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REPORT BACK

# QUEER FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN MEXICO

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON ROUNDTABLE #1 OF THE  
QUEER FORCED DISPLACEMENT INITIATIVE  
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Glossary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Key Recommendations for Policy Makers</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>8</b>
About the Queer Forced Displacement Initiative	8
LGBTQI+ forced displacement in Mexico	9
The Roundtable Consultation Process	9
<b>PART 1: Key Challenges facing displaced LGBTQI+ persons in Mexico</b>	<b>12</b>
Access to Essential Services	12
Institutional Barriers and Systemic Discrimination	15
Partnering with LGBTQI+ Civil Society	17
<b>PART 2: A Global Network on LGBTQI+ Forced Displacement</b>	<b>18</b>
A Platform for Information Sharing, Data Collection, and Evidence-based Policymaking	18
Leveraging the Network to Push for Systemic Change and Institutional Accountability	20
Network and Sustainability	20
<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Key Recommendations for Policy Makers</b>	<b>22</b>

# GLOSSARY

<b>ASYLUM SEEKER</b>	An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution.
<b>CITIZEN</b>	A citizen is a person who, by place of birth, nationality of one or both parents, or naturalization is granted full rights and responsibilities as a member of a State.
<b>COMAR</b>	Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>HRD</b>	Human Rights Defender
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>NO LEGAL STATUS</b>	Someone without any legal immigration status (either temporary or permanent) in their country of residence. This is sometimes also referred to as someone who is “undocumented” or “non-status”.
<b>PERMANENT RESIDENT</b>	A person who has been granted the right to reside permanently in a certain country, but is not a citizen. Permanent residents are often afforded basic rights similar to those of citizens, with some limitations and restrictions.
<b>REFUGEE</b>	Someone who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.. The legal definition that applies to a given refugee varies between countries based on the applicable national legal framework, regional declarations and conventions, complementary protection policy frameworks, and international law. The broad definition offered here is derived from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Some refugees are registered by UNHCR under their mandate.

# GLOSSARY

<b>SEGOB</b>	Mexican Ministry of the Interior
<b>SOGIESC</b>	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
<b>STATELESS PERSON</b>	A person is “stateless” if no State considers them a citizen. States have specific obligations towards their citizens and grant citizens significantly more rights than non-citizens. Since no State recognizes them, stateless persons are deprived of many basic rights and have no State to protect them.
<b>TEMPORARY RESIDENT</b>	A foreign national who is legally authorized to enter and live in a certain country for temporary purposes (work, studies, etc.).
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# INTRODUCTION

Queer Forced Displacement Initiative (QFDI) is a project to create an international network to advance protection and solutions for LGBTQI+ people in forced displacement. To lay the groundwork for this network, from 2024-2025 Rainbow Railroad is co-facilitating a series of global roundtable consultations with civil society organizations, people with lived experience of forced displacement, and state and humanitarian actors. The consultations aim to provide a snapshot of the local context in key transit countries for LGBTQI+ migrants across Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The collective data and findings emerging from each consultative roundtable will be used to directly inform the design, focus and function of this multi-stakeholder network, which aims to be launched at the end of 2025.

This report summarizes key themes, findings and recommendations from the first in this series of roundtables, held in Mexico City, Mexico from September 5th-6th, 2024, organized in partnership with Casa Frida, Refugio LGBTQI+.

Over the course of two-days, participants identified a number of key challenges faced by LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees. Notably, xenophobic and anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination at the interpersonal, structural, and systemic levels create significant barriers for LGBTQI+ individuals in safely accessing essential services such as healthcare, shelter, housing, food, and employment. Participants also highlighted the need to enhance the security of individuals, combat human rights violations, and enhance access to justice. The following recommendations emerged in response to these challenges.

Group Picture of Day 2 Attendees

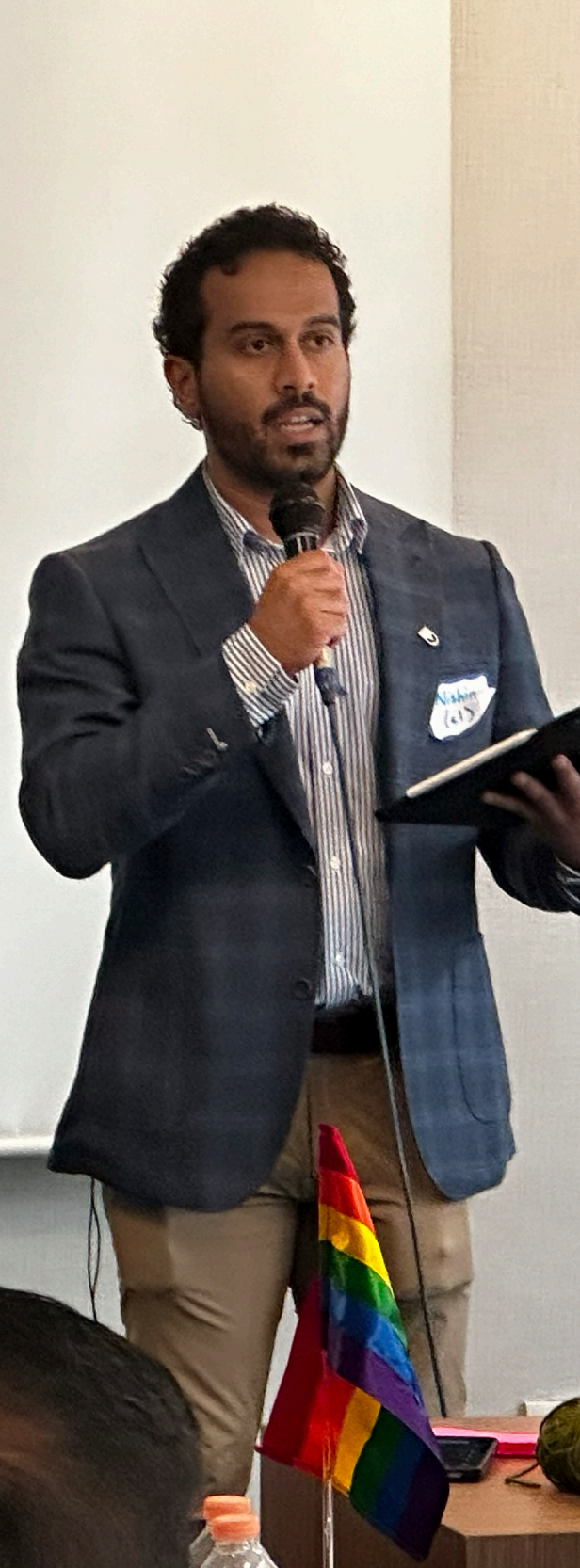


# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

- **Partner with LGBTQI+-led civil society organizations.** Governments and international organizations should formally leverage the expertise of LGBTQI+ led CSOs, through ongoing consultative processes, joint referral mechanisms and service delivery initiatives, formal partnerships and broadscale investments.
- **Include LGBTQI+ people with lived experience of forced displacement in policy design.** Establish formal mechanisms to capture and translate the real-world challenges faced by forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people into flexible, responsive protection policies. .
- **Create specific measures to streamline and improve access to legal status and documentation for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people.** Removing key barriers to obtaining legal status and documentation within the immigration and asylum system must be viewed as a fundamental component of the overall safety and protection of LGBTQI+ FDPs, without which individuals are unable to access essential rights and services.
- **Prioritize targeted economic inclusion programs aimed at providing dignified employment opportunities for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons.** Barriers to accessing dignified livelihood opportunities leave forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people unable to meet their basic needs, while also heightening risks to exploitation. Targeted, inclusive livelihood programs are urgently needed to ensure protection and survival.
- **Expand refugee policy frameworks beyond binary (male/female) definitions of gender.** Legal institutions and organizations providing services to forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people must integrate gender diverse categories into existing systems, in order to enhance safety and inclusion for trans, non-binary and gender fluid individuals.
- **Strengthen accountability measures for human rights violators and actors who fail to comply with protection laws and policies.** Existing legal and policy frameworks to protect LGBTQI+ and asylum rights must be strengthened through effective enforcement and oversight mechanisms to hold actors accountable for violations
- **Enhance legal protections for LGBTQI+ human rights defenders.** Human rights defenders (HRDs) need increased legal support and protection against violence and threats, in order to continue bringing their critical voice and leadership to the issues facing forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ communities.
- **Establish dedicated spaces specifically for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons to access essential services safely.** Forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals need accommodations to enable their safe access, such as the creation of LGBTQI+ specific spaces that are free of discrimination within health care, shelter and other essential services.

# Recommendations on the Global Multi-Stakeholder Network on LGBTQI+ Forced Displacement

- **Facilitate cross-regional learning and knowledge exchange.** Sharing best practices from successful LGBTQI+-centered policies and programs in other refugee-hosting countries can inform localized LGBTQI+ advocacy, enhance refugee protection delivery models, and guide policy reforms.
- **Facilitate the collection and dissemination of accurate data, case studies and research.** Data can be used to support targeted, evidence-based policy development and the creation of robust migration laws and policies that remain responsive to the needs of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people.
- **Establish dedicated spaces within the network where civil society organizations and LGBTQI+ FDPs can share knowledge, skills and resources.** These spaces should foster mutual support and collective action toward addressing challenges faced by LGBTQI+ people living in forced displacement.
- **Create formal mechanisms for engagement between lived-experience advocates, CSOs, researchers, state actors and international organizations.** This will strengthen program implementation and promote inclusive policymaking for LGBTQI+ FDPs. The network should also establish tangible leadership opportunities for people with lived experience of forced displacement to directly feed into refugee response programming at regional, national, and local levels.
- **Develop Monitoring and Evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of refugee protection systems for LGBTQI+ FDPs.** These tools should measure both service delivery outcomes and policy impact. Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks should also be used to foster better accountability by tracking the network's impact across stakeholder types, and promoting transparency.
- **Leverage international organizations and spaces to secure stronger commitments for LGBTQI+ people living in forced displacement.** The network should have a dedicated presence in relevant international forums, and coordinate with key international organizations such as the UNHCR.
- **Establish clear operational structures and accessible mechanisms for diverse stakeholder representation and engagement in the network.** Recommendations include having an independent, rotating secretariat to coordinate efforts, set shared objectives, and ensure continuity. Network composition should be balanced among stakeholders, and the voices of people with lived experience should be sufficiently represented and amplified.
- **Establish sustainable funding models and resource-sharing mechanisms.** A diversified funding strategy balancing public, private, and philanthropic sector contributions will ensure sustainability for the network. Outside of monetary resources, the network should invest in human capital through training and skills development, educational initiatives, and capacity-building programs.



Nishin Nathwani, Head of Strategy at Rainbow Railroad.  
Delivering opening Remarks

This project is led by Rainbow Railroad, with funding contributions from Global Affairs Canada and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. For more information about the QFDI project activities and how to get involved, please visit: <https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/QFDI>.

## CONTEXT

### About the Queer Forced Displacement

The Queer Forced Displacement Initiative (QFDI) emerged in response to the urgent realities faced by forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people, who encounter challenges that are distinct from those faced by other migrants and refugees. These challenges stem from the stigma surrounding their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), placing them at heightened risks of violence, marginalization, and discrimination throughout the displacement cycle. The specific protection needs of LGBTQI+ people living in forced displacement remain underaddressed and they experience restricted access and exclusion from traditional humanitarian protection systems and limited pathways to long-term safety.

Despite these adversities, LGBTQI+ people with lived experience, human rights defenders and activists, civil society organizations, international organizations and government actors from across the globe have demonstrated success in addressing the unique challenges experienced by forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people. The QFDI aims to create a sustained, multi-stakeholder platform to capture this critical expertise, advance research and evidence-based policy solutions, and proactively mobilize response efforts at the early onset of crises that affect LGBTQI+ communities. The need for an organized global response to the challenges faced by forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ persons was highlighted during the 2021 Global Roundtable on Protection and Solutions for LGBTQI+ Persons in Forced Displacement, co-convened by the UNHCR and the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. This event produced 33 significant recommendations including calls for the creation of this network.

Following the 2024-2025 phase of global consultations, the network will enact a multi-stakeholder declaration to ground the network's focus and activities. Ultimately, the QFDI seeks to build a sustainable, coordinated global response to LGBTQI+ forced displacement.

## LGBTQI+ Forced Displacement in Mexico

The selection of Mexico for the inaugural QFDI roundtable was informed by its positioning as a major entry point and key migratory corridor for forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people, both from neighbouring countries in Latin America and globally. The legal and policy frameworks in Mexico provide for the recognition and protection of LGBTQI+ rights,<sup>1</sup> as well as a domestic asylum system which offers refugee protection for individuals fleeing persecution on the basis of their SOGIESC identity.<sup>2</sup> Mexico has therefore emerged as a key leader in advancing LGBTQI+ rights and providing refuge for forcibly displaced individuals in the region, and it is a central hub for the work of government representatives, INGOs, and humanitarian organizations committed to shaping collaborative, LGBTQI+ inclusive migration policy solutions.

Despite substantial gains in improving protection for LGBTQI+ migrants in recent years, the effectiveness of existing efforts continues to be significantly impeded by challenges such as inconsistent implementation and enforcement of laws in different states, widespread xenophobia and homophobia, exclusionary, bureaucratic systems and resource scarcity.<sup>3</sup> These issues are compounded by dangerous, complex conditions on the ground including organized crime, and human trafficking.<sup>4</sup> The impact of wide-ranging geopolitical forces across Latin America and beyond, as well as specific risks emerging out of the shared border with the United States, further intensifies these conditions through the violent enforcement of migration deterrence policies in an increasingly militarized and securitized migration environment.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, this landscape is also directly influenced by long-standing, robust and dynamic networks of civil society organizations and human rights defenders, which continuously shed light on the lived realities of forcibly

displaced LGBTQI+ individuals, advocate for improved protections for their communities and fill gaps in existing laws and policies through the provision of essential front-line services. With this context in mind, Mexico provides a vital perspective on the experiences and needs of displaced LGBTQI+ individuals in the region.

Finally, a note on terminology is this report interchangeably uses the terms "migrant, refugee, asylum seekers and forcibly displaced people" to encompass the diverse experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals who are displaced and forced to leave their homes and/or migrate elsewhere. Displaced LGBTQI+ individuals do not often conform to a single category and many participants themselves used these terms interchangeably when detailing their own experiences navigating a lifetime of forced displacement and migratory experiences as LGBTQI+ persons.

## The Roundtable Consultation Process

### Partnership with Rainbow Railroad and Casa Frida

roundtables are adapted to the local country context and grassroots expertise on the issues, in each transit country location, Rainbow Railroad operates in partnership with LGBTQI+ civil society. This is a core feature of the global consultation process.

Mexico, Rainbow Railroad partnered with Casa Frida, Refugio LGBTIQ+, a civil society organization based in Mexico City, focused on issues facing LGBTQI+ migrants. Casa Frida engages in strategic work in the southern Mexico-US border strip, including the provision of accommodation, health care, comprehensive support and psychosocial services to LGBTIQ+ people fleeing extreme violence, people persecuted and displaced by organized crime, people who migrate and/or seek asylum in Mexico for humanitarian reasons, young people who are expelled from their homes because of their SOGIESC identity, people living with HIV, and survivors of conversion therapy.<sup>6</sup> ersecuted and displaced by organized crime, people who migrate and/or seek asylum in Mexico for humanitarian reasons, young people who are expelled from their homes because of their SOGIESC identity, people living with HIV, and survivors of conversion therapy.<sup>6</sup>

For this roundtable, Casa Frida led efforts in participant outreach and selection, provided core input on agenda design, supported with logistics and security planning and took on a key facilitation and note-taking role during the roundtables. Casa Frida's guidance, leadership and expertise was integral to creating a more accessible and meaningful experience for all roundtable participants.

## Methodology

The roundtables in Mexico City took place over the course of two days using simultaneous interpretation services (English and Spanish) throughout the events. Ethical and safety considerations were central to the consultation process, and informed consent protocols were followed from the outset, ensuring that participants understood how their contributions would be recorded, stored, and used. Privacy and confidentiality were prioritized, with the anonymization of notes taken during the event, and clear notifications provided to participants when recording devices were active or photographs were being taken. Following the conclusion of the roundtables, recordings of the sessions were transcribed and reviewed by multiple staff members. A systematic thematic analysis of facilitator notes and transcriptions helped identify the recurring issues and recommendations outlined in this report. Participants and co-organizers received a draft copy of the report for their review and feedback prior to public distribution.

## Scope of Participation

Day 1 of the roundtables was a closed door meeting with LGBTQI+ migrants, civil society organizations and activists. Participants were selected in consultation with Casa Frida, with a mind to geographic and demographic diversity, sector of operation, thematic expertise in LGBTQI+ forced displacement, and demonstrated commitment to advancing protection frameworks. Attendees completed pre and post-event surveys to collect targeted demographic data and information about levels and modes of engagement on issues of LGBTQI+ forced displacement.

Day 1 saw the active participation of 28 attendees, representing migrants from multiple Latin American countries including Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, United States.<sup>7</sup> Pre-event surveys also indicated participants were currently living in Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico and the United States.<sup>8</sup> Of the 28 participants who completed the

pre-event survey, 13 respondents self-identified as gay cisgender men. Notably, overlapping gender identities reveal a significant representation of transgender individuals with 6 transgender women, and 1 transgender man contributing to the discussions. Among 6 respondents with lived displacement experience, 3 people identified as asylum seekers, 2 people had refugee status, 1 person identified as an internally displaced person, and 1 person had the experience of being a returnee.

The data also reflects substantial involvement from civil society, Human Rights Defenders, and activists. There were 12 participants from the following organizations: Al Otro Lado, Jardin de las Mariposas, the Centre for Inclusion, the Transgender Law Centre, working in key transit routes such as Mexico City, Tapachula, Tijuana and others. These organizations have built strong networks of support for LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees, offering essential services including shelter, legal aid and mental health services.

Day 2 of the roundtables focused on engaging government representatives, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and humanitarian organizations, and international organizations, interested and active in supporting the rights of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people in Mexico. The 19 participants included government representatives

## Focus and Structure

The format for the Day 1 roundtable was participatory and discussion based, with a combination of large group activities and thematic breakout sessions. Participants were encouraged to share their perspectives on systemic barriers, personal experiences, and potential solutions for addressing the needs of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people. Building on these discussions, participants were then invited to think broadly about how a global, multi-stakeholder network could function to meaningfully address the challenges identified in earlier sessions. The conversation explored what would be required for such a network to be relevant, practical, and effective in supporting LGBTQI+ people experiencing forced displacement.

The core themes and recommendations emerging from Day 1 were brought forward into Day 2, where representatives from governments, INGOs, and international organizations shared insights into best practices, programs, and advocacy strategies currently being implemented to address the challenges facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people. Day 2

participants also provided input into how a global, multis-takeholder network might function to help advance their domestic and foreign policy priorities. Participants from Day 1 attended the Day 2 sessions and attendees from both days of the roundtables engaged in collaborative, small group discussions about how diverse stakeholders might collectively leverage the global network to address the key issues identified during the meetings.

## Limitations of the Findings

The Mexico City Roundtables provided valuable insights into the challenges and needs of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals and generated several concrete recommendations for the creation of the global network. However, several limitations influenced the scope and depth of the findings.

The structure of the roundtables, including early departures and replacements by individual participants, introduced variability in demographic data captured through pre-event and post-event surveys. While all 28 participants completed the pre-event survey, 24 people completed the post event survey. Some participants chose not to disclose information due to optional survey questions—a measure implemented to respect privacy and safety concerns. Additionally, the surveys were translated from English to Spanish, which may have led to varying interpretations of questions or terms. The consultation also primarily focused on urban refugee experiences, leaving out the perspectives of those in rural areas, camp or detention settings, which limited the diversity of migration contexts captured. In capturing the content of the discus-

sion, although professional interpretation services were used, some subtleties in language were lost in translation, particularly during policy discussions, and reliance on AI transcription introduced minor inaccuracies.

Lastly, though participant invite lists from both days were intentionally kept small and targeted to facilitate meaningful roundtable discussions with relevant experts, the small number of participants overall acts as an inherent limitation on the breadth of discussion possible. For instance, while the 6 persons who identified themselves as having a lived experience of displacement forms a relatively high component at 13% of overall participants across both days, in total this is still only 6 people. That said, according to the pre-event survey most respondents are either very familiar or familiar with policy issues related to LGBTQI+ migrant and refugee protection, with only 1 person self-reporting being very unfamiliar. Key sources of information participants cited as informing their expertise included international human rights organization reports, national reports, and personal experiences as activists or forcibly displaced persons. Other important sources include advocacy with organizations defending displaced persons' rights, UNHCR publications, and government involvement.

Ultimately, the roundtable process demonstrated the challenges of balancing robust data collection with ethical, cultural, linguistic, and privacy considerations, reflecting the complexities of addressing LGBTQI+ forced displacement and highlighting areas for refinement in future consultations.



## PART 1: KEY CHALLENGES FACING DISPLACED LGBTQI+ PERSONS IN MEXICO

LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees, grassroots civil society organizations and activists provided a vivid snapshot into the challenging and complex daily realities faced by individuals living at the intersections of race, immigration status, and SOGIESC identities in Mexico. In addition to their on-the-ground expertise, the majority of participants, 22, had a strong understanding of policy issues related to LGBTQI+ migrant and refugee protection going into the discussion, reflecting a well-informed group. The following section summarizes the key challenges and themes identified by participants from both days of the roundtable.

### Access to Essential Services

#### Access to Health

Expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), placing Participants identified a lack of adequate healthcare services as a major issue impacting forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ communities. This includes gaps in treatment and lack of medication for chronic, complex health conditions

such as HIV, as well as other health issues which require regular monitoring such as diabetes. Participants also pointed to a scarcity of gender-affirming care to address the specific health needs of transgender migrants, and gaps in the availability of essential reproductive health services for women. As noted by one participant,

“Many women have arrived to medical services having been raped, sometimes pregnant, and there is a stigma that people think they may have a better of chance of asylum if they have an abortion. We need better access to safe abortions.”

In addition to physical health concerns, participants highlighted the urgent need for mental health care and psychological support. Participants emphasized the severe mental health impact of forced migration, of being “broken” during the migration journey, and the loss of critical support systems which must then be reconstructed in a new country. These impacts are compounded by the unique traumas experienced by forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals, who are often grappling with added layers of stigma, discrimination and persecution based on their SOGIESC identities. In some areas of Mexico, participants also identified the growing problem of drug addiction and substance abuse among LGBTQI+ migrants and the lack of available treatment options for them.

Participants noted that mental health care in Mexico remains expensive and inaccessible for most LGBTQI+ migrants, barriers which are exacerbated by long wait times, stigma associated with mental illness, and the lack of information about what services are available and how to access them. One person also highlighted that LGBTQI+ migrants held in detention have no access to mental health support whatsoever, despite the dire need for trauma-informed care in carceral settings.

For forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people with physical or mental health needs, their ability to access critical health services is often determined by their legal documentation and immigration status, as migrants are usually required to register with the authorities and regularize their status before gaining access to comprehensive healthcare. This creates significant delays in accessing vital services, due to lengthy processing times, administrative barriers and other factors impacting the ability to get documentation. Participants noted that Mexican government authorities

are unwilling to help individuals without legal documentation, and as such, undocumented or precarious status LGBTQI+ migrants may be entirely excluded from accessing most physical and mental health services. As stated by one participant: “It is complicated if you don’t have regular migration status, it’s three times as hard as it is for Mexicans here in Mexico.”

Participants also described how institutional xenophobia, discrimination and limited LGBTQI+-centered health services in receiving countries compound challenges in accessing critical health protections:

“Mental health is still a privilege. There’s resistance, especially in public institutions. There’s stigma related to HIV, a lack of medications, and even when the government promises increased funding, we don’t see the change.”

Participants emphasized the need to address these gaps through accessible, inclusive health services and community-based initiatives that promote resilience and belonging. They highlighted the importance of creating spaces where forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals can access care, rebuild support networks, and engage in activities that foster empowerment and well-being. Collaboration between government entities and LGBTQI+ civil society organizations was identified as key to ensuring that health services are equitable, sustainable, and tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQI+ FDPs.

## **Access to Safe Shelter, Housing and Food**

Participants identified access to safe shelter and stable housing as a core unmet need for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people, essential for their well-being and ability to rebuild their lives. As highlighted by one speaker, migrants need “a place where they can keep their things and feel safe and protected, so they can take a shower, so they can decide if they want to settle or move somewhere else.”

Participants noted that the shelters available for migrants and refugees are not always safe for the LGBTQI+ community, exposing residents to discrimination and violence from other asylum seekers on the basis of their SOGIESC identity:

“Shelters are mixed, and we see how violence is normalized. Cultural norms have taught us from a young age that we are monsters, that we don’t deserve dignity. We see this from our places of origin, [and] they replicate that violence.”

Participants noted the need to create shelter spaces that are intersectional in their approach and tailored towards specific communities, including forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ communities and the elderly. The provision of safe spaces, specialized supports and rehabilitation programming for LGBTQI+ migrants struggling with addiction was also brought forward as a growing and pressing need, as these individuals are often not permitted to access available shelter spaces and end up living on the streets in dangerous conditions. However participants emphasized that although they are aware of the needs of their communities and despite having strong desires to respond to these challenges, CSOs simply cannot adapt their service delivery models without better access to sustainable funding from governments and international organizations, programs to train and sensitize staff, and institutional support to develop the necessary infrastructure to serve all members of their communities.

Outside of transitional shelter settings, LGBTQI+ migrants and asylum seekers also encounter obstacles in accessing stable, longer term housing within the broader community, as they face multiple layers of homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia from landlords, neighbours and the local population. On the need for adequate food, multiple participants noted that although LGBTQI+ migrants may have access to food and are able to eat, they may lack access to nutritious food options, which can further exacerbate other poor life conditions.

CSO participants additionally identified the need for better coordination among different organizations providing complementary services to the LGBTQI+ migrant community:

“Even though we all work in the same area, each shelter does something different. For example, one shelter has sexual health and abortion services. Very distinct services can need a lot of specialized knowledge. We need to make ourselves more professional in this way, and learn best practices from other organizations that are offering specific services.”

Participants concluded that addressing these fundamental gaps requires a multi-faceted approach including the establishment of shelters which cater to the specific needs of the LGBTQI+ refugee community, improved access to stable housing, and programs to provide nutritious food.

## Access to Employment and Economic Inclusion

Roundtable participants identified significant barriers for LGBTQI+ migrants in accessing dignified employment in Mexico, leaving them unable to meet their basic needs and entrenching exclusion from the local economy. Participants shared experiences of discrimination by employers and institutions due to their SOGIESC identity and/or migration status, with one participant stating, “Employers look you up and down and don’t give you options. They minimize you.” Another participant noted that “...if someone has [HIV] positive status [and] takes anti-retroviral medications, [employers] start looking at those things, then they fire you.”

Participants highlighted how workplaces fail to implement anti-harassment measures, exposing LGBTQ+ migrants to discrimination and hostility. This gap reflects broader societal stigmas and a failure of employers and governments to enforce inclusive practices. Without effective protections, migrants with diverse SOGIESC identities face limited opportunities, are at heightened risk of exploitation and are often forced into precarious or unsafe work environments. As one person shared, “When companies hire LGBTQI+ migrants, they tend to offer the worst, lowest-paying jobs.”

Proposed solutions to mitigate these gaps include the provision of widespread sensitivity training for employers and improved information sharing about the rights of migrants and LGBTQI+ people in the workplace, efforts which must be undertaken with active collaboration between CSOs and the government. Moreover, as stated by one non-governmental organization with extensive experience providing services to LGBTQI+ refugees in Mexico and globally:

“In other parts of the world, we are talking about the same things. The largest issues among hundreds of people we have interviewed is housing and dignified employment. We need to connect LGBTQI+ people more among themselves, everyone wants to be self-sufficient, they just need the opportunity to do so.”

## Human Rights Violations and Access to Justice

Roundtable participants shared their experiences of being exposed to pervasive violence throughout their migration journeys at individual, community and systemic levels, and identified this multi-faceted violence as a key issue impact-

ing personal security and quality of life. LGBTQI+ migrants are subjected to extortion by border authorities and police, human trafficking, rape and sexual violence, and may be victims of cartels and organized crime. After reaching Mexico, participants reported at times encountering even worse violence than what they have fled, including violence from within migrant and LGBTQI+ communities themselves. As stated by participants,

“One of the most important issues is the violence, all types, not just organized crime that is displacing people here in Mexico, but also families that don’t accept their LGBTQI+ children... we even begin to attack one another among LGBTQI+ people.”

“Violence is normalized...and people running from violence reproduce the same violence when they arrive.”

As vocal and visible advocates for LGBTQI+ refugees, LGBTQI+ human rights defenders in Mexico also face distinct and heightened safety concerns, especially in politically volatile environments. Human rights defenders play a critical role in bringing voice and leadership to the issues facing LGBTQI+ refugees in Mexico, and yet in speaking out they expose themselves to greater risks of violence and threats in a deeply insecure environment. As highlighted by one human rights defender with lived experience of forced displacement:

“...we need to focus on human rights defenders, especially defenders of LGBTQI+ community and trans women. I was not protected when I encountered organized crime violence, now I am a human rights defender. We are protecting everyone else, but who is protecting us?”

Participants noted that despite the presence of laws in place to protect migrants and prevent hate crimes against the LGBTQI+ community, these measures are not effective in practice, and LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers have limited access to justice when faced with human rights violations. Participants pointed to the normalization of hate speech from politicians and experiences of pervasive institutional homophobia and xenophobia as contributing to inadequate enforcement of federal laws at the state and local level. They highlighted the need to push for institutions at all levels of government to guarantee the safety of migrants, and called for strengthened anti-discrimination laws, effective accountability mechanisms, thorough inves-

tigations for human rights violations and increased legal support and protection for human rights defenders. Participants also shared that many LGBTQI+ migrants are not aware of their rights and do not know how to advocate for their own protection, pointing to the importance of sharing clear, accurate “Know Your Rights” information within the community.

## **Institutional Barriers and Systemic Discrimination**

### **Challenges Accessing Legal Documentation**

A common thread running through participant discussions related to obstacles in obtaining legal status and documentation within Mexico’s immigration and asylum system. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of LGBTQI+ specific policies keep individuals in legal limbo, further delaying and preventing access to essential rights and services such as employment, housing and healthcare.

Participants shared that upon arrival in Mexico, LGBTQI+ migrants often receive inaccurate information about how to access asylum or regularize their status, and may even be led to believe that they do not have the right to seek refugee status. In some cases, the dissemination of misinformation may be an intentional tactic to deter migration; as one participant working near the U.S.- Mexico border described:

“People need access to accurate information so they can make informed decisions. A root cause of the lack of information is intentional misinformation. Keeping people uninformed and confused gives US border officials more power over LGBTQI+ asylum seekers.”

Roundtable participants highlighted that physically accessing the migration system is often difficult and unsafe. LGBTQI+ migrants must wait in long lines for several hours alongside other asylum seekers, leaving them vulnerable to experiences of homophobia and violence. As noted by one participant: “People with babies, older people were there making a line at 3 or 4 am...it’s cold, dark, and unsafe. This could be avoided by creating a pre-registration.”

Participants additionally expressed how existing immi-

gration and legal systems remain rigidly binary in their consideration of gender identity, with legal documentation only permitting male or female gender categories, thereby excluding non-binary and genderfluid individuals and signaling to people that it is not safe to declare their true gender. This further contributes to exclusion, and as stated by one participant, results in “complicated legal processes that revictimize people.”

Access to counsel and effective legal services was also identified as a barrier to regularizing immigration status. One participant highlighted the particularly severe impact of having limited access to legal resources on LGBTQI+ migrants held in preventative detention:

“Many people do not have access to legal counsel, they don’t have access to interpretation in legal proceedings. People are criminalized without being criminals. There are 15-18 people in prison who have not been charged with anything. They don’t know how long they will be detained or if they will get the benefit to be released. They don’t have any access to justice to reduce the sentence. We need to build awareness and work with people deprived of liberty.”

Critically, participants emphasized that access to legal status and documentation must be viewed and prioritized by policy makers as a fundamental component of the overall safety and security of LGBTQI+ migrants, rather than a mere administrative process.

Roundtable participants additionally noted that there are many CSOs who are providing essential services, but may not be adequately trained or resourced to extend that support to LGBTQI+ communities and migrants. One CSO participant shared that although their LGBTQI+ organization does not work specifically with migrants, in the last two years they began to see more and more migrants arriving at their space and they lacked information about how to obtain documentation, how to access health and community services and specific protocols for serving LGBTQI+ migrants. They travelled to the COMAR offices four hours away to ask for training and to become better prepared as they expect to receive more migrants in the future. The participant emphasized the need for clear and well communicated protocols for receiving and supporting forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ communities.

## Xenophobia and Systemic Discrimination

Many of the daily intersecting challenges experienced by forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people are rooted in and intensified by pervasive xenophobia and discrimination based on SOGIESC identity, embedded at the interpersonal, structural, and systemic levels. Participants pointed to the often unexpected reception they receive upon arrival in Mexico, expressed in both explicit and subtle forms:

“The first problem is to decide to leave your country and everything you know. Then you have to arrive in a country where everything is new, there is racism and xenophobia, differences in language and norms around talking can cause issues, xenophobia comes out of this.”

“As a migrant I have experienced distinct types of stigma or persecution, even though I just want to live in peace. The way people look at you does a lot of harm, or the way they treat you, sort of friendly, but abrupt, trying to hide certain personal opinions.”

CSO participants expressed the urgent need to raise awareness and counter xenophobic rhetoric and hate speech within society and institutions, as these attitudes directly contribute to the perpetuation of harm and exclusion of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and migrants:

“In Mexico City there are a lot of advances in human rights, this is attractive for LGBTQI+ people and migrants, but the reality is different, we still face large issues of discrimination. One of the main projects of civil society organizations is how to sensitize the population. How do we teach people to be welcoming to those who have fled their countries? This initiative is something we really need...”

The impacts of systemic discrimination and anti-migration discourse in the media and within public institutions permeates all facets of daily life for LGBTQI+ migrants, directly impeding access to healthcare, housing, employment and the ability to regularize immigration status. As one participant noted, “The government has to do more than just regularize migration, they need to make integration efforts.” Participants emphasized that including LGBTQI+ individuals within major protection institutions is vital to fostering a sense of trust and safety for communities accessing them. Participants also cautioned that without adequate sensi-

zation training and institutional protocols for working with LGBTQI+ individuals, LGBTQI+ communities will remain unrepresented and excluded from key institutions of power, such as police and other governmental bodies.

## Partnering with LGBTQI+ Civil Society

Throughout the consultations, it was evident that the combined effect of anti-LGBTQI+ and anti-migrant sentiments impacts LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in nearly every aspect of their daily lives. From access to health, shelter, food, employment, personal safety, and legal documentation, LGBTQI+ displaced persons need coordinated service delivery through clear LGBTQI+-specific protocols shared among CSOs, governments, and international organizations. Despite entering the conversation with a high degree of understanding surrounding policy issues related to LGBTQI+ displacement, only 3 respondents indicated experience of being involved in these discussions with governments, and 12 respondents indicated no participation, highlighting a gap in engagement. Participants stressed the essential role of grassroots LGBTQI+ organizations and CSOs in bridging service gaps left by the state and other institutions, and in supporting forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people as they navigate the complex migration environment in Mexico.

However, CSOs remain chronically underfunded, and they are often unable to access the institutional and governmental support necessary to meet the growing demands of the communities they are serving. As highlighted by participants:

“NGOs are doing the work that governments should do, but there are not enough resources to meet the needs. Same thing in mental health services, [there is] not enough capacity, infrastructure, or resources.”

“CSOs that offer these services don’t have support from the government or private organizations, they do it on their own, knocking on doors.”

Throughout the discussions, international organizations and government institutions charged with protecting refugee communities, such as the UNHCR and COMAR were

frequently identified as having enormous power in shaping outcomes and improving conditions for LGBTQI+ displaced persons. Participants from both days of the roundtables recognized the integral need for formalized mechanisms of communication and coordination between CSOs, government actors, public institutions, and international organizations, in order to translate the frontline expertise of CSOs into more streamlined, responsive and effective protection programming:

“We need referral mechanisms, because things are going to happen as we are building and making a plan. We need to identify people who have decision making power in order to efficiently resolve issues as they arise.”

Participants consistently identified multi-sectoral collaboration with LGBTQI+-led civil society organizations as a necessary component of addressing the complex issues facing LGBTQI+ displaced persons. CSOs have specialized experience in LGBTQI+ refugee service delivery programs and their expertise must be explicitly integrated into the policy development, implementation and monitoring process.



## PART 2: A GLOBAL NETWORK ON LGBTQI+ FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Throughout both days of the roundtables, participants were asked to think concretely, within their own personal and professional contexts, about how an international, multi-stakeholder network might meaningfully and practically address the challenges facing forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals. Participants engaged with core questions about operation and focus, including how the network should be governed and organized, proposed mechanisms for network participation, ideas for network priorities and activities, as well as risks and mitigation strategies associated with the network. The section below outlines the core recommendations generated by participants for integration into final network design.

### A Platform for Information Sharing, Data Collection, and Evidence-Based Policymaking

A core recommendation emerging from the roundtable discussions was for the network to serve as a central hub for ongoing data collection, cross-border learning, and the exchange of best practices between a wide range of stakeholders.

Participants highlighted that the collection and dissemination of accurate data, case studies and research can be used to support targeted, evidence-based policy development and the creation of robust migration laws and procedures that remain responsive to the needs of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people. As an international platform, participants proposed that data collection in the network could transcend national borders and be used to map regional trends and track global migration patterns, to then better adapt service delivery models and policies in different refugee transit and host countries.

It was cautioned however that advocacy for LGBTQI+ migrants must also move beyond statistical representations and a view of migrants as “just numbers,” toward a human-centered approach that amplifies lived experiences. In tandem with data collection, the network must create formal mechanisms for consistent and meaningful dialogue between people with lived experience, civil society, governments, researchers and international organizations. In particular, participants emphasized that the network must establish tangible opportunities to amplify and uplift the voices of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ persons, especially in government spaces where decisions about their lives are made. As noted by one participant, “Sometimes organizations are bridges between communities and governments. But we need the government to hear first hand accounts directly from refugees.”

Through the ongoing generation of real world knowledge and expertise, participants highlighted the potential for the network to act as a space to share and document best practices from a wide range of diverse stakeholders, sectors and country contexts. Participants identified that the formal exchange of best practices would enable CSOs to enhance and harmonize service delivery methods, and noted that multi-sectoral collaboration would allow for more holistic approaches to LGBTQI+ migrant protection, for example through updating university curricula, mental health and other professional training programs to integrate expertise from different perspectives. Participants further recommended that the network create spaces specifically for LGBTQI+ people in transit and those seeking asylum to meet each other, share resources on housing and jobs, and to build solidarity and support.

At a broader scale, participants expressed a desire to expand knowledge across borders and exchange models of

effective policies from other regions to enhance local initiatives, noting that:

“The network can allow us to learn about the contexts of other regions. We have perspective from our area and our experiences. There are ways in which the contexts will be very different ... [but] there may be more similarities than we realize. We tend to work from our own perspectives.”

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# Leveraging the Network to Push for Systemic Change and Institutional Accountability

Throughout the consultations, it was evident that the Participants identified several areas of potential focus for the network and highlighted how this platform could be harnessed to push for enduring policy reforms and long term systemic change through coordinated advocacy efforts. This includes initiatives aimed at strengthening legal protections against hate crimes, pushing for the inclusion of non-binary identities in institutional contexts, legal support and protection for human rights defenders, and the implementation of educational and training programs to combat stigma and raise awareness about the rights and realities of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people.<sup>9</sup>

Participants also highlighted the potential for the network to engage in international solidarity work, through advocacy campaigns against legislation that criminalizes SOGI-ESC identities or a global petition for improved laws around gender markers. As a component of this work, participants noted that the network should have a presence in relevant international forums and interface with international organizations such as the UNHCR, to bring greater visibility to and secure stronger commitments and policy frameworks for, LGBTQI+ people living in forced displacement.

In order to move beyond legal frameworks and deliver tangible improvements in the lives of displaced LGBTQI+ individuals, participants emphasized that the network must adopt transparent accountability measures to ensure that commitments made by various stakeholders are actively monitored and enforced. As one participant stated,

“There are a lot of support networks, but refugee voices are not heard or listened to. The help is not actually being seen or experienced. People are facing discrimination in official government offices. It’s like a vicious cycle, we talk and talk about the issue, but people are not really getting support.” Discussions highlighted that the network could foster better accountability by creating clear, time-constrained action plans with deliverables specific to each stakeholder type, and developing methods to gauge the effectiveness and

impact of outcomes. Participants also proposed having dedicated teams in each country tasked with monitoring and reporting on government progress on goals. Publicly sharing commitments made by governments and policy makers to electoral constituents and broader society could also contribute to a greater culture of accountability within the network.

Governments themselves also play an important role in ensuring mutual accountability for commitments in the network and beyond. Participants recommended that the network engage stakeholders within all levels of decision-making, so that local and regional governments can commit to action even when federal governments are unwilling or slow to respond. Active and visible participation from governments can also foster a greater level of commitment across the network, including from more reluctant state actors. As noted by one participant,

“It is really difficult to get individual governments to take action...[the network] can create an international commitment so participating governments can pressure others.”

## Network Structure and Sustainability

Participants envisioned a collaborative network built on clear operational structures and accessible mechanisms for diverse stakeholder representation and engagement. Recommendations included having an independent, rotating secretariat to coordinate efforts, set shared objectives, and ensure continuity, and the development of a monitoring and evaluation system to track the network’s impact and promote transparency. It was noted that participation in the network should be on a voluntary basis, but that members should have some level of background, strategic relevance or decision-making power about the issues facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people, to allow for meaningful contributions and actionable commitments. Participants also explored various models for network operation, such the creation of regional network hubs, thematic focus groups for people with issue specific expertise, and individual country based chapters with network leaders pushing for change in their respective contexts.

As a diverse platform engaging a range of backgrounds and experiences, participants stressed that the network must remain alive to the very real power dynamics at play among the different stakeholders, and particularly those between people with lived experience and government actors. It was noted that many LGBTQI+ migrants are reluctant to engage with the government, due to past experiences of mistreatment or potential risks associated with speaking out and advocating for their rights. Participants stated that network composition should be effectively balanced among stakeholders with different education levels and backgrounds to mitigate these issues. Participants also cautioned against states having disproportionate control over decision making within the network, and recommended that the voices of people with lived experience be sufficiently represented and amplified in network spaces using principles of equity. Accessibility of the network space for LGBTQI+ migrants is also key to enabling their meaningful participation and requires awareness of different language needs - it was recommended that the network prioritize the inclusion of interpretation and translation options within network communications whenever possible.

Finally, issues around network funding and sustainability were central to the discussion. Participants highlighted the risks of relying too heavily on government funding sources, given the uncertainty of political climates and the need to remain insulated from the impact of changes in administration. They recommended seeking out sustainable resource-generation models that balance public, private, and philanthropic contributions and the need to continually make the work of the network visible to attract ongoing sources of funding. Participants also highlighted that the network should think creatively about generating different types of resources outside of monetary funding alone, and seek ways to invest in human capital through training and skills development, educational initiatives and capacity-building programs.

By fostering collaboration, generating actionable data, and ensuring migrant voices are central to advocacy, participants expressed that the proposed multi-stakeholder network could play a transformative role in advancing the protection landscape for LGBTQI+ displaced persons.

Swathi Sekhar, Director of Protection Initiatives at Rainbow Railroad, facilitating Day 2 sessions.



# NEXT STEPS

According to the post-event surveys, the roundtable largely met participants' expectations, with 23 people reporting being either completely or mostly satisfied. Feedback highlighted the positive atmosphere and effective structure, and all participants felt their voices were heard, with 18 people reporting feeling completely heard and 6 mostly heard. Most people indicated they were very likely to engage in future policy discussions, with 21 stating they are eager to contribute further.

It bears noting that in the post-event surveys, participants identified several key themes as either missing or warranting further discussion. Comments highlighted the need for increased discussion on the situation of lesbian women who migrate, challenges for people living with HIV, and the health and safety of human rights defenders and particularly women human rights defenders, the rights of incarcerated individuals and barriers to justice and legal support for marginalized communities in legal systems, safety issues for advocates of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers' rights, and how to translate these discussions into concrete advocacy. This feedback will both help inform future roundtable consultations, and feed into the overall considerations for the global multi-stakeholder network.

## Key Recommendationms for Policy Makers

- Partner with LGBTQI+-led civil society organizations
- Include LGBTQI+ people with lived experience of forced displacement in policy design
- Create specific measures to streamline and improve access to legal status and documentation for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people.
- Prioritize targeted economic inclusion programs aimed at providing dignified employment opportunities for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons
- Expand refugee policy frameworks beyond binary (male/female) definitions of gender

- Strengthen accountability measures for human rights violators and actors who fail to comply with protection laws and policies
- Enhance legal protections for LGBTQI+ human rights defenders
- Consider the establishment of dedicated spaces specifically for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons to access essential services safely

## Recommendations on the multi-stakeholder network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement:

- Facilitate cross-regional learning and knowledge exchange
- Facilitate the collection and dissemination of accurate data, case studies and research
- Establish dedicated safe spaces where civil society organizations and LGBTQI+ refugees can share knowledge, skills, and resources
- Create formal mechanisms for engagement between lived-experience advocates, CSOs, researchers, state actors, and international organizations
- Develop Monitoring and Evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of refugee protection systems for LGBTQI+ migrants
- Leverage international organizations and spaces to secure stronger commitments for LGBTQI+ people living in forced displacement
- Establish clear operational structures and accessible mechanisms for diverse stakeholder representation and engagement