



THE INTERNATIONAL
PRIDE CENTRE
PROTECTION, RIGHTS, INCLUSION
IN DISPLACEMENT & EMERGENCIES

REMARKS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Hearing on EU action in the field of LGBTIQ+ rights worldwide, with a focus on Africa

Michael Bruce, Executive Director

7 May 2026

On the evening of **3rd of April**, at about 7 PM, Nandi, a transgender woman and refugee from DRC, went out with a group of 7 other queer friends to buy food at the market in Nakivale refugee settlement in Uganda -but there was another group of refugees waiting for them.

They tried to run, but Nandi was overwhelmed. They caught her first. She was beaten severely, raped with a stick in her anus. The mob attempted to castrate her male organs and she sustained severe injuries— all in a busy, crowded, refugee settlement. The others were also beaten, punched, whipped, kicked.

I tell you these horrific details not to shock you, but to tell you the truth about the extraordinary circumstances that queer refugees and displaced persons have to navigate every day.

The situation for queer people across Africa is horrendous. As we are hearing today, their rights and basic safety are -quite literally- under assault. But the situation for queer persons who are forcibly displaced- refugees and IDPs, is much, much worse.

Why is this?

Because even in the most hostile environments, LGBTQIA+ persons develop strong coping mechanisms. And Queer civil society in these places is strong, vibrant and resilient, even in Kampala and Goma and Addis.

But when they are displaced, whether by conflict or by being driven away by their families, those coping mechanisms are gone. Often, they find themselves in crowded refugee or IDP camps, or in foreign cities where the ability to earn enough income to survive is non-existent.

In our surveys, **65% of LGBTQIA refugees say they are dependent on sex work for survival**. Community leaders estimate this to be even higher, **at 85-90%**. With aid cuts, leaders are increasingly forced to use sex work as a form of funding. I was visiting a trans refugee shelter recently when the manager reluctantly had to excuse herself: one of the residents needed medicine, she explained, they had run out of food, and so she needed to, as she said, “go out to work.”

But why do they need to do this? Don't entities like the EU provide substantial funding for humanitarian aid and assistance, for food and shelter and medical care, all of which is **supposed to be targeted to the most vulnerable?**

Yes. They do.

But the reality of aid distribution is that queer refugees are often unable to access this aid, or, that it is outright denied to them.

So, why does *this* happen?

First: Invisibility is survival. If you are known, like Nandi and her friends were, then you are at incredible risk every day. Trans people cannot go to a food distribution. They can't participate in NGO livelihood programmes. They will be attacked – they could be killed

Second: humanitarian systems simply **do not recognise them**. Humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies do not collect data on LGBTQ persons.

Third: **NGOs and UN agencies do not account** for the unique vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ persons in their programmes, whether on gender-based violence or education or protection or health.

Fourth and finally: **homophobia and transphobia**. This is not just an African social-political issue; homophobia and transphobia are **rife within the very NGOs and UN agencies** that are providing these services - including

agencies which receive EU funds.

Let me return to the case of Nandi in Uganda. After the assault, Nandi couldn't get the medical care she needed at the camp health centre. Despite the extent of her injuries, staff at the UN agency responsible said she needed to have a police report, first. She got this- despite the fact that going to the police as a queer person in Uganda - entails an extremely high risk of arrest, extortion, and further violence. Then, when we intervened with the UN agency responsible – and reported to the EU delegation to try to force action- my team was told:

'the injuries don't seem to be that bad,' and 'you need understand...these people exaggerate.'

This isn't isolated to Uganda. A UN protection official told me in Nairobi at an LGBTQ working group meeting that *"these people only come here because they want to go to Canada."* Queer refugees in South Sudan have been **told to stop calling UN help hotlines to ask for assistance**. When I have requested to meet with UN humanitarian officials in other countries, I frequently get no response at all. These agencies receive substantial EU funding.

I have a list of dozens cases, from just *one* settlement in Uganda, of emergency medical needs, food assistance, education, and other services being **outright denied on the basis of their identity**.

Ultimately, Nandi did get the care she needed. But not through humanitarian systems – we don't actually know why. She had to find the assistance herself, and now she has to cover the \$6,200 US dollars herself... Somehow.

And so... what can we do? **What can you as members of the European Parliament do?**

First: Mandate the organisations that receive EU funding. Mandate them to collect the data, to train and monitor their staff and partners on inclusivity and on homophobia and transphobia in within their teams; **mandate** them to just simply include LGBTQIA+ vulnerabilities in their *analysis*. Analysis does not cost additional money. And despite what they might say: none of this is illegal. It is **not illegal** in Uganda or DRC or Kenya or Sudan or Burundi or Nigeria to provide emergency shelter or healthcare or shelter or food to LGBTQIA+ people.

The PRIDE Centre has done this analysis. We have sent them the roadmaps for how to reach LGBTQIA+ persons in these countries. They just need to read it.

Second: The answer - as always- are the **local organisations** – the refugee-led, community, and civil society LGBTQIA+ groups that do this work even in exceptionally hostile settings. They never stop- even when their funding has disappeared. They *never* stop, even when their leadership and ranks are assaulted, imprisoned, humiliated and demeaned. They are the answer. But **they need resources**.

They need your voice and they need your support. They need you to take action.

Nandi and her allies shouldn't have to be going to embassies and donors to beg for health care. The PRIDE Centre shouldn't have to badger UN agencies to step in, or leverage donors to help make the UN pay attention.

My ask is for you – at the European Parliament – to use your leverage within the international aid system-**to mandate your partners and grantees-** to ensure that this homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in humanitarian action **stops**.