International PRIDE Centre's submission to the Independent Expert on SOGI's thematic report to HRC62:

Discrimination and violations against LBQ women in humanitarian settings

14 January 2026

Introduction

The International PRIDE Centre is pleased to contribute to the Independent Expert's report on violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women.

The PRIDE Centre is an Africa-based initiative focused on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in humanitarian programming. In 2025, we conducted research with 452 participants across Nigeria, Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi to identify needs and challenges for SOGIESC[1] minorities in humanitarian settings. This submission is based on the findings of that research – which are discussed in more detail in the reports linked in the footnote below.[2]

A key finding of our research is that though LBQ women are equally impacted by the events that lead to forcible displacement – whether conflict, natural disasters, or SOGIESC-based persecution – they are less able to move across borders, or to engage in LGBTQIA+ organising. This is due to a range of factors: social expectations on women to become wives and mothers from a young age, and lack of agency to choose a different path; lack of space to identify as LBQ; care responsibilities that tether women to their places of origin; and limited resources available for LBQ-specific programming.

Nevertheless, there are LBQ women in every refugee camp, displacement setting, and humanitarian crisis. This submission addresses three areas relating to their experiences in these contexts:

1. Discrimination and violence.
2. Marginalisation and exclusion in humanitarian programming.
3. Lack of funding/ support for LBQ-led civil society organisations.

[1] Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics

[2] Kenya's Legal Framework and Its Impact on LGBTQIA+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers (November 2025); Nigeria: Context, Analysis, & Recommendations for Aid Agencies (October 2025); Burundi: Legal Analysis & Recommendations for Aid Agencies (August 2025); Laws, policies and developments related to LGBTQI+ communities in Malawi (July 2025). Reports on the situation in Uganda and the DRC will be released in early 2026.

Discrimination and violence

DRC

UN-verified incidents of sexual violence in the DRC increased by one third from 2024 to 2025.[3] Our research suggests that these attacks have disproportionately targeted LBQ and trans women.[4] In November 2025, the Director of a Goma-based GBV organisation reported they were collecting 4-5 gender-based violence (GBV) cases against these populations daily; a Bakavu-based organisation reported collecting up to 7.[5] These violations include conflict-related sexual violence carried out by M23 and other armed groups,[6] as well as "corrective rapes" and targeted attacks carried out by non-combatants.[7]

Nigeria

In northern Nigeria, where the majority of the country's refugee and internally displaced populations are concentrated, LBQ women face intersectional harms due to repressive laws, deeply patriarchal social norms, and extremist violence. In Kano and Katsina, 'lesbianism' is punishable by death.[8] The experiences of LBQ women with Boko Haram is not well documented – but in interviews with northern-based LGBTQIA+ organisations, staff reported that it is common for this population to flee southward in search of safety.[9]

Malawi

In Dzaleka refugee camp, where most refugees in Malawi live, LBQ women interviewed by The PRIDE Centre reported facing daily threats and living in constant fear of sexual violence.[10]

Burundi

State sponsored sexual violence has been prevalent in Burundi since 2015, and the UN warned it increased again in the 18 months before the June 2025 elections.[11] LBQ activists who met with our team in May 2025 were concerned that increases in homophobic rhetoric by government actors would render them targets of this

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[3] Carmo, A. (2025). UN sounds alarm over spike in sexual violence against women in DR Congo [Online]. United Nations. Available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166150

[4] Interviews with five LGBTQIA+ organisations based in Goma and Bukavu, 21 and 24 November 2025.

[5] Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025

[6] Interview with Director of LGBTQIA+ organisation in Goma, 21 November 2025.

[7] Above n 2.

[8] UK Government. (2025). Country policy and information note: sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, Nigeria, June 2025 [Online]. Available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/nigeria-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-and-expression-and-sex-characteristics-nigeria-june-2025-accessible; Njoku, E. T. (2024). Queering Terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *47*(8), 888–910. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.2016514; Amnesty International. (2025). Nigeria: One year on since Boko Haram kidnappings [online]. Available at: www.amnesty.org.uk/nigeria-one-year-boko-haram-kidnappings/

[9] FGD with LBQ organisation in Abuja, 11 May 2025.

[10] FGD with LGBTQIA+ group in Dzaleka camp, 11 March 2025

[11] OHCHR. (2025). Burundi: UN experts alarmed by increase in serious human rights violations during election period [Online]. Available at: www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/burundi-un-experts-alarmed-increase-serious-human-rights-violations-during

violence.[12] LBQ women have also been attacked by anti-government protestors, who accuse them of working for foreign governments.[13]

The high number of rape survivors amongst the 110,00 Congolese refugees who entered Burundi in 2025 has been well documented, and LBQ activists in both DRC and Burundi are concerned about the many LBQ women this is likely to include - though none have been able to make contact with survivors.[14]

Religious preachers and community members frequently blame severe weather events on the LGBTQIA+ community. “Corrective” rapes against LBQ women reportedly surge during these crises.[15]

Kenya

The PRIDE Centre met with 24 LBQ refugees living in urban areas after fleeing the SOGIESC-based violence of Kakuma refugee camp, who report frequent experiences of harassment, abuse, and threats by members of the host community.[16] Kenya’s femicide epidemic – which has included high profile murders of both LBQ[17] and refugee[18] women – has exacerbated the fears of this population.

Queer mothers describe facing compounded challenges, including exclusion from shelters, stigmatisation within the LGBTQIA+ community, and being unable to register or secure basic rights for their children.[19]

Uganda

Violations committed against displaced and crisis-affected LBQ women in Uganda include public attacks in refugee camps, evictions from family shelters, and “corrective” rapes.[20] LBQ mothers are frequently turned away from shelters because of the risk of sheltering children stemming from the language of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA).

[12]FGD with LBQ organisation in Bujumbura, 28 May 2025
[13] FGD with LBQ organisation in Bujumbura, 28 May 2025; a UN investigation found have been targeting women and girls generally: UN News. (2017). Independent UN probe reveals 'cruel and brutal nature' of human rights violations in Burundi [Online]. Available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/06/559562
[14] UN Media. (2025). UNHCR / DRC REFUGEES BURUNDI [Online]. Available at: https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d351/d3516654; KIIs with five LGBTQIA+ organisations in East DRC, 21 and 24 November; FGD with LBQ organisation in Bujumbura, 28 May 2025.
[15] Above n 13.
[16] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees and IDPs, 29 September 2025.
[17] E. Kilbride (2022) 'Inadequate Kenyan Police Response to Brutal Killing of Non-Binary Lesbian' HRW, available at www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/29/inadequate-kenyan-police-response-brutal-killing-non-binary-lesbian
[18] KNCHR (2025) 'Demanding Justice for th e Heinous Murder of Gaala Aden Abdi (17 Year Old Refugee Girl) in Wajir County', available at https://www.google.com//search?udm=14&q=femicide+kenya+refugees#:~:text=Kenya%20National%20Commission,org%20%E2%80%BA%20DocumentDownload
[19] FGD with LGBTQIA+ organisation, 29 September 2025; FGD with LBQ organisation, 2 October 2025.
[20] HRAPF (2025) 'HRAPF’s Report on Cases of violence & violations based on real or presumed SOGIE' (January, February, March 2025), available at https://hrapf.org/mdocs-posts/hrapfs-report-on-cases-of-violence-violations-based-on-real-or-presumed-sogie-for-february-2025/

1. Marginalisation and exclusion in humanitarian programming

LBQ women are largely invisible in humanitarian and refugee responses. Of the 13 Humanitarian Response Plans in place in Africa in 2015, only one – Mozambique – references SOGIESC minorities. Regional Refugee Plans for DRC, South Sudan, and Sudan mention SOGIESC populations, but not LBQ women – nor do they include metrics through which to measure interventions.

DRC

The disbandment of the IDP camps in Eastern DRC by M23 has further marginalised LBQ women in need of humanitarian assistance.[21] Prior to the camps' closure, the PRIDE Centre was informed that some humanitarian actors had been denying food aid and medical services on the basis of actual or perceived SOGIESC – leaving many reliant on local LGBTQIA+ organisations for life saving assistance.[22] In these regions, queer organisations are predominantly MSM and trans-focused, meaning LBQ individuals are less likely to be reached. [23]

Nigeria

Through our research, we were able to identify just two organisations providing any services to displaced LBQ women in Nigeria, who likely number in the tens of thousands.[24] Both are local, non-LGBTQIA+ groups, whose work with small numbers of LBQ women is not funded or supported by any international humanitarian actors.[25]

One interviewee from an international organisation acknowledged that cases of GBV against LBQ women had been brought to their attention through the case management system, but said they were unsure where to refer such cases. No LBQ-led organisations are included in formal humanitarian referral pathways.[26]

Malawi

In Malawi, staff from Plan International and UNHCR have made efforts to include LBQ populations in humanitarian programming – but our research indicates that this progress has not translated into formal recognition of LBQ women as a vulnerable population in need of targeted assistance. [27]

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[21] HRW. (13 February 2025). DR Congo: M23 Drives Displaced People From Goma Camps [Online]. Available at: www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/13/dr-congo-m23-drives-displaced-people-goma-camps; Action Aid. (18 March 2025). Women evicted from DRC camps face widespread sexual violence and forced marriage – ActionAid [Online]. Available at: https://actionaid.org/news/2025/women-evicted-drc-camps-face-widespread-sexual-violence-and-forced-marriage-actionaid

[22] KII with LGBTQIA+ organisation in Bukavu, 24 November 2025.

[23] KIIs with five LGBTQIA+ organisations in East DRC, 21 and 24 November.

[24] In the absence of demographic data in the countries where we work, The International PRIDE Centre conservatively estimates that 5% of disaster-affected populations are SOGIESC minorities. In Nigeria, the refugee and IDP population is around 3,730,000, translating to an estimated 186,500 LGBTQIA+ people, some percentage of whom would be LBQ.

[25] KII with refugee-led organisation in Adagom, 13 May 2025; KII with organisation based in northeast Nigeria, 3 November 2025.

[26] The International PRIDE Centre (2025) 'Laws, policies and developments related to LGBTQI+ communities in Malawi: Legal Analysis & Impact for Humanitarians'; Interview with international humanitarian organisation in Abuja, 7 May 2025.

[27] The International PRIDE Centre (2025), 'Laws, policies and developments related to LGBTQI+ communities in Malawi: Legal Analysis & Impact for Humanitarians'; Interview with international humanitarian organisation in

Burundi

Our research indicates that no attempts have been made to include LBQ programming carried out by humanitarian actors.[28] LGBTQIA+ CSOs told The PRIDE Centre that they sought to provide assistance to queer refugees, but that only international organisations are permitted to assist new arrivals.

Kenya

Though humanitarian actors in Kenya conduct more programming with SOGIESC minorities than in our other focal countries, projects rarely target LBQ women. Most humanitarian programming is carried out within refugee camps – environments that are extremely unsafe for LBQ women, and from which many are forced to flee.[29] LBQ mothers living outside of the camp face extreme challenges in securing access to aid, education, and healthcare services for their children.[30]

Uganda

Humanitarian actors report reluctance or inability to engage with LBQ communities, citing the AHA criminalisation of 'promotion' of homosexuality. Research by LBQ-led organisations shows that drop-in centres and safe spaces that previously facilitated access to health services, psychosocial support, and emergency assistance have increasingly ceased physical operations following the passage of the Act.[31]

2. Lack of funding and support for LBQ-led civil society organisations

Across the region, LBQ-led organisations suffer an acute lack of funding and are under-represented in civil society spaces. African LGBTQIA+ organisations have historically been highly reliant on HIV funding streams, which do not recognise LBQ women as target populations, but recognise transgender persons and MSM. Recent funding cuts have been particularly devastating for grassroots, refugee, and LBQ groups, many of whom have had their already limited resources stripped away.[32]

LBQ activists across countries highlight barriers to being able to join and grow the queer rights movement – including the disproportionate likelihood of being married and becoming pregnant at an early age,[33] and a shrinking space for feminist activism.[34]

Abuja, 7 May 2025; FGD with LGBTQIA+ group in Dzaleka camp, 18 March 2025; KII with LBQ organisation in Lilongwe, 17 March 2025

[28] The International PRIDE Centre (2025) 'Burundi: Legal Anaysis & Recommendations for Aid Agencies'.

[29] The International PRIDE Centre (2025), 'Kenya's Legal Framework and Its Impact on LGBTQIA+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers'.

[30] FGD with LGBTQIA+ RLO in Nairobi, 29 September 2025; FGD with an LBQ organisation in Nairobi, 2 October 2025

[31] Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG), Under the Shadow of the Anti-Homosexuality Act: Experiences and Barriers to SRHR Access for LBQ Womxn in Uganda

[32] Outright International. (2025). Defunding Freedom: Impacts of U.S. Foreign Aid Cuts on LGBTIQ People Worldwide.

[33] Ibid; FGD with LBQ organisation in Kinshasa, 12 November 2025.

[34] Eg, Civicus (2025) 'Burundi', available at https://monitor.civicus.org/country/burundi/; Saiget, M. (2020). Women in Burundi. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History.

DRC

The lack of representation of LBQ women in queer organisations in the DRC is evident throughout the country, but is particularly acute in conflict-affected areas. Of the 79 queer activists The PRIDE Centre spoke to in 2025, only 12 identify as LBQ, none of whom were based in the East.[35]

Nigeria

The largest lesbian-led group in Nigeria estimates that LBQ organisations make up only 10% of LGBTQIA+ groups in the country.[36] Of a coalition of 24 organisations that document SOGIESC-based violations across Nigeria annually, only five are LBQ-focused. This contributes to erroneous imbalances in the data collected – for example, accounts of violations against 649 MSM, and 73 LBQ women, in the 2024 report.[37]

Malawi

Two of the nine major LGBTQIA+ organisations in Malawi are LBQ-led, and reportedly receive the least funding.[38] When our team visited the informal association of queer refugees in Dzaleka camp, it did not include any women identifying as LBQ.[39] Since 2024, all LBQ-led organisations have exited the national LGBTQIA+ coordination body (the Diversity Forum),[40] accusing it of being exclusively focused on issues relevant to MSM and trans populations.[41]

Burundi

Of the 14 formal LGBTQIA+ organisations operating across Burundi, only one is LBQ-focused.[42] There are no known groups or networks of LBQ refugees or displaced people within the country.[43]

Kenya

The PRIDE Centre is aware of 25 refugee-led organisations providing services to LGBTQIA+ refugee communities in the outskirts of Nairobi, and has conducted interviews with 10. Only one of these organisations is LBQ-led.

Uganda

Global representation and advocacy on behalf of LGBTQIA+ Ugandans is visibly dominated by cis-gender males, which is reinforced by donors and governments who

[35] KII with the Director of an LBQ organisation in Kinshasa, 12 November 2025.
[36] FGD with a LBQ organisation in Abuja, 11 May 2025.
[37] TIERS. 2024. 2024 Human Rights Violations Report, p 9.
[38] FGD with LBQ organisation in Blantyre, 20 March 2025; FGD with LGBTQIA+ organisation in Lilongwe, 21 March 2025
[39] The International PRIDE Centre. (2025). Laws, policies and developments related to LGBTQI+ communities in Malawi: Legal Analysis & Impact for Humanitarians.
[40] Luba, M. (2019). Malawi Community-Based KP-Led Organizations Demand Transparency and Inclusion in the Planning and Implementation of the KPIF (3 July 2019). AVAC. Available at: avac.org/blog/malawi-community-based-kp-led-organizations-demand-transparency-and-inclusion-in-the-planning-and-implementation-of-the-kpif/
[41] KII with LBQ organisation in Lilongwe, 17 March 2025; FGD with LGBTQIA+ organisation in Lilongwe, 21 March 2025.
[42] The International PRIDE Centre. (2025). Legal Analysis & Impact for Humanitarians Protection of SOGIESC minorities in Burundi.
[43] Interviews with 13 LGBTQIA+ groups in Bujumbura, 26 – 30 May 2025.

disproportionately provide access and opportunities to male-led groups. This has substantial downstream impacts on LBQ organisations' ability to fundraise and influence policy and coordination structures.

Recommendations

The International PRIDE Centre urges the Independent Expert to consider making the following recommendations:

To UN agencies:

1. Recognise LBQ women as a population in need of targeted assistance in humanitarian contexts, and reflect this in response plans, coordination mechanisms, and policy documents.
2. Appoint local LBQ focal points within agencies engaging directly with LBQ individuals.

To states:

3. Classify LBQ refugee women as extremely vulnerable and prioritise them for third country resettlement, particularly those with children.
4. Ensure legal accountability for violations against LBQ women by state and non-state actors.

To donors:

5. Support and resource LBQ civil society.
6. Conduct assessments into the needs of LBQ populations in humanitarian settings.
7. Diversify representation of LGBTQIA+ spokespersons and advocates to ensure LBQ women have increased opportunities.