

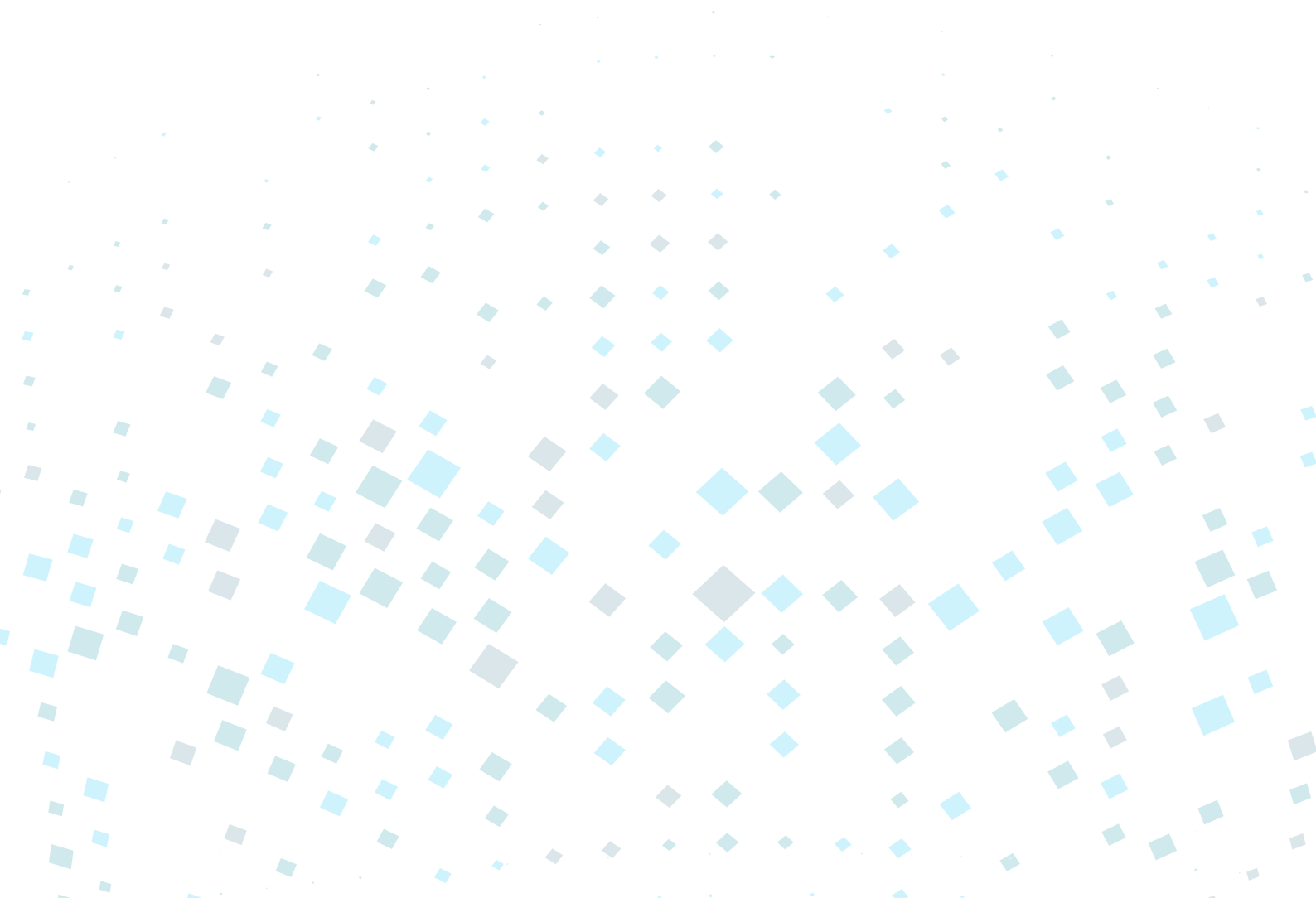


**THE INTERNATIONAL
PRIDE CENTRE**

PROTECTION, RIGHTS, INCLUSION
IN DISPLACEMENT & EMERGENCIES

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
OF THE CONGO**

LEGAL ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AID AGENCIES



Acknowledgements

Research team: Clare Brown, Aska Okeyo and Kate McGrane

Written by: Clare Brown

Reviewed and edited by: Michael Bruce

Acknowledgments: MOLI, for helping to organise the PRIDE Centre's research mission to the DRC and facilitate this research. All of the LGBTQIA+ organisations who set up key informant interviews and focus group discussions in person and online, including House of Rainbow, Baobab Club, Enigma Pride, Sante Lisungi, Elikya Myumu, Palmier, Oasis RDC, Kitumaini, CEDHUC, La Colombe Pride, AL-CIS, Sunrise Mapambazuko, MOPREDS, Egalatie Transgenre, and Last Hope Refugee Association in Uganda.

Layout and design: Sisonke Kalipa, Carpe Diem Software Group

Suggested citation: Brown, C. (2025) Democratic Republic of the Congo: Legal analysis and recommendations for aid agencies. PRIDE Centre. Available at: www.pridecentre.org

About the International PRIDE Centre: The PRIDE Centre (Protection, Rights, Inclusion in Displacement and Emergencies) provides legal and policy analysis, preparedness, and programming tools for aid workers, NGOs, and emergency response agencies to ensure inclusive programming for LGBTQIA+ persons in emergency, humanitarian, and development settings. The PRIDE Centre focuses on countries experiencing acute and protracted crises, in which the space for LGBTQIA+ rights and expression has become increasingly restricted.

For more information, visit:

Website: www.pridecentre.org

LinkedIn: International PRIDE Centre

Bluesky: @intl-pride-centre.bsky.social – The International PRIDE Centre

Mastadon: International_PRIDE_Centre

Tiktok: pride.centre

Youtube: @TheInternationalPrideCentre

The PRIDE Centre does not use X or any Meta platforms due to their transphobic and homophobic leadership and policies.



Introduction

Protection of SOGIESC minorities in DRC, with a focus on crisis-affected populations

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is home to one of the **largest and most severe humanitarian crises in the world**, with approximately 14.9 million people classified as being 'in need' by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 2026. A total of 5.8 million are internally displaced, following decades of conflict. The seizure of large swaths of eastern Congo by the March 23 Movement (M23) in has dramatically escalated an already acute crisis: since January 2025, over a million people have been displaced within North and South Kivu, and nearly 1.15 million people have fled the country. Humanitarian access in conflict-affected regions has been severely restricted, and recent cuts to the aid sector has had a devastating impact on access to food, water, protection, education, and life-saving medical care amongst affected populations.

The PRIDE Centre conservatively estimates¹ that **at least 6.4 million of the Congolese population and 745,000 of those in humanitarian need have diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC)**.

SOGIESC minorities are **not named as a target group** in DRC's current 2026 humanitarian planning frameworks.

Congolese laws do not criminalise homosexuality, same sex intimacy, or LGBTQIA+ human rights work. Despite this, police harassment of LGBTQIA+ individuals is common.

LGBTQIA+ civil society in DRC, including in the east, has been remarkably resilient over the last 15 years – but has been **devastated by the 2025 aid cuts**, in conjunction with the outbreak of the conflict.

The analysis of The PRIDE Centre is that humanitarian and development actors in the DRC have the **ability and responsibility** to more proactively include diverse SOGIESC populations in their programming and operations – and that they can do so even without accumulating additional funding or resources.

This brief is intended to give aid agencies working in the DRC a clear understanding of the risks and opportunities related to increasing their engagement with LGBTQIA+ populations in humanitarian settings. Given its humanitarian focus, the brief focuses primarily on the conflict-affected regions of eastern DRC. However, some of the research conducted by the PRIDE Centre, and some of the recommendations, centre on Kinshasa – the country's political, diplomatic, and civil society hub.

¹ In the absence of demographic data pertaining to diverse SOGIESC identities in the countries where we work, The PRIDE Centre conservatively estimates 5% of populations in Africa identify as SOGIESC minorities. This estimate is based on the global average of 9% of population based on [IPSOS' annual 26-country survey](#), weighted to reflect (i) South Africa is the only African country represented in the survey (4%) and (ii) extreme social conservatism alongside religious, legal, policy, and political strictures in most countries in Africa severely limit the space for people to identify as a member of a diverse SOGIESC community and/or to engage with their communities or receive affirming care.

The below table lists laws and policies in place in DRC that discriminate on the basis of SOGIESC status, and those that provide the community some level of protection.

Discriminatory laws

Law	Contents	Analysis/ enforcement
Penal Code ²	Articles 172 and 174: 'Inciting, facilitating, or promoting debauchery or prostitution ', punishable by 3 months – 5 years' imprisonment.	Collectively referred to as 'immorality' offences, these are often referred to by the police when arresting members of the community - but are never relied on to prosecute people or go to trial . Amongst other evidence, this confirms that same sex intimacy and related conduct is not criminalised in DRC .
	Article 175: Displaying or distributing materials 'contrary to good morals' , punishable by up to one year's imprisonment.	
	Article 176: Publicly offending good morals through actions that 'violate modesty' , punishable with up to 3 year's imprisonment.	
	Article 124: forgery committed with 'fraudulent intent or with the intent to harm' is punishable by 3 months – 5 years' imprisonment.	This article is occasionally referenced by police when arresting trans people, but as with the immorality provisions, is never relied on to lay charges or proceed to trial.
Family Code (1987); ³ Law on the Protection of the Child (2009) ⁴	Prohibits the adoption of a child by 'homosexuals'; ⁵ and 'transsexuals'. ⁶	The Family Code was updated in 2016 to add trans people to the previously existing ban on 'homosexuals', highlighting the heightened attention given to this population.
Ordinance on Exercise of Freedom of the Press (2023) ⁷	Articles 113 and 127: media professionals, who produce media, and members of the general public, who engage with it, must not violate 'good morals'. Those who do may face criminal and/ or civil liability. The High Council for Audio-visual and Communication (CSAC) is granted the power to regulate compliance with 'good morals' in the media, including online media (Article 92).	This is an administrative policy, rather than a law. In 2023, CSAC released a statement declaring that any 'campaign of homosexuality and lesbianism' is against good morals.⁸ The policy also seems to give CSAC broad, vague power to regulate what members of the

² Décret du 30 janvier 1940 portant Code pénal congolais (1940), DRC, available at <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1940/fr/54256>

³ Loi n° 87-010 du 1er août 1987 portant Code de la famille, as amended by Loi n° 16/008 du 15 juillet (2016), DRC, available at <https://genre.gouv.cd/ressources-et-publications/5/code-de-la-famille>

⁴ Loi n° 09/001 du 10 janvier 2009 portant protection de l'enfant (2009), DRC, available at <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2009/fr/101728>

⁵ Family Code, Article 653

⁶ Law No. 09/001, Article 20

⁷ Ordonnance-loi n° 23/009 du 13 mars 2023 fixant les modalités d'exercice de la liberté de la presse, la liberté d'information et d'émission par la radio et la télévision, la presse écrite ou tout autre moyen de communication en République Démocratique du Congo (2023), DRC, No. 243, p 12

⁸ ILGA World Database (2026) 'Democratic Republic of Congo', available at <https://database.ilga.org/democratic-republic-of-congo-lgbti>

DRC constitution (2006) ⁹	Defines the right to marry as the right to marry a person of the opposite sex.	public post on social media – the implications of which, in this area, are untested.
--------------------------------------	--	--

Same sex intimacy is not criminalised in the DRC. Though the Penal Code's provisions on 'acts against public decency' are often referenced by the police when conducting arrests of LGBTQIA+ individuals, they are reportedly never relied on to lay formal charges or proceed to trial – indicating that officially, same sex intimacy is not considered to violate this section of the Code. This has also been confirmed by MPs introducing draft legislation criminalising practices relating to homosexuality, who explain that they are doing so to address what they view as a lacuna in the existing law.¹⁰

There are no laws in the DRC that explicitly prevent or restrict NGOs or service providers in targeting or offering services to LGBTQIA+ populations. Organisations should be aware of references to the 'promotion' of debauchery and the distribution of materials 'contrary to good morals' in the Penal Code, which have been used to target the activities of LGBTQIA+ organisations in other contexts. However, **these provisions have not been used to target NGO service provision in the DRC.**

Laws that protect

Law	Contents	Analysis/ enforcement
DRC constitution (2006) ¹¹	- Articles 11- 13: Right to equality, non-discrimination, and equal protection by the law. - The protection of other relevant rights, including: - Right to privacy (Article 31). - Freedom of expression (Article 23). - Freedom of association (Article 37). - Economic, social and cultural rights, including housing, food, education, and health-care. (Articles 36, 43 – 48). - Article 15: Places an obligation on the government to eliminate sexual violence.	Individuals who believe their constitutional rights have been infringed upon may challenge this alleged violation through a process of administrative review. Administrative court cases alleging violations of constitutional rights are rare.
Law on the Protection of the rights of people living with HIV/ Aids and of those affected (2008) ¹² The National HIV	Law 08/011: Contains protections for people with HIV and "vulnerable groups" (in relation to the transmission of HIV), defined to include "homosexuals" (Article 2(5)).	Penalties for non-compliance with the Act include prison sentences. Though prosecutions under these sections are unlikely, the existence of these laws has

⁹ Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2005, as amended to 2011), available at https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo_2011

¹⁰ AllAfrica / Think Africa Press (2014) 'DR Congo Looks to Follow in Uganda's Footsteps with Anti-Gay Bill', available at <https://allafrica.com/stories/201403111646.html>; MambaOnline (2024) 'Alarming Move to Criminalise Homosexuality in the DRC', available at <https://www.mambaonline.com/2024/04/11/alariming-move-to-criminalise-homosexuality-in-the-drc/>

¹¹ Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2005, as amended to 2011), available at https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo_2011

¹² Loi n° 08/011 du 14 juillet 2008 portant protection des droits des personnes vivant avec le VIH/SIDA et des personnes affectées, as amended by Loi n° 18/012 du 9 juillet 2018. (2008).

Strategic Plan (PSN-VIH) 2023–2027 ¹³	- This includes protections of the right to healthcare for vulnerable groups, and protection against discrimination based on real or perceived HIV status. PSN-VIH: - Recognises Key Populations (to be prioritised in targeting) as including men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender people.	contributed to some level of inclusivity of MSM and trans people in public health programming.
Data protection laws: Law on Telecommunications and Information and Communication Technologies (2020); ¹⁴ Law on the Digital Code (2023) ¹⁵	- Article 132, Law 20/017: Prohibits the collection and processing of personal data through telecommunications or ICT systems, explicitly including data relating to a person's 'sex life'. - Article 245(2), Law 23/10: protects personal data that reveals information concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation – providing that this can only be collected with strict legal justification and with the person's consent.	Penalties for collecting and storing personal data include prison sentences. Though this provides some protection to queer individuals, LGBTQIA+ organisations who collect data on their beneficiaries should also be aware of the conditions imposed on them by this law.
Ministry of Employment decree on private placement services (2008) ¹⁶	Private employment placement services are prohibited from publishing job advertisements that contain discriminatory selection criteria – including that based on 'sexual preference'.	This is administrative policy, not a law – but indicates some level of progressiveness on these issues within some parts of the government.
Law No. 021/2002 on the Status of Refugees in the DRC (2002) ¹⁷	- Requires DRC to provide asylum to individuals persecuted for their 'membership in a particular social group', and protects them from being <i>refouled</i> to a country in which 'their life or freedom will be threatened'. - UNHCR Guidelines provide that persecution on the basis of SOGIESC should be considered persecution on the basis of membership of a particular social group.¹⁸	A representative from UNHCR DRC confirmed that SOGIESC-based persecution could be considered a reason for granting refugee status, and there was at least one example of this happening, but said that it was rare and 'not encouraged' by immigration authorities. ¹⁹

¹³ The National HIV Strategic Plan (PSN-VIH) 2023–2027 (2023), available at <https://www.pnmls.cd/documentation/uploads/PSN%202023-2027.pdf>.

¹⁴ Loi n° 20/017 du 25 novembre 2020 relative aux télécommunications et aux technologies de l'information et de la communication (2020).

¹⁵ Ordonnance-Loi n° 23/010 du 13 mars 2023 portant Code du Numérique (2023).

¹⁶ Arrêté ministériel n° 012/CAB.MIN/ETPS/062/08 du 18 septembre 2008 fixant les conditions d'ouverture, d'agrément et de fonctionnement des services privés de placement (2008).

¹⁷ Loi n° 021/2002 du 16 octobre 2002 portant statut des réfugiés en République Démocratique du Congo (2002).

¹⁸ UNHCR (2012) 'Guidelines on International Protection No. 9: Claims to Refugee Status based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees', available at www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2012/en/89548

¹⁹ Email received from UNHCR to the PRIDE Centre, 22 March 2026.

Regional and international law	• The DRC has ratified 7 of the 9 core international human rights treaties,²⁰ all of which are incorporated into DRC law. • DRC is party to the African Charter,²¹ which should be read in conjunction with: - 2014 African Commission Resolution Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the basis of their real or imputed SOGI.²² - 2023 African Commission Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Intersex Persons in Africa.²³	In addition to being able to make arguments based on these laws in domestic courts, individual citizens can take complaints to the UN Committees overseeing the ICCPR and the CRPD, and to the African Commission for alleged violations of the African Charter.
--------------------------------	--	--

DRC's Constitution protects the rights of all people to **equality, non-discrimination, health, expression, association**, and a range of other rights important to the protection of LGBTQIA+ communities. It also gives international treaties ratified by the DRC the status of binding domestic law, able to be relied on in Congolese courts. If an individual believes their rights under the constitution or international law have been infringed upon by a state actor, they are required first to challenge the alleged violation with the responsible government entity, and are then permitted to challenge the act in the administrative courts.²⁴ In reality, cases challenging state conduct are rare.²⁵ However, legal aid providers attest that they have been able to **rely on constitutional protections and international laws to negotiate for the release of arrested LGBTQIA+ individuals at police stations**, and activists and public health actors report that they have been able to use the rights contained in these instruments when negotiating for improved access to healthcare.

DRC has agreed to allow citizens to make complaints against the state for alleged violations of two instruments: the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Bringing complaints to UN committees is notoriously slow, however, often taking years, and judgments are ultimately unenforceable. DRC can also be taken to the African Commission by citizens alleging human rights violations by government actors. The mechanisms of the African system have their own challenges, however, including the politicisation of LGBTQIA+-related issues.

As in many countries focused on by the PRIDE Centre, HIV programming and policy has been an important entry point for the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights. Unlike our other countries of focus, **DRC explicitly recognises 'homosexuals' as priority target populations for HIV response programming** in its national HIV legislation, rather than only in policy documents – giving this population more robust legal protection. **DRC's National HIV Strategy recognises both men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender individuals** as having this status and includes tracked performance indicators relating to these groups within the HIV response framework.²⁵

²⁰ It has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It has not ratified the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance or the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

²¹ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981).

²² ACHPR (2014) 'Resolution on Protection against Violence and other Human Rights Violations against Persons on the basis of their real or imputed Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity', ACHPR/Res.275.

²³ ACHPR (2023) 'Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Intersex Persons in Africa - ACHPR/Res.552 (LXXIV)'.

²⁴ UNHCR (2023) 'Democratic Republic of the Congo: Refugee Policy Review Framework update as at 30 June 2023', available at www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2024/en/147866

²⁵ USCRI (2020) 'The Crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', available at https://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/USCRI-Backgrounder_DRC.pdf

Draft anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation

Several attempts have been made by individual Congolese Members of Parliament to introduce anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation to the DRC – including in 2010,²⁷ 2013 – 2014²⁸ and most recently in 2024.²⁹ **None have been successful.**

As with almost all anti-LGBTQIA+ laws introduced across Africa within this period, these Bills have sought to criminalise not only same sex intimacy, but the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality.³⁰ The 2024 Bill was introduced by former Justice Minister Constance Mutamba, and was submitted with a preamble describing the law as necessary to defend Congolese culture and protect against foreign ideologies.³¹ This Bill no longer appears to be under active consideration by the National Assembly.

Enforcement of laws

DRC’s formal justice system is weak – in 2025, the country ranked 136th out of 143 countries covered in the World Justice Project’s annual Rule of Law Index.³² In the east, previously existing state institutions collapsed when Goma and Bukavu were seized by M23 on 25 January and 15 February 2025 respectively.³³ M23 has since established parallel government structures in these cities and surrounding regions,³⁴ including a police force – comprised of M23 personnel and former Congolese national police officers who have undergone “retraining”, often by force³⁵ – and a court system.³⁶ In the west of the DRC, where government courts exist, they are “*completely subordinate to political and military authorities*”, and “*notoriously known to return favorable verdicts for the highest bidder or for those with direct connections to political and military authorities*”.³⁷

Activists explain that due to the absence of the rule of law in the DRC, the benefit conferred by the permissive legal environment is limited. “*In our country, the law is not really respected,*” said a member of one Kinshasa-based organisation. “*Our country is not a safe place for us, not because of the law, but because of the opinion of people.*”³⁸ In 2024, then-Minister of Justice Constance Mutamba wrote a letter to the Attorney General of the Court of Cassation of Kinshasa demanding prosecutions against “*the perpetrators of deviant practices of a sexual and homosexual nature*”, despite the absence of any law that would support this. One legal aid provider complained, “*The difficulty we face is that even though there is no reason to arrest them LGBTQIA+ people, when the lawyer has to intervene, every time, we have to pay a bribe for that person to be released.*”

Thus, despite the absence of any legal provisions criminalising conduct relating to same sex intimacy in the country, arrests of LGBTQIA+ individuals are frequent – as described in more detail in the section on ‘Police abuse and misconduct’, below. In 2019 and 2024, several countries³⁹ recommended that the DRC take action to ensure that the immorality sections of the Penal Code were not used to arrest or prosecute individuals on the basis of their SOGIESC. The government of the DRC declined to accept these recommendations.⁴⁰

²⁷ ICJ (2010) ‘DRC: bill threatens grave violations of Human Rights for LGBT individuals’, available at www.icj.org/resource/drc-bill-threatens-grave-violations-of-human-rights-for-lgbt-individuals-and-human-rights-defenders/

²⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2014) ‘Responses to Information Requests: DRC’, available at www.justice.gc.ca/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2014/08/04/COD104815.FE.pdf

²⁹ MP Constant Mutamba Tungunga (2024) ‘Proposition de loi portant criminalisation de l’homosexualité’, available at [https://database.ilga.org/api/downloader/download/1/CD%20-%20LEG%20-%20Bill%20Criminalising%20Homosexuality%20\(2024\)%20-%20OR\(fr\).pdf](https://database.ilga.org/api/downloader/download/1/CD%20-%20LEG%20-%20Bill%20Criminalising%20Homosexuality%20(2024)%20-%20OR(fr).pdf)

³⁰ ILGA (2026) ‘Democratic Republic of Congo’, available at <https://database.ilga.org/democratic-republic-of-congo-lgbti>

³¹ Above n 29.

³² World Justice Project (2026) ‘WJP Rule of Law Index’, available at <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/global>

³³ M. Elysee (2025) ‘AFC/M23 rebellion sets up a parallel justice system in North Kivu’, Africa News, available at www.africanews.com/2025/11/04/afcm23-rebellion-sets-up-a-parallel-justice-system-in-north-kivu/

³⁴ Y. Ford and L. Karr (2025) ‘September 09, 2025 M23’s State-Building Project: Africa File Special Edition’, Critical Threats, available at www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/m23s-statebuilding-project-rwanda-drc-africa-file-special-edition

³⁵ Ibid; UNSC (2025) ‘Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo’, S/2025/446, para 21.

³⁶ Above n 34.

³⁷ BTI Transformation Index (2024) ‘Congo, DR Country Report 2024’, available at <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/COD>

³⁸ FGD with members of an LBQ and trans group in Kinshasa, 12 November 2025

³⁹ Including Iceland, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Germany: UN HRC (2019) ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Democratic Republic of the Congo’, A/HRC/42/5; UN HRC (2024)

‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Democratic Republic of the Congo’, A/HRC/58/6

⁴⁰ Ibid.

LGBTQIA+ people in humanitarian need

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that there are 14.9 million people in humanitarian need in DRC. The PRIDE Centre's conservative estimate that at least 5% of any population are from a SOGIESC minority suggests that **the number of LGBTQIA+ people in humanitarian need in the country is at least 745,000**. This includes individuals living in conflict-affected regions, those internally displaced by the fighting, and those experiencing food insecurity, who also happen to be queer. It also includes people who have fled their area of origin specifically due to SOGIESC-based persecution.

The most common cause of displacement, for the LGBTQIA+ community along with everyone else, is the violent conflict in the eastern part of the country. This fighting has been ongoing since 25 January 2025, when the March 23 Movement – or M23 – took control of Goma, the capital of North Kivu and the eastern region's largest city. On 15 February, M23 took control of Bukavu – the capital of South Kivu and the region's second-largest city.⁴¹ M23 continues to expand the territories under its control, which currently comprise an area estimated to be around 15,000 square kilometres and to be inhabited by five million people.⁴² At its highest point in 2025, this fighting increased the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in DRC to over **7 million**.⁴³ In February and March 2025, M23 **forcibly evicted more than 400,000 people from IDP camps in Goma** that had long housed people displaced by different iterations of the conflict, severing many from food aid or medical care.⁴⁴ By the end of 2025, the number of Congolese refugees fleeing the DRC reached nearly **1.15 million— a historic first in 75 years of UNHCR record-keeping, and a doubling of refugee numbers over the past decade**.⁴⁵

Access to humanitarian aid and services

A combination of access constraints caused by the conflict in eastern DRC and the 2025 USAID cuts has **left millions of Congolese people without access to humanitarian assistance**.⁴⁶ Physical access to conflict-affected regions of the country has been restricted due to the closure of the airports in Goma and Bukavu.⁴⁷ The destruction of the IDP camps in Goma disrupted access to humanitarian services for hundreds of thousands of people. Bank closures have hampered the operations of humanitarian organisations attempting to provide services.⁴⁸ **These factors were dramatically compounded by the suspension and subsequent termination of the majority of USAID contracts in early 2025**. The US had been the DRC's largest humanitarian donor, accounting for more than 70% of all humanitarian funding in the country in 2024. Cuts have forced many aid agencies to halt essential work, including offering shelter, distributing food, and carrying out lifesaving medical interventions.⁴⁹

The below table summarises the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ people in East DRC when attempting to access shelter, food, medical care, and livelihoods opportunities.

⁴¹ Associated Press (2025) 'M23 rebels advance into eastern DRC's 2nd major city of Bukavu, residents say' VOA, available at www.voanews.com/a/m23-rebels-advance-into-eastern-drc-s-2nd-major-city-of-bukavu-residents-say-/7975711.html

⁴² Above n 34.

⁴³ ECHO (2026) 'Democratic Republic of the Congo — Humanitarian Situation (updated January 2026)', available at https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/democratic-republic-congo_en

⁴⁴ ActionAid International (2025) 'Women Evicted from DRC Camps Face Widespread Sexual Violence and Forced Marriage', available at: <https://actionaid.org/news/2025/women-evicted-drc-camps-face-wide-spread-sexual-violence-and-forced-marriage-actionaid>

⁴⁵ Concern Worldwide (2025) 'The largest refugee crises to know in 2026', available at <https://concernusa.org/news/largest-refugee-crises/>

⁴⁶ Concern Worldwide (2026) 'The Democratic Republic of the Congo Crisis, Explained', available at <https://concernusa.org/news/democratic-republic-congo-crisis-explained/>

⁴⁷ Y. Ford (2025) 'DRC-M23 Doha Peace Framework—A Long Road Ahead: Africa File Special Edition' available at www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/drc-m23-doha-peace-framework-a-long-road-ahead-africa-file-special-edition

⁴⁸ The New Humanitarian (2025) 'Aid Efforts Hamstrung in Goma as M23 Tightens Control', available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2025/02/14/aid-efforts-hamstrung-goma-dr-congo-m23-tightens-control>

⁴⁹ Physicians for Human Rights (2025) 'Abandoned in Crisis: The Impact of U.S. Global Health Funding Cuts in the Democratic Republic of Congo', available at <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/abandoned-in-crisis-the-impact-of-u-s-global-health-funding-cuts-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/>

Shelter

The ongoing conflict and the eviction of IDPs from the camps and settlements in Goma **left many LGBTQIA+ people without a place to live**. As one interviewee explained, previously, those living in rural areas would often flee to the urban centres for a higher level of security – but now, **the cities were even less safe**: *“Thousands of LGBTQ people in rural areas find themselves being kicked out of their homes ... attacked by people in the community ... threatened with death, which forces them to flee for safety. Some people may then flee into the conflict zones. ... We try to find a place for them to spend the night because they can’t be left on the street in these places. If they are left on the street, it’s really catastrophic. There have already been reported cases of death.”*⁵⁰ The Director of a Goma-based organisation explained that this population could **no longer benefit from the relative security that had been offered by the Goma IDP camps**: *“Many LGBTQ people who were in the IDP camps were forced to leave, when the M23 rebels dismantled all the camps in the city. ... All these LGBTQ+ people were driven out of war displacement camps without any support measures.”*⁵¹

Some of the displaced LGBTQIA+ community remain in Goma, in unsafe conditions – with many, especially amongst the MSM and trans women communities, relying on sex work to survive.

There was previously one shelter in Goma for at-risk LGBTQIA+ individuals, but this was forced to shut in 2025 due to funding cuts. Other community members have moved to Bukavu or onwards to Uganda or Burundi in search of safety. One shelter continues to operate in Bukavu, but is unable to house the enormous numbers of queer people in need. LGBTQIA+ people across the region often come together in one house for their own safety – but these houses can also become targets for violence by gangs or M23, as evidenced by an M23 raid of a house resided in by trans people in Bukavu in July 2025.⁵²

Food

In the previously existing IDP camps in Goma, some community members were able to access food aid through mainstream organisations – though Goma-based interviewees report that **discrimination and denial of services by these agencies was common**, especially against trans people. For this reason, LGBTQIA+ organisations **had begun undertaking food distributions themselves**, focused predominantly on the vulnerable trans populations living in the camps. Since their disbandment, all these food distribution programmes have been disrupted. One organisation who had been undertaking such a programme explained that it had been ended due to the destruction of the IDP camps, and that since the funding cuts, they had no resources or ability to locate the dispersed population or procure the amount of food necessary to meet their needs.⁵³

Medical care

Access to medical care for LGBTQIA+ populations in eastern DRC, including HIV treatment and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care, has been severely restricted. Before January 2025, queer individuals had been able to access basic HIV-related supplies and information through the peer-to-peer system – a public health intervention

⁵⁰ KII with two members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in North Kivu, 24 November 2025.

⁵² M. Florisse (2025) 'LGBT+ lives at risk in areas of Congo controlled by M23 rebels', Erasing 76 Crimes, available at <https://76crimes.com/2025/07/17/lgbt-rights-under-attack-in-areas-of-congo-controlled-by-m23-rebels/>

⁵³ KII with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Goma, 21 November 2025.

through which LGBTQIA+ organisations circulate these resources through their own peer educators. Such interventions are no longer receiving funding – and in any case, supply routes into the Kivu states have been disrupted. An employee of a Goma-based organisation told us, *“USAID used to help us with PrEP, condoms, lubricants, and other support with managing HIV. It’s been 10 months since we had any of that. And we cannot get it. Goma airport is closed down.”*⁵⁴

Two Goma-based organisations said **queer individuals who sought medical treatment in local hospitals after being subjected to sexual violence were often refused assistance:** *“Often, when we have cases of rape, rape victims are rejected from health-care facilities, who don’t want to provide medical support, saying, they deserve it.”*⁵⁵ In Bukavu, interviewees said that Panzi hospital – run by Nobel peace prize winner Dr Denis Mukwege – had been willing to provide treatment to LGBTQIA+ patients, but that it had also been badly affected by funding cuts, as well as being a potential target for M23.⁵⁶

Interviewees also stressed the need for mental health care: **“Everyone is traumatised.”**⁵⁷

The context in Kinshasa, unlike east DRC, is not one of protracted humanitarian crisis. **Much of the Kinshasa-based LGBTQIA+ community are, however, experiencing needs and vulnerabilities that would accurately be described as being humanitarian in nature** – including forced displacement and lacking access to basic medical care. Most people spoken to by the PRIDE Centre only felt comfortable going to explicitly LGBTQIA+-friendly clinics – but reported that since the aid cuts, these had drastically cut the number of services and medication they were able to offer. Some of these clinics have since opened to non-queer members of the population – who they charge for their services, as a means of collecting revenue. The PRIDE Centre team spoke to an LGBTQIA+ patient at one of these clinics about this, who told us, *“Since that happened, we don’t feel safe and secure here. So we don’t come frequently.”*⁵⁸ A staff member at the clinic added that since they had opened up to non-LGBTQIA+ patients, they were questioning whether the location was still safe, as they had begun receiving threats from neighbours.

Another reason that LGBTQIA+ people lack access to basic services – and one that plagues the community across the country – is their lack of access to livelihoods. **It is extremely challenging for LGBTQIA+ individuals who are identifiable as members of the community to find employment. For trans individuals, it is almost impossible.** These challenges are compounded in the east, where conflict, bank closures and lack of access have stymied most economic activity. Though all civilian populations in eastern DRC are suffering under these conditions, queer communities often have amongst the highest health and protection needs, and the least access to resources or alternative support structures.

⁵⁴ KII with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Goma, 21 November 2025.

⁵⁵ Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025 (2).

⁵⁶ I. Yorulmaz (2025) 'US Foreign Aid Cuts Hit Women Hard in the War Zones of Eastern Congo and Sudan', PassBlue, available at <https://passblue.com/2025/02/11/us-foreign-aid-cuts-hit-women-hard-in-eastern-congo-and-sudan/>

⁵⁷ KII with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Goma, 21 November 2025.

⁵⁸ FGD with a health focused organisation, In Kinshasa, 11 November 2025.

Human rights and protection environment

LGBTQIA+ populations are at high risk of human rights violations and have multiple and compounding protection concerns. The section below focuses on three of categories of violations: sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); other physical violence; and police misconduct and abuse.

! Warning:

The below section contains accounts that readers may find distressing.

Sexual and gender-based violence

Conflict-related sexual violence

M23, Congolese forces, and allied militias have all been accused of carrying out conflict-related sexual violence in North and South Kivu. UNFPA reported over 80,000 cases of rape in eastern Congo between January and September 2025 — a 32% increase from the same period in 2024.⁵⁹ The UN Human Rights Council's Fact-Finding Mission found that the M23 has been systematically carrying out gang rapes of civilians in areas under its occupation, and that these campaigns target women, men, boys, and LGBTQIA+ individuals.⁶⁰

LGBTQIA+ organisations confirmed that **M23's campaign of sexual violence has disproportionately targeted their community – particularly LBQ women and TGNC individuals.** Those perpetrating these rapes include M23 soldiers and their local recruits. An interviewee explained, *"Sexual violence is perpetrated by those who take up arms, which oftentimes are local people from the community, who are recruited by armed groups, and then given weapons. They target everyone."*⁶¹

Other sexual violence

Sexual violence carried out by non-combatants against LBQ women and TGNC individuals in the east is also staggeringly common. Common violations include **'corrective' rape, sexual violence perpetrated as part of conversion practices, public stripping (particularly for TGNC populations), and gang rapes** carried out by groups of young and often armed men. One trans man interviewed by the PRIDE centre described this happening as he carried out outreach work for a local LGBTQIA+ organisation, saying, *"One day when I was out in the field, I was attacked. People removed my clothes and were saying they needed to know if I was a boy or a girl. They attacked me and then they raped me. They gave me a problem with my head. I woke up in the hospital after three days."*⁶²

Interviewees based in Kinshasa also described living under the constant threat of rape – though instances of this were less relentless and common than in the east. Across the country, sexual violence against LGBTQIA+ sex workers was common. A survey carried out by the PRIDE Centre with Congolese queer people in displacement found 50% to rely on sex work for survival – a dynamic which makes them vulnerable to abuse.

⁵⁹ UNFPA (2026) 'UNFPA Statement on Sexual Violence Perpetrated Against Women and Girls in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo', available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/press/unfpa-statement-sexual-violence-perpetrated-against-women-and-girls-eastern-democratic>

⁶⁰ UN HRC (2025) 'Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Democratic Republic of the Congo', available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffmk-drc/a-hrc-60-80-auv-en.pdf>, para 50.

⁶¹ KII with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Goma, 21 November 2025.

⁶² FGD with Congolese refugees in Nakivale, Uganda, 25 February 2026.

Forced marriage

It is common for queer individuals across the country to be **forced into a marriage or relationship with someone from the opposite sex**, and to have children with them. LBQ women and TGNC individuals viewed as women by their families are most likely to be pushed into this at a young age – though the PRIDE centre also spoke to several MSM and transwomen who had been pressured into this situation, usually after their true sexuality or gender identity had been discovered. One trans woman explained her situation after her gender identity was revealed: *“My family decided to force me to marry a woman. I didn’t want to. My father took a knife and cut my on my back and my face. My family took a pan and filled it with hot oil and burnt me with it. They forced me to marry this woman and I have one child with her.”*⁶³

Interviewees described abuse, including marital rape, as common within forced marriages. One noted this as a driver of displacement, saying, *“Lesbian women are forced into marriages with men, where they have no rights. Customary chiefs will marry them to someone of the opposite sex. Sometimes, when a person feels threatened and forced to do something they can't live with, they are forced to flee or move to town to seek refuge.”*⁶⁴

Other physical violence

In an online survey conducted by the PRIDE Centre with queer Congolese people who were experiencing displacement, **94%** reported that they had been subjected to physical violence.

Killings and disappearances

Targeted killings of LGBTQIA+ individuals are increasing in eastern DRC, where violence in general is more normalised, and the disintegration of both formal and customary legal systems means that perpetrators are unlikely to be held accountable. Sometimes, it is **M23 – the same body charged with upholding the law – that is responsible for murders or disappearances of community members**. In April 2025, for example, M23 soldiers abducted three trans women and took them to their military barracks. They have not been seen or heard from since. On 10 July 2025, M23 officers raided a shelter in Bukavu where several trans people had been staying – though they had been warned to flee in advance. The Director of a Bukavu-based LGBTQIA+ organisation has blamed local churches with anti-gender agendas for inciting the attack, telling the international publication Erasing 76 Crimes, *“For 100 US dollars, the rebels are willing to kill anyone, and I can confirm that the churches paid the M23 soldiers to [try to] execute LGBT+ people during the premeditated attack [of July 10]”*.⁶⁵

In Kinshasa, killings and disappearances of LGBTQIA+ individuals are much less common – but some interviewees had heard of murders being perpetrated, especially by family members of the victim. Trans women were described as being the most at risk.

Violent mobs

The PRIDE team heard consistent accounts of LGBTQIA+ people being attacked by violent mobs. While some interviewees described these mobs as forming spontaneously, others said they were existing groups of young men who were constantly on the

⁶³ FGD with Congolese refugees in Nakivale, Uganda, 25 February 2026.

⁶⁴ Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025 (2).

⁶⁵ M. Manoël-Floris (2025) 'LGBT+ lives at risk in areas of Congo controlled by M23 rebels', Erasing 76 Crimes, available at <https://76crimes.com/2025/07/17/gbt-rights-under-attack-in-areas-of-congo-controlled-by-m23-rebels/>

lookout for opportunities to commit violence against groups deemed ‘deviant’ or deserving of punishment and ill-treatment. In the east, it is common for **churches and community leaders to blame the LGBTQIA+ community for the protracted crisis**. One interviewee claimed that certain churches “*often incite people to hate LGBTQIA+ people during sermons,*” which “*further increases violence against [the queer] community.*”⁶⁶ These narratives have become even stronger since the takeover of M23. One interviewee explained, “*Before the war, pastors were preaching against LGBTQIA+ people at church. But now they are saying that we are friends of the white people, and it’s white people who are paying for the rebels.*”⁶⁷ Community members spoken to by the PRIDE Centre had been **chased, beaten, cut with knives, shot, beaten with guns, and raped by gangs of men**. Many described the perpetrators of these attacks as blaming them for various social ills, and/ or telling them they were less than human, and did not deserve to live.

Several Congolese refugees who spoke to the PRIDE team in Uganda told us that these gangs had **also attacked and sometimes killed their immediate family members**, including their parents – especially in circumstances where those family members accepted their sexual orientation or gender identity. One recalled, “*People mobilised a group to attack our house, and said I was destroying the neighbourhood children due to being a lesbian. They said I was a curse to the community. They killed my parents. My father was killed straight away, but my mother was still alive at first. We took her to the hospital. She died on the way. I was 12.*”⁶⁸

There are also instances of queer people being attacked on the streets in Kinshasa. There are certain areas where this is more common, and which the community has had to learn to avoid.

Police misconduct and abuse

Arrests of LGBTQIA+ people are common across DRC despite the absence of any law criminalising same sex intimacy or related conduct. Prior to M23’s takeover, these arrests were carried out by Congolese police officers in all parts of the country – they are now carried out by police officers in the west, and M23 officers in Goma, Bukavu, and some of the smaller surrounding regions in which they have a presence.

The primary legal aid provider serving the LGBTQIA+ community in DRC is the Centre d’Expertise en Droits Humains et Criminologie (CEDHUC), which works in 13 provinces. CEDHUC lawyers report that while cases against LGBTQIA+ individuals never proceed to trial, they can be left in pre-trial detention for years. Negotiating their release is a time consuming and usually expensive process. CEDHUC’s case management data shows that it has intervened in **188 arrests of LGBTQIA+ people between December 2025 and March 2026** – indicating an arrest rate of 1 – 2 queer people every day.⁶⁹ Of this 188, 52 individuals have been released, while **137 remain in detention**. Detention is a dangerous place for members of the LGBTQIA+ community to be. One Kinshasa-based activist explained, “*When they [LGBTQIA+ people] get into the jail, they are attacked. There was a trans woman recently who was killed in the prison ... that’s why, when someone is arrested, we just try to get them released as quickly as possible. We call the legal aid organisation, and pay some money – whatever is necessary. We don’t even look at what they’ve been arrested for.*”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025 (2).

⁶⁷ Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025 (2).

⁶⁸ FGD with Congolese refugees in Nakivale, Uganda, 25 February 2026.

⁶⁹ Email from CEDHUC to the PRIDE Centre, 18 March 2026.

⁷⁰ KII with LGBTQIA+ organization in Kinshasa, 12 November 2025.

Negotiating for the release of detainees is difficult, time consuming, and expensive. In some areas, it can also be dangerous. A CEDHUC employee explained, *“Even us, as lawyers, when we go to defend those people in rural areas, just because that person is gay, sometimes even the lawyer is at risk.”*⁷¹ As described above, negotiating with M23 for the release of these individuals is even more difficult than negotiating with the Congolese police. As one activist explained, “Before, people were just looking for money. You could pay to be released. But now, with the rebels, they come and they carry out their executions.”⁷²

LGBTQIA+ civil society

Despite the constrained operating environment, funding cuts, and the uptick in homophobic rhetoric by members of the government, a strong and resilient LGBTQIA+ civil society continues to operate in the DRC. The activists who spoke to the PRIDE team estimate that there are **around twenty registered LGBTQIA+ organisations across the country**, in addition to a higher number of informal and community-based groups. Several of these organisations began as HIV-focused projects in the late 2000s, before transitioning into specifically LGBTQIA+-focused entities in the early 2010s. In the years since, the number of LGBTQIA+ organisations in DRC, and the size of their membership bases, has increased.

In the course of our field research, the PRIDE Centre spoke only to organisations based in Kinshasa, Goma, and Bukavu, some of whom also had a presence in other urban centres. Interviewees were not aware of LGBTQIA+ organisations based in more rural or remote regions – though given the size of DRC, it is possible that such groups exist.

Coordination platforms

A national coordination platform exists for Key Population (KP)⁷³-led CSOs involved in addressing HIV – called ANORS – which is explicitly inclusive of MSM and transgender-led organisations. This platform had been supported by UNAIDS to decentralize across all 26 provinces of DRC, but since the takeover of M23 it no longer functions in areas controlled by the militia. According to interviewees in Kinshasa, around **15 LGBTQIA+ organisations conduct informal coordination and referrals** alongside their formal engagement through the ANORS structure. In the east, there is no formal coordination mechanism between CSOs – but the three largest LGBTQIA+ organisations work closely together, determining how to use their limited resources to respond to an ever-increasing need.⁷⁵

In 2025, one of the largest Kinshasa-based LGBTQIA+ organisations embarked on the project of **establishing a network of LGBTQIA-specific organisations which will be Kinshasa-based, but will include queer organisations in the east of the country**. The primary purpose of this network will be to document human rights violations against the community, for the purposes of coordinating the response, collecting evidence, and conducting advocacy.

⁷¹ FGD with CEDHUC, 11 November 2025.

⁷² Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025 (I).

⁷³ ‘Key Populations’ (KPs) is the terminology used in public health programming to refer to populations at high risk of contracting HIV, who need to be targeted with treatment and prevention programming.

⁷⁴ UNAIDS (2024) ‘DRC: Key Results in 2024’, available at <https://open.unaids.org/countries/democratic-republic-congo>

⁷⁵ Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025 (I); KII with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Goma, 21 November 2025.

Demographics

The majority of LGBTQIA+ CSOs in DRC are male-led, and are focused primarily on men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) populations. Lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women are notably under-represented in civil society spaces. The PRIDE Centre was not able to identify any organisations specifically serving the intersex community, nor did we speak to any individuals identifying as intersex in the course of our research in DRC.

Eastern DRC

Of the four organisations based in eastern DRC that the PRIDE Centre engaged with, three were led by TGNC individuals, and one was MSM-led. Though each of these groups serves all members of the LGBTQIA+ community, all four report that in the context of the current conflict, they have placed a particular focus on transgender individuals, given their extreme vulnerability and high level of need.

Kinshasa

In Kinshasa, most of the organisations who met with the PRIDE Centre team were male-led, and primarily served MSM and TGNC populations. We met with one long-established LBQ-led organisation, and – after some effort to identify them – two smaller LBQ community groups. In a focus group discussion held with beneficiaries of the larger group, consent forms filled by participants indicated that the majority identified as being transgender or non-binary, rather than as LBQ. Ultimately, of the 67 people we spoke to, only 6 identified as being a lesbian.

One reason for the under-representation of LBQ women in these spaces is likely the **recognition of MSM and transgender individuals, but not LBQ women, as KPs in HIV prevention programming**. As explained by the Director of the established LBQ-led organisation, *“The entry point for LGBTQIA+ funding is HIV funding streams. ... All organisations we have in DRC use that as the entry point. That is why we have funds that focus on this.”*⁷⁶ Another interviewee told our team, *“There are a lot of problems facing LBQ women in Kinshasa and the different provinces. But we can’t address those problems easily, because there is no funding specifically for any of them.”*⁷⁷ Our research also indicates that LBQ women were more likely than MSM to be forced or pressured into marriages and to have children at a young age – restricting their ability and options for living openly, and making it less likely that they would become active in civil society.

A primary reason for the high representation of TGNC as beneficiaries of these organisations is the extreme marginalisation of this group throughout the DRC. Though the humanitarian crisis has worsened the situation for trans people living in the east, their exposure to discrimination and violence is high in all parts of the country, and their ability to find safe employment options extremely limited.

Several interviewees described the intersex population in the DRC as “invisible”. One organisation said they had met with some intersex individuals, but described this engagement as limited, adding, *“It’s complicated. It is not easy to identify intersex people unless they identify themselves.”*⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Interview with Director of LBQ organisation in Kinshasa, 11 November 2025.

⁷⁷ Interview with Director of LBQ organisation in Kinshasa, 11 November 2025.

⁷⁸ Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Kinshasa, 10 November 2025.

Ability to operate

CSOs operating in DRC are required to register at federal and provincial levels. Organisations attempting to register with explicit references to LGBTQIA+ terminology in their names are **generally refused** – but those who adopt alternative framings, such as references to health, human rights, or minority groups, **have been able to register successfully**. As explained by the Director of one organisation, *“They don’t like the acronym ‘LGBTQ’. They say it is something that is imported from Europe. Our constitution protects all minorities. So when we phrase it in that way, it is more likely to be accepted. ... Once we applied using those words, it took only one month.”*⁷⁹ Several smaller organisations also reported that they were able to operate by using a larger, registered organisation as their fiscal host.

Kinshasa-based organisations engage across multiple parts of government, including the Ministry of Health, national HIV coordination bodies, the National Human Rights Commission, and actors within the Ministry of Justice. CSO employees attested that the former Minister of Justice’s directive to arrest people for homosexuality made their work more difficult. However, as one interviewee emphasized, *“Although he said what he said, we didn’t fold our hands. We advocated to the National Human Rights Commission and others that this issue had to be addressed.”*⁸⁰ Multiple interviewees stated that advocacy by civil society led to criticism of the Minister’s comments by other members of the government. One recalled, *“The Health Minister said that his work was affected because of these comments. ... He said that it affected medical centres who had been welcoming MSM, who couldn’t carry out their work anymore.”*⁸¹ Some even believe that this advocacy is what forced Constance Mutamba out of his position as Minister of Justice.⁸²

In Kinshasa, the ability of these organisations to register and their cooperation with government agencies means that their work is able to be carried out relatively openly. Though LGBTQIA+ individuals are regularly arrested, detained, and extorted, police harassment of CSOs – such as through office raids or surveillance of activities – appears to be minimal.

The ability of these groups to do their work contrasts with the perception of several international humanitarian actors engaged by the PRIDE Centre, who saw working directly with LGBTQIA+ populations as potentially politically fraught. When asked about this, **Kinshasa-based CSOs sought to reassure international agencies that the risks involved in this work are low and manageable**. *“Today, a lot of LGBTQIA+ organisations have alliances in the government,”* one CSO Director explained. *“This sensitisation has been done with the police, the prosecutors, the magistrates, everyone. Today, doing this work is not risky.”*⁸³

Eastern DRC

Prior to the M23 takeover, LGBTQIA+ organisations had also established working relationships with state actors in Goma and Bukavu – though these were less advanced and more tenuous than in Kinshasa. With the collapse of these institutions and their replacement by M23’s parallel administrative structures, **these organisations’ engagement with the police and other governance structures has ceased entirely**. One Di-

⁷⁹ Interview with Director of LBQ organisation in Kinshasa, 11 November 2025.

⁸⁰ FGD with CEDHUC, 11 November 2025

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

rector explained, *“Before January [2025], we had easy access to the governor to talk about our problems or ask for security. But now the authority is completely new. We can no longer raise awareness among health care providers, we can no longer raise awareness among legal providers, lawyers and others. There are new health providers. There are new legal providers.”*⁸⁴ This CSO said they were now attempting to open dialogue with certain M23 authorities – but this is an exceptionally difficult task, given that M23 exercises its control through extreme violence, which it has explicitly targeted at both human rights defenders and SOGIESC minorities.

Funding

The funding cuts by the US and other donors have **decimated LGBTQIA+ organisations across the country**. CSOs in all regions described losing 70 – 80% of their operating budgets since the beginning of 2025. In eastern DRC, these cuts have combined with the economic difficulties brought on by conflict: *“The airport is not operational, the banks are closed. You cannot even get cash; you have to go across Rwanda to withdraw it. They won’t give you it in dollars. They give you it in Rwandan currency. When you convert to dollars, they cut even more.”*⁸⁵ Interviewees felt that the departure of international actors from the region also meant that opportunities for donor funding had drastically reduced.

Impact on aid programming: NGOs, UN, civil society

SOGIESC minorities are not named as a target group for receiving aid or requiring protection in DRC’s OCHA-led Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan,⁸⁶ nor the IOM-managed Crisis Response Plan.⁸⁷ The Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for 2024- 2025 emphasised the need for the meaningful participation of SOGIESC minorities in humanitarian interventions – and was at the time **the only RRP in Africa to do so** in the overarching strategy section of the document.⁸⁸ Though this acknowledgment of the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ communities represents an important step, the RRP did not include any details as to how the inclusion of these populations would be achieved or measured.⁸⁹ The PRIDE Centre understands that UNHCR is not releasing a DRC RRP in 2026, but is moving towards refugee response engagement through the national plans of the receiving countries – such as Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, and Malawi. At present, only Kenya’s plan makes any reference to LGBTQIA+ populations.⁹⁰

When the PRIDE Centre raised questions about LGBTQIA+ populations in need in eastern DRC, most international aid actors interviewed responded that they had not been able to conduct programming specifically targeting these populations. This was in a large part due to the low capacity of the sector to respond to the humanitarian and protection needs of civilians in general. **In 2025, only 20% of the UN’s Humanitarian Response Plan budget was met, forcing organisations to scale back essential services for millions of people** – including in terms of providing basic food assistance, clean water, or support to survivors of SGBV.⁹¹ Some international organisations working in Kinshasa also worried that working with LGBTQIA+ populations would be politically sensitive and potentially high-risk.

⁸⁴ KII with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Goma, 21 November 2025.

⁸⁵ KII with two members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in North Kivu, 24 November 2025.

⁸⁶ Humanitarian Action (2026) ‘Democratic Republic of the Congo Humanitarian Response Plan’.

⁸⁷ IOM (2026) ‘Democratic Republic of the Congo Crisis Response Plan 2026’.

⁸⁸ UNHCR (2024) ‘Democratic Republic of the Congo Regional Refugee Response Plan (2024 - 2025)’, p 16.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ UNHCR (2023) ‘Kenya Multi-year Strategy 2023 – 2026’.

⁹¹ Concern Worldwide (2026) ‘The Democratic Republic of the Congo Crisis, Explained’, available at <https://concernusa.org/news/democratic-republic-congo-crisis-explained/>

The PRIDE Centre Analysis: Programme Impacts

The analysis of The PRIDE Centre is that humanitarian and development actors in the DRC have both **the humanitarian responsibility and the practical ability to more proactively include SOGIESC minority populations in their programming and operations**. Much of this work would not require new programmes or the mobilisation of funding that does not exist – but would rather entail ensuring that the most acutely marginalised people are not being systematically excluded from existing aid programmes and delivery.

This analysis is consistent with the objectives set by the Humanitarian Reset, which emphasises hyper-prioritisation, the elimination of duplication, and a commitment to reaching those in the greatest need. Displaced, conflict-affected, and food-insecure LGBTQIA+ people in eastern DRC – particularly TGNC individuals and others who visibly do not conform to gender binaries – are among the most acutely vulnerable groups of people in the world. **Assistance to this community is life saving assistance; their invisibility does not negate the extreme levels of need**. When humanitarian actors are engaging in ‘hyper-prioritisation’, the specific vulnerabilities and needs analysis pertaining to this population should be systematically and compulsorily considered.

Critical to undertaking this work is the formation of **partnerships between international aid agencies and local LGBTQIA+ organisations** operating in eastern DRC – groups that have developed strategies for managing the extraordinarily difficult operating environment, and who are able to reach communities that international agencies cannot. International humanitarian, health and development organisations working in Kinshasa should also consider strengthening their relationships with national LGBTQIA+ actors – particularly in the areas of healthcare and livelihood programming, where the needs of the community are most acute.

Recommendations

These recommendations apply to aid sector actors, including UN Agencies, INGOs, donors and diplomatic missions. The PRIDE Centre is available to discuss these recommendations with interested organisations and to support on implementation.

Partnerships with local organisations

1. Partner with LGBTQIA+-led organisations.

- Provide financial and institutional support to the LGBTQIA+ organisations currently operating in conflict-affected areas of eastern DRC, who are already reaching some of the most acutely marginalised people in the crisis.
- Support Kinshasa-based LGBTQIA+ organisations in specific areas, including to provide basic medical services to high-risk LGBTQIA+ populations in western DRC, to undertake livelihoods programming, and to partner on government-facing advocacy.

2. Support the newly established national coordination mechanism of LGBTQIA+ organisations, which spans Kinshasa and eastern DRC.

3. Avoid entrenching traditional imbalances in funding and support.

- In engaging partnerships, ensure equity with and support for LBQ groups.

- b. Support projects by LGBTQIA+ organisations that attempt to reach and provide assistance to the intersex population.

Integration of a SOGIESC needs analysis to humanitarian programming

4. Integrate LGBTQIA+ organisations into humanitarian response infrastructure

- a. Invite LGBTQIA+ CSOs to participate in humanitarian coordination platforms at national and sub-national levels.
- b. Include LGBTQIA+ CSOs in GBV case management referral pathways.
- c. Provide training and accompaniment to LGBTQIA+ CSOs to enable them to participate safely and effectively in these platforms.
- d. Advocate within humanitarian coordination structures for SOGIESC minorities to be explicitly named as a population of heightened vulnerability in the HNRP and other strategy documents.

5. Include SOGIESC needs analysis to existing emergency programming

- a. Ensure that food assistance targeting methodologies explicitly account for the heightened vulnerability of SOGIESC minorities.
- b. Review programmes providing emergency, SRH, and/ or HIV healthcare in humanitarian settings to ensure their accessibility to LGBTQIA+ populations.

6. Build internal capacity

- a. Train staff to recognise humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities of SOGIESC minorities that may be invisible at first glance.
- b. Include LGBTQIA+ needs in needs assessments, programme planning, design, and service mapping exercises, in collaboration with local CSOs.

Protection

7. Support the re-opening of shelters and safe spaces in conflict-affected regions

- a. Provide funding to support the re-establishment of shelters and safe spaces where the collapse of displacement infrastructure has left highly visible and targeted individuals — particularly TGNC people — with nowhere to seek safety.
- b. Link LGBTQIA+ safe houses and safe spaces with formal humanitarian protection referral pathways.

8. Proactively include LGBTQIA+ populations in protection programming

- a. Review targeting criteria and implementation plans for protection programmes (including in emergency cash assistance) to ensure strategies are built in for reaching and including LGBTQIA+ communities.

9. Support legal aid services in government-controlled areas

- a. Prioritise funding for legal aid in government-controlled areas.
- b. Back legal aid efforts with active diplomatic advocacy to accelerate the release of detained LGBTQIA+ people and to press for accountability in cases of abuse.'

Health

10. Revive and strengthen peer-to-peer health support networks

- a. Work with LGBTQIA+ organisations to re-establish peer-to-peer support networks in conflict-affected, rural, and remote areas of eastern DRC.
- b. In partnership with public health actors, support the re-establishment of this model in urban areas where peer networks have been decimated by funding cuts.

11. Invest in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

- a. Fund MHPSS programming specifically designed for LGBTQIA+ survivors of conflict-related violence, including survivors of sexual violence and torture.
- b. Adopt innovative approaches to MHPSS programming, including remote health models and use of trained AI tools.
- c. Ensure such programmes are designed and delivered in partnership with LGBTQIA+ civil society organisations with existing community trust.

Government engagement and advocacy

12. Leverage diplomatic and technical entry points

- a. In Kinshasa, build on the established precedent of government cooperation with LGBTQIA+ organisations to deepen engagement with the Ministry of Health, PNLs, PNMLS, and other relevant bodies on issues of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the humanitarian response.
- b. Engage constructively with the Ministry of Justice on the protection of LGBTQIA+ people from arbitrary arrest, detention, and violence, drawing on the existing entry points that Kinshasa-based organisations have already established.

The International PRIDE Centre

The PRIDE Centre (Protection, Rights, Inclusion in Displacement & Emergencies) provides legal and policy analysis, preparedness, and programming tools for emergency response agencies to ensure inclusive programming for LGBTQI+ persons in emergency, humanitarian, and development settings. For questions about this briefing or to discuss how the PRIDE Centre may be able to support your operations, please contact InternationalPrideCentre@pridecentre.org.

Acronyms - DRC

CEDHUC	Centre d'Expertise en Droits Humains et Criminologie
CSO	Civil society organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
(I)NGO	(International) Non-governmental organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
KII	Key informant interview
KP	Key Populations (in HIV response and programming)
LBQ	Lesbian, bisexual or queer
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, and other identities
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MSM	Men who have sex with men
OCHA UN	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RLO	Refugee-led organization
RRP	Refugee Response Plan
RSD	Refugee status determination
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex charac
TGNC	Transgender and gender non-conforming
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees



The PRIDE Centre is rooted in a foundation of anti-racism and aid decolonisation across all outputs and operations. We embrace SOGIESC communities in all their diversity, inclusive of indigenous understandings of non-CIS sexual identity and gender expression and identity.

SUPPORTED BY

With the
participation
of



LUSH



Activity supported by the
Canada Fund for Local Initiatives
Activité réalisée avec l'appui du
Fonds canadien d'initiatives locales

Canada

Joshua Berson Photography

