

Advancing LGBTQ-Inclusive Responses to Forced Marriage

Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

October 29, 2025

This is a joint submission by Outright International, Nazariya (India), and Women in Innovation and Tech Initiative (WITI) (Nigeria) in response to the call for input of OHCHR to inform its guidelines on child, early, and forced marriage.¹

The submission focuses on lesbian, bisexual, and queer women and girls and trans and nonbinary people assigned female at birth, who experience the intersecting forms of discrimination based on their assigned sex at birth, sexual orientation, and gender identity. For the sake of simplicity, we'll refer to this group as LGBTQ people. The authors recognize that child, early, and forced marriage takes many forms in different contexts, with nuance to how marriages occur or are compulsory in many cultures. For simplicity in this submission, we use the term “forced marriage” to mean any forced marriage (early or later in life), as this is the form that LGBTQ persons most often report.

The submission will examine the specific vulnerabilities of LGBTQ people to forced marriage, discuss gaps in existing measures, and outline recommendations for inclusive responses to address the harmful practice of forced marriage.

This joint submission addresses questions 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 of the call for input. It starts with an overview of existing literature on LGBTQ people's experiences of and vulnerabilities to forced marriage in India and Nigeria, and a review of relevant international standards. Next, it examines four thematic areas from an LGBTQ perspective. Finally, it presents recommendations for an inclusive roadmap to eradicate forced marriage.

¹ **Outright International** works with partners around the globe to strengthen the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality. **Nazariya** is a Delhi-based Queer Feminist Resource Group founded in October 2014 working to integrate a queer perspective into issues of gender-based violence, livelihoods, education, and health through research, capacity building, and advocacy. **WITI (Women in Innovation and Tech Initiative)** is dedicated to empowering marginalized LBQ+ women in Nigeria by providing the tools, training, and community to help women excel in the digital world, achieve economic independence, lead innovation, and drive climate-focused solutions while advocating for the rights of LBQ+ women. **Dr Evie Browne** is a Research Fellow at ODI Global, a global affairs thinktank, in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion team. Evie researches intersectional feminism, gender norms and normativity, sexualities, rights, and social justice on-the-ground work in India, as well as consultations.

Methodology

Outright developed this joint submission based on desk research and a focus group discussion with the co-author organizations. It also draws from the individual written contributions of civil society partners that employed various approaches to collect data:

- Nazariya's contribution draws on lessons from their on-ground work in India and a consultation with grassroots activists and partner organizations, supplemented by secondary research.
- WITI conducted secondary research and disseminated two surveys.²
- Dr. Evie Browne, a research fellow at ODI Global, drafted the global overview based on secondary research and assisted in reviewing the document. Madhura Chakraborty, a feminist researcher, also reviewed the document and provided expert input.

Overview

Forced marriage poses distinct and severe harms for LGBTQ persons and must be explicitly addressed in the OHCHR guidelines to counter longstanding policy invisibility.

Coercive marriage practices were one of the top three most frequently reported of ten human rights abuses Human Rights Watch identified as most affecting LBQ women's lives.³ However, LGBTQ women and girls are rarely considered as rights-holders, nor are their specific needs discussed in policy and research on forced marriage.⁴ Research often overlooks how sexual orientation and gender identity shape marriage decisions.⁵ However, some stakeholders are beginning to address these issues.⁶

In some cases, parents, extended families, and traditional and religious leaders force women and girls into marriage to control their sexual activity and enforce expected

² The first online survey circulated among LGBTQ and allied civil society networks in Nigeria, and yielded three complete anonymized responses from two victim-survivors of forced marriage and a civil society expert. The second survey collected 20 responses from victim-survivors of forced marriage.

³ "Compulsory heterosexuality, the pressure to marry men, and coercive marriage practices were the most frequently reported abuses experienced by our LBQ+ interviewees in Canada, Indonesia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malawi, Mexico, Poland, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Ukraine." See Human Rights Watch, *"This Is Why We Became Activists" Violence Against Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women and Non-Binary people*, February 2023, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/02/global_lbq0223_web.pdf, 58-59.

⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁵ Amy Harrison, *Evidence review: Child marriage interventions and research from 2020 to 2022*, January 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/media/136646/file/CRANK-Evidence-Review-Child-Marriage-2023.pdf>, 23-25.

⁶ See CEFM and Sexuality Programs Working Group, *Tackling the Taboo: Sexuality and gender-transformative programmes to end child, early, and forced marriage*. Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions and Sexuality Working Group, 2019, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/905/Tackling-the-Taboo-Full-English.pdf>; Torchlight Collective and Girls Not Brides, *Girls' sexuality and child, early, and forced marriages and unions: A conceptual framework*, April 2022, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/cefm-sexuality-framework->.

heterosexual norms.⁷ Families or communities may coerce LGBTQ persons into marriage to conceal or “correct” their identities, punishing gender and sexual nonconformity.⁸ This belief that marriage and enforced heterosexual intimacy will make a woman heterosexual is a form of “conversion practice” that is recognized as torture in some instances.⁹ Efforts to push a girl or woman into marriage can force LGBTQ persons to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity, often putting them at risk of violence.

Forced marriage is gender-based violence in and of itself. Forced marriages also produce other types of violence. People in forced marriages can experience severe psychological distress, and for LGBTQ persons, this is compounded by the denial of their sexual or gender identity. Within a forced marriage, spouses may perpetrate interpersonal violence, including coercive sexual acts. Forced marriage condemns LGBTQ persons to a lifetime of invisible, condoned sexual assault.¹⁰ LGBTQ persons who leave or seek divorce frequently encounter familial retribution and ongoing abuse.¹¹

India

Globally, approximately one in three girls forced into marriage resides in India.¹² While research largely focuses on cisgender women and girls, many LGBTQ individuals in India are forced into marriages intended to “correct” their sexual orientation or gender identity, a practice that is compounded by the lack of legal recognition of same-sex marriages and limited protections for transgender persons.

As non-governmental organizations in India have documented, forced marriages for LGBTQ people operate as a tool to enforce sexual and gender conformity, often involving violence.¹³

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Outright International, *Harmful Treatment: The Global Reach of So-Called Conversion Therapy*, August 2019, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/global-reChildch-so-called-conversion-therapy>, 20, 33, 34, 56.

⁹ Enforced heterosexual intimacy is sometimes known as “corrective rape.” Ibid; OHCHR, “‘Conversion therapy’ can amount to torture and should be banned says UN expert,” July 17, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2020/07/conversion-therapy-can-amount-torture-and-should-be-banned-says-un-expert>.

¹⁰ Human Dignity Trust, *Breaking the Silence: The Criminalisation of Lesbian and Bisexual Women and its Impacts*, May 2016, <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/resources/breaking-the-silence-the-criminalisation-of-lesbian-and-bisexual-women-and-its-impacts>, 27.

¹¹ Ibid, 7–8, 70–73.

¹² UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in India*, May 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/ending-child-marriage-a-profile-of-progress-in-india-2023>.

¹³ PUCL and National Network of LBI Women and Trans Persons, *Apon Ka Bahut Lagta Hai (Our Own Hurt Us the Most): Centering Familial Violence in the Lives of Queer and Trans Persons in the Marriage Equality Debates*, April 2023, <https://pucl.org/manage-reports/apnon-ka-bahut-lagta-hai-our-own-hurt-us-the-most-centering-familial-violence-in-the-lives-of-queer-and-trans-persons-in-the-marriage-equality-debates>, 41–48; Nazariya, *Understanding Violence Against Queer Women and Transmasculine Persons in Forced Marriages*, 2025, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H0XX6z7lpZJrypPRk8_YyOBO00IWzEZn/view.

However, some of the publicly available government data from India does not disaggregate forced marriages by sexual orientation or gender identity, leaving this dimension invisible.¹⁴

Forced marriage results in significant emotional, psychological, and social consequences for LGBTQ persons.¹⁵ Due to institutional exclusion, many individuals only seek support from their communities, chosen families, and advocacy networks, rather than from state agencies. However, in some cases, they are isolated even from these supportive networks. In these marriages, LGBTQ persons face multiple forms of violence, including emotional abuse, physical assault, sexual coercion, and threats or attempts at “conversion.”¹⁶

Nigeria

In Nigeria, nearly a third of women aged 20–24 reported having entered a marriage before the age of 18.¹⁷ However, LGBTQ women and girls are rarely named in forced marriage discourse, despite facing particular risks. Two of three respondents to the first survey indicate that some LGBTQ individuals, including themselves, are pressured into heterosexual unions by families as a cover or to disprove perceived “deviance,” while the second survey revealed experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.¹⁸ Many conceal their sexual and gender identity, live in fear of exposure, and avoid seeking help. Mainstream anti-forced marriage strategies, such as school incentives, community dialogues, or legal reform, fail to account for the intersecting stigma, confidentiality demands, and identity-based exclusion that LGBTQ youth confront.

International Standards

In the past few years, several bodies have started to recognize LGBTQ people’s specific vulnerabilities to forced marriage.

In 2018, the **UN Office on Drugs and Crime** acknowledged that LGBTQ and asexual persons “might face pressures to marry to conform to perceived gender norms” and recognized the

¹⁴ Indian demographic data, including data from the National Family Health Surveys, captures information on the economic status, education levels, religion, caste/tribal affiliation, and settlement type (urban/rural) of persons subjected to forced marriages. See, for example: UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage*, 12–15.

¹⁵ PUCL and National Network of LBI Women and Trans Persons, *Apon Ka Bahut Lagta Hai*, 41–48.

¹⁶ Nazariya, *Understanding Violence*.

¹⁷ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children’s Fund, *2021 Nigeria Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) & National Immunization Coverage Survey (NICS) Statistical Snapshots*, August 2022, <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/2021%20MICS%20Statistical%20Snapshots%20Report.pdf>, 65.

¹⁸ WITI (Nigeria) conducted secondary research and analyzed data from three complete anonymized responses to an online survey circulated among LGBTQ and allied civil society networks in Nigeria. A second survey with 20 survivors revealed more severe experiences, including sexual and physical abuse, forced pregnancies, abandonment, educational deprivation, and ridicule in religious settings, with marriages lasting up to nine years and some survivors having up to four children.

possibility that men could also face forced marriages “to control unwanted sexual orientation such as homosexuality.”¹⁹

In January 2024, the **UN Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity** cited “forced heterosexual marriages” of LBQ women as a “chilling example” of “religiously justified” violence carried out by non-state actors.²⁰

In June 2024, the **UN Secretary General**, in his report to the General Assembly, highlighted that the pushback against gender equality has reinforced harmful norms “in societies where early marriage is viewed as a way to control girls’ and women’s sexuality.” The report noted that lesbian and bisexual women can be exposed to various forms of violence, including forced marriage, when their sexual orientation is revealed.²¹

At the European level, in 2010, the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** called on member states to recognize that “lesbian, bisexual and transgender women face an increased risk of gender-based violence (in particular rape, sexual violence and harassment, as well as forced marriages)” and to “provide protection commensurate with the increased risk.”²²

Root Causes (Q1)

The root causes of forced marriage of LGBTQ people are a combination of social norms that pressure women into heterosexual unions, and legal and economic systems of discrimination that become coercive leverage.

¹⁹ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Interlinkages between Trafficking in Persons and Marriage*, December 2018, https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2020/UNODC_Interlinkages_Trafficking_in_Persons_and_Marriage.pdf, 23, 28.

²⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Freedom of religion or belief and freedom from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/37, January 24, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/37>, para. 19. In April 2025, the mandate noted that asylum systems fail to take into account “coerced marriage” and reject LBQ women’s applications based on their having children and being in heterosexual marriages. UN Human Rights Council, Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to forced displacement, UN Doc. A/HRC/59/43, April 17, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/43>, para. 64.

²¹ UN General Assembly, Issue of child, early and forced marriage, UN Doc. A/79/308, August 9, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/308>, para. 27; Human Dignity Trust, *Breaking the Silence: Criminalisation of Lesbians and Bisexual Women and its Impacts – 2nd Edition*, 2024, <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/resources/breaking-the-silence-2>, 5.

²² Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, Resolution 1728 (2010), April 2010, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17853/html>, para. 16.3.

Cultural Norms

Many communities presume women must marry men and have children. Feminist scholars frame this as **compulsory heterosexuality**—a social system that erases lesbian and bisexual women’s existence and channels women into heterosexual marriage.²³ In India, there is a prevalent belief in both Hindu and Muslim communities that a father’s primary duty is to marry off his daughter, and failing to do so at the “right time” is considered a religious failing or sin.²⁴

Forced marriage stems from patriarchal norms that affect all women and girls, but the routes to marriage are different. Some girls enter marriage because they have an unwanted pregnancy, some are married off by their families for economic reasons, but LGBTQ people are often forced into heterosexual marriages as adults as a means to convert their sexuality. Families use forced marriage to suppress signs of queerness, avoid gossip, and reassert control. As such, forced heterosexual marriage can be used as a form of “**conversion practice**,” alongside “corrective rape” and other abuses intended to change or suppress sexual orientation.²⁵

Discriminatory Laws and Criminalization

Male guardianship and unequal divorce, inheritance, and property regimes limit women’s mobility, choice of spouse, and ability to resist or escape from coerced marriage. These inequalities create structural conditions where refusing a family-chosen husband is dangerous or impossible.²⁶ Where same-sex relations are criminalized or socially demonized, families can leverage fear of exposure to force compliance.

Social Infantilization and Economic Dependence

Economic reliance on fathers, plus the **infantilization** of unmarried women, pushes some LGBTQ people toward marriages of convenience or coerced unions to attain autonomy and

²³ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (Monthly Review Press, 1980), <https://sites.oxxy.edu/ron/csp19/2010/rich%20compulsory%20heterosexuality.pdf>.

²⁴ “Honour” plays a role in compulsion, coercion, and capitulation. See Pervvez Mody, “Marriages of Convenience and Capitulation: South Asian marriage, family and intimacy in the diaspora,” in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (Routledge, 2014), 374–387.

²⁵ UN human rights mechanisms describe conversion practices broadly—including family-arranged sexual coercion and marriages intended to “cure” lesbian/bisexual women. See UN Human Rights Council, Practices of so-called “conversion therapy”: Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, UN Doc. A/HRC/44/53, May 1, 2020, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/44/53>.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Trapped: How Male Guardianship Policies Restrict Women’s Travel and Mobility in the Middle East and North Africa*, July 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/07/18/trapped/how-male-guardianship-policies-restrict-womens-travel-and-mobility-middle>.

social legitimacy. In the Indian context, socio-economic status doesn't always protect from forced marriage. Forced marriage operates differently across caste lines in India. Among Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women, it is often driven by poverty, caste vulnerability, and the need for "protection" from dominant-caste violence.²⁷ Among Savarna women, coercion functions to preserve caste purity and uphold family honour—each enforcing control over women's choice and sexuality.²⁸

LBTQ people, especially when masculine-presenting or gender nonconforming, face **discrimination in access to employment and in the workplace**. That reduces their economic independence and reinforces family control. Without income or assets, many LBTQ people are forced to rely on marriage for survival.²⁹

Responses to Address Root Causes and Counter Forced Marriage

(Q1-2)

Interventions to counter forced marriage and address its root causes are often not tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of LBTQ people or are inadequate to respond to their needs.

Research on forced marriage in all its forms is essential to inform advocacy and policies. However, because forced marriages of LBTQ people are often hidden due to stigma, fear, and family secrecy, they are underreported, making them statistically invisible across regions. This leads to their exclusion from programs or policies designed to prevent forced marriage. Most existing research on forced marriage does not address the specific experiences of LBTQ people.³⁰ The only available research is anecdotal, journalistic, or focused on particular contexts, such as the South Asian diaspora in the United Kingdom.³¹

²⁷ Human Rights Watch and the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ) at New York University School of Law, *Hidden Apartheid Caste Discrimination against India's "Untouchables,"* February 2007, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/02/12/hidden-apartheid/caste-discrimination-against-indias-untouchables>, 71-72; Oxfam India, *Thorny Transition: Women's Empowerment and Exposure to Violence in India*, June 2014, <https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/WPI0Thorny%20transition%20final.pdf>, 11.

²⁸ Bidisha Saikia, "Caste And Gender: A Question on Women's Sexuality in a Brahmanical Patriarchal System," *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 5, no. 4 (2023): <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2023/4/5346.pdf>, 2.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, *"This Is Why We Became Activists."*

³⁰ See, for example: UNICEF, "Child marriage," accessed October 27, 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>; UNFPA, "Child marriage," accessed October 27, 2025, <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>; Girls Not Brides, "Resource centre," accessed October 27, 2025, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre>.

³¹ Karma Nirvana, *Helpline Statistics Q2 Report*, 2019, https://s40641.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/KN_Q2_19_Report-V3.pdf; <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage>.

Laws that explicitly prohibit forced marriage provide legal deterrents and signal states' rejection of forced marriage. However, they don't foresee or explicitly protect people who are forced into heterosexual marriages because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Where forced marriage is prohibited, LGBTQ persons may be reluctant to access police, courts, or legal aid due to safety concerns, such as fear of exposure or discrimination. Where sexual and gender diversity is criminalized, LGBTQ victim-survivors are left with no effective legal recourse.

Awareness-raising campaigns tackle the cultural norms that create the conditions for perpetuating forced marriage. Dedicated programs engage religious, community, and family leaders in dialogues to challenge harmful norms. But these critical initiatives are often designed on the assumption of women's heterosexuality and do not integrate conversations about sexual orientation and gender identity and the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. Forced marriage stems from patriarchal norms that affect all women and girls, but LGBTQ people may enter forced marriages through different routes, described above, and need specific campaigns that counter the narrative of conversion or correction.

Empowerment or livelihood programs are essential measures to support women's economic autonomy and reduce their reliance on fathers and husbands. However, these programs often do not account for the intersecting forms of marginalization LGBTQ people face. For example, for those who have been disowned by family, microfinance requiring collateral or group guarantees is inaccessible; in training settings, visible LGBTQ people might be bullied or ostracized, with no mechanisms for protection.

Protection services provide essential safe spaces and aid for victim-survivors of forced marriage. However, shelters may be hostile to LGBTQ people, who may avoid seeking help for fear of being outed, stigmatized, or rejected by services.

Responses to Support Victim-Survivors (Q3)

Existing Measures: Civil society organizations provide crucial support through crisis intervention by coordinating rescue operations and offering trauma support and responses to self-harm or suicidal ideation.³² NGOs facilitate socio-legal counseling, access to emergency and medium-to-long-term shelter, legal aid, and health care referral.³³ Organizations also conduct advocacy along with capacity-building and sensitization of law

³² Information from submission by Nazariya, on file with Outright International.

³³ Nazariya submission.

enforcement, the judiciary, and other stakeholders engaged in responses to forced marriage.³⁴

However, most existing legal frameworks lack explicit recognition of forced “corrective” marriages or coercion based on sexual orientation, leaving significant protection gaps.³⁵

LBTQ victim-survivors of forced marriage face distinct needs that differ from heterosexual victim-survivors and vary across the LBTQ spectrum:

- **Safe shelter and housing** that protects confidentiality and prevents forced outing.
- **Legal protections**, including restraining orders, safe relocation support, legal representation in divorce and custody proceedings, and enforcement mechanisms that shield victim-survivors from perpetrators, including family members.
- **Trauma-informed psychosocial support** that recognizes both forced marriage trauma and identity-based harms, delivered by providers trained to serve LBTQ persons without bias.
- **Health care access**, including gender-affirming care, mental health support, and sexual and reproductive health services free from discrimination and heteronormative assumptions.³⁶
- **Economic independence pathways** through educational continuity, vocational training, livelihood support, and targeted employment opportunities that address structural barriers LBTQ persons face in accessing independent income.

Aside from these specific needs on the basis of sexuality or gender identity, an intersectional approach should be promoted to consider other vulnerabilities LBTQ individuals may experience.

³⁴ Nazariya submission.

³⁵ These include India’s Supreme Court guidelines on police protection and Nigeria’s Child Rights Act and VAPP Act. See Devu G. Nair vs. The State of Kerala and Ors, Supreme Court of India, MANU/SC/0232/2024, Decision of March 11, 2024, <https://clpr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/45.pdf>; Federal Republic of Nigeria, Child’s Right Act No. 26 of 2003, <https://features.hrw.org/features/african-union/files/Nigeria%20-%20Child%20Rights%20Act%20No.%2026%20of%202003.pdf>; Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015, <https://fida.org.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Violence-Against-Persons-Prohibition-Act-2015-1.pdf>.

³⁶ Gender-affirming care can include specialised psychology services, hormone replacement therapy, and gender-reaffirming genital surgery and other surgeries.

Tools and Strategies for Data Collection (Q6)

Global Tools and Strategies

Global data on forced marriage mostly come from large-scale quantitative surveys such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)³⁷ and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).³⁸ Other similar data collection tools combine national statistics with community-based monitoring, such as the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Program to End Child Marriage,³⁹ the UNICEF CRANK Evidence Review,⁴⁰ the Walk Free Global Slavery Index,⁴¹ and the Girls Not Brides Atlas.⁴²

However, none of these tools include sexual orientation or gender identity indicators, leaving LGBTQ people largely invisible in global datasets. Current data collection methods also primarily focus on child and early marriage, resulting in a significant gap in data on adult women who experience forced marriage, whose realities remain largely undocumented and invisible.

Tools and Strategies for LGBTQ-Inclusive Data

Data on forced marriage involving LGBTQ people remain scarce due to limited tools, resources, and institutional support. Most civil society organizations working on these issues operate at the grassroots level, with minimal capacity for systematic documentation or disaggregated data collection, and only a few comprehensive global reports have documented these experiences.⁴³ These reports employed qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, testimonies, and case studies, which were collected through trusted networks and community referrals, ensuring the confidentiality and safety of participants. In contexts that criminalize or are hostile to sexual and gender diversity, data collection and monitoring pose significant risks, requiring the highest ethical safeguarding considerations.

³⁷ The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) are large national surveys conducted in many countries to collect data on population health, fertility, family planning, gender equality, and child protection.

³⁸ Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) are international surveys developed and supported by UNICEF. They are conducted by national governments to collect data on the situation of women and children.

³⁹ UNFPA & UNICEF, *Global Programme to End Child Marriage Annual Report, 2023*, <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/phase-iii-programme-document-unfpa-unicef-global-programme-end-child-marriage>.

⁴⁰ UNICEF, CRANK Evidence Review: Child Marriage Interventions and Outcomes, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/media/136646/file/CRANK-Evidence-Review-Child-Marriage-2023.pdf>.

⁴¹ Walk Free, *Understanding forced and child marriage*, 2023, <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/05/23134413/GSI-2023-Forced-Marriage-Spotlight.pdf>.

⁴² Girls Not Brides, *Child Marriage Atlas*, accessed October 27, 2025, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas>.

⁴³ Human Dignity Trust, *Breaking the Silence*; Human Rights Watch, *This Is Why We Became Activists*."

Recommendations (Q7)

Existing measures addressing forced marriage are not inclusive of the specific vulnerabilities of LGBTQ persons. The absence of legal and social recognition and protection for LGBTQ persons contributes to forced marriage and limits remedies for victim-survivors. Responses must adopt a gender-transformative, sexuality-aware approach so that prevention, protection, and services address how cisheteronormativity, homophobia, and legal discrimination intersect with age and gender power imbalances.

If the measures addressing forced marriage are robust, even the most vulnerable, including LGBTQ people, will be protected.

1. Legal reforms

National governments and lawmakers should:

- Amend laws addressing forced marriage, family, and gender-based violence to explicitly account for persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Provide access to justice and redress mechanisms for all victim-survivors, and ensure that these mechanisms prioritize their repair, healing, and recovery.
- Repeal criminalizing laws that endanger LGBTQ persons and override protections.
- Remove guardianship laws and overhaul personal status, family law, inheritance, and custody regimes in ways that allow plural family forms and alternatives to marriage.
- Strengthen property rights, land tenure, and asset ownership without discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status.
- Legally recognize same-sex partnerships and equal family rights so that refusal of heterosexual marriage is recognized as a legitimate decision.

2. Data, research, and monitoring

Governments, academic institutions, and civil society organizations should:

- Collect disaggregated data on sexual orientation and gender identity in surveys on forced marriage, family violence, and gender norms, while ensuring safety and confidentiality.
- Implement community-based participatory research with LGBTQ organizations, anonymized digital surveys, and inclusive data frameworks to enhance outreach and trust, especially in risky contexts, and ensure that data is grounded in lived experience.
- Build capacity among victim-survivors, community groups, and data collectors on ethical, confidential, and trauma-informed approaches to working with marginalized groups.
- Monitor the implementation of interventions against forced marriage, taking into account their specific impact on marginalized groups.

3. Targeted economic support and autonomy programs

Public authorities and implementers should:

- Design comprehensive livelihood, education, vocational, microfinance, or cash-transfer programs to help address the socioeconomic costs of discrimination and reduce LGBTQ persons' vulnerabilities to forced marriage.
- Strengthen mechanisms to ensure the inclusion, enrollment, and retention of LGBTQ persons in the education system, and address discrimination and violence in schools.

4. Awareness-raising

Media and civil society organizations should:

- Integrate conversations about sexual orientation and the legitimacy of same-sex relationships into advocacy around forced marriage.
- Engage religious, community, and family leaders in dialogues that challenge compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia.
- Encourage media and storytelling to humanize LGBTQ persons' experiences, reduce stigma, and expose forced marriage as an LGBTIQ human rights issue.
- Promote the understanding that the patriarchal norms underpinning forced marriage are the same norms that harm LGBTQ people.

Governments should:

- Train social workers, law enforcement authorities, judicial officers, and other relevant public officials on non-discrimination, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Incorporate comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula.⁴⁴

5. LGBTQ-inclusive protection services

Public authorities should:

- Train hotlines, shelters, NGOs, and social services in competency, confidentiality, and safety for LGBTQ victim-survivors.
- Create inclusive, safe spaces for LGBTQ victim-survivors that address their specific needs and provide adequate protection.
- Ensure legal aid offices have protocols to support LGBTQ persons seeking to resist forced marriage.

⁴⁴ CSE is a curriculum-based rights- and gender-focused approach to sexuality education, whether in school or out of school, that aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will enable them to develop a positive view of their sexuality, in the context of their emotional and social development.