeguarding policies.**

Integrating LGBTIQ needs and priorities into humanitarian action may be more feasible in countries where civil society and human rights movements are more robust, and where the sociopolitical, legal, and cultural contexts are more accommodating to LGBTIQ populations. Central and Southern America, parts of South and Southeast Asia, and Ukraine are examples of contexts where there is generally more scope to openly pursue LGBTIQ inclusive efforts, whether it be partnering with local LGBTIQ organizations, specifically reaching out to LGBTIQ communities in need, or training staff to be responsive to the needs and priorities of marginalized groups. Humanitarian organizations are increasingly recognizing that, in many settings, it is possible to move inclusion forward as long as staff at all levels understand that it is an organizational priority and they have access to necessary tools and guidance. Incremental expansion of inclusion initiatives may also foster internal learning and generate useful case studies to guide action in other contexts.

3

**“Office champions” and staff-led initiatives often kickstart modest momentum addressing LGBTIQ inclusion within humanitarian organizations, but without formal institutional backing or adoption, the risk of staff burnout and loss of momentum may be high.**

Initiatives can range from informal ones, such as LGBTIQ social groups or peer-to-peer mentoring, to more formal actions, such as organizationally endorsed employee resource groups. While these groups typically begin with a focus on staff well-being, they often lead to conversations about how programming can be more LGBTIQ-inclusive. Once these initiatives gain traction, it is important that they are recognized—and resourced—within the organization to avoid loss of momentum and staff fatigue.

## INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIANISM IN ACTION: FINDINGS FROM CASE STUDIES

“We don’t see them as a subcontractor where we have to check indicators and boxes. For us, they are specialists. They know what we don’t know. They are complementing us, and we complement them.” **Carolina Rodríguez, Mercy Corps.**

CARIBE AFIRMATIVO • MERCY CORPS  
—COLOMBIA

**The crisis:** Massive and constant flow of Venezuelan migrant populations with unmet needs entering Colombia.

**The partnership:** Recognizing its insufficient attention to LGBTIQ populations, Mercy Corps established an equitable partnership with Caribe Afirmativo to roll out a program focusing on protection-related services (including psychological support, emotional resilience, and regularization of legal status) as well as entrepreneurship and livelihood creation for vulnerable LGBTIQ migrants from Venezuela.



### The takeaways:

- Partnerships between LGBTIQ organizations and humanitarian actors work best when the voices of local LGBTIQ people are centered in programmatic decision-making. Mercy Corps recognized that, as a grassroots LGBTIQ-led organization, Caribe Afirmativo was best placed to assess the needs of and find solutions for vulnerable LGBTIQ migrants.
- The partnership between the two organizations has had a transformative impact on Mercy Corps, prompting its staff to undergo a much deeper exploration of what being genuinely LGBTIQ-inclusive means both internally and through their community-facing programmatic work.

“I want to be involved in long-term conversations, not just incident-based coordination.” **Manisha Dhakal, Blue Diamond Society.**

*BLUE DIAMOND SOCIETY  
NEPAL RED CROSS • UNFPAS  
—NEPAL*

**The crisis:** The devastating 2015 earthquake.

**The partnership:** Following the 2015 earthquake, Blue Diamond Society (BDS) asserted itself within the humanitarian sector in the wake of the unmet needs of LGBTIQ communities. Both the Red Cross Society of Nepal (NRCS) and UNFPA Nepal made proactive efforts to galvanize greater LGBTIQ inclusion within their organizations, as well as the humanitarian sector more broadly: first, by having staff participate in LGBTIQ awareness training, and second, by welcoming LGBTIQ advocates into humanitarian coordinating mechanisms. In turn, Blue Diamond Society staff have also been included in NRCS’s emergency response training.

### The takeaways:

- Both NRCS and UNFPA Nepal demonstrated that they are prepared to integrate greater LGBTIQ sensitivity into their work. This involved embarking on learning journeys that involve all personnel, from frontline responders to programmatic staff based in other locations.
- Such engagements work best when local LGBTIQ actors are compensated for their contributions, and when the overarching goal is to build sustainable, reciprocal, and ongoing learning opportunities rather than ad hoc engagements.
- UNFPA Nepal’s inclusion of Blue Diamond Society into humanitarian coordination mechanisms, particularly within the gender-based violence sub-cluster, has had multiple positive impacts on the sector. First, Blue Diamond Society’s presence legitimizes an LGBTIQ organization as an integral actor within the country’s crisis

response architecture. Second, it creates an official space where LGBTIQ issues may be raised. Third, it introduces other organizations to LGBTIQ needs and experiences. Avoiding tokenism in these types of actions is also crucial. These efforts will have the greatest impact if LGBTIQ organizations are not simply shoehorned into existing coordination and communication mechanisms but are instead meaningfully introduced to forums that may be unfamiliar to them.

“Our strengths-based approach is to make sure that we fund not just in times of need, not just in times of emergency or crisis. But to prepare the organization to be resilient in the long-term.”  
**Phoebe De Padua, *Foundation for a Just Society*.**

*RAINBOW FOUNDATION  
FOUNDATION FOR A JUST SOCIETY  
CENTER FOR JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY  
INTERNATIONAL DONORS*  
**—Myanmar**

**The crisis:** The 2021 military coup and its aftermath.

**The partnership:** In the turbulence that followed Myanmar’s 2021 coup, the Rainbow Foundation (RF)\* went from being an LGBTIQ advocacy organization to a frontline humanitarian responder practically overnight. Flexible and trusting support of multiple donors, coupled with its ability to effectively document human rights through trauma-informed programming, facilitated its capacity to continue to support LGBTIQ communities during the crisis. Ultimately, the Rainbow Foundation relocated to Thailand for safety.

**The takeaways:**

- Despite a relocation to Thailand and the many challenges of delivering aid in post-coup Myanmar, the Rainbow Foundation has been able to successfully meet the needs of Myanmar’s LGBTIQ communities—thanks in large part to the long-term, mutually trusting relationships that exist between the Rainbow Foundation and international donors. These donors understand that the Rainbow Foundation knows best how to assist vulnerable LGBTIQ individuals safely and effectively inside Myanmar, even if reaching them requires reliance on informal networks and communication channels that sit well outside of traditional humanitarian architecture.
- The Center for Justice and Accountability’s engagement with the Rainbow Foundation, in particular, was an excellent example of how an LGBTIQ organization was supported to lead in documenting abuses against their communities, rather than having to engage in a process through which data is extracted from or through them. Additionally, the efforts to recognize and mitigate the psychological burden that can accompany such data collection demonstrated a trauma-informed approach that, in turn, built deeper trust between the two organizations.

\*A pseudonym, for safety.

“Marginalized communities’ vulnerabilities are going to look different from the ‘average household’ in Ukraine. Vulnerable communities look different. It should not be a one-size-fits-all situation.” **Robert Dolan, Mercy Corps.**

*GENDER STREAM • UNHCR  
SPHERE • ACTIONAID  
ALLIANCE.GLOBAL • MERCY CORPS  
—Ukraine*

**The crisis:** Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

**The partnerships:** Since the start of the war, Ukraine’s robust LGBTIQ civil society has organized itself to provide humanitarian assistance and support to LGBTIQ communities impacted by the conflict. Gender Stream, a Ukrainian feminist inclusive organization, established emergency shelters for LGBTIQ refugees, especially transgender people, in Uzhhorod, western Ukraine, and developed a small-scale partnership with the UNHCR Office in Uzhhorod. In another case study, we feature a partnership between ActionAid and Sphere, a Ukrainian feminist and LGBTQ organization, that aims to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to LGBTQ communities and women in Kharkiv, northeast Ukraine. Lastly, Mercy Corps launched a multi-year cooperation program with ALLIANCE.GLOBAL, a non-governmental organization that focuses on health and human rights for LGBTIQ people in Ukraine.

**The takeaways:**

- Humanitarian organizations and international donors should simplify and facilitate administrative processes. Both Gender Stream and Sphere highlighted cumbersome and time-consuming processes, which led to obstacles before and during their respective partnerships. LGBTIQ organizations are often volunteer-led and comprise informal networks that do not always have the financial structures required by humanitarian organizations and donors. Nevertheless, in crises, these organizations become first responders.
- Partnerships should be mutually productive and beneficial. Humanitarian organizations should create bridges between local LGBTIQ organizations and national and international structures that provide other opportunities for assistance, such as grants and training. They should also support LGBTIQ organizations to build alliances and identify different entry points to decision-making structures.
- Local LGBTIQ organizations can be key actors in generating data about the specific realities, needs, and experiences of LGBTIQ communities in humanitarian settings. Mercy Corps stressed the importance and relevance of ALLIANCE.GLOBAL in explaining that vulnerability will look different community by community, which should be reflected in needs assessment and mapping work.



“It’s the first time that LGBTIQ organizations and members of the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding nexus are sitting at the same table to strategize for diverse-SOGIESC humanitarian and development responses.” **Fadi Mezher, Queer Coordination Platform.**

*THE QUEER COORDINATION PLATFORM  
HELEM • INTERNATIONAL ACTORS  
—Lebanon*

**The crisis:** The Syrian refugee influx, the COVID-19 pandemic, a crippling economic recession, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, political unrest, and regional tensions.

**The partnership:** In an environment where civil society spaces are shrinking, the establishment of the Queer Coordination Platform, bringing together LGBTIQ organizations and activists with prominent humanitarian actors and donors, has resulted in strengthening collaboration and funding opportunities to meet the needs of vulnerable LGBTIQ populations. Simultaneously, Helem, a local LGBTIQ organization, was overwhelmed with demand when the humanitarian sector became overly reliant on it to provide humanitarian support, effectively pulling Helem away from its usual civil and political advocacy mandate.

**The takeaways:**

- The establishment of the Queer Coordination Platform demonstrates how international actors can use their influence and privileged positions to create space and opportunities for LGBTIQ organizations in hostile settings. In this case, it has significantly contributed to creating opportunities for movement organizing, access to funding, and highlighting the humanitarian priorities of LGBTIQ communities.
- While LGBTIQ actors should be at the forefront of initiatives that aim to meet their needs, an overreliance on these organizations without adequate support or acknowledgment of the challenges of the local context can result in fatigue and frustration. Humanitarian organizations must learn how best to operate alongside LGBTIQ groups in ways that harmonize the strengths and capacities of both.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN PRACTITIONERS

### VISION

- 1. Nurture political will at the country level.** International humanitarian organizations are complex, and the contexts in which they work are diverse. As such, there will always be friction in embedding a top-down, systematized approach to LGBTIQ inclusion across an organization. These institutional challenges, however, should not impede momentum and action in contexts where staff are pushing for more inclusive interventions. Investing in teams that are ready to implement LGBTIQ-sensitive responses results in better outcomes for vulnerable populations and generates key lessons for future programming, as highlighted in the Colombia case study. Country-based actions may build confidence across the organization that LGBTIQ-inclusive approaches are achievable.

- 2. Change must be documented and institutionalized through organizational policies, practices, investments, and learning initiatives.** Individual champions often drive LGBTIQ inclusion within humanitarian organizations, and most will be shouldering these advocacy roles on top of their existing responsibilities. However, no matter how competent and passionate, individuals cannot drive sustainable and transformative change alone. These efforts require institutionalized investment and support. One finding emerging from this research is that dedicating funding and staff to work on LGBTIQ inclusion is critical for ensuring LGBTIQ populations are appropriately considered in humanitarian action.
- 3. Organizations should pursue formal partnerships with LGBTIQ organizations whenever possible.** Local and national LGBTIQ organizations and advocates will always be best placed to determine the needs and priorities of their communities as part of crisis response. Sustained consultative and remunerative partnerships will result in the best outcomes for LGBTIQ populations. There are, of course, contexts in which formal partnerships may be difficult to establish—whether due to unsafe or hostile environments that force LGBTIQ organizations underground, the inability of LGBTIQ organizations to legally register, or lack of sufficient financial or administrative capacity to absorb international funding. Other options may be considered in these circumstances, such as including LGBTIQ organizations in broader localization efforts, inviting representatives to join formal or informal working groups, or using trusted intermediary local or regional organizations or individual consultants to reach hidden populations. The lack of visible LGBTIQ organizing does not mean that LGBTIQ people and communities do not exist.

## ENGAGEMENT

- 4. Place trust, dignity, and respect at the heart of all partnerships and engagements with local LGBTIQ communities.** To ensure that the humanitarian sector does not reinforce or generate new forms of discrimination and harm, humanitarian actors must approach relationship-building with LGBTIQ organizations with sensitivity and commitment to safety, security, and confidentiality that reflects local knowledge. LGBTIQ organizations are best placed to determine the risks, priorities, strategies for ensuring safety, and means of reaching their communities. By necessity, many LGBTIQ organizations operate covertly and communicate and distribute goods and services through informal networks, which can look very different from the more structured and documented operations of other organizations. Humanitarian actors must be flexible and adaptable, ensuring that they respect how LGBTIQ organizations and networks operate to remain safe and effective, rather than deciding unilaterally how risks should be mitigated. Working with LGBTIQ organizations and networks can and should be as much of a learning process for the humanitarian sector as it is an opportunity to strengthen small organizations.
- 5. Recognize diversity within LGBTIQ populations and find a balance between targeted LGBTIQ programming and sensitizing mainstream programming to meet LGBTIQ needs.** The LGBTIQ umbrella captures a broad array of identities and experiences that may inhibit or enhance visibility, access to services, and trust in institutions. The needs, preferences, and capabilities of individuals will be informed by the intersecting components of their identities. For example, the best ways to reach lesbian women will be different for gay men. The needs of a transgender person will differ from those of a cisgender person. Meeting the needs of an intersex person, often completely overlooked, may require an entirely different set of approaches. Similarly, an individual’s characteristics as a migrant, a sex

worker, a parent, as living with HIV or a chronic illness, or a person with a disability—or any combination of these identities—will shape their experience of the world and the assistance they may require. Not all LGBTIQ organizations will reach—or should have to reach—all LGBTIQ people in need. Ensuring that mainstream assistance is safe and accessible for people regardless of their SOGIESC is critical to meeting humanitarian principles. Additionally, relying solely on LGBTIQ organizations to meet the humanitarian needs of their communities risks fatiguing these organizations, particularly if their work is not adequately funded, as highlighted in our case study on Lebanon. Taking vulnerable LGBTIQ people out of the “too hard” basket requires shouldering responsibility for inclusive responsiveness alongside LGBTIQ organizations.

- 6. Ensure that training on LGBTIQ inclusion focuses on capacity-building that is tied to tangible programmatic and organizational change and, where possible, engages LGBTIQ organizations as facilitators.** General awareness-raising training can be a good way to begin conversations, but if learning objectives and activities are not oriented toward identifying practical improvements to intervention design, implementation, and evaluation, the training is unlikely to result in meaningful outcomes. In the country or crisis context, engaging LGBTIQ organizations to advise on training content and, if they have the skills, to facilitate training, will ensure that the training is relevant and informed by LGBTIQ people’s lived realities—with the bonus of building stronger relationships and trust between humanitarian organizations and local LGBTIQ organizations. Inclusivity training will feel tokenistic if the organization does not dedicate sufficient time and resources or lacks clear buy-in and participation from senior leadership.

## DESIGN

- 7. LGBTIQ needs and experiences should be an automatic consideration within the needs assessments and context analyses that inform humanitarian interventions.** Research and analysis, sometimes ad hoc and sometimes institutionally backed (such as the *Humanitarian Needs Overviews* and *Humanitarian Response Plans* produced by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), form the backbone of actions and resource distribution within humanitarian activities. While these types of analyses have increasingly considered different vulnerabilities faced by groups due to specific individual characteristics (such as gender, age, and disability), LGBTIQ people are rarely meaningfully considered. This is concerning, given that the places where the most significant amount of humanitarian aid is channeled are also largely contexts where LGBTIQ people face acute forms of legal and cultural discrimination, violence, and exclusion. Humanitarian actors should comprehensively research the contextual factors that may result in greater vulnerabilities for LGBTIQ populations in crisis settings—not simply as a tick-box exercise, but in genuine partnership with local expertise as much as possible.
- 8. Humanitarian actors should develop or sponsor the development of guidelines and toolkits for LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian activities in consultation with LGBTIQ specialists and communities.** Implementing systematized approaches to LGBTIQ inclusion across a complex array of legal and cultural contexts presents obvious challenges for humanitarian organizations. Nevertheless, as stated previously, a lack of readiness in some contexts should not impede momentum and energy in other settings. Ad hoc products could be specific to a country or region, address a particular issue or sector (such as water, sanitation, and hygiene or cash provision), or provide guidance to specific audiences

(such as medical service providers or emergency shelter intake staff). These products should be developed in collaboration with relevant LGBTIQ experts and in consultation with local LGBTIQ communities. While having an immediate practical benefit in the contexts in which they are intended to be used, the application of guidelines and toolkits in one setting may also inspire adaptation and testing in other settings, which can help reinforce an institutional vision for LGBTIQ inclusion without imposing a top-down mandate. When transferring knowledge and frameworks that have been used in other settings, practitioners need to ensure that there is an adequate process of re-contextualization in consultation with local communities—what was successful in one context cannot be assumed to be entirely transferrable to another setting.

- 9. Be comfortable operating with “imperfect” data sets when it comes to assisting LGBTIQ populations.** Population data sets are, of course, integral to designing, implementing, and evaluating humanitarian activities. Given that LGBTIQ people may conceal their identities or defy the rigid binary categories of identification within standardized collection tools, collecting precise data concerning LGBTIQ populations presents a range of challenges. Developing methods to collect and disaggregate data based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics is important and will assist in developing more targeted programming. Deciding not to work directly with LGBTIQ populations simply because data are lacking reinforces invisibility and vulnerability. Fine-tuning and experimenting with LGBTIQ-sensitive data collection approaches that are safe and secure should be pursued where possible, but incomplete data should not be a barrier to action.

## ENVIRONMENT

- 10. Humanitarian organizations should ensure that internal human resources policies and training directly address non-discrimination based on SOGIESC.** This may seem simple, but it is an essential component of demonstrating organizational commitment to the inclusion of LGBTIQ people. More basic approaches will involve an explicit non-discrimination policy and references to LGBTIQ inclusion within core administrative documents and organizational policies, while transformative approaches will embed LGBTIQ sensitivity as a throughline with onboarding training—as is common, for example, for reinforcing commitment to inclusion of women and girls.
- 11. SOGIESC sensitivity should be standardized within community-facing policies such as protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH) and protection policies.** LGBTIQ people face unique vulnerabilities to violence and other forms of abuse, as well as distinct challenges in reporting such incidents. The humanitarian sector’s policies and processes must be equipped to address and mitigate incidents that involve LGBTIQ people. These should be developed in consultation with LGBTIQ experts at the country level, considering specific contextual barriers and, where feasible, seeking to make linkages and identify referral pathways with LGBTIQ organizations.
- 12. Internal staff initiatives to increase attention to LGBTIQ issues should be nurtured.** This can take many forms—such as employee resource groups, acknowledging global days of importance to LGBTIQ communities, or establishing informal connections with local LGBTIQ community groups. Often, internal initiatives can develop into meaningful conversations and opportunities within programming. These initiatives should have institutional approval where appropriate, but the extent to which senior management or leadership should be involved will depend upon the specific initiative. In some cases, stringent oversight may

discourage participation, such as in an Employee Resource Group. In other circumstances, it can powerfully signal an organizational commitment to inclusivity, such as the acknowledgment of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex-phobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT, 17 May), International Transgender Day of Visibility (31 March), International Human Rights Day (10 December), or Pride months.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

- 1. Proactively enter into open conversations with implementing partners about LGBTIQ inclusion.** Inaction on LGBTIQ inclusion among humanitarian organizations can sometimes be attributed to a cyclical and self-perpetuating dynamic whereby fund recipients say they are unable to implement agendas that are not explicitly endorsed by donors, and where donors say that implementing partners are not requesting funds for LGBTIQ inclusion activities. Acknowledging the donor-recipient power dynamic, we urge donors to enter practical and transparent conversations with implementing partners that are not characterized as additional demands but, instead, are framed as questions about what additional funding and support would be required to make progress on LGBTIQ inclusion at that level. That being said, humanitarian agencies should begin their work on LGBTIQ inclusion regardless of whether they secure dedicated funds.
- 2. Fund LGBTIQ inclusion to allow meaningful change to happen.** Frustrations build between donors and primary fund recipients when new inclusion activities feel vague or appear to be tacked onto the end of a long list of expectations—without being reflected in the funding received. Committing to LGBTIQ inclusion should include funding for dedicated staff positions and consultants, undertaking programmatic reviews to identify gaps and opportunities, commissioning needs assessments or developing guidelines and training for humanitarian implementers, strengthening the capacity of national or local LGBTIQ organizations, and financing new activities that target LGBTIQ populations. For these to become realities, dedicated funding streams need to be available.
- 3. Be comfortable with the reality that outcomes for LGBTIQ inclusion can be tricky to measure.** Data collection for LGBTIQ populations is inherently challenging, and tangible impact can be difficult for humanitarian implementers to demonstrate. Improving and encouraging LGBTIQ-sensitive data collection is important, but it should not be the key decisive factor in allocation decisions. Transformative change takes time, and progress may not be reflected in data.
- 4. Be flexible when it comes to expectations regarding financial administration and reporting, and aware of the registration difficulties that LGBTIQ organizations may face.** Many LGBTIQ organizations do not operate in the same ways that other NGOs do, as many face issues with resourcing, registration, and a need to conduct work covertly through informal networks. Due to safety, security, or legal reasons, many do not or cannot officially register. Nevertheless, LGBTIQ networks and advocates often provide wide-ranging support to their respective communities. Donors and implementing partners should find ways to engage smaller LGBTIQ organizations in ways that respect how they operate and that account for varying administrative and reporting capacity—with the burden being shouldered by primary fund recipients (such as UN agencies or INGOs) rather than by community-level organizations.

**5. Funding and strategies should be diversified to ensure that different subpopulations under the LGBTIQ umbrella are included in interventions.** Diverse-SOGIESC populations are by no means homogenous, and multiple other identities may intersect with an individual's SOGIESC, thereby altering the challenges or barriers they may face in accessing humanitarian assistance. This diversity should be top-of-mind when allocation and strategy decisions are being made.





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