

Advocating For LGBTIQ Inclusion in Ukraine's Humanitarian Response

Case Study

August 2025



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INTERNATIONAL





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.

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Finally, we wish to recognize the resilience and advocacy of LGBTIQ communities and civil society organizations in Ukraine, whose voices and lived experiences remain central to this work. Their efforts continue to inspire and drive meaningful change in humanitarian response efforts in Ukraine and beyond.

Abbreviations

AD Technical Working Group	Age and Disability Technical Working Group, set up in December 2015 under the auspices of Protection Cluster
CDP	Center for Disaster Philanthropy
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
CE	Council of Europe
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender based violence
GiHA WG	Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, is a subsidiary of the UN Country Team's (UNCT) Gender Theme Group
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
LGBTIQ	Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer
LGBTIQ Technical Working Group	LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group
NRC	The Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs under the United Nations Secretariat, responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies
Outright	Outright International
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RFSL	The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights
SAG PC	Strategic Advisory Group Protection Cluster
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics
UHF	The Ukraine Humanitarian Fund
UN	United Nations
UN RCO	UN Resident Coordinator's Office, which coordinates the efforts of the UN Country Team operating in Ukraine
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. Introduction

Across the world, humanitarian relief efforts have traditionally fallen short in addressing the unique needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) individuals before, during, and after crises. At best, humanitarian interventions lack the necessary sensitivity and awareness to create safe, appropriate avenues for support. At worst, intentional exclusion can occur due to deeply ingrained biases, discriminatory beliefs, and practices among humanitarian actors. LGBTIQ communities, like any other, have a fundamental right to survive and to access basic life-sustaining support and protection such as shelter, medical care, and sustenance. Yet, when it comes to crisis-affected LGBTIQ communities, these rights are frequently overlooked and excluded from humanitarian action.

In response to these challenges, Outright International, with support from the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP), piloted a two-year (2023-2024) advocacy initiative in Ukraine to assess and promote the inclusion of LGBTIQ individuals in humanitarian response in the context of the ongoing war. The project identified **barriers to inclusion, tested strategies for engagement, and worked to integrate LGBTIQ people's needs and priorities** into the operational frameworks of major humanitarian actors within the UN cluster system. A second phase, which began in January 2025, focuses on accelerating and documenting the institutionalization of structural reform within Ukraine's UN Coordination system. The aim is to further strengthen the inclusion of LGBTIQ needs and priorities in humanitarian response, enhance the capacity of Ukrainian LGBTIQ CSOs to meaningfully engage with the humanitarian sector to create new entry points and opportunities for accessing humanitarian resources, and deepen collaboration with humanitarian actors to strengthen their capacity to effectively incorporate the needs of LGBTIQ persons into humanitarian assistance in Ukraine.

Achieving meaningful LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian response requires **structural change, policy adaptation, and sustained engagement** from all stakeholders. This case study report presents Outright's **approach, key achievements, and the insights** gained throughout the project's first implementation phase. By documenting lessons learned, it aims to **inform and strengthen future advocacy efforts**, providing practical guidance for LGBTIQ organizations and humanitarian actors seeking to enhance the inclusion of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people in all responses globally.

II. Context

The Russian Federation's full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has resulted in the occupation of approximately 20 percent of Ukraine.¹ Over the last three years, Ukraine has had to endure regular air attacks on civilian and critical infrastructure, resulting in power outages, water supply interruptions, and disruption of heat during the winter. Residential buildings, medical facilities, schools, transport hubs, and other civilian structures are routinely targeted. With the change in the United States' foreign policy, including its abrupt dismantling of foreign assistance and its declining support for Ukraine, the future of the humanitarian sector and the trajectory of Russia's war on Ukraine is increasingly uncertain. This greatly endangers the protection and well-being of all Ukrainians.

According to the 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for Ukraine, 12.7 million people are in need, and 3.6 million are internally displaced.² About 45 percent are women, 30 percent are older people, and 14 percent are individuals with disabilities.³ The uncertainties and everyday stress brought on by the war continue to affect people of all ages negatively. Still, they are especially detrimental to vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and/or chronic diseases, elderly people, and children. Marginalized populations, including LGBTIQ people, people living with HIV, and ethnic minorities such as Roma communities, are disproportionately affected due to pre-existing discrimination, limited access to essential services, and heightened barriers to protection and humanitarian assistance in times of crisis.

Not surprisingly, the full-scale invasion has exacerbated inequalities and discrimination, threatening progress made in recent years toward greater gender equality and improved respect for the human rights of all people.⁴ The intersection of gender, age, and disability in Ukraine – among other attributes – has further increased vulnerability.⁵

Over the last decade, Ukraine's LGBTIQ civil society has flourished, with a range of national and community-based LGBTIQ-led organizations engaging in advocacy and providing services in areas such as human rights, health care, psychological and peer support,

¹ Institute for the Study of War, "Ukraine Fact Sheet," 21 February 2025, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-fact-sheet-february-21-2025>.

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025*, 14 January 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-april-2025-enuk>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ OCHA, *Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024*, 3 January 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-enuk>; UN Women, Regional Gender Task Force, *Making the Invisible Visible: An Evidence-Based Analysis of Gender in the Regional Response to the War in Ukraine*, October 2022, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine>.

⁵ OCHA, *Ukraine Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023*, December 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enuk>.

and legislative reform. With the full-scale invasion, most of these organizations had to pivot quickly from their peacetime mandates to respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of their communities, with few or no resources from the formal humanitarian system.

NEEDS OF LGBTIQ PEOPLE AFFECTED BY WAR

Independent reports and evaluations in Ukraine suggest that the conditions for LGBTIQ people in Ukraine worsened significantly after the full-scale invasion in February 2022.⁶ As summarized in “Strategic and Practical Recommendations of the LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group” and in other documents, LGBTIQ Ukrainians, especially those who have been internally displaced, continue to face a range of challenges including poor availability of safe transport and shelter, lack of access to employment, heightened risks of violence and exclusion, increased harassment by military and law enforcement personnel, and lack of access to medical care, including access to gender-affirming and HIV-related care (see Table 1).⁷ In occupied territories, legal persecution, violence, and forced hiding of identities are life-threatening issues. These realities throughout the country highlight the compounded vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ individuals and underscore the need for targeted interventions to ensure their protection and inclusion in humanitarian responses.

“While many international organizations have channeled their humanitarian assistance to alleviate the struggles of Ukrainian IDPs, they have paid much less attention to addressing the specific needs of displaced LGBTQ+ people.”

– POLICY BRIEF BY MARYNA SHEVTSOVA

LGBTIQ EXCLUSION IN UKRAINE'S HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The humanitarian sector has been active in Ukraine since Russia's annexation of Crimea and its invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014. Yet, since that time, LGBTIQ communities have not formally been identified as a vulnerable category with unique needs that requires tailored programming. To date, the UN cluster system, managed by the United Nations Office on Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), does not collect data on the needs of LGBTIQ people in the context of war, although ILGA Europe worked with the Protection Cluster to produce a fact sheet on the importance of involving LGBTIQ people in humanitarian action, which briefly outlined some of the specific needs of LGBTIQ people who are displaced or otherwise affected by war.⁸

⁶ Maryna Shevtsova, “Queering Displacement: The State of the Ukrainian LGBTQ+ Community During the Russian Full-Scale Invasion,” Global Public Policy Institute and Feminist Perspectives for Supporting Ukraine, April 2024, https://gppi.net/assets/Shevtsova_2024_Queering_Displacement_FINAL.pdf.

⁷ Protection Cluster Ukraine, “Strategic and Practical Recommendations of the LGBTIQ Communities Working Group,” September 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KaJ0L-Tt2gKX2vzhHp4WM5hT8zKCsxPM/view>; Protection Cluster Ukraine, “Protection of LGBTIQ+ People in the Context of the Response in Ukraine,” 17 May 2022, https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/protection-lgbtqi-people-context-response-ukraine-enuk?utm_.

⁸ Protection Cluster Ukraine, “Protection of LGBTIQ+ People in the Context of the Response in Ukraine.”

Table 1. Needs of LGBTIQ People During the War, 2022–2024⁹

Physical and Mental Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased stigma and harassment, as well as targeted attacks against LGBTIQ activists, human rights defenders, and shelters • Heightened mental health concerns due to war-induced trauma • Limited access to non-discriminatory psychosocial support • Legal persecution, violence, and forced hiding of identities in occupied territories due to widespread harassment, arbitrary detentions, and even torture by occupying forces
Access to Safe Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers in gender-segregated shelters, especially for transgender and intersex people • Lack of safe housing options • Increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation • Social exclusion due to internal displacement • Denial of shelter or facing violence in communal housing • No legal family recognition for lesbian families with children
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High risk of GBV, including trafficking and conflict-related sexual violence • Difficulties accessing GBV services due to discriminatory attitudes and lack of specialized support
Healthcare Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial of care, breaches of confidentiality, and discriminatory attitudes from healthcare providers • Limited access to critical treatments such as HIV medication, hormone therapy, and PrEP • Challenges for HIV-positive LGBTIQ individuals due to stigmatization • Lack of necessary medicines or exorbitant prices for people undergoing gender-affirming care
Documentation and Legal Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity documents not matching gender identity for transgender and intersex people • Denial of safe passage at checkpoints • Inclusion under martial law restrictions • Lack of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships • Exposure to violence and discrimination

⁹ Ibid; INSIGHT, "Analytical Note. The Situation of LGBT+ People in Ukraine During the War," 13 October 2022, <https://www.insight-ukraine.org/en/library/analytics-lgbt-war-ukraine/>; LGBT Human Rights Nash Svit Center, *LGBTQ and War*, November 2022, <https://gay.org.ua/en/blog/2022/11/22/lgbtq-and-war/>; 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-lgbtq-people>, 62–73.

Table 1. Needs of LGBTIQ People During the War, 2022–2024 *(continued)*

Access to Livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double discrimination due to IDP status and sexual orientation or gender identity • Loss of jobs and rejection in workplaces after disclosure of sexual orientation • Financial challenges in relocation and rebuilding livelihoods
Social Exclusion and Marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion from traditional support networks and host communities due to sociocultural stigma • Limited awareness among humanitarian actors and service providers of the unique needs of LGBTIQ individuals • Domestic violence and discrimination when seeking essential services due to stigma, lack of legal protections, and widespread societal prejudice result in many being rejected by their families and experiencing abuse at home

III. Case Study Purpose

This case study examines key lessons learned from Outright's two-year (2023–2024) advocacy initiative to enhance LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian response within the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The report analyzes whether and how the project advanced the humanitarian inclusion of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people and identifies critical factors that may support the broader advocacy and adoption of LGBTIQ-inclusive policies and practices by humanitarian actors in other crisis settings.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This case study is aimed at global and national humanitarian system actors within UN agencies, international NGOs, donors, national governments, and national or community-based civil society groups.

METHODOLOGY

The findings and recommendations presented in this case study are based on a thorough analysis of project documents, staff interviews, available publications and reports by international and local LGBTIQ organizations, UN publications, and other secondary sources. It also draws on a set of interviews with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, and LGBTIQ organizations that Outright commissioned in late 2024 with a Ukrainian research agency to assess progress toward project objectives.

LIMITATIONS

The approach taken for this case study has several methodological limitations:

- *Potential bias in project records and staff narratives. Self-reported results may not fully capture external perspectives, including those from aid recipients, partner organizations, or independent observers.*
- *Reliance on secondary sources and a lack of direct contact with all project stakeholders may result in an incomplete picture of processes and outcomes and inconsistencies in reporting.*
- *Lack of direct feedback from aid recipients. The findings may not fully reflect the experiences and challenges as perceived by crisis-affected LGBTIQ people.*
- *Limited comparative analysis. The case study does not include a comparison to similar initiatives, as few comparable efforts focused on LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian response were identified in Ukraine or elsewhere.*
- *Limited time frame for impact. Potential positive impacts on LGBTIQ communities may not be fully apparent yet, given that changes in inclusion practices are only just now being implemented.*

IV. Project Description

Starting in January 2023, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP) funded Outright to undertake a two-year project entitled "LGBTIQ Inclusion Assessment and Advocacy in the Context of War in Ukraine." The project sought to increase inclusion of LGBTIQ communities in Ukraine's humanitarian response. Working with national and regional partners, Outright focused on achieving three main outcomes:

1. Consistently represent LGBTIQ community needs during humanitarian aid coordination meetings, ideally as a standing agenda item.
2. Establish sustainable communication and partnership mechanisms between humanitarian assistance organizations and leading national LGBTIQ organizations involved in humanitarian response.
3. Increase national LGBTIQ organizations' understanding and capacity to better navigate the humanitarian system in Ukraine, with the ultimate objective of advocating for their needs and increasing their access to financial and technical support.

PROJECT DESIGN

To ensure a fully localized effort, including cultural and linguistic competency, Outright prioritized hiring staff from the LGBTIQ community in Ukraine to implement the project, as follows:

- The LGBTIQ inclusion advisor, based in Ukraine, has experience with the humanitarian sector and is responsible for identifying entry points for advocacy within this sector, building relationships, and educating humanitarians about the needs and priorities of LGBTIQ Ukrainians. The inclusion advisor has taken the lead in organizing trainings and workshops and representing Outright in official humanitarian working groups and other convenings. He also co-chairs the new LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group initiated under the project.
- The LGBTIQ advocacy coordinator, based in Ukraine, has a long history of working with the community and is responsible for maintaining relationships and sharing information with LGBTIQ organizations, conducting needs assessments, organizing public events, and mobilizing local LGBTIQ organizations to participate in relevant humanitarian convenings and working groups.
- The program officer for Ukraine, based in the US since late 2022, is a Ukrainian national who was formerly with one of Ukraine's leading LGBTIQ advocacy organizations. He coordinates activities, supports logistics, and contributes to project and budget management.

The team is supported by Outright's director of Humanitarian and Global Development Programs.

To maximize relevance and synergy, Outright also sought input from a range of leading human rights organizations in the region, including ILGA-Europe; Transgender-Europe (TGEU); the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights (RFSL); Freedom House; and, importantly, numerous LGBTIQ human rights defenders and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ukraine. Further, prior to the start of the CDP-funded program, Outright managed an emergency fund (2022–2024), which raised and disbursed more than US \$3.6 million to over 40 LGBTIQ CSOs in Ukraine and border countries to address the needs of internally and externally displaced LGBTIQ populations. This grantmaking effort, and the relationships that were strengthened through it, helped Outright gain important insights into the needs, challenges, priorities, and capacities of LGBTIQ communities throughout the country, as well as strengthen relationships and build trust with Ukraine's diverse LGBTIQ movement.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Outright's activities, summarized in Table 2, encompassed five main areas of work:

1. Mapping and analysis to fully understand and continue to monitor the challenges facing crisis-affected LGBTIQ communities, as well as the potential opportunities and entry points for strengthening LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian action
2. Capacity-strengthening of national and community-based LGBTIQ CSOs throughout Ukraine to better understand the principles underlying humanitarian action and how the system functions
3. Capacity-strengthening of personnel working within humanitarian agencies and organizations to better understand the needs, priorities, and capacities of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people in Ukraine
4. Advocacy and policy engagement to formalize recognition of the humanitarian needs of LGBTIQ communities and create mechanisms for routine inclusion
5. Networking and raising the visibility of community needs and strengths through convenings and publications

Table 2. Summary of Project Activities

Mapping and Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathered feedback from local LGBTIQ CSOs and international humanitarian organizations to understand their experiences with the humanitarian sector and identify barriers in cooperation and inclusion (periodic) • Mapped humanitarian aid available to assist LGBTIQ people in need of support (periodic) • Commissioned qualitative assessment on the perceived effectiveness of advocacy programs to strengthen LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian programming (November 2024)
Capacity-Strengthening for National LGBTIQ Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed and conducted a five-week online course for local LGBTIQ CSOs on their role within Ukraine's humanitarian response, followed by a two-day in-person orientation regarding UN humanitarian standards and the UN humanitarian coordination system. Twenty-eight participants attended, representing 19 local CSOs (August–September 2023)

- Collaborated on a two-day Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) workshop for LGBTIQ organizations in partnership with UN Women in Ukraine and the GiHA and LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Groups (October 2024)
- Co-designed and conducted a three-day workshop, "Advocacy for Change and Increasing the Visibility of WROs and LGBTIQ Communities in Humanitarian Response Programs," for local LGBTIQ-led CSOs and women's rights organizations in partnership with CARE Ukraine (November 2024)
- Provided technical assistance on project management and proposal writing for LGBTIQ CSOs (periodically, throughout the project period)

Capacity-Strengthening for Staff of International Humanitarian Agencies and CSOs

- Conducted a two-day workshop for representatives from LGBTIQ CSOs, international humanitarian organizations, and UN cluster coordinators (October 2023)
- Convened, as a result of the workshop, monthly meetings of UN cluster organizations and local LGBTIQ and women's rights organizations (monthly since November 2023)

Advocacy and Policy Engagement

- Convened numerous multi-stakeholder meetings to promote LGBTIQ inclusion in the UN Country Team (UNCT) response plan, leading to the creation of the LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group (throughout 2024)
- Submitted recommendations based on LGBTIQ humanitarian needs assessments to UNCT (July 2024)
- Gained formal recognition for and launched the National LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group under the Protection Cluster, co-chaired by UNHCR and Outright International (August 2024)
- Launched a Community-based LGBTIQ Community Technical Working Group in Odesa (August 2024)
- Participated in developing the OCHA Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025, securing a section on LGBTIQ needs for the first time (September–December 2024)

Networking and Visibility-Raising

- Co-sponsored Ukraine's National LGBTIQ Association Annual Conference, contributing sessions on LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian response (November 2023)
- Convened the First National Forum on LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Response to stimulate cooperation among LGBTIQ activists, humanitarian workers, and donors (April 2024)
- Published *Strategy for Ensuring LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Response in Ukraine* based on input from Forum participants (December 2024)¹⁰

¹⁰ Outright, *Strategy for Ensuring LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Response in Ukraine*, December 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/strategy-ensuring-lgbtqi-inclusion-humanitarian-response-ukraine>.

V. Project Achievements

After two years of intensive work, Outright, collaborating with a wide array of partners and allies, achieved the following outcomes.

INCREASED VISIBILITY OF LGBTIQ NEEDS AND PRIORITIES AMONG INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Outright helped establish direct connections among international actors and LGBTIQ organizations in Ukraine, working with the community to provide a strong needs-based rationale for inclusion and to bridge gaps in communication and understanding where they existed.
- Through various convenings and training workshops, Outright sought to elevate and amplify the needs of crisis-affected LGBTIQ Ukrainians, serve as a resource to the humanitarian sector, and create events and other spaces for sharing perspectives and information. The most prominent of these was the first National Forum on LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Response in Ukraine, held in Kyiv in April 2024, co-sponsored by CARE Ukraine, RFSL, and the Danish Refugee Council. This meeting proved to be a breakthrough for fostering open dialogue and understanding among LGBTIQ organizations, humanitarian agencies, and donors. It resulted in a written strategy and set of recommendations for strengthening LGBTIQ inclusion. Further, inviting humanitarians into an LGBTIQ space opened new communication channels and influence.

"The forum was very useful... It was useful both in terms of work and as an anti-burnout tool. In addition, these meetings help our organization to find new partners and communicate LGBTIQ+ needs to a wider audience."

– UKRAINIAN LGBTIQ CSO REPRESENTATIVE

- Through constant interaction and participation in formal and informal humanitarian meetings, Outright helped deepen the understanding of the UN and other humanitarian agencies regarding the needs and priorities of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people and their experiences with the sector. Formal training with humanitarian actors also helped to eliminate potential prejudice and latent stigma that may have prevented closer cooperation in both national and sub-national UN agency offices.

Successfully elevating the needs and priorities of LGBTIQ people in Ukraine was critical as it helped foster learning and dialogue among LGBTIQ communities and the humanitarian sector, which in turn helped eliminate persistent barriers due to misunderstanding and prejudice. Importantly, increased mutual engagement also led to the inclusion of LGBTIQ needs into humanitarian organizational strategies and plans and a willingness to create formal structures for ongoing inclusion.



National Forum participants, April 2024¹¹

LGBTIQ INCLUSION MECHANISM FORMALIZED WITHIN THE UN CLUSTER SYSTEM

- In August 2024, the first-ever LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group (Technical Working Group) was formally recognized under the National Protection Cluster. This Technical Working Group aims to contribute to a more equitable and effective response in Ukraine by addressing the specific needs of the LGBTIQ community. As currently configured, the Technical Working Group is chaired by Outright International and co-chaired by UNHRC, and meets monthly. Its membership is comprised 28 international humanitarian organizations, 7 national NGOs, and 11 LGBTIQ CSOs. Its establishment represents an important milestone in the UN's commitment to integrating LGBTIQ inclusion into Ukraine's humanitarian response.
- As part of the Technical Working Group formalization process, ReliefWeb launched an LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group webpage that allows tracking the Group's activities and achievements.¹² Its Terms of Reference, news and events, and meeting minutes are now on the website and shared with all members.
- Accompanying the Technical Working Group is a Request Planning and Response Tool that Outright and the Technical Working Group designed.¹³ The tool allows LGBTIQ CSOs to request the Technical Working Group's assistance in seeking funding for their activities and urgent needs. These requests are then shared with humanitarian partners who may have the resources to respond and provide support.

The establishment of the LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group and the creation of tools for documenting and increasing support to crisis-affected LGBTIQ people represent important milestones in the UN's commitment to integrating LGBTIQ inclusion into Ukraine's humanitarian response, with potential ramifications for other crisis contexts.

¹¹ Outright International, "First-Ever National Forum on LGBTIQ Inclusion in Humanitarian Response in Ukraine," video still, 31 May 2024, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDCC6U-wrLE>.

¹² ReliefWeb, "LGBTIQ+ Communities Technical Working Group," accessed 4 August 2025, <https://response.reliefweb.int/ukraine/lgbtiq-plus-working-group>.

¹³ LGBTIQ+ Communities Technical Working Group, "Request Planning and Response Tool," accessed 4 August 2025, <https://ee-eu.kobotoolbox.org/x/IK77jVBS>.

LGBTIQ NEEDS INCLUDED IN THE 2025 HNRP FOR UKRAINE

- Working closely with allies and partners, and led by the LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group, a full paragraph on the needs of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people was drafted and inserted into Ukraine's 2025 HNRP (see Annex 1).¹⁴ This was accomplished through diligent advocacy and the steady support of allies from within the coordination system, such as the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Technical Working Group and members of the UNCT.
- The HNRP also includes 13 mentions of LGBTIQ needs in the various sections pertaining to ensuring accountable, inclusive, and quality programming; protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and in specific programming areas such as food security and livelihoods, protection, and health (see Annex 1).

Including a detailed description of LGBTIQ needs in the HNRP is critical since this annual plan dictates the coming year's humanitarian priorities and guides fundraising and allocations. The additional mentions throughout the plan also help emphasize that inclusion approaches must be multi-sectoral.

FORMAL RECOGNITION OF LGBTIQ NEEDS IN HUMANITARIAN PLANS AND STRATEGIES

- At the start of the program, LGBTIQ people were generally absent or only cursorily mentioned in humanitarian organization strategies and plans. With Outright's engagement, humanitarian organizations such as CARE Ukraine, UNHCR, and DRC also named LGBTIQ persons as a specific target group within their annual plans and organizational strategies.
- In recognition of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) on 17 May 2024, Ukraine's National Protection Cluster and UNHCR updated guidance originally published in 2022 outlining the importance of tailored programs to ensure that LGBTIQ individuals affected by the war are protected and that their specific needs are addressed.¹⁵ The guidance highlights the specific needs of LGBTIQ people in the context of Ukraine's humanitarian response and provides recommendations for humanitarian actors on strengthening LGBTIQ inclusion.
- UN Women established cooperation with the National LGBTIQ Technical Working Group through its Gender in Humanitarian Action Technical Working Group, ensuring that LGBTIQ inclusion was considered alongside broader gender priorities.
- The Age and Disability Technical Working Group (ADTechnical Working Group) collaborated with Outright and the LGBTIQ Technical Working Group, the GiHA Technical Working Group, and several international organizations to incorporate strategies for working with elderly LGBTIQ people and those with disabilities. This cooperation led to a broader commitment to establish an "Inclusion Coalition" to accelerate intersectional collaboration among groups representing marginalized and vulnerable populations, including ethnic minorities.
- The Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster initiated a Gender and Inclusion Technical Working Group and invited Outright to join as a core group member to discuss the needs and issues that LGBTIQ people face in this cluster's area of responsibility.

¹⁴ OCHA, *Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025*, 37.

¹⁵ Protection Cluster Ukraine, "Protection of LGBTIQ+ People in the Context of the Response in Ukraine."

- Working closely with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) GenCap Advisor, the WHO Disability Inclusion in Emergencies Specialist, the ADTechnical Working Group, UN OCHA/Ukraine, Outright, and the LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group provided critical input for adjusting the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender with Age Marker (GAM) tool to ensure that it is LGBTIQ-inclusive. The components of age and disability were also strengthened to reflect the demographic characteristics of crisis-affected populations in Ukraine.

LGBTIQ needs are now formally recognized in humanitarian responses, leading to greater visibility in cross-sectoral guidance, UN agencies, and other organizations. This recognition pressures humanitarian groups to be more responsive and collaborate with local LGBTIQ organizations.

VI. Key Factors Contributing to Success

The following represents a range of insights into the main factors that have contributed to advancing LGBTIQ inclusion in Ukraine's humanitarian response thus far.

DEDICATED FUNDING TO ADVANCE LGBTIQ INCLUSION

- Allocating dedicated funding to advance LGBTIQ inclusion is essential to building pressure and momentum. Given the broad array of actors and long-established guidance, institutionalizing inclusion on a structural level is time-consuming and complex. As such, the advocacy process cannot be periodic or piecemeal; rather, it must be constant, with sufficient support to engage full-time national staff who can promote the evidence-based rationale for inclusion.
- Further, as momentum has built, Outright's insights and recommendations have become increasingly in demand. Having two full-time in-country staff allows the team to respond quickly.
- Dedicated funding is also needed to support and document formal and informal convenings, private meetings, and public events that bring communities and humanitarian actors together and raise awareness about the challenges facing crisis-affected LGBTIQ people.
- While the CDP-funded advocacy program did not include an onward CSO grantmaking component, Outright's experience in managing an emergency fund that overlapped with the advocacy work has helped illuminate the importance of pursuing both. LGBTIQ CSOs cannot be expected to participate in advocacy interventions (at the Cluster and other levels) if they are not properly resourced. Therefore, a separate pool of funds for emergency grantmaking to national LGBTIQ-led and serving CSOs is highly recommended, as the ultimate aim of this advocacy – to ensure better support to LGBTIQ communities from humanitarian partners – is not achieved overnight. In the meantime, local organizations will need more immediate assistance.

APPROPRIATE STAFFING AND PROGRAMMATIC DESIGN

- Three of the four key staff involved in this advocacy program are Ukrainian and from the LGBTIQ community. The team configuration has helped ensure that the team members are seen as credible advocates in the Ukrainian context.
- Outright's physical presence in the country and ability to maintain direct engagement with stakeholders has enhanced its understanding of their priorities, enabling the development of tailored solutions and fostering more efficient and collaborative processes.

"It was incredibly helpful that we had one person (from Outright International – ed.) to coordinate all LGBTIQ issues."

– REPRESENTATIVE FROM AN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN

- Outright's evidence-based approach, combined with a deep understanding of both the realities faced by LGBTIQ communities in Ukraine and the operational framework of the UN humanitarian system, has strengthened its effectiveness.
- By having one in-country position with deep expertise in humanitarian work and the other with a long history of community engagement, the team has been able to create a bridge between the two sets of actors and to ensure safe, appropriate interactions. This has allowed Outright to pursue more effective advocacy and sustained engagement with multiple community organizations and humanitarian actors, including UN agencies, donors, and international humanitarian organizations within the cluster system. It has also created focal points for both the humanitarian sector and LGBTIQ CSOs, helping to simplify communication and avoid misunderstandings.
- Outright's team, thanks to its close collaboration with LGBTIQ CSOs, has had a clear understanding of the reasons for existing barriers to inclusion, as well as expertise in humanitarian standards and architecture.

CLOSELY COLLABORATING WITH LGBTIQ ORGANIZATIONS AND ADVOCATES

- Outright's work has been consistently guided by and involved with LGBTIQ community leaders and organizations, with Outright's LGBTIQ advocacy coordinator ensuring constant communication and consultation.
- Outright's team in Ukraine has actively sought to create entry points into the humanitarian system with and for its LGBTIQ organization partners. This included creating events like the National Forum on LGBTIQ Inclusion in Ukraine's Humanitarian Response, where LGBTIQ community leaders, humanitarian organization representatives, and donors could interact and learn from one another.

BUILDING TRUST WITH THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR BY "CALLING IN," INSTEAD OF "CALLING OUT"

From the start of this program, Outright focused on educating and supporting its humanitarian colleagues, inviting them to interact with and learn from the LGBTIQ community. This has helped position us as a trusted partner and a key facilitator for advancing LGBTIQ inclusion within the humanitarian system. This trust paved the way for long-term collaboration, policy changes, and the gradual institutionalization of mechanisms to support LGBTIQ individuals in humanitarian response.

- In-person, one-on-one communication makes a difference and may be preferred when it comes to building cooperation.
- Collaboration among organizations with similar goals in the sector enhances the representation of the community's rights and interests.

FINDING ALLIES, INCLUDING LGBTIQ STAFF, WITHIN THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

- Several key staff within international humanitarian organizations, as well as some UN cluster coordinators, demonstrated a genuine interest in cooperating with local LGBTIQ organizations. Their openness to ongoing engagement has created a solid foundation for future partnerships.
- Protection Cluster and UNCT Leadership support was especially crucial in launching the LGBTIQ Communities Technical Working Group under the Protection Cluster. In addition, collaboration with UNHCR, UNFPA, and UN Women played a pivotal role in advancing advocacy efforts. The strong relationships developed with these organizations have facilitated their active support in creating and sustaining technical working groups, both nationally and regionally.
- Numerous UN agencies and international organizations have diversity and inclusion policies, which could be leveraged to push for greater attention to LGBTIQ needs and priorities.
- Integrity, flexibility, and responsiveness build trust, which is essential for any partnership and advocacy campaign.

DEDICATED CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING THROUGH TRAINING AND CONVENING

- Consistent efforts to raise awareness and understanding among key UN agencies and international NGOs staff about the specific needs of LGBTIQ people via training, joint events with LGBTIQ people, and personal meetings have been integral to the program and essential to the success of advocacy efforts.

"The training helped us to better understand how the humanitarian system works."

– UKRAINIAN LGBTIQ CSO REPRESENTATIVE

- Concurrently, strengthening the capacity of LGBTIQ CSOs to understand the humanitarian system and structures and to engage with humanitarian actors directly has helped accelerate the advocacy process.
- Convening an annual national event – The National Forum on LGBTIQ Inclusion in the Humanitarian Response in Ukraine, which was jointly sponsored by LGBTIQ and humanitarian organizations – created an important collective event that raised visibility and amplified the perspectives of all participants. It also gave substantial weight and attention to the topic, creating a safe space for discussion and collaboration.

VII. Program Challenges and Gaps

- The global humanitarian system lacks formal guidelines for LGBTIQ inclusion, making it challenging to advocate for LGBTIQ Technical Working Groups or clusters at the country level. Without existing regulations, it is hard to justify establishing dedicated LGBTIQ mechanisms, hindering progress in formalizing inclusion initiatives.
- International humanitarian organizations initially lacked understanding of Ukraine's LGBTIQ communities' challenges during the war. Although they recognized the need for support, their mandates did not include specific, accountable policies or measures to assist LGBTIQ individuals.
- Initial meeting requests from Outright to UN agencies went unanswered. Humanitarian actors and stakeholders did not respond, prompting the national team to intervene and use personal connections to establish communication.
- Ingrained prejudices and homophobic attitudes among certain national and international humanitarian actors have hindered the broader involvement of local LGBTIQ NGOs in cluster-coordinated humanitarian responses. These discriminatory perspectives have impeded the advancement of initiatives aimed at including LGBTIQ communities in humanitarian planning and response efforts.
- Local NGOs working with Outright often did not gain immediate funding, leading them to question the value of engaging with the humanitarian system. Many local LGBTIQ NGOs found it difficult to see the benefits of coordinating with the cluster system, which required more resources and capacity building than direct funding from non-cluster donors.
- The gap between local CSOs' capacities and UN cluster donors' administrative expectations hindered collaboration and funding. Local NGOs also wanted to remain flexible in addressing the emerging needs of LGBTIQ and other beneficiaries, which strict cluster partnership procedures would limit.
- International LGBTIQ organizations that commenced funding LGBTIQ initiatives before and during the full-scale invasion in 2022 did not mandate participation in the cluster system. Additionally, local initiatives lacked experience since 2014, as they were not engaged in activities in eastern Ukraine and Crimea.
- Outright's cooperation with government agencies was limited. This constraint impeded the integration of advocacy initiatives into national humanitarian strategies.

VIII. Anticipated Risks and Challenges for Future Initiatives Beyond Ukraine

For advocacy initiatives promoting LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian response – whether in Ukraine or other countries – several potential risks and challenges should be carefully considered:

Structural and Capacity Barriers for Local Organizations

National and community-based LGBTIQ organizations often lack the capacity, resources, or administrative infrastructure required by humanitarian donors and the UN coordination system. These burdensome requirements can limit access to funding and formal coordination mechanisms, especially in the absence of established allies.

Limited Integration with Humanitarian Systems

Despite their ability to respond quickly and effectively to urgent needs, local LGBTIQ organizations may struggle to engage in structured coordination or adhere to international standards. This disconnect can hinder sustained partnerships with humanitarian actors and lead to missed opportunities for collaboration.

Political, Social, and Security Risks

Resistance to LGBTIQ inclusion – whether from government authorities, faith-based institutions, or humanitarian agencies – can result in legal barriers, reduced access, or even direct threats. Security risks are especially acute in conflict settings and require careful, locally informed advocacy to avoid unintended harm.

Shrinking International Support and Shifting Donor Priorities

Cuts in humanitarian funding – alongside efforts to “mainstream” inclusion – can weaken or eliminate support for initiatives that specifically focus on LGBTIQ communities. While mainstreaming aims to integrate inclusion across programs, it often deprioritizes targeted work, even when such communities have been historically overlooked and remain underserved. These trends, combined with political backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion, may cause donors and agencies to scale back or avoid LGBTIQ-focused efforts altogether.

X. Conclusions

Over the two-year course of this advocacy initiative, Outright and its partners in Ukraine have made important progress in leveraging partnerships with UN agencies and international organizations to promote the inclusion of LGBTIQ individuals in humanitarian planning and response. Critical elements of the program have included: capacity-strengthening of LGBTIQ organizations regarding humanitarian structures and processes; sensitizing humanitarian actors to the needs and priorities of crisis-affected LGBTIQ people in Ukraine; and consistent, direct, and respectful engagement with the humanitarian coordination system and its various structures.

Unfortunately, the potential material benefits of this initiative for LGBTIQ Ukrainians – many of which are still unfolding – now face serious threats. The uncertain trajectory of the war and its long-term impact, as well as the abrupt funding shifts to Ukraine and globally, have endangered the humanitarian system. This means that the anticipated increase in localized funding to LGBTIQ and other national CSOs is gravely threatened. In addition, the backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts is creating chilling effects, leading humanitarian actors and UN agencies to reconsider initiatives that might jeopardize future funding. While the full impact of these shifts remains to be seen, they are likely to have profound consequences for marginalized communities around the world.

Yet, humanitarian principles demand that all crisis-affected people in current or future emergencies receive assistance when and how they need it. This initiative clearly demonstrates that resourcing advocacy to bridge the divides that often exist between humanitarians and LGBTIQ communities can work and that creating structured mechanisms for cooperation, advocacy, integration of LGBTIQ issues into humanitarian clusters, networking, and partner engagement is possible. Despite the radically shifting humanitarian landscape, we hope that the lessons learned presented in this case study will be adapted and applied in other settings so that all those in need have access to safe, dignified, and life-saving support.

Annex 1. Excerpts From the Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 Related to LGBTIQ Inclusion

1.2 Analysis of Shocks, Risks and Humanitarian Needs People in Need

Unique needs of different groups of people

Other vulnerable communities, including Romas, ethnic minorities and LGBTIQ people, also face compounded vulnerabilities as the war continues, experiencing barriers in accessing documentation, resources and services, impacting their ability to receive humanitarian aid such as safe and adequate shelter, water and sanitation facilities and other types of support, including access to information.¹⁶

2.6 Accountable, Inclusive and Quality Programming

Two-way communication with affected people will be further reinforced by prioritizing inclusive programming through engagement with local CSOs, Internally Displaced People's Councils, organizations of people with disabilities and organizations of older people, LGBTIQ organizations, women rights organizations, Roma organizations and other forms of community-based platforms.¹⁷

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

The GTS report underscores the need to continuously improve accessible and safe community feedback mechanisms tailored to local contexts. Community-based organizations, such as youth associations, play a pivotal role in informing victims rights and enabling safe reporting. These mechanisms are designed to address barriers to reporting, especially for vulnerable groups like Roma, LGBTIQ people and people with disabilities. Moreover, integrating law enforcement into system-wide SEA reporting processes will enhance accountability and legal enforcement of PSEA while contributing to a rights-centered approach based on access to justice for survivors.¹⁸

Gender, age, disability and other diversities

Although not a determinant of vulnerability in isolation, gender can be an exacerbating factor in the severity of needs and vulnerabilities, particularly when combined with age, disability and household composition, and more especially among other vulnerable groups, including Roma or other ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ people, and people living with HIV+.¹⁹

¹⁶ OCHA, *Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025*, 16.

¹⁷ Ibid, 34.

¹⁸ Ibid, 35.

¹⁹ Ibid, 36, 95–98.

The war in Ukraine has exacerbated vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ communities who already encounter structural barriers to essential services. Stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination and lack of recognition from service providers often lead to exclusion from shelter, health care, legal support, case management and other services. This is further complicated by the fear of disclosing sexual orientation or gender identity, making LGBTIQ people hesitant to seek assistance. Compounding barriers such as the lack of accessible services, including documentation for same-sex families and transgender people, leave many of them without protection and crucial resources. Furthermore, LGBTIQ communities are frequently underrepresented in needs assessments, impeding accurate data collection and response planning to better address their specific needs.²⁰

3.4 Food Security and Livelihoods

Targeting and prioritization

In 2025, the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster (FSL) aims to provide life-saving food and livelihood assistance to 2.3 million people, focusing on the most vulnerable and food-insecure people in the 10 most affected oblasts experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity and deteriorating livelihoods in the south, east and north-east. The Cluster will ensure inclusive and gender-sensitive programming to address the specific vulnerabilities of internally displaced people whose livelihoods have been severely disrupted by displacement, older people and people with disabilities, Roma and LGBTIQ and female-headed households facing significant challenges due to lower income levels and other forms of barriers to assistance. By directing interventions towards these priority groups, the Cluster ensures that assistance reaches those most affected by the ongoing war, helping to mitigate the risk of further deterioration in food security and livelihoods across priority oblasts.²¹

3.5. Health

Summary of needs

Violence has also increased the risk of GBV, mainly affecting women. War-related stress has led to a substantial burden of hypertension among affected people, with an increased risk in some frontline oblasts. Centralized accessible sexual and reproductive health care is lacking at the primary level, limiting access. LGBTIQ people often face barriers to accessing specialized health services, including mental health, and sexual and reproductive care.²²

3.7. Protection

Response strategy

In 2025, Protection Cluster partners aim to reach 1.1 million internally displaced people and 1.52 million non-displaced war-affected people (56 percent women, 44 percent men, 15 percent children, 54 percent adults, 31 percent older people, and 16 percent people with disabilities). These include returnees, people in collective sites, LGBTIQ people and people in areas occupied by the Russian Federation as access allows. This will involve engaging women's rights organizations, organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs), organizations of older people (OPAs), LGBTIQ organizations and councils of internally displaced people,

²⁰ Ibid, 37.

²¹ Ibid, 54.

²² Ibid, 55.

ensuring a tailored protection response incorporating an age, gender and diversity lens.

The three pillars of the response are:

1. Delivering critical specialized protection services and targeted social support to internally displaced people and non-displaced war-affected people, while advancing localization efforts through partnerships with government service providers, civil society organizations (CSOs) and volunteer networks, particularly in eastern, north-eastern and southern Ukraine
2. Reinforcing community capacities to develop inclusive protective mechanisms for all people in and outside of collective sites, reducing negative coping mechanisms and contributing to social support services, while enhancing self-reliance and access to rights
3. Complementary strengthening of the protection environment, focusing on advocacy and free legal aid, social services and internal displacement policies to ensure that the most vulnerable internally displaced people and non-displaced people affected by the war can meaningfully and safely access public services, while their rights are protected, respected and fulfilled²³

Targeting and prioritization

In 2025, Protection Cluster partners aim to reach 1.1 million internally displaced people and 1.52 million non-displaced war-affected people (56 percent women, 44 percent men, 15 percent children, 54 percent adults, 31 percent older people, 16 percent people with disabilities). This includes returnees, people in collective sites, LGBTIQ people and people in areas occupied by the Russian Federation as access allows. The protection response will focus on raions with severity levels 4 (critical) and 5 (catastrophic), mostly in the east, north-east and south of Ukraine, and will aim to reach 83 percent of internally displaced people and 95 percent of non-displaced war-affected people in these prioritized raions.²⁴

²³ Ibid, 59–60.

²⁴ Ibid, 62.



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