OUTRIGHT INTERNATIONAL

DISCUSSION PAPER

ASEXUAL PEOPLE'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Developed in collaboration with Yasmin Benoit

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KEY POINTS

- **Asexuality is an umbrella term used to describe people who experience little to no sexual attraction toward others, regardless of their gender.**
- **Asexual people face pathologization, discrimination, and violence linked to their sexual orientation. They are impacted by conversion practices, sexual violence, school bullying, workplace harassment, and healthcare discrimination.**
- **In some countries, laws that criminalize sexual and gender diversity also make asexuality illegal.**
- **Laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation rarely include clear protections based on asexuality. Asexual people are entitled to universal human rights protections, and legal protections based on sexual orientation should be understood to be inclusive of asexual people.**
- **There is a limited understanding of asexual people's specific needs. Asexuality is largely invisible in research, policymaking, and movement-building for sexual and gender minorities.**
- **This paper invites policymakers, human rights organizations, donors, queer movements, asexual groups, and other stakeholders working on sexual and gender minorities to develop strategies to advance the inclusion of asexual issues in their work.**

About This Paper

Asexual people face discrimination due to their sexual orientation, but these abuses are often invisible. This discussion paper is designed to call the attention of policymakers, human rights organizations, and queer movement leaders to these abuses and support discussions on how we can better address the specific needs and demands of asexual people. It examines challenges asexual people face in accessing healthcare, along with other forms of discrimination and violence.

This paper is informed by expert input from British asexual activist Yasmin Benoit and ten asexual advocates from Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, and Vietnam who participated in two online focus group discussions in June 2026.

It is part of ongoing efforts within Outright to improve our understanding of asexual issues and engage in dialogue with asexual communities.[1]

Asexuality 101

Asexuality is an **umbrella term** used to describe people who experience little to no sexual attraction toward others, regardless of their gender.[2] Asexual can also be abbreviated as "ace." Some ace people also use **"a-spec"** to describe the spectrum of individuals who experience little to no emotional, affectional, or sexual attraction.[3]

Asexuality is a legitimate variation of human sexuality and is understood by some asexual people as a sexual orientation. It is not a sexual dysfunction or a mental illness. It is different from voluntary celibacy: as one asexual network puts it, "Unlike celibacy, which is a choice to abstain from sexual activity, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who we are, just like other sexual orientations."[4]

Being asexual does not necessarily mean the absence of sexual activity or intimate relationships. Asexual people can form intimate relationships, and some asexual people may feel sexual attraction in varying degrees.[5]

Asexuality is related to but not the same as **aromanticism,** which is a romantic orientation describing people who experience little to no

romantic attraction to others. Some asexual people are aromantic, while others experience romantic attraction.[6]

Data on asexual people is scarce, and most of the available information is concentrated in Global North countries. A 2023 survey conducted by Ipsos in 30 countries—mostly from Western Europe and North America—found that 1% of 22,514 respondents identified as asexual.[7] Only very few countries collect census data on sexual orientation, and an even smaller minority allows residents to self-declare as "asexual." In **England and Wales,** according to the 2021 census, 28,000, or around 0.05% of the population, identified as asexual.[8]

Acephobia is prejudice against asexual people based on the belief that asexuality is abnormal or deviant.[9]

> **"So you find that most [ace] people, they grow up feeling so isolated, confused, and also under pressure from the family and society to conform to societal expectations. Mostly in Africa, you need to get married, you need to have children, and all that, so you find that you're being forced to that."**
>
> — ASEXUAL ADVOCATE FROM KENYA[10]

A 2012 study found that heterosexual respondents in the U.S. and Canada viewed asexual people more negatively than heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual people.[11] They were also found to associate asexual people the least with human traits and emotions, demonstrating higher rates of dehumanization. In the **England,** 23% of 400 people surveyed in 2024 believed that asexuality is a mental health issue, while 11% said that asexual people do not exist.[12]

Acephobia facilitates discrimination, violence, and exclusion against asexual people across societal spheres. While asexual people face distinct forms of harm, they share overlapping experiences of marginalization with other sexual minorities. Like other queer people, asexual people are perceived to transgress norms that establish monogamous, procreative heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexual behavior, and they face prejudice as a result. Yet some asexual people say that other queer people have dismissed their experiences of queerphobia.[13] One purpose of this discussion paper is to identify areas of common ground and combat ace exclusion, both within and outside queer movements.

Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against Asexual People

Due to negative attitudes around their sexual orientation, asexual people are vulnerable to harassment and violence from their families and communities, as well as service providers. According to the 2024 Ace Community Survey, an online survey dominated by respondents from North America and Western Europe, 32% of 1,667 respondents had been verbally harassed, while 19% had experienced bullying in person or online.[14] Asexual respondents to a 2021 online survey reported targeted online harassment and doxxing, as well as threats of violence due to their public visibility as asexual.[15]

Conversion practices. Asexual people are targeted by sustained efforts to change or suppress their sexual orientation, justified by medical norms that pathologize them.[16]

The 2022 Ace Community Survey found that 10.9% of 8,958 asexual respondents had been offered (7.8%), advised to undergo (3.1%), or subjected (0.5%) to conversion practices.[17]

In the **U.K.,** the 2018 National LGBT Survey found that asexual respondents were the group most likely to have undergone (2.3%) or been offered (7.9%) conversion practices.[18] Five percent of asexual respondents also reported facing unwanted pressure to undergo medical or psychological examination—the highest among all sexual orientation groups.[19] Some asexual people in the U.K. have been subjected to unnecessary psychosexual therapy intended to change their sexual orientation. In **Spain,** according to a 2020 online survey of a-spec people, 232 out of 549 (42.3%) respondents reported "attempts or suggestions to test, cure, or fix" their asexual identity, with 61 (11.1%) disclosing that they received "healing advice from professionals."[20] The same survey found that 338 out of 615 (55%) respondents feared being "pathologized" or told they had "to seek treatment or be cured" if they came out.[21]

Conversion practices can also take on violent forms.[22] Asexual people in the **U.K.,** along with trans men and nonbinary people, were "more likely to experience sexual violence with intent to convert or punish than others," according to a 2022 Galop survey of 1,020 queer respondents aged 16 and above.[23]

In **Vietnam,** a 2024 survey of 475 asexual respondents found that "40.2% of people on the asexual spectrum have experienced abuse from perpetrators who expressed a desire or pressure to perform 'corrective' act."[24]

Sexual coercion and violence. In **Vietnam,** 31% of surveyed asexual respondents had experienced "unwanted physical contact with sexual undertone," while 54% had experienced "being propositioned, seduced, or coerced into engaging in unwanted sexual acts."[25] Asexual people also experience violence within intimate relationships. In the **U.S.,** 15%, or 66 out of 435, asexual respondents to a nationwide study said they experienced intimate partner violence in 2021.[26]

In some contexts, studies have found that asexual people are disproportionately victimized by sexual violence. In **Australia,** a 2017 report based on over 30,000 student responses found that asexual people (15%) were more likely than gay or lesbian (8%) or heterosexual (6%) people to have been sexually assaulted in universities.[27] In the **U.S.,** a 2015–2016 survey of college students found that 3.5% of asexual respondents reported experiencing sexual assault in the past 12 months, compared to 2.4% of non-asexual respondents.[28]

Forced and coerced marriages. Research on forced marriage is largely not disaggregated by sexual orientation, and Outright has not identified quantitative data on the prevalence of forced marriages affecting asexual people.[29] However, community reporting has uncovered asexual people's experiences of forced marriages, including with the intent to change their sexual orientations.[30] For example, an asexual woman from **Guinea** reported that shortly before she fled the country to seek asylum in Ireland, her parents had chosen a husband for her and intended to fix her "aversion to the idea of marriage."[31] A report from **Vietnam** found that asexual people faced the "double burden" of being pressured to be heterosexual and to fulfill familial expectations to marry and have children.[32]

Restrictions on family rights. Restrictions on family life based on sexual orientation may impact asexual people. For example, **Georgia's** Law on Family Values and Protection of Minors prohibits adoption and foster care of minors by persons "whose sexual orientation does not fall into the category of heterosexuality."[33]

Employment discrimination. According to a 2012 study, heterosexual respondents from the **U.S.** and **Canada** were less likely to hire asexual, homosexual, and bisexual people compared to heterosexual people.[34] A 2023 **U.K.** survey of 3,695 respondents aged 18 to 25 showed that more asexual people and gay men experienced workplace bullying (23%) than other sexual minority groups.[35]

> **"The biggest problem is that because we live in a very allonormative society [assumption that all human beings experience sexual attraction], even in circles where gay people are accepted, lesbians are accepted, we do not talk about asexuality being a totally valid orientation."**
>
> — ASEXUAL ADVOCATE FROM HUNGARY[36]

Data from the **U.K.** also reveals that asexual people were least likely among sexual minorities to disclose their sexual orientation at work and were most likely to receive negative reactions from colleagues when they do so.[37] Similar findings in a government-led survey in **Canada,** based on the responses of 25,636 2SLGBTQI+ people, showed that among sexual minority groups, asexual people (26%) were most likely to report not being comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation at work.[38]

Lack of awareness and barriers to the right to education. Asexuality is generally unaddressed in school curricula, fueling misconceptions.[39] The lack of awareness of asexual identities and their pathologization can hamper the identity development of asexual youth, lead them to question the legitimacy of their sexual orientation, or facilitate internalized acephobia, contributing to risks to their mental health and well-being.[40] In addition, asexual students experience sexual assault, verbal harassment, and threats of violence in schools. In response to a 2024 Outright survey on the right to education, eight of the 26 asexual respondents,

representing 11 countries, reported having experienced discrimination and violence from other students.[41]

In **Bangladesh,** the Asian Network of A-Spec Queer Activists (ANOAQA) documented a case of a school expelling an asexual nonbinary pupil for "corrupting the school environment" after they told their teachers about being sexually assaulted by classmates on a school trip.[42]

Omar, who was 13 or 14 at the time of the incident, was physically restrained by three classmates during a field trip and forced to strip and watch pornography against their will to "test" their asexuality. After refusing to view the material, Omar was beaten up and endured severe physical trauma.

Instead of responding to this case of abuse, the school punished Omar for speaking about the "taboo" topic of sexuality and permanently expelled them.

Barriers to Access to Healthcare

Acephobia is legitimized and fueled by the incorrect idea that asexuality is a disorder.

Pathologization. Asexual people risk being pathologized under the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (ICD), the global standard used by most psychiatrists and psychologists around the world.[43] It retains the definition of Hypoactive Sexual Desire Dysfunction (HSDD) as "the absence or marked reduction in desire or motivation to engage in sexual activity… associated with clinically significant distress."[44] Unlike the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the ICD does not include an acknowledgment of the existence of asexual people who are not experiencing dysfunction. This omission could render asexual people experiencing distress due to societal prejudice or partner pressure vulnerable to pathologization.

The history of the DSM shows that classification systems can be reformed to reverse medical harm against sexual minorities. Until 2013, the DSM—one of the main references for the classification of mental disorders—classified people who reported little or no sexual desire, regardless of their sexual orientation, with HSDD.[45] In 2008, five activists from the pioneering Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) formed a task force to engage in the revision process of the DSM and lobby for changes to the HSDD classification.[46] This led to a critical change: while the most recent DSM still classifies HSDD as a sexual dysfunction under the narrow binary categories of "female sexual interest/arousal disorder" and "male hypoactive sexual desire disorder," it adds an important qualifier: "if a lifelong lack of sexual desire is better explained by one's self-identification as 'asexual,' then a diagnosis should not be made."[47] This note is only included in the full manual, not the shortened desk reference used by most practitioners, leading to concerns that diagnostic decisions may ultimately depend on mental health professionals' level of awareness about this change.[48]

In 2023, a federal court in **Mexico** issued a landmark ruling ordering the National Health System to stop prescribing psychotherapeutic care for asexual people and train health personnel on asexuality.[49] In the ruling, the court affirmed that "pathologizing their asexuality constitutes a violation of their right to the free development of their personality and amounts to discrimination against them simply because they do not conform to the heterosexual norm."[50]

This ruling—which Mexican ace activists described as the first in Latin America—came in response to a 2019 complaint by asexual activists against national health authorities. The court found that the national health protocols' failure to distinguish between asexual people and people with hypoactive sexual desire disorder made asexual people vulnerable to psychological and behavioral interventions due to their sexual orientation.[51]

In 2019 alone, the National Health System referred at least 317 people (not disaggregated based on sexual orientation) to psychiatric care to address their lack of sexual attraction.[52] At the time, internal protocols

prescribed "referral to the psychology department so that the psychological causes of the disorder can be identified through a psychotherapeutic process" for people whose lack of sexual attraction could not be explained by physiological causes.[53]

Asexuality is not a sexual dysfunction. A study of 423 individuals in **Canada** found "notable differences" between people likely to identify as asexual and people who meet the diagnostic criteria for HSDD: while both groups had little to no sexual desire, the latter group experienced clinically significant levels of distress associated with their sex life, leading the researchers to conclude that "asexuality is a category distinct from a sexual desire dysfunction."[54]

> **"We don't have the right to just choose a psychotherapist and be fine, because we risk them seeing our asexuality or aromanticism as a symptom and not a part of our being."**
>
> — ASEXUAL ADVOCATE FROM ITALY[55]

The effect of these categories of pathologization is that medical and health professionals treat asexual people as having a disease that professionals need to "cure." Some asexual people report being prescribed medication to increase their sex drive, which could demonstrate the lack of practitioner awareness about asexuality.[56] A 2018 study in the **U.S.,** where the DSM applies, found that more than a third of the 136 adult asexual respondents reported being misdiagnosed by doctors with a medical condition.[57] A 2025 study in **China** of 10 asexual individuals documented experiences of pathologization that include interrogatory or dismissive treatment by counselors.[58] In **Bangladesh,** an asexual trans man reported that a physician prescribed an elevated dosage of testosterone, higher than that of his trans peers, in an explicit attempt to address his lack of sexual attraction, although he had not requested such treatment.[59]

Outright could not identify public statements by major medical and professional associations explicitly addressing the pathologization of asexuality. A notable exception is the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT), which issued a statement in 2022 affirming that asexual identities are not disorders, but "valid and fulfilling identities and orientations," and opposing conversion practices directed toward asexual people.[60]

Mistreatment and stigma. Some asexual people experience stigmatization, mistreatment, judgment, or dismissal of their health issues at the hands of health professionals.[61] Data from the **U.K.'s** 2018 National LGBT Survey showed that 18% of the around 2,050 ace respondents experienced negative impacts on their healthcare due to the disclosure of their sexual orientation, the highest among sexual orientation groups.[62] Due to fear of discrimination, 8.5% of asexual respondents reported avoiding health services.[63] In the **U.S.,** according to the 2018 study cited above, the majority of asexual people surveyed reported that they did not disclose their identity to, or felt discomfort discussing sexuality with, their medical providers.[64]

Stonewall, in the U.K., reported on a focus group participant's experiences with a general practitioner who seemed more focused on her asexuality than the surgical complications she was seeking to address.

"After suffering nerve damage following a surgical procedure, a respondent mentioned being asexual to her GP. The GP then insisted that she bring her partner to her next appointment. She was later told that this was because they were 'concerned' about her relationship. Her asexuality was deemed as being 'not normal,' and it was assumed that it was caused by past psychological trauma. She was told that her partner would leave her and that they could attend couple's therapy. **The concern had shifted entirely away from her nerve damage.** She tried to explain to her healthcare provider what asexuality was but was met with a 'blank look.'"

-Stonewall Ace in the UK Report[65]

Acephobia as Part of Broader Attacks on Sexual and Gender Minorities

Criminalization and restrictions on civil and political rights. Some countries have adopted hostile laws that could be used to target asexual people as part of attacks against queer communities. A law in Niger explicitly names asexual people, while other laws use more vague language.

Niger's new penal code, promulgated by the junta in 2026, criminalizes "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) practices" with five to ten years in prison.[66] As of writing, Outright has not yet received reports of asexual people being arrested under this law.

In **Ghana,** a member of parliament proposed a bill in 2021 that would have criminalized "LGBTTQQIAAP+" people, defined to include "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Ally, Asexual, Pansexual and any other sociocultural notion of sex and sexual relationship that is contrary to the sociocultural notion of male and female assigned at birth." While the bill was inconsistent in its approach to asexuality, it appeared to prohibit "holding out" as asexual, with a sentence of up to five years in prison.[67] The version of the bill adopted by parliament in May 2026 does not mention asexual people. However, its vague language prohibiting "any other sexual orientation… that is contrary to the sociocultural relationship between a male and a female" could still be used against them, and the bill's history demonstrates the willingness of some politicians to codify the criminalization of asexual people into law.[68]

Numerous countries have passed "propaganda" laws that restrict the dissemination of information on sexual and gender diversity, banning any discussion of "nontraditional sexual orientations"—vague language that could be interpreted to include all sexual and gender minorities, including asexual people.

- In 2022, **Russia** passed amendments to the 2013 "gay propaganda" law, prohibiting "promoting or demonstrating nontraditional sexual relationships and/or preferences" among all age groups.[69]
- In December 2025, **Kazakhstan** banned the "dissemination of information about nontraditional sexual orientation" through media, the internet, and public spaces.[70]
- **Bulgaria's** 2024 Law on Amending the Pre-School and School Education Act prohibits the dissemination of information on "nontraditional sexual orientation," defined as anything "different from the generally accepted and enshrined in the Bulgarian legal tradition concept of emotional, romantic, sexual, or sensual attraction between persons of opposite sexes."[71]
- In June 2026, a **Belarusian** law banning "propaganda of homosexual relations, sex change, childlessness, and pedophilia" came into force, punishing violators with fines or even administrative arrest for "propaganda" directed to children.[72]

Acephobia from anti-gender movements.[73] Anti-gender actors target asexuality as part of their attacks on sexual and gender diversity.[74] For example, in the **U.K.,** "conspiracy theorists on the far right" responded to a pioneering report from the LGBTIQ group Stonewall on asexual people's human rights by claiming that gender-affirming care is a plot to forcibly turn children asexual.[75] Some anti-trans actors in the U.K. call for the exclusion of asexual people from queer spaces.[76] In the **U.S.,** some of the conservative groups that lobby against marriage equality and legal gender recognition also oppose "platonic marriages" and frame asexuality as contravening the Christian duty to marry and procreate.[77]

Impact of Exclusion

Erroneous beliefs that asexual people do not exist, that asexuality is not a legitimate sexual orientation, or that asexual people do not experience discrimination and violence render them invisible in national laws and policies, including antidiscrimination protections.

It can also exclude them from international protection. People fleeing persecution based on sexual orientation may qualify for refugee status as members of a "particular social group," according to the Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees and various UN human rights mechanisms.[78] Nevertheless, misconceptions about asexuality, as well as the lack of data on

human rights violations against asexual people, can lead authorities to reject their asylum claims and deny international protection.

In March 2018, the Dutch Council of State (the highest administrative court in the **Netherlands**) rejected an asylum application by an asexual Algerian man who was expelled from his family's home for refusing to marry his cousin. The Council ruled that asexuality did not fall under the Netherlands' interpretation of asylum grounds based on sexual orientation, reasoning that asexual people are not criminalized or generally targeted in Algeria and thus did not meet the criteria for persecution under the "safe country of origin" exception.[79]

Discrimination and violence lead some asexual people to seek protection and emergency support.[80] In 2024, out of the 10,750 people who requested help from Rainbow Railroad—an international nonprofit organization that helps queer people escape violence—244 (2%) identified as asexual.[81]

Legal Protections

While asexual people are often invisibilized in legal and policy discourse, they are entitled to universal human rights protections, which policymakers, human rights activists, asexual people, and queer movements can leverage.

General human rights protections. Under international human rights law, all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, have a right to nondiscrimination and are entitled to equal protection under the law, even if their specific identity characteristics are not listed in national law.[82] Discrimination against asexual people contravenes the core human rights principle of nondiscrimination.

Protection from sexual orientation discrimination. Due to the persistence of discrimination, UN human rights mechanisms recommend that states explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics in education, employment, housing, public services, social security, and other areas.[83]

However, protection is uneven. For example, only around 53 UN member states currently ban sexual orientation-based discrimination in healthcare.[84]

Legal protections based on sexual orientation, where they exist, should be understood to be inclusive of asexual people. Within asexual communities themselves, activists and individuals have different perspectives on whether asexuality is best understood as a sexual orientation or a lack of sexual orientation.[85] But according to either understanding, interpretations that exclude asexual people from sexual orientation nondiscrimination protections are themselves discriminatory. Nondiscrimination laws covering sexual orientation should extend to those who lack sexual attraction in the same way that human rights protections on religion equally cover atheists.[86]

Some countries define sexual orientation in a way that could limit or exclude protection for asexual people.[87] In the **U.K.**, the Equality Act (2010) defines sexual orientation as "a person's sexual orientation towards (a)persons of the same sex, (b)persons of the opposite sex, or (c)persons of either sex."[88]

In October 2024, then-Minister for Women and Equalities Anneliese Dodds affirmed that the government had "no plans for including asexuality as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010."[89] Asexual activists are lobbying for the explicit inclusion of asexuality under this law's Statutory Guidance.[90]

Exclusion from legal protection has tangible impacts. Philippa, a U.K. respondent to a 2021 online survey, said that when she reported harassment from her flatmates based on her asexual orientation, the management of the university student housing denied her assistance on the grounds that she was "not actually 'LGBT'" and was, therefore, "not protected under the anti-discrimination policies that would have had [her harassers] evicted."[91]

Laws and Policies Addressing Asexual People

While no UN member state explicitly refers to asexuality in its national nondiscrimination laws, some cities, states, and agencies have addressed this gap by explicitly protecting asexual people.

South Africa's Department of Employment and Labour interprets "harassment," which is prohibited under the Employment Equity Act (1998), as including "LGBTQIA+ phobic language."[92]

In the **U.S.,** the State of New York's Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (2003), which amends several existing laws on civil rights and education, protects from discrimination in education, employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, and other areas. It defines sexual orientation as "heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or **asexuality,** whether actual or perceived."[93] Several U.S. cities have banned discrimination in housing, employment, and public services based on "family or relationship structure," defined as covering diverse family structures and consensual sexual and/or intimate relationships, including **"asexual and aromantic** relationships."[94]

In **Spain,** at least two autonomous communities have enacted nondiscrimination laws aiming "to guarantee the rights of LGBTI persons and the eradication of LGBTI-phobia" that explicitly recognize "asexual" as covered under the term "LGBTI."[95]

In the Australian state of **Queensland,** the Respect at Work and Other Matters Amendment Act (2024) added this definition of sexual orientation to the Anti-Discrimination Act (1991): "the person's capacity, or **lack of capacity,** for emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, or intimate or sexual relations with, persons of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender."[96]

In **Canada,** the Canadian Space Agency's 2025–2028 Employment Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan includes asexual people among members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities that may qualify for human resource opportunities.[97]

Some jurisdictions have moved to explicitly include asexual people in laws prohibiting or regulating conversion practices, guaranteeing robust protection. In Australia, the states of **New South Wales** and **South Australia,** in their 2024 laws banning conversion practices, define sexual orientation as including "a **lack of sexual attraction** to any individual of any sex," removing any legal ambiguity regarding asexual people's inclusion under the law.[98]

In some countries, queer advocates are pushing for ace-inclusive nondiscrimination laws. In the **Philippines,** the proposed SOGIESC Equality Act—which would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics—defines sexual orientation as "the direction of emotional, sexual attraction, or conduct…or the absence of sexual orientation (asexual attraction)."[99] In the **U.S.,** the most recent version of the proposed Equality Act includes a definition partially adapted from a proposal by a coalition of asexual and aromantic activists: "Discrimination based on sexual orientation includes discrimination based on an individual's actual or perceived romantic, emotional, physical, or sexual attraction to other persons, or **lack thereof,** on the basis of gender."[100]

Discussion: Advancing Asexual Inclusion

Asexual people face a range of human rights violations due to their sexual orientation—from pathologization and conversion practices to discrimination and violence. What do ace-inclusive legal, policy, and programmatic responses look like? These questions seek to initiate dialogue among and between policymakers, human rights organizations, donors, queer movements, asexual groups, and other stakeholders on asexual issues:

Legal protection. Asexual people should be able to equally benefit from protections based on sexual orientation. At least nine UN member states have national laws that define sexual orientation in ways that could be interpreted as excluding asexuality (see Annex), leading some asexual groups to advocate for legal reforms in order to make explicit references to asexuality in the texts. Other laws define sexual orientation in broad terms and do not list specific identities.

- How can we ensure that asexual people can benefit from existing laws and policies on sexual orientation, regardless of how they are written?
- How can we draft laws and policies that do not contain any legal ambiguity in their application for all sexual and gender minorities?
- How can policy responses to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, forced marriage, and some forms of conversion practices, as discussed below, better take into account the experiences of asexual people?

Pathologization and conversion practices. Asexual people's identities and experiences are legitimate and should be affirmed as valid expressions of human sexuality. They should never be subjected to pathologization, conversion practices, and medical violence.

- How can legal and policy responses to conversion practices sufficiently protect asexual people?
- How can we end the pathologization of asexual people while ensuring that people who experience distress related to their lack of sexual desire or attraction can receive the medical care they need?

Broader attacks. While some asexual groups are calling for explicit inclusion in the queer umbrella, some hostile governments have adopted inclusive movement terminology and weaponized it in hostile laws. For instance, lawmakers have included acronyms like "LGBTQIA+" in laws criminalizing sexual diversity and gender nonconformity.

- How can we ensure that stronger asexual inclusion in queer movements does not lead to backlash against these communities, including in the form of criminalization?
- How can we fight anti-queer backlash together?

Organizing and movement-building. In some countries like Australia and the U.K., asexual activists are engaging in public legal and policy advocacy, while asexual groups in other countries are focusing on community-building and education. The level of inclusion of asexual people in broader queer spaces and groups also varies from one place to another.

- Amid a restricted funding landscape, how can donors and intermediaries working on sexual and gender minorities support asexual organizing and movement-building?
- How can queer organizations create inclusive and welcoming spaces for asexual people and all sexual and gender minorities?
- What steps can queer organizations take to ensure the inclusion of asexual people in research, data collection, and programming?

ANNEXES

Nondiscrimination Laws Defining Sexual Orientation

The following are the UN member states that define "sexual orientation" in the main text of their nondiscrimination laws. Most of these laws define sexual orientation in ways that could be interpreted as excluding asexuality.

Australia: "sexual orientation means a person's sexual orientation towards: (a) persons of the same sex; or (b) persons of a different sex; or (c) persons of the same sex and persons of a different sex."[101]

Bulgaria: "'Sexual orientation' shall mean heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation."[102]

Iceland: "Sexual orientation: An individual's ability to be attracted to or fall in love with another individual."[103]

Ireland: "sexual orientation''means heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual orientation."[104]

Mauritius: "'sexual orientation' means homosexuality (including lesbianism), bisexuality or heterosexuality."[105]

Netherlands: The country prohibits discrimination based on "hetero- or homosexual orientation," not "sexual orientation."[106]

New Zealand: "sexual orientation, which means a heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual orientation."[107]

Spain: "Sexual orientation: Physical, sexual, or emotional attraction to a person. Sexual orientation can be heterosexual, when one feels physical, sexual, or emotional attraction only to people of the opposite sex; homosexual, when one feels physical, sexual, or emotional attraction only to people of the same sex; or bisexual, when one feels physical, sexual, or emotional attraction to people of different sexes, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, to the same degree, or with the same intensity."[108]

Sweden: "sexual orientation: homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual orientation."[109]

United Kingdom: "Sexual orientation means a person's sexual orientation towards— (a) persons of the same sex, (b) persons of the opposite sex, or (c) persons of either sex."[110]

Definitions of Sexual Orientation That Explicitly Address Asexuality

American Psychological Association: "Sexual orientation can be conceptualized first by the degree to which a person feels sexual and emotional attraction; some parallel terms are "sexual," "demisexual" (or "gray-asexual" or "gray-A"), and "asexual" (see The Asexual Visibility & Education Network, n.d.). A person who identifies as sexual feels sexual and emotional attraction toward some or all types of people, a person who identifies as demisexual feels sexually attracted only within the context of a strong emotional connection with another person, and a person who identifies as asexual does not experience sexual attraction or has little interest in sexual behavior."[111]

Amnesty International: "Sexual orientation refers to a person's capacity for profound emotional, affectionate and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with other people. People experience sexual and romantic attraction differently. You can be attracted to people of a different gender, or the same gender as you. Some people are asexual, meaning they experience little to no sexual attraction."[112]

GLAAD: "Sexual Orientation: The scientifically accurate term for a person's enduring physical, romantic and/ or emotional attraction to another person. Sexual orientations can include heterosexual (straight), lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, and other orientations."[113]

International Organization for Migration: "Sexual Orientation: Each person's enduring capacity for profound romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Encompasses hetero-, homo-, bi-, pan- and asexuality, as well as a wide range of other expressions of sexual orientation."[114]

World Health Organization: "Sexual orientation is a person's physical, romantic, and/or sexual attraction (or lack of it) to other people. It includes three elements: sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and sexual identity (1, 2, 3). For some, sexual orientation is fluid and changes over time. For others, it is experienced as deeply innate and does not change over time. Sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct, and one cannot be inferred from the other."[115]

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ABOUT OUTRIGHT 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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Together, for better LGBTIQ lives. Outright.

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