

# **Leaving No One Behind Means Starting at the Back of the Line: LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Settings**

**Report on the Global Consultation on  
LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Action**

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is inspired by a statement made by Tuisina Ymania Brown, co-secretary general of ILGA World, at the opening event of the Human Rights Forum 2021. The original quote was, "If we are to truly leave no one behind, do not focus on the front and start from the front! Go to the back of the queue. Start from there! Reach those people first, especially Global South people where you will find my LGBTIQ people. We need help the most. That's how you leave no one behind." UNCity Copenhagen, "The Opening of the Human Rights Forum 2021," 16 August 2021, posted 30 August 2021, YouTube, 1:56:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uplgJr4Ryk>.



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## **Outright International works together for better LGBTIQ lives.**

Outright is dedicated to working with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, with staff in over a dozen countries, Outright works with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, governments, humanitarian and development institutions, and civil society partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

[www.outrightinternational.org](http://www.outrightinternational.org)  
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Outright International  
216 East 45th Street, 17th Floor New York, NY 10017 USA  
+1 212 430 6054

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# Acknowledgments

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# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

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As the world contends with a growing number of overlapping, complex, and urgent crises, the humanitarian aid system is under increasing pressure to become more efficient, effective, and accountable to *all* affected populations. Yet, to date, the needs and priorities of crisis-affected LGBTIQ communities are generally overlooked and left behind. This is unacceptable.

## OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

From September 11 to 13, 2024, Outright International, in partnership with Deutsche Bank, hosted a groundbreaking Global Consultation on LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Action in New York City, NY. The Consultation united 73 participants from over 35 countries, including representatives from LGBTIQ civil society organizations, international humanitarian agencies, UN bodies, governmental and corporate donors, and researchers. The Consultation's core objectives were to 1) amplify the needs, experiences, capacities, and preferences of LGBTIQ crisis-affected people; 2) elevate critical challenges and promising efforts to strengthen LGBTIQ inclusion; and 3) create a draft Advocacy Roadmap for strengthening LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action. Over the two-day meeting, participants led panels and facilitated group discussions on the current state of LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action. Morning plenaries were followed by afternoon multi-sectoral working groups, which were tasked with identifying the key barriers and potential solutions to achieving meaningful inclusion of LGBTIQ people in humanitarian action. These discussions resulted in a set of key advocacy goals and actions.

## CRITICAL THEMES

The following five key themes emerged from the presentations and discussions:

- 1. Reframing the Context: Understanding Humanitarian Crises as Part of a Continuum of Marginalization.** LGBTIQ communities often face a constant state of marginalization, which is exacerbated during crises. Humanitarian actors must therefore account for pre-crisis social norms that lead to discrimination and exclusion, recognizing that LGBTIQ people may already be facing different forms of crisis when humanitarian emergencies occur.
- 2. The Meaning of Equitable Partnership.** During humanitarian crises, LGBTIQ organizations often pivot from their core mandates to become first responders in their communities, generally because no one else will. Humanitarian actors should not expect LGBTIQ organizations to shoulder this burden alone. Instead humanitarian actors should create equitable partnerships through which safe, trusted assistance can be provided.

3. **Recognizing Diversity Within LGBTIQ Communities.** Individuals across the LGBTIQ spectrum face distinct and intersecting needs and challenges. Inclusive humanitarian action must account for the differing forms of vulnerability, paying particular attention to hyper-vulnerable groups such as transgender, gender-nonconforming, nonbinary, and intersex people.
4. **Localization: Unfulfilled Promises.** Despite humanitarian sector commitments to shift power, resources, and decision-making to crisis-affected local actors and communities, progress has been slow. Humanitarian actors must do better to ensure that local organizations, including those serving LGBTIQ communities, are given increased resources and agency to meet the needs of their constituents.
5. **Private Sector: Challenges and Opportunities.** The private sector has been increasingly active in humanitarian response and represents an important avenue for advancing LGBTIQ inclusion. Private sector actors must be “at the table” where strategies and resource allocations are being determined to ensure that inclusion principles are being upheld.

## BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES TO LGBTIQ INCLUSION IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Consultation participants defined six main barriers that still hinder meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian contexts:

- **Barrier 1: Presence of Dominant LGBTIQ-Excluding Norms, Values, and Actors in the Humanitarian Sector.** Participants highlighted discriminatory attitudes and prejudice from within the humanitarian system. Cisheteronormative and patriarchal values and assumptions are often incorporated in programming, leading LGBTIQ communities to distrust the very system meant to protect them.
- **Barrier 2: Impact of the Rise of the Anti-gender Movement and Criminalization of LGBTIQ People and Identities on Humanitarian Programming.** LGBTIQ-criminalizing and hostile contexts adversely impact LGBTIQ communities, limit the ability of LGBTIQ organizations and activists to provide needed humanitarian assistance by restricting formal registration, and prevent humanitarian actors from engaging with LGBTIQ populations out of fear of doing harm. This is further exacerbated by the rise of anti-rights, anti-gender movements across the world.
- **Barrier 3: Institutional Donor Funds Are Inaccessible to National LGBTIQ Organizations.** Strict eligibility requirements and bureaucratic barriers limit the ability of LGBTIQ organizations to engage with the humanitarian system. This is further intensified by a lack of LGBTIQ voices within national humanitarian coordination systems where priorities and funding allocations are set.
- **Barrier 4: Competition for Programmatic and Strategic Attention and Resources.** Participants noted that the limited funding available to LGBTIQ and other local organizations means that marginalized groups have to compete against each other to access humanitarian funds instead of working together. This issue is further exacerbated by the political nature of inclusion in humanitarian settings.



- **Barrier 5: Lack of Political Will and Consistent Follow-Through on Rights-Based Approaches.** Participants across sectors expressed how engaging with LGBTIQ communities is still perceived as a political risk. In most cases, the rights-based approach of LGBTIQ organizations differs from the humanitarian sector's needs-based mandate, creating a form of value dissonance.
- **Barrier 6: Disconnect Between Humanitarian Agency Policies and Practice.** Participants underlined the disconnect between headquarters policies and on-the-ground practice. Implementation challenges stem from frequent staff turnover, lack of local context understanding, and inadequate cultural or linguistic competence among expatriate staff. While some crisis-based staff may develop inclusive practices that go beyond organizational mandates, these good practices often lack institutional support and documentation, preventing them from being sustained or scaled across the organization.

## THE DATA BURDEN: A CROSSCUTTING CHALLENGE

While data collection is crucial for humanitarian response, it can endanger LGBTIQ populations if not handled properly with attention to privacy and security. The emphasis on requiring data to justify assistance creates additional burdens on LGBTIQ communities. Current data collection methods often fail to capture the complexity of LGBTIQ identities and experiences, highlighting the need for more participatory approaches developed in partnership with LGBTIQ communities.

## CONCLUSION

The consultation highlighted that meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action requires systematic change, sustained commitment, and collaborative effort from all stakeholders. While the challenges are significant, particularly in hostile contexts, there are clear opportunities for progress through strategic partnerships, improved funding mechanisms, and institutional transformation. Success depends on maintaining the delicate balance between immediate crisis response and long-term systemic change while ensuring LGBTIQ communities are genuine partners in humanitarian action rather than simply beneficiaries. The advocacy burden cannot solely rest on their shoulders. It is time for all in the humanitarian and LGBTIQ human rights sectors to push collaboratively for durable and meaningful change. The full report provides an Advocacy Roadmap that identifies short-, medium-, and long-term actions to strengthen inclusion.

# Introduction

# Introduction

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As the world contends with a growing number of overlapping, complex, and urgent crises, the humanitarian aid system is under increasing pressure to become more efficient, effective, and accountable to *all* affected populations. Yet, to date, the needs and priorities of crisis-affected LGBTIQ communities are generally overlooked and left behind. This is unacceptable. The humanitarian system must fulfill its commitments to centering crisis-affected people in humanitarian action,<sup>2</sup> protecting all people who are at risk or affected by humanitarian conditions, including LGBTIQ people, by accounting for their specific vulnerabilities,<sup>3</sup> and upholding their rights without discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

From September 11 to 13, 2024, Outright International, in partnership with Deutsche Bank, convened a Global Consultation on LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Action in New York City, NY. The Consultation, the first in potentially a series of meetings, brought together 73 participants from more than 35 countries representing national LGBTIQ civil society organizations, international non-governmental humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies, government and corporate donor representatives, and researchers. The Consultation's goal was to further develop strategic advocacy approaches to ensure that LGBTIQ people's needs and priorities are considered in crisis prevention, response, and recovery regardless of the location or nature of the crisis.

Specifically, the Consultation sought to:

- *Amplify the needs, experiences, capacities, and preferences of LGBTIQ crisis-affected people in emergency contexts, as well as emerging recommendations for improved inclusive humanitarian action.*
- *Elevate critical challenges and promising efforts to strengthen LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action.*
- *Create a draft Advocacy Roadmap for strengthening LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action.*

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<sup>2</sup> Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance, Groupe URD, and Sphere Association, "The CHS: Nine Commitments to People Affected by Crises," 2024, <https://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>.

<sup>3</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals, "The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action: Statement by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals," 17 Dec 2013, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/The%20Centrality%20of%20Protection%20in%20Humanitarian%20Action%20%28English%29.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Sphere Association, *Sphere Handbook: The Humanitarian Charter*, 2018, <https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/sphere/#ch003>.



The Consultation sought to combine the lived experiences of LGBTIQ individuals and organizations with the perspectives of international humanitarian non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, donors, and other actors engaging in LGBTIQ inclusion in different crisis contexts to foster dialogue across disciplines, levels, and regions. Over the two-day meeting, participants led panels and facilitated group discussions on the current state of LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action. Themes included highlighting key challenges and positive practices as well as discussions on the experiences of LGBTIQ communities and organizations when engaging in humanitarian inclusion in a variety of crisis contexts. Sessions also delved into the prospects of greater localization and simplified financing, and the role that the private sector can play to strengthen LGBTIQ inclusion.



Morning plenaries were followed by afternoon working groups where participants joined one of six multi-sectoral groups. Each type of stakeholder was represented in each group. Together, they were tasked with first identifying the key barriers and challenges to meaningful inclusion of LGBTIQ people in humanitarian action, and then proposing potential short-, medium-, and long-term solutions to overcome the identified barriers. This group work is summarized in the Advocacy Roadmap section at the end of the report.

## BACKGROUND TO THE CONSULTATION

LGBTIQ people often have specific and extensive needs during humanitarian crises, which are connected to their experiences of discrimination and violence in everyday life in non-crisis periods. Global and setting-specific research has also shown that humanitarian systems have

largely failed to understand the needs, preferences, or capacities of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people. They also rarely integrate them throughout all phases of the humanitarian program cycle. Research to date suggests that:<sup>5</sup>

- Pre-emergency marginalization in families, communities, institutions, public services, laws, and other aspects of life means that LGBTIQ people often lack opportunities to build resilience in their lives. As a result, they are already disadvantaged when a crisis happens.
- Marginalization during response, in the form of direct and indirect discrimination, may lead to the exclusion of LGBTIQ individuals from protection and aid distribution. It can also lead LGBTIQ people to “self-exclude” due to expectations of humiliation and discrimination.
- Marginalization during recovery – including, but not limited to, determining safe, voluntary, and dignified durable solutions to displacement – can reinforce pre-emergency marginalization and reduce opportunities to rebuild lives.

Given the many challenges facing LGBTIQ communities, as well as the system itself, fostering LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian settings leads to several key questions. Does pushing for meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion mean that advocacy should be aimed at working toward reforms within the existing, flawed system, or should efforts focus on challenging the structure itself, which has so far resisted meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion in a variety of contexts? What is the vision of an inclusive humanitarian system, and how can all stakeholders contribute to making that vision a reality? Another important topic that emerged from these discussions is how inclusion is defined. While having a “seat at the table” where humanitarian priorities are being determined is needed, it is insufficient unless it actually translates into decision-making power and resource allocation.

## DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE AND REFERENCE POINTS

Bringing together participants representing diverse backgrounds and settings, varying levels of experience with the humanitarian sector, and lived experience with discrimination and exclusion based on SOGIESC<sup>6</sup> carries several particular challenges. For example, those representing national or community-based LGBTIQ organizations typically use rights-based language and approaches to advocacy, having come from communities that likely have experienced years of neglect and exclusion from the very structures that are meant to provide lifesaving assistance, humanitarian or otherwise. Those from the humanitarian sector view their work within the context of well-established humanitarian principles and needs-based mandates framed by an overarching humanitarian coordination system with fixed roles and objectives.

The system’s complex array of operational structures, power centers, and affiliated agencies can be confusing and frustrating to understand for someone unfamiliar with it – just as the points of reference and language used by LGBTIQ activists may be unclear or confusing or overly critical to those humanitarians who have not had experience in LGBTIQ advocacy.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Outright International and Edge Effect, “They Know What We Don’t”: Meaningful Inclusion of LGBTIQ People in Humanitarian Action, June 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/they-know-what-we-dont-meaningful-inclusion-lgbtqi-people>; Ilaria Michelis, “Later is a Cis-Hetero Patriarchal Time Zone: Narratives of Resistance to LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Amongst Humanitarian Practitioners,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead072>; Edge Effect, *The Only Way is Up: Monitoring and Encouraging Diverse SOGIESC Inclusion in the Humanitarian and DRR Sectors*, March 2021, [https://www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TheOnlyWaysUp\\_Web.pdf](https://www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TheOnlyWaysUp_Web.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> SOGIESC is an acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

Nevertheless, this Consultation underscored the value of trying to close the gap in language and understanding. The positive outcomes also suggest that such convenings should occur more often.

## THE ADVOCACY IMPERATIVE

The Consultation's principal theme focused on the need for the humanitarian system to fulfill its commitments to centering crisis-affected people in humanitarian action, and to protecting all people who are at risk or affected by humanitarian conditions.<sup>7</sup> This includes accounting for their specific vulnerabilities and upholding their rights, thus creating interlocking obligations to provide high-quality, accountable programming for LGBTIQ populations.<sup>8</sup>

Consultation participants agreed that advocacy aimed at humanitarian agencies and donors is essential, emphasizing that humanitarian agencies must take a two-pronged approach of simultaneously implementing 1) dedicated programming responsive to the experiences, needs, social positioning, preferences, and capacities of LGBTIQ people; and 2) LGBTIQ mainstreaming in all sectors of humanitarian programming. Donors, too, must both hold their implementing partners accountable for inclusive practices and lead by example by instituting systems, policies, and practices that explicitly reflect LGBTIQ people in their humanitarian work and strategic funding priorities.



To ensure the safe and meaningful inclusion of LGBTIQ people in humanitarian response, all international actors involved in it must forge partnerships with and facilitate access of LGBTIQ activists and organizations to the humanitarian system. For those with little humanitarian system experience, this includes guiding them in understanding the entry points and mechanisms for accessing humanitarian assistance and funding (if LGBTIQ organizations wish to do so) and leveraging their resources and knowledge to break down barriers that exclude LGBTIQ organizations. It also means creating and protecting space for them within the coordination architecture, and working with them on equal footing to develop localized advocacy strategies to reform current practices that often overlook the specific needs and priorities of LGBTIQ communities.

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<sup>7</sup> CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, and Sphere Association, "The CHS: Nine Commitments to People Affected by Crises." <https://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

<sup>8</sup> IASC, "The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action," Sphere Association, *Sphere Handbook: The Humanitarian Charter*. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/The%20Centrality%20of%20Protection%20in%20Humanitarian%20Action%20%28English%29.pdf>

## CRITICAL THEMES EMERGING FROM THE CONSULTATION

Over the course of the two days, five key themes emerged from the discussions. Taken together, they highlight areas in need of further action to advance meaningful inclusion of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people.

### Critical Themes Emerging from the Consultation

- ***Reframing the Context: Understanding Humanitarian Crises as Part of a Continuum of Marginalization***
- ***The Meaning of Equitable Partnership***
- ***Recognizing Diversity Within LGBTIQ Communities***
- ***Localization: Unfulfilled Promises***
- ***Private Sector: Challenges and Opportunities***

#### Reframing the Context: Understanding Humanitarian Crises as Part of a Continuum of Marginalization

LGBTIQ communities often face a constant state of marginalization through criminalization, discrimination and exclusion, and social prejudice as a result of deeply entrenched political, economic, and social inequalities. Humanitarian emergencies further exacerbate their vulnerabilities, thereby fueling long-term and embedded crises. Addressing the needs of LGBTIQ individuals in humanitarian contexts must account for this continuum of marginalization, spanning pre-crisis realities through post-emergency recovery.

Participants and panelists urged a reexamining of terms such as disaster and crisis, as defined by the humanitarian system. Understanding the vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ communities in humanitarian settings demands a recognition that beyond *force majeure* events, other forms of complex disruptions — such as the rise of autocratic regimes, shrinking political spaces, crackdowns on LGBTIQ communities, or other constructed moral panics and fear-mongering against LGBTIQ people — can exacerbate the impact of crises.

#### The Meaning of Equitable Partnership

Across crisis contexts, representatives from LGBTIQ organizations noted that they are almost always the first to respond to their communities' needs when conflicts or disasters hit. First, this is because they are present and embedded within their communities and are trusted by local LGBTIQ people. They are therefore best placed to bring their needs and priorities to the forefront of humanitarian discussions and to collaborate as partners to humanitarian actors who seek to assist crisis-affected LGBTIQ people.

Second, as several participants emphasized, many LGBTIQ organizations engage in humanitarian action and support LGBTIQ communities because no one else will. It is about survival. As the leader of an LGBTIQ organization from Kenya noted, "I wasn't born to do this work [humanitarian action]. I shouldn't be doing this work. There are systems and structures that are meant to do this, but there are gaps. They are failing our communities. So we step in." Yet, stepping in often means pivoting away from original organizational missions. Demanding

more support from the humanitarian sector also carries risks. As a gay activist from Lebanon observed, “You can’t poke the bear about human rights accountability if the bear can take away humanitarian funding when or if poked.”

**“I wasn’t born to do this work [humanitarian action]. I shouldn’t be doing this work. There are systems and structures that are meant to do this, but there are gaps. They are failing our communities. So we step in.”**

— LEADER OF AN LGBTIQ ORGANIZATION IN KENYA

Yet, humanitarian inclusion of LGBTIQ communities should not result in LGBTIQ organizations shouldering the work alone or assuming risk by themselves. When crises hit, LGBTIQ organizations can leverage their community resources; however, as highlighted by Consultation participants, especially coming from contexts hostile to LGBTIQ people, these fought-for safe spaces and services for LGBTIQ communities are neither a given nor secure or stable. Putting too much of the risk and burden on national partners providing services to vulnerable communities of any sort may put excessive pressure on these organizations to meet unrealistic requirements and targets, resulting in damaged trust with the communities they are serving and causing staff burnout. Thus, humanitarian actors should not expect LGBTIQ communities to provide critical support as a sustainable resource without sharing the risk and burden, supporting and partnering with them, and providing adequate funding and services for their projects in a manner that respects their role and expertise in their communities.

In addition, LGBTIQ organizations operating in humanitarian settings should not become or be expected to be the automatic service point of every LGBTIQ person seeking assistance. Rather than discharging their responsibility through partnerships or using LGBTIQ organizations’ knowledge without remuneration, humanitarian actors should seek to create and engage in strategic, equitable partnerships. Humanitarian actors need to include local voices, especially in LGBTIQ-criminalizing or otherwise complex and difficult contexts. They also should ensure that LGBTIQ communities are treated respectfully once they are at the table.

Partnerships presented during the Consultation panels demonstrated how embracing these principles benefits both parties in a myriad of ways. For instance, in Colombia, a partnership between Mercy Corps and Caribe Afirmativo emphasized the importance of building a relationship rooted in solidarity, trust, and belief in LGBTIQ organizations’ mission and vision. The partnership demonstrated the importance of mutually beneficial relationships whereby both parties supported and promoted each other and helped the other improve, resulting in transformational internal changes within both organizations.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, in Ukraine, a partnership between ActionAid and a local organization, Sphere, based in Kharkiv, underscored the need for humanitarian organizations to understand the context and approach LGBTIQ organizations with openness.<sup>10</sup> Sphere emphasized how crucial it was that ActionAid supported them in the administrative process to meet compliance requirements. “For an organization in crisis on the frontline, supporting us to meet those due

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<sup>9</sup> For a full description of this partnership, see: Outright and Edge Effect, “They Know What We Don’t,” pp 45–51.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



diligence processes can make the partnership possible,” the Sphere representative shared. The partnership also demonstrated the importance of transparency and honesty about needs and possibilities. When it comes to LGBTIQ inclusion, it is all about “moving between neutrality and solidarity, going beyond pure humanitarian aspects,” stated a participant. “It is about developing compassion and humanizing a population that has too often been othered or marginalized by society.”

### **Recognizing Diversity Within LGBTIQ Communities**

Meaningful inclusion also requires an ability to understand and address the intersectional and distinct needs of people across the LGBTIQ spectrum. Humanitarian practitioners need to account for different forms of intersecting vulnerabilities in LGBTIQ communities and fight against continuing or exacerbating the marginalization of already hyper-vulnerable groups.



Participants identifying as transgender, gender-nonconforming, nonbinary, or intersex highlighted specific issues related to their communities in humanitarian settings, stressing the issue of (in)visibility. For example, shelters or camps segregated by cisgender binary identities make access difficult for gender-diverse and transgender people and may expose them to heightened risks of violence. Assistance is often denied to transgender, gender-nonconforming, or nonbinary people because their gender identity or expression does not match their legal identification documents. “There is no ‘box to tick’ for them,” explained one transgender participant. Another LGBTIQ representative from Colombia described their work in supporting transgender women refugees to change their legal identification documents as a small change with substantial positive impact.

The needs of intersex communities are also invisibilized in crisis settings with activists stressing widespread ignorance, lack of knowledge, and misinformation on intersex realities, even in LGBTIQ spaces. This results in harms that may include, for example, disruptions in access to essential medications or placing intersex refugees or internally displaced persons in shelters based on binary sex markers, which may put them at higher risks of experiencing mental, physical, and sexual violence or other forms of abuse.<sup>11</sup> This lack of knowledge puts pressure on intersex organizations to provide quantitative data to verify the existence and needs of intersex

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<sup>11</sup> Jana Hugo and Luan Pertl, *Intersex Refugees & Asylum Seekers Toolkit*, Oii Europe, March 2024, <https://www.oiiurope.org/new-resource-oii-europe-refugees-asylum-seeker-toolkit>.

people, with limited or no funding to support their communities. “This is not a sustainable solution,” emphasized a participant who is intersex.

### Localization: Unfulfilled Promises

Inclusion of marginalized populations in humanitarian action is deeply intertwined with the localization agenda. This agenda refers to shifting power, resources, and decision-making to local actors and communities directly affected by crises, ensuring they lead and shape the response based on their needs and priorities. Improving localization efforts has been a core humanitarian commitment for years, but progress has been very slow.<sup>12</sup> Consultation participants observed that current commitments to localization can end up simply transferring risk to LGBTIQ organizations to the detriment of local communities and actors whom the efforts are meant to protect. As a participant from a global humanitarian research and policy organization stated, “What [the humanitarian sector] is doing is not risk mitigation, it’s risk dumping.” Additionally, since international actors and donors define and set localization standards, localization has become a means to further extend international actors’ reach and power in specific contexts, often by setting up local satellite organizations to increase funding eligibility, rather than as a tool to support local networks.

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**“What [the humanitarian sector] is doing is not risk mitigation, it’s risk dumping.”**

— RESEARCHER FROM A GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN POLICY AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

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From the outset, localization has been stalled by a system that is resistant to change, reluctant to give up power, and afflicted by administrative hurdles and cost-related challenges. Consultation panelists representing LGBTIQ organizations observed that even attempts at localization end up reproducing harmful power dynamics, with interventions mirroring conservative and patriarchal public and private divides when it comes to identities, invisibilizing LGBTIQ families, and perpetuating problematic narratives about sexual and gender diversity. Localization commitments can therefore result in more harm to local communities when ill-fitted, designed as a tick-box, or executed without adequate understanding of pre-existing norms that affect LGBTIQ lives.

### Private Sector: Challenges and Opportunities

The private sector has been increasingly active in humanitarian response and represents an important avenue for advancing LGBTIQ inclusion. However, participants from the private sector emphasized the current mismatch between intention to include and actual implementation, with the latter often falling short because the right people were not at the development table or in the room creating solutions. Rigorous inclusive design principles and an understanding of where aid goes is essential to preventing LGBTIQ people from falling through the gaps. A participant explained how implementation also sometimes stumbles due to funds falling outside tracking systems and a lack of coordination among private sector actors.

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<sup>12</sup> Victoria Metcalfe-Hough, Wendy Fenton, and Farah Mannji, *The Grand Bargain in 2022: An Independent Review*, The Humanitarian Policy Group, June 2023, [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2023-08/HPG\\_report-Grand\\_Bargain\\_2023\\_master\\_rev.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2023-08/HPG_report-Grand_Bargain_2023_master_rev.pdf); Rana B. Khoury and Emily K.M. Scott, “Localization Doesn’t Shift Power. It Deepens International Dominance,” *New Humanitarian*, 23 July 2024, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2024/07/23/localisation-doesnt-shift-power-it-deepens-international-dominance>.



The leader of a regional LGBTIQ rights organization in the Caribbean noted that working with the private sector underlined the difficulties faced by informal organizations that may be legally prohibited from registering in LGBTIQ-criminalizing countries to comply with all the processes and rules around anti-laundering and anti-bribery. “In an emergency, the priority is response, not compliance tick boxes,” they expressed. Private sector actors engaging with informal networks should strive to support them through training on how to fit the criteria — or revise the criteria to be more attainable. Engaging with local organizations also demands that they accept risk-sharing. As a participant from UN OCHA noted, “There needs to be a balance between minimum quality and assurances and simplified procedures” to allow LGBTIQ local organizations and communities to be part of the conversations. In this regard, proactive engagement with local organizations and communities is key to putting in place systems prior to an emergency so when the crisis hits, first responders can focus on action rather than on administrative requirements.

**“There needs to be a balance between minimum quality and assurances and simplified procedures.”**

— HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS OFFICER FROM THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (UN OCHA)

## BARRIERS TO LGBTIQ INCLUSION IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS: RESULTS OF GROUP WORK

During the first day’s group work, Consultation participants identified a range of barriers and obstacles that still hinder, prevent, or stall meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian contexts. These were rolled up into six main categories. Cutting across many of these barriers was also the issue of data — how to safely collect and use data that accurately characterizes the needs and priorities of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people and monitors the effectiveness of interventions.

## Key Barriers to LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Settings

- **Barrier 1: Presence of Dominant LGBTIQ-Excluding Norms, Values, and Actors in the Humanitarian Sector**
- **Barrier 2: Impact of the Rise of the Anti-gender Movement and Criminalization of LGBTIQ People and Identities on Humanitarian Programming**
- **Barrier 3: Institutional Donor Funds Are Inaccessible to National LGBTIQ Organizations**
- **Barrier 4: Competition for Programmatic and Strategic Attention and Resources**
- **Barrier 5: Lack of Political Will and Consistent Follow-Through on Rights-Based Approaches**
- **Barrier 6: Disconnect Between Humanitarian Agency Policies and Practice**
- **The Data Burden: A Crosscutting Challenge**

### **Barrier 1: Presence of Dominant LGBTIQ-Excluding Norms, Values, and Actors in the Humanitarian Sector**

Participants highlighted that prejudice against LGBTIQ communities sometimes stems from biases and discriminatory attitudes from within the humanitarian system. Humanitarian representatives noted that internal anti-discrimination policies sometimes remain too passive to tackle the root causes of this prejudice, with anti-discrimination provisions only emphasized at global headquarters levels.

The humanitarian system is also rooted in dominant cisgender, heteronormative, and patriarchal values and assumptions, which are then sometimes incorporated into humanitarian responses. Prejudice regarding who can access humanitarian resources and services, as well as policies and programmatic criteria defined along heteronormative definitions of the family that ignore or overlook the difficulties of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming individuals, can be harmful to LGBTIQ communities. Participants underlined that these biases lead many LGBTIQ individuals to distrust a system that is meant to protect and support them. Humanitarian actors and organizations must engage in actively examining and deconstructing harmful myths about LGBTIQ people as well as systems and methodologies that reinforce invisibility and exclusion. Further, they must develop compassionate and humanizing approaches to LGBTIQ inclusion that become institutionalized, rather than driven by a few internal champions who may come and go.

### **Barrier 2: Impact of the Rise of the Anti-gender Movement and Criminalization of LGBTIQ People and Identities on Humanitarian Programming**

The socio-legal contexts in which humanitarian actors operate heavily influence their ability and willingness to engage with LGBTIQ communities. Hostile contexts force LGBTIQ

organizations and activists to work through informal networks, which makes them harder to reach. In addition to criminalizing consensual same-sex relations, national legislation may criminalize transgender and gender-diverse people (for example, through laws prohibiting “cross-dressing” or debauchery), prohibit the official registration of LGBTIQ organizations, or outlaw information about LGBTIQ people under the harmful guise of preventing the “promotion of homosexuality.” Participants noted that, often, humanitarian actors will not engage with LGBTIQ communities out of fear of doing harm or because the hostile context makes inclusive projects more complex to design and implement and may put other programming at risk. In some cases, humanitarian organizations may believe that they are barred from working with LGBTIQ populations due to criminalization laws. However, in most cases, anti-LGBTIQ laws criminalize same-sex sexual practices rather than LGBTIQ identities. In other words, while people are not criminalized, some behaviors are.

The world is also witnessing the rise of anti-rights, anti-gender movements that are targeting people with sexual orientations and gender identities that challenge cisgender, hetero-patriarchal norms. Participants from all regions underscored the significant threats that these movements pose to the existence of LGBTIQ people and the organizations devoted to supporting them. In humanitarian contexts, discriminatory anti-gender movements may genuinely prevent humanitarian organizations from safely addressing LGBTIQ needs. In these settings, it is incumbent upon the humanitarian sector to carefully identify safe channels of communication with LGBTIQ populations, so that they can determine together how best to provide essential support and protection.

Activists from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands pointed out that the anti-gender movement also uses places of worship and faith-based organizations as vehicles for spreading misinformation, and which often blame LGBTIQ communities for bringing on crises as retribution for social acceptance of queer lives. Activists expressed concerns that significant amounts of humanitarian funding are channeled through faith-based organizations as intermediaries, some of which may promote anti-rights agendas. Faith-based and religious support networks tend to be more organized, better resourced, and have greater reach than other movements that work to uphold the rights and needs of LGBTIQ communities. This is especially true in times of crisis where LGBTIQ civil society organizations are often underfunded and not positioned to provide humanitarian support to their communities.

Yet, there are ways to counteract the spread of anti-gender ideology. Participants from Tonga and several Caribbean countries highlighted that LGBTIQ organizations have managed to build relationships and develop trust between LGBTIQ communities and faith-based organizations. As one transgender participant from the Pacific explained, “National consultations with all the churches are crucial to foster and build trust,” and allow the different actors to sit at the table and talk.

### **Barrier 3: Institutional Donor Funds Are Generally Inaccessible to National LGBTIQ Organizations**

Several factors lead to challenges in accessing institutional humanitarian funds. Most participants cited the very high bar that all national organizations must meet as part of donor or intermediary due diligence processes, and, concurrently, the lack of more flexible options for support. In particular, representatives from LGBTIQ organizations stressed the challenges they face when humanitarian agencies ask potential partners to conform to a system that is top-heavy and insensitive to LGBTIQ needs and the LGBTIQ movement landscape.

LGBTIQ communities often rely on volunteer-based and informal mechanisms to support each other — systems that rarely look like traditional humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile, humanitarian actors often require formal registration, strict internal policies and guidelines, or other structural requirements which LGBTIQ organizations typically lack, especially in hostile contexts where they may be unable to legally register which thereby hinders their ability to secure funding and partnerships. As emphasized by LGBTIQ representatives and humanitarian actors engaged in LGBTIQ inclusion, adaptable and flexible funding is crucial for LGBTIQ (and all) national organizations working in humanitarian contexts since the needs and priorities of their communities may fluctuate, especially in LGBTIQ-criminalizing contexts. As demonstrated in the human rights sphere, less formal, more flexible rapid response mechanisms do work, and they need to be supported.

The lack of LGBTIQ voices within national humanitarian coordination systems where priorities and funding are set also reduces the chance of funding. Similarly, national-level pooled humanitarian funds, for which pre-approval is often necessary, maintain strict eligibility requirements that exceed the operational capacity of community organizations. LGBTIQ organizations engage in humanitarian work out of necessity because they see their communities being left out during crises. As a result, they often lack specific expertise on the structure, operations, and language of the humanitarian architecture, adding stress to their work. Indeed, many participants and LGBTIQ organizations highlighted the need to urgently pivot from their normal work to providing humanitarian assistance as their biggest challenge. They often do not know which actors to turn to for assistance, who the donors are, how to get funding, or where to find the information they need, and so they try to do what they can on their own.

Participants across disciplines also emphasized the lack of inter-organization consultations at national or regional levels where LGBTIQ organizations and advocates, humanitarian practitioners, and donors can interact and find ways to address current gaps. Additionally, participants noted that donors and intermediaries tend to be risk-averse, preferring to go to the same — or same types of — organizations with which they already have partnerships or contact. Thus, new potential partner organizations may struggle to get on the radar for funding consideration.

Ultimately, the relationship between humanitarian agencies and their donors on the one hand, and LGBTIQ organizations and communities on the other, requires adaptation on both sides: humanitarian actors must seek to genuinely understand and sufficiently resource community-informed responses to meet the needs and priorities of LGBTIQ communities across contexts. At the same time, LGBTIQ civil society and community-serving organizations must try to adapt their capacity and operations to better meet the requirements of the system, preferably with technical support from humanitarian agencies if needed.

#### **Barrier 4: Competition for Programmatic and Strategic Attention/Resources**

Active competition for funding and access to humanitarian resources across the humanitarian system can also hinder LGBTIQ inclusion. Funding levels are insufficient, especially when it comes to marginalized groups, and protection, as a humanitarian focus area, often receives the least amount of funding, which leads to competition over scarce resources within the sector. LGBTIQ groups seeking funding, for example, may be seen as competing against other women's rights groups, organizations supporting people with disabilities, or groups championing ethnic or religious minorities.

This “competition” narrative hinders the ability of LGBTIQ organizations to engage in international spheres in which other groups representing specific populations may be more present and established. Echoing this, one participant explained how the anti-gender movement will often oppose LGBTIQ inclusion to the gender equality movement, arguing that the LGBTIQ-serving groups are trying to “steal” funding or advocacy spaces from the latter. Such a narrative not only weaponizes LGBTIQ inclusion and creates exclusionary advocacy spaces, but it also hinders intersectional cooperation across movements.

Participants from LGBTIQ organizations also noted how funding streams silo marginalized groups, rather than building bridges and cohesion among them. Entrenched and persistent silos between humanitarian and rights-based funders still remain as well. Currently, LGBTIQ inclusion is rarely embedded within humanitarian organization priorities and remains an accessory or a supplement to their commitments. Understanding it as another add-on means that organizations can – and will – drop it as soon as the organization needs to cut funds. As one participant underlined, inclusion in humanitarian settings is not only technical: it is also often political.

Reflecting on the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality, one participant noted how these principles can be turned around to perpetuate exclusion: “LGBTIQ inclusion is stalled because it wouldn’t be impartial – focusing on one marginalized group – or neutral, as it is too political [for humanitarian actors to engage with].”

### **Barrier 5: Lack of Political Will and Consistent Follow-Through on Rights-Based Approaches**

Participants across sectors expressed how engaging with LGBTIQ communities is still perceived as a political risk. At the national level, especially in hostile settings, there may still be a pervasive assumption that including LGBTIQ communities into humanitarian work will jeopardize all other humanitarian efforts. LGBTIQ inclusion is therefore stalled because it is considered “too soon” and “too dangerous” in light of the context. As one participant explained, these perceptions of risk, albeit at times used as an excuse not to engage with LGBTIQ communities, sometimes stem from real concerns about compromising other interventions.

At the regional and international levels, LGBTIQ issues become embroiled in politics and culture wars on a global stage. Various countries, especially within UN spaces such as the Commission on the Status of Women, currently block or impede inclusive language and policy – such as allowing a broader interpretation of the word “gender” or adding explicit protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Participants thus underscored the lack of a global LGBTIQ inclusion operational commitment as a major barrier to action. This is further exacerbated by the trend in decreasing international development funding from donor countries, which have historically been more willing to fund LGBTIQ organizations. As such, according to many participants, LGBTIQ communities still remain outside of the halls of power. Given this reality, the role of private actors becomes crucial in leveraging their control over funding streams to foster LGBTIQ inclusion and ensure that it is part of due diligence processes.

In most cases, LGBTIQ organizations also come with a rights-based approach, which may differ from the humanitarian sector’s needs-based orientation. Even those humanitarian organizations with rights-oriented mission statements, or that have signed onto the Humanitarian Charter, still may largely operate based on needs. Participants emphasized how this difference may create a form of value dissonance in which national LGBTIQ

organizations must adhere to strict requirements to secure funding. The rights-based commitments of LGBTIQ organizations, especially in hostile contexts, is also primarily focused on gaining access to and securing equal civil and political rights. This emphasis on the former means that LGBTIQ civil society actors may be unprepared to pivot their work to humanitarian assistance when a conflict or other disaster hits. Further, as noted, accessing the resources to address the needs of their communities is nearly impossible due to the humanitarian sector's strict eligibility requirements for receiving funds, combined with a pervasive reticence to work with LGBTIQ populations.

### **Barrier 6: Disconnect Between Humanitarian Agency Policies and Practice**

Another obstacle to meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian settings is the gap between policy and practice within humanitarian agencies. Participants from the humanitarian system noted that there is often a disconnect between values and norms at organizational headquarters versus at national offices. At the same time, humanitarian headquarters' policies may be disconnected from the needs on the ground or more inclusive practices being implemented by country-office colleagues. Participants stressed how enacting policies is relatively easy, but developing good practice requires investment.

Participants noted that humanitarian organizations must do better to ensure that central policies translate into positive practices on the ground, and that accountability mechanisms are strengthened so that investments can be made to support country operations to make necessary improvements. At the same time, senior leadership at headquarters levels should support promising inclusive practices led by country-based staff. For example, national implementers of global agencies may engage in good practices that go beyond organizational policies or mandates. In these cases, national staff take initiative to fill gaps and may serve as an example to the larger organization on how to ensure appropriate inclusion of crisis-affected LGBTIQ and other marginalized populations. Without institutional policy support and documentation, however, good practices may be lost.

Many participants stated that a major flaw in implementation is a lack of contextual understanding and local awareness from humanitarian actors. While inclusive strategies can (and must) be global, they should be adequately adapted to local contexts. The contextual adaptation of policies is often hindered by humanitarian workers moving around every couple of years. As one humanitarian representative noted, this can adversely impact long-term projects that demand an inclusive approach that requires time to create mutual respect and trust.

The implementation of good policies may also fail due to issues of cultural competence and language. Expatriate humanitarian workers may lack local language proficiency, national partners may not be adept in English, and the translation of toolkits and guidelines is not always attuned to local terms.

### **The Data Burden: A Crosscutting Challenge**

While data is essential for assessing the scale and impact of humanitarian crises, as well as the coverage and effectiveness of assistance, participants underscored that there are many situations where collecting data on LGBTIQ populations can be dangerous, especially if not properly guided by communities themselves. Indeed, data collection on LGBTIQ people can pose a real danger for LGBTIQ individuals if executed without due attention to privacy, confidentiality, and security concerns. This may also lead to LGBTIQ individuals choosing to remain invisible, especially in LGBTIQ-criminalizing contexts, due to concerns for their safety.



Yet, deciding not to work directly with LGBTIQ populations simply because data is lacking reinforces invisibility and vulnerability. Several participants emphasized data on numbers should not be required to prioritize inclusion as this delays the provision of lifesaving assistance. They noted that the emphasis on collecting data in humanitarian contexts has the consequence of putting the statistical existence of a group into question and that the burden is on LGBTIQ communities to prove that they exist and need humanitarian assistance. For instance, one participant highlighted how some of the major organizations working on intersex issues end up solely working on collecting and producing data when, instead, their funds could be directed towards concrete assistance. Similarly, participants from the private sector acknowledged that companies are often data-driven, which adds burden to the recipient organizations and partners.

Participants also noted that data collection tools and methods are often extractive rather than participatory, and do not capture nonbinary or transgender identities or sexual orientations — factors that can influence risk and vulnerability. In addition, humanitarian actors also tend to prioritize quantitative data over qualitative data, thus missing out on the nuances of people’s experiences and testimonies. Participants therefore urged that humanitarian actors work closely with LGBTIQ communities to fine-tune and experiment with LGBTIQ-sensitive data collection approaches and disseminate emerging good or positive practices throughout the sector.

# Advocacy Roadmap

# Advocacy Roadmap

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The following Advocacy Roadmap is intended to stimulate new thinking and action tailored to specific contexts to ensure that LGBTIQ people are no longer left behind in humanitarian response. The Roadmap is expansive, providing a number of potential entry points for change. In some cases, similar recommendations have emerged across different barriers due to the interrelated nature of root causes. Many of the recommendations are aimed at allies within the humanitarian system who have the leverage – which activists and allies may not have – to encourage change. National LGBTIQ organizations also have a role; however, the advocacy burden should not fall solely on their shoulders. It is time for all in the humanitarian and LGBTIQ human rights sectors to push collaboratively for durable and meaningful change.

## BARRIER 1: PRESENCE OF DOMINANT LGBTIQ-EXCLUDING NORMS, VALUES, AND ACTORS IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

### Immediate and Underlying Causes:

- The humanitarian sector is rooted in socio-cultural norms and values that tend to exclude LGBTIQ communities
- National dynamics that mean LGBTIQ organizations experience discrimination from other national actors as part of localization efforts

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### *For activists and allies within the humanitarian system:*

- Emphasize that the humanitarian principle of impartiality recognizes the need to prioritize urgent concerns of all marginalized communities
- Promote understanding that LGBTIQ people exist in all contexts and that requiring data to justify numbers hinders inclusion

#### *For UN agencies, INGOs, and donors:*

- Support staff initiatives for achieving greater inclusion
- Consult with LGBTIQ actors to determine practical, safe methods for documenting needs
- Clarify language by collaboratively developing and disseminating lists of clear terms and definitions that explain complex jargon commonly used in humanitarian spaces
- Incorporate inclusive definitions of households and families into policies on aid distribution, housing allocation, and case management
- Ensure that data collection forms and assessment tools reflect inclusive definitions
- Promote sex and gender disaggregated data collection while prioritizing safety and protection
- Require that humanitarian agencies (UN, INGOs) have complaints or accountability mechanisms that appropriately respond to LGBTIQ discrimination

Short-Term

## Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

### Medium-Term

*For activists, INGOs, UN agencies, researchers, and others with relevant experience:*

- Disseminate best practices for going beyond binary (male/female) data collection, using inclusive terms

*For UN agencies, INGOs, and donors:*

- Expand data collection to include qualitative and intersectional data that goes beyond statistical prevalence, capturing the lived experiences, needs, and priorities of LGBTIQ communities in humanitarian settings
- Form partnerships with national LGBTIQ activists and organizations that may already have useful data and data collection processes to assess need and guide resource allocation
- Create spaces for community-based organizations and humanitarian agencies to build shared knowledge on good practices for changing underlying norms and values that negatively impact inclusive humanitarian action
- Create and deliver inclusive values and norms trainings for humanitarian staff to encourage improved attitudes toward and inclusion of LGBTIQ people
- Redefine guiding principles to be inclusive of diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, and family structures, ensuring that these revised principles are embedded in organizational policies and frameworks
- Drive narrative change by clarifying humanitarian principles and challenging misinterpretations that use impartiality as a justification for excluding use of tailored approaches
- Develop practical guidance to help translate principles into inclusive actions
- Apply an intersectional lens in program design, implementation, and monitoring
- Challenge the false dichotomy of needs-based versus rights-based approaches

### Long-Term

*For donors, INGOs, UN agencies, and researchers:*

- Strengthen approaches for safe and secure data collection to ensure “do no harm” principles

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### Long-Term

- Build in accountability mechanisms to ensure that humanitarian actors support crisis-affected LGBTIQ communities as part of any response
- Ensure that humanitarian organizations are safe for LGBTIQ employees to be out, recognizing that queer people are present in every organization at every level
- Create safe and enabling environments and formal and informal platforms for LGBTIQ organizations to equitably partner with humanitarian actors and access local LGBTIQ expertise (e.g., technical working groups, advisory committees, paid consultancies, etc.)

## BARRIER 2: IMPACT OF THE RISE OF THE ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT AND CRIMINALIZATION OF LGBTIQ PEOPLE ON HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMING

### Immediate and Underlying Causes:

- Entrenched and persistent silos between humanitarian and rights-based funders
- Competing resources and limited funding
- Invisibility of LGBTIQ communities in hostile, criminalizing contexts
- Increased migration and displacement due to hostile political and social environments
- Risk aversion and lack of information on conditions facing LGBTIQ people on the part of humanitarian organizations
- Lack of prioritization of the safety and protection of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people by the humanitarian system

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### Short-Term

#### *For activists, CSOs, and allies within the humanitarian system:*

- Advocate for human rights organizations to track and publicize the impact of criminalizing laws on access to humanitarian programming
- Conduct “follow-the-money” investigations with due protection against retaliation

## Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

### Short-Term

- Press key international humanitarian actors to recognize that criminalization is a form of crisis for LGBTIQ people, driving persecution and displacement
- Enhance understanding among humanitarian actors about the legal, physical, and social risks that LGBTIQ people face in criminalized settings
- Press international actors to safeguard crisis-affected LGBTIQ communities where governments actively persecute them
- Develop confidential networks with international allies who can discreetly advocate for LGBTIQ rights and protection in hostile regions, providing resources without exposing local activists to risk
- Amplify voices of and build partnerships with supportive religious institutions, places of worship, and other faith-based allies to counter anti-LGBTIQ discourse
- Implement strong data protection protocols, ensuring use of anonymized and encrypted methods
- Leverage the expertise of public health organizations, which have frameworks for safely engaging marginalized communities
- Partner with global mental health organizations to use trauma-informed models of care to address the mental health needs of queer refugees and other LGBTIQ individuals

### Medium-Term

#### *For activists, CSOs, donors, and allies within the humanitarian system:*

- If safe for, and supported by LGBTIQ activists, launch campaigns or petitions that highlight who/how actors export anti-LGBTIQ messaging
- Engage in quiet, behind-closed-doors communications to draw attention to bias and exclusion without compromising local safety
- Build regional networks of donor allies
- Identify approaches for using the “humanitarian-development nexus” to advocate for attention to human rights as part of humanitarian response
- Combine human rights and humanitarian funding to relieve burden on CSOs and harmonize agendas

## Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

### Medium-Term

- Strengthen legal and physical protections for LGBTIQ refugees and communities
- Partner with international LGBTIQ or LGBTIQ-friendly organizations, including UN offices, to provide legal aid and advocacy for queer individuals facing persecution
- Implement safe-house programs supported by international allies, providing protection and safe reporting spaces for GBV survivors as well as physical and mental health support
- Collaborate with global health NGOs to gain access to gender-affirming medications

### Long-Term

*For activists, CSOs, donors, humanitarian actors, and allies within the humanitarian system:*

- Encourage international human rights bodies, coalitions, and mechanisms to lead global advocacy campaigns that focus on regions with aggressive anti-LGBTIQ laws, minimizing the exposure of local communities and providing them with diplomatic and legal support
- Highlight good and promising practices in high-level advocacy to advance inclusive programming
- Ensure that protective measures such as legal defense funds and safe asylum routes are in place for activists and persecuted LGBTIQ individuals in criminalizing environments
- Invest in strengthening LGBTIQ movements to challenge discriminatory laws and policies and protect gains against backsliding

## BARRIER 3: INSTITUTIONAL DONOR FUNDS ARE GENERALLY INACCESSIBLE TO NATIONAL LGBTIQ ORGANIZATIONS

### Immediate and Underlying Causes:

- Cumbersome and bureaucratic systems that favor large agencies and prevent national organizations from being eligible to receive humanitarian funding
- Hostile legal frameworks that prevent LGBTIQ organizations from being registered, which, in turn, make them ineligible for partnerships and funding
- Lack of attention on capacity-building of national CSOs to strengthen systems to improve funding eligibility



- Lack of attention on capacity-building of international and national humanitarian actors, who may lack the skills and understanding to work competently with LGBTIQ organizations and communities
- Lack of investment in mutual learning and capacity-sharing across the humanitarian sector
- Pressure to demonstrate results quickly, which may negatively impact the development of sustainable, long-term recovery programs
- Power imbalances between LGBTIQ organizations and major humanitarian organizations
- (Unconscious) bias among donors that hinders new organizations, or those new to partnerships, from accessing funding
- Bias against piloting new approaches to inclusion
- Fear of fund diversion and misuse of funds
- Lack of representation of LGBTIQ organizations in decision-making processes regarding priorities and funding
- Growing gap globally between the need for humanitarian aid and available funding

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### Short-Term

#### *For Donors, INGOs, UN agencies, and funding intermediaries:*

- Simplify application processes for national/local organizations
- Create opportunities for donors and intermediaries to hear LGBTIQ needs, challenges, and priorities firsthand as part of decision-making processes (e.g., through National LGBTIQ Technical Working Groups or other formal platforms)
- Empower local organizations to conduct needs assessments that inform humanitarian priorities and resource allocations
- Strengthen coordination among humanitarian actors seeking to improve LGBTIQ inclusion
- Analyze the Grand Bargain commitments to improve effectiveness and efficiency promised and document the specific opportunities for LGBTIQ inclusion that they may offer
- Determine what will be required from humanitarian actors to implement Grand Bargain commitments to localization
- Evaluate internal (organizational) restrictions that hinder inclusion of LGBTIQ communities

## Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

### Medium-Term

*For donors, intermediaries, UN agencies, and private sector actors:*

- Create simplified, flexible mechanisms and diversify funding intermediaries to enable direct access to funding for national CSOs
- Increase private sector core funding
- Conduct training to orient LGBTIQ organizations to humanitarian sector principles and funding requirements
- Learn from existing intermediaries and pooled funding mechanisms (e.g., feminist funds, human rights funders, LGBTIQ funders) on how to ensure intermediaries partner with LGBTIQ CSOs safely
- Build partnerships between small and large organizations to share administrative burden and risk
- Explore opportunities for shared due diligence at the national level so that LGBTIQ organizations can avoid repeating similar processes for each donor
- Strengthen and streamline the administration of country-based pooled funds

### Long-Term

*For donors, intermediaries, UN agencies, and private sector actors:*

- Evaluate LGBTIQ (and other) inclusion approaches, highlighting good practices and generating recommendations for improvement

*For national-level humanitarian actors:*

- Simplify donor or pooled funding registration processes that guide funding eligibility so that LGBTIQ organizations can participate
- Adopt more participatory, equitable approaches to partnership creation and accountability

## BARRIER 4: COMPETITION FOR PROGRAMMATIC AND STRATEGIC ATTENTION/RESOURCES

### Immediate and Underlying Causes:

- Current approaches to funding are typically grounded in patriarchal and colonial legacies, which bias grantmaking toward traditional recipients who have greater power than smaller, less resourced organizations
- Entrenched and persistent silos between humanitarian and rights-based funders
- Siloing of resources within the humanitarian system, with the protection sector receiving a small portion of overall humanitarian funding, leading to competition among marginalized groups for limited resources
- Lack of understanding about how intersecting forms of marginalization, including impacts of patriarchy and misogyny, are connected to homophobia and transphobia
- Excessive bureaucratic and due diligence requirements that lock out national organizations
- Bias, perception of risk, and lack of political will among donors and intermediaries to overcome reticence to engage with LGBTIQ communities
- Hesitation to explore or determine actual risk, resulting in a lack of assessment
- Mismatched values and focus between grassroots organizations and global agencies

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### Short-Term

*For humanitarian donors, UN agencies, intermediaries, CSOs, and private sector actors:*

- Ensure intermediary funders consider inclusion of LGBTIQ organizations as partners, especially where direct local funding is difficult
- Support emerging opportunities for partnership and coalition-building among international and local LGBTIQ organizations

*For donors, intermediaries, and national CSOs:*

- Foster collaborative, intersectional efforts with other groups and movements through mechanisms such as global or national “inclusion coalitions”
- Collaborate with human rights and humanitarian organizations to support inclusion of new partners
- Build two-way accountability mechanisms so national LGBTIQ organizations can assess potential partnerships with humanitarian organizations

## Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

### Medium-Term

*For humanitarian donors, UN agencies, intermediaries, CSOs, and private sector actors:*

- In collaboration with national organizations representing diverse populations, explore strategic, intersectional partnerships and alliances
- Identify the value of rights-based coalitions of various marginalized populations without putting them in competition with one another
- Create a system of funding that values not just efficiency, but also collaboration, co-creation, and experimentation

*For activists and allies within the humanitarian system:*

- Support advocacy efforts (aimed at donors, governments, and INGOs) to change laws, policies, and guidelines that create barriers to full inclusion
- Pursue dialogue with states and governments to ensure inclusion in humanitarian programming, from needs assessments to delivery of assistance
- Increase LGBTIQ representation across all phases of humanitarian action

### Long-Term

*For humanitarian donors, UN agencies, intermediaries, CSOs, and private sector actors at global, regional, and national levels:*

- Create a dedicated international fund or coalition of donors willing to advance LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action
- Support regional convenings on LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action
- Evaluate GBV/feminist coalition-building to identify lessons learned for building and sustaining support over time
- Create and promote ethical principles and concrete guidance that lead to more inclusive humanitarian practice
- Create flexible preparedness funding mechanisms for national and grassroots LGBTIQ organizations that can be used for emergency response and to support resilience and self-efficacy in times of crisis
- Build intersectional coalitions among marginalized and at-risk vulnerable communities to advocate for and secure funding for collaborative action

## BARRIER 5: LACK OF POLITICAL WILL AND CONSISTENT FOLLOW-THROUGH ON RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

### Immediate and Underlying Causes:

- Presence of anti-rights, anti-LGBTIQ status quo influenced by current power holders
- Influence of negative geopolitics, with some UN Member States continuously impeding progress on LGBTIQ human rights
- Backsliding in countries historically supportive of LGBTIQ human rights
- LGBTIQ communities still largely remain outside of decision-making spaces
- Reliance on individual “office champions” within global humanitarian donor and intermediary organizations to advance LGBTIQ inclusion
- Perceived dichotomy between rights-based and needs-based funding
- Lack of LGBTIQ inclusion global mandate and recommendations
- Lack of regional cooperation among states
- Lack of opportunity to include LGBTIQ voices in advocacy and decision-making
- Prevalence of hostile socio-political contexts that potentially endanger LGBTIQ people
- Lack of pre-crisis understanding of social norms that may impact how LGBTIQ organizations must operate
- Advocacy aimed at the UN humanitarian system to foster greater inclusion is very slow to yield results

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### Short-Term

*For humanitarian donors, UN agencies, intermediaries, and private sector actors:*

- Evaluate internal institutional learning and identify positive case studies of LGBTIQ inclusion
- Create internal organizational and evaluative policies to institutionalize commitment to LGBTIQ inclusion
- Sensitize staff to policies and accountability mechanisms
- Use values-based recruiting, onboarding, and other professional development processes within the organization to emphasize inclusion
- Engage the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to promote LGBTIQ inclusion using recent UN LGBTIQ Policy statements
- Support national LGBTIQ CSOs to gain access to humanitarian decision-making to push for greater inclusion

## Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

### Short-Term

#### *For activists and allies within the humanitarian system:*

- Engage strategically with UN special procedures mandate, including the mandate of the UN Independent Expert on SOGI to increase visibility and needs of crisis-affected LGBTIQ communities and advocate for greater inclusion
- Engage other human rights mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), treaty bodies, regional mechanisms, and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to set a standard that LGBTIQ-inclusive humanitarian response is an integral part of human rights obligations
- Advocate to expand the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other relevant norms

### Medium-Term

#### *For humanitarian donors, UN agencies, intermediaries, and private sector actors:*

- Conduct contextual risk analyses informed by LGBTIQ local actors to ensure that local expertise guides decision-making processes
- Strengthen partnerships with LGBTIQ communities and organizations to facilitate the contextualization of approaches
- Determine actual risk of engagement through consultation with LGBTIQ CSOs (e.g., versus assuming that LGBTIQ inclusion is unsafe)
- Evaluate partnerships between humanitarian agencies and LGBTIQ CSOs with two-way accountability mechanisms
- Contribute submissions and recommendations to UN bodies and mechanisms (UPRs) regarding LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action
- Learn from human rights organizations and donors who have networks, know how to navigate hostile contexts, and can act as intermediaries for local LGBTIQ CSOs

### Long-Term

#### *For humanitarian donors, UN agencies, intermediaries, and private sector actors:*

- Identify concrete approaches to hold humanitarian staff accountable to inclusion policies

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### Long-Term

*For activists, CSOs, and allies within the humanitarian system:*

- Leverage the 2024 UN LGBTIQ strategy to generate donor and UN agency commitment to support LGBTIQ-inclusive policies and programs
- Hold pro-LGBTIQ donor governments to account so they do not fund anti-LGBTIQ organizations (religious or secular) as part of their humanitarian funding
- Support human rights advocacy efforts on LGBTIQ human rights to influence various guiding humanitarian documents (e.g., the Sphere Handbook, ICRC/IFRC Code of Conduct, UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and others)

## BARRIER 6: DISCONNECT BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AGENCY POLICIES AND PRACTICE

### Immediate and Underlying Causes:

- Personal biases of individuals within humanitarian organizations hinder inclusive policy-making and prevent good policies from being implemented
- LGBTIQ-inclusion policies may be adopted in writing to appeal to donors but are not institutionalized or implemented
- Resistance to change, lack of political will to enforce LGBTIQ-inclusive policies, and weak accountability mechanisms
- Low or no resourcing of specialist knowledge on LGBTIQ inclusion within humanitarian agencies
- Fear of doing harm is used as an excuse for inaction

### Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

#### Short-Term

*For humanitarian donors, INGO and UN agencies, and national CSOs:*

- Share good practices among human rights donors, humanitarian donors, implementing agencies, and national LGBTIQ CSOs
- Improve reporting mechanisms to flag and be accountable for anti-LGBTIQ bias or harmful practices

## Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets

### Short-Term

#### *For activists and allies:*

- Publicize violations if national/local LGBTIQ actors agree that it will be useful in advocacy efforts
- Facilitate peer-to-peer reviews of national programming to ensure high-quality, intersectional interventions and mutual learning across movements (e.g., those advocating for people with disabilities, LGBTIQ people, ethnic minorities, women's rights, etc.)

#### *For activists, donors, and humanitarian allies:*

- Facilitate dialogue among humanitarian leadership, humanitarian practitioners, and LGBTIQ advocates to close the gap between policy and practice

### Medium-Term

#### *For humanitarian donors, international civil society, and allies:*

- Highlight the gaps and challenges between policy and implementation and push for improved accountability

#### *For humanitarian donors:*

- Hold implementing partners accountable for LGBTIQ exclusion and recognize positive practices
- Allow LGBTIQ CSOs to submit reports using creative, low-burden approaches (e.g., oral reporting) to meet donor requirements

#### *For humanitarian donors, INGOs, UN agencies, and intermediaries:*

- Resource positions within humanitarian agencies whose mandate is to promote LGBTIQ inclusion
- Create an enabling environment for LGBTIQ individuals to access employment within humanitarian agencies and the humanitarian system at large

### Long-Term

#### *All humanitarian actors:*

- Strengthen and diversify humanitarian leadership
- Create mentoring and training opportunities to support higher education of young LGBTIQ people in humanitarian affairs – create a “pipeline development initiative”





**Long-Term**

### **Potential Solutions and Advocacy Targets**

*For humanitarian donors, INGOs, UN agencies, and intermediaries:*

- Shift power from global-north-based headquarters to national and local entities
- Maintain flexibility regarding branding of project activities that engage LGBTIQ people or organizations, to ensure adherence to “do no harm” principles



**Contact:**

**Outright International**

216 East 45th Street, 17th Floor, New York, NY, 10017 USA

+1 212 430 6054

[comms@outrightinternational.org](mailto:comms@outrightinternational.org)

[outrightinternational.org](http://outrightinternational.org)