



THE MISSING JIGSAW

**Cross-Regional Findings from the
Frontlines and the Case for the
Queer Forced Displacement Network**

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All direct quotes appearing in this report are drawn from the five individual QFDI roundtable reports. Full source reports are available at <https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/qfdi>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The architecture of global refugee protection is fundamentally inadequate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals. For these communities, forced displacement is seldom a singular event; rather, it constitutes a continuous experience of persecution. Escaping criminalization and violence in their countries of origin, LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants often arrive in transit and host nations only to encounter institutions that are ostensibly designed to provide sanctuary, but instead operate as secondary sites of trauma, exclusion, and state-sanctioned violence. Systematically locked out of formal labor markets and basic healthcare, they are frequently forced into precarious survival economies while navigating bureaucratic systems that actively erase their identities.

In response to these compounded systemic failures, the Queer Forced Displacement Initiative (QFDI) convened a fourteen-month global consultation process to build the foundation for a sustainable, coordinated global response to LGBTQI+ forced displacement, grounded in the broader movements for queer liberation and migrant justice around the world. Rainbow Railroad partnered with local civil society organizations to hold consultations in five major displacement corridors — Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Türkiye, and Kenya — engaging 270 individuals including grassroots defenders, civil society leaders, government representatives, UN agencies, and individuals with direct lived experience. The findings of these consultations now form the foundation for the Queer Forced Displacement Network (QFDN) — a multi-stakeholder global platform committed to coordinating transnational advocacy, advancing protection, and delivering durable solutions for forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ communities.

WHAT WE FOUND: SIX ENTRENCHED SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

Across diverse geopolitical contexts, a disturbingly consistent narrative emerged. The consultations revealed six entrenched systemic challenges:

Systemic Barriers to Protection, Legal Documentation, and Durable Solutions: Absent or malfunctioning asylum systems, conditional protection statuses, and a global resettlement system in acute crisis leave LGBTQI+ refugees trapped in indefinite and dangerous transit with no pathway to safety.

Criminalization and Hostile Legal Environments: In nearly all contexts, specific laws and policies actively or de facto criminalize people based on their LGBTQI+ identity or migration status, transforming host and transit countries into extended sites of persecution.

Discrimination, Abuse, and Impunity by State Actors: Border agents, police, and government officials frequently exploit their authority, subjecting refugees to arbitrary detention, deportation, and abuse within cultures of systemic impunity.

Xenophobia, Stigma, and Societal Violence: Physical insecurity poses a daily threat, exacerbated by state-sanctioned xenophobia, localized hostility, and in some contexts, the cross-border reach of transnational repression.

Denial of Essential Services and Severe Economic Deprivation: Structural exclusions systematically prevent LGBTQI+ displaced persons from accessing formal employment, stable housing, and vital services including HIV treatment, gender-affirming care, and mental health support.

Under-Resourced and Marginalized Civil Society: Grassroots organizations on the frontlines are chronically under-resourced, excluded from decision-making, and bypassed by international donor practices that consistently overlook community-led expertise.

THE NETWORK BLUEPRINT: AN ELEVEN-PILLAR ACTION PLAN

Despite these compounding crises, participants across all five roundtables articulated a powerful and unified vision for change. As one participant captured it: “This network represents the missing jigsaw” in the daily struggle for the rights and safety of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people. Stakeholders overwhelmingly rejected incremental reform, delivering a rigorous mandate for the QFDN structured around eleven foundational pillars. These pillars organize into three interconnected clusters, each answering a distinct and essential question about how the network must be built and governed.

Who Leads and How We Build Power (Pillars 1, 2, 4, 5): The network must be led by people directly impacted by forced displacement as a structural commitment and central organizing principle. Regional solidarity must serve as the foundation for global coordination. Membership must be designed to include the most marginalized, alongside concrete safeguards to ensure that community priorities are not co-opted by powerful institutional actors.

What We Do and How We Will Do It (Pillars 3, 6, 7, 8, 9): The network’s core function is to coordinate and amplify what already exists — filling genuine gaps rather than duplicating or competing for scarce resources. This means driving coordinated advocacy and lobbying, building shared data and evidence infrastructure, establishing rapid-access emergency response mechanisms, and fostering knowledge exchange and capacity building across movements and borders.

How We Evolve and Stay Accountable (Pillars 10, 11): The network must diversify its funding sources and invest in human capital to protect its independence. It must embed time-bound workplans and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks with measurable outcomes and transparent public reporting. The network must conduct rigorous self-evaluation to assess whether it is still effective, relevant and community led, and perhaps most radically, the network must be prepared to dissolve if it ceases to serve its purpose.

THE POLICY IMPERATIVE: IMMEDIATE DEMANDS FOR STATES, DONORS AND GLOBAL PROTECTION ACTORS

The crises identified in this report are the direct consequence of policy choices made by governments, international organizations, and institutional donors. Participants articulated seven urgent demands across three areas:

Dismantling hostile frameworks and reforming protection systems: Cease the criminalization of LGBTQI+ identities, reform asylum systems, expand resettlement commitments, develop complementary pathways to safety, end arbitrary detention and deportation, and establish enforceable accountability mechanisms for violations.

Guaranteeing access to services, safety, and economic inclusion: Denounce anti-LGBTQI+ and anti-migrant rhetoric, establish accessible reporting mechanisms for violence, ensure universal access to HIV treatment, gender-affirming care, and mental health support decoupled from documentation status, and dismantle barriers to dignified employment.

Resourcing frontline civil society and centering lived experience: End the systematic bypass of community-based and refugee-led organizations, channel resources directly to frontline actors, provide multi-year funding reflective of protracted displacement realities, and establish formalized mechanisms for lived experience to drive protection responses.

FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

The LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced individuals navigating these hostile corridors cannot afford to await interminable administrative processes. The findings of the QFDI global roundtables are not merely academic data points — they are a blueprint for survival, and a mandate for action. Genuine global solidarity requires the international community to transfer power and resources directly to the communities striving daily for their right to live in safety, dignity, and freedom.

GLOSSARY

A Note on Terminology

This report uses the terms “migrant,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” and “forcibly displaced person” to encompass the diverse and compounding experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals who have been forced to leave their homes. Throughout this document, these terms are often used interchangeably. This is a deliberate choice, recognizing that the lived realities of displaced LGBTQI+ individuals rarely conform to the rigid, static legal categories defined by governments and international institutions. Furthermore, this interchangeable usage directly reflects the language utilized by the roundtable participants themselves when detailing their own survival, movement, and advocacy.

ASYLUM SEEKER	An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee.
CITIZEN	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.
COMAR	<i>Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados</i> (Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees); the primary national agency responsible for processing asylum claims in Mexico.
CONDITIONAL REFUGEE STATUS	A precarious legal status specific to Türkiye due to its geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, granting temporary protection to non-European asylum seekers while they await resettlement to a third country.
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DOUBLE MARGINALIZATION	The compounding discrimination experienced by LGBTQI+ displaced persons who face both pervasive xenophobia from local host populations and intense homophobia/transphobia from within their own diaspora or migrant communities.
DHA	Department of Home Affairs: the government department in South Africa responsible for immigration control and the administration of the national asylum and refugee protection system.

HRD	Human Rights Defender; individuals or groups who act to promote or protect human rights, often at severe risk to their own physical safety and legal freedom.
IDP	Internally Displaced Person; someone who is forced to flee their home but who remains within their country's borders. International Labor Organization
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and other identities not specifically listed, such as asexual, pansexual, nonbinary, two-spirit, and more.
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support; a broad range of activities and interventions aimed at protecting or promoting psychosocial well-being and treating mental health conditions, particularly crucial for populations surviving the trauma of displacement.
NON-REFOULEMENT	A fundamental principle of international law that strictly forbids a country receiving asylum seekers from returning them to a country in which they would be in likely danger of persecution based on "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."
QFDI	Queer Forced Displacement Initiative: A project convened by Rainbow Railroad and local civil society partners to co-create an international network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement through a series of global roundtable consultations held across five displacement corridors from 2024-2025
QFDN	Queer Forced Displacement Network: The multi-stakeholder global network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement established through the QFDI consultation process, designed to coordinate transnational advocacy and advance protection and durable solutions for forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ communities worldwide
REFUGEE	A person who has fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country, and has been formally recognized under international or national law.
TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION	The phenomenon where states reach across national borders to silence, harass, surveil, or violently target dissidents, human rights defenders, or marginalized groups (such as LGBTQI+ refugees) residing in host countries.
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (also known as the UN Refugee Agency); the global body mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.

INTRODUCTION

The architecture of global refugee protection is profoundly broken for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals, who encounter devastating, compounding threats to their health, safety, and overall wellbeing throughout the migration process. The underlying causes of this flight are consistently described not merely as discrimination, but as a continuum of persecution that compels individuals to flee their countries of origin simply to survive. In their pursuit of safety across transit and host nations, these migrants do not find sanctuary. Instead, they contend with systemic inadequacies within asylum and legal frameworks, face insufficient humanitarian assistance, and endure the pervasive, and often lethal effects of intersectional discrimination.

These structural failures have devastating consequences for health, safety, and dignity; from life-threatening gaps in HIV treatment and mental health support, to forced reliance on precarious survival economies. Yet frontline advocates are clear: LGBTQI+ displaced persons must not be framed as passive victims. Their resilience, informal support networks, and capacity for self-determination are profound, and must be centered in any meaningful response.

In direct response to these glaring protection gaps and the inadequacies of conventional humanitarian responses, the Queer Forced Displacement Initiative (QFDI) convened a series of global roundtables to lay the groundwork for a critically needed international network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement. The QFDI's primary objective is to co-create a sustainable, multi-stakeholder platform — engaging grassroots LGBTQI+, civil society, and international organizations, as well as people with lived experience, academics, and key government stakeholders — to coordinate efforts to advance protection and durable solutions for forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals and communities. Grounded in the broader movements for queer liberation and migrant justice, the network aims to center the expertise and participation of those most directly impacted by forced displacement, build on the critical work already being led by LGBTQI+ human rights defenders and civil society organizations locally and regionally, and proactively mobilize

coordinated responses at the early onset of crises affecting LGBTQI+ communities.

To ensure a globally representative understanding of these intricate dynamics, the QFDI conducted roundtables in five strategically selected host and transit countries—Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Türkiye, and Kenya—which anchor major global displacement corridors and encapsulate distinct regional migration contexts.

It must be noted that the geopolitical landscape has shifted significantly since the project's inception. The findings herein are now situated within a global context of drastically tightened immigration policies and increased border securitization across Europe and North America, the closure of key resettlement pathways and slots, and a deepening funding crisis across the humanitarian sector that has further hollowed out the already fragile international protection apparatus. A resurgent global anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric, amplified in large part by the United States, has lent new legitimacy to discriminatory policies and hostile environments that place LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people at even greater risk.

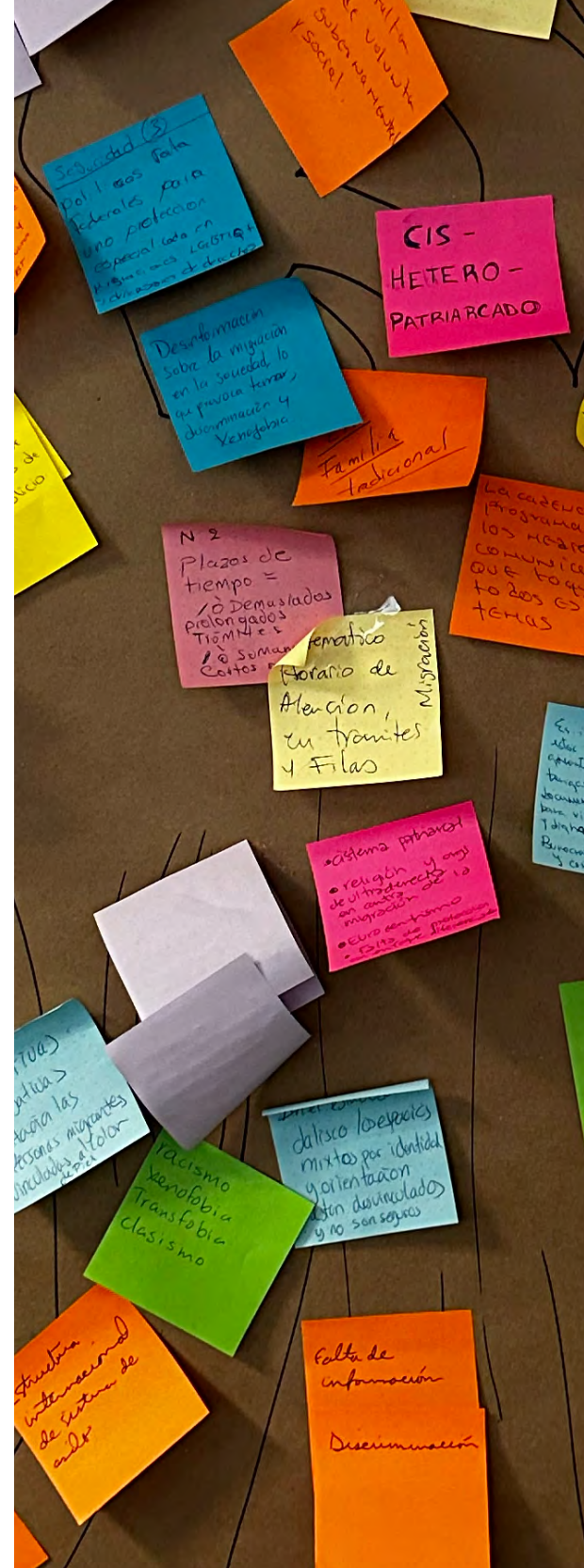
Building upon this foundational context and the diverse expertise of roundtable participants, the remainder of this report synthesizes the primary challenges identified across all five locations, before transitioning to a concrete strategic action plan detailing the governance structures, data infrastructures, and coordinated advocacy mechanisms required to operationalize the global network. Finally, note that each individual roundtable report contains detailed country-specific findings, participant testimony, and context-specific policy recommendations that go beyond what this cross-regional synthesis can capture. All direct quotes appearing in this report are drawn from the five individual QFDI roundtable reports, which readers are strongly encouraged to consult alongside this document. Full source reports are available at <https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/qfdi>.

METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The findings presented in this report result from a 14-month global consultation process convened by the QFDI from September 2024 to October 2025. Grounded in participatory action research and decolonial frameworks, and adhering to the principle of “nothing about us without us,” the initiative deliberately traveled to five strategic displacement corridors rather than convening participants in distant, inaccessible locations. Day 1 of each roundtable was a closed-door session for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons, civil society representatives, refugee-led organizations, activists, and grassroots human rights defenders who are directly navigating these hostile systems. Day 2 expanded to include representatives from resettlement governments, UN agencies, and international organizations, bringing institutional decision-makers into direct dialogue with frontline actors. Participation on Day 2 included both returning Day 1 participants and additional attendees, and did not necessarily mirror the Day 1 cohort.

The QFDI consultations engaged a total of 270 unique participants across all roundtables. “Unique participants” refers to the number of distinct individuals engaged across both days, accounting for participants who may have attended more than one session. There were 110 unique participants on Day 1 and 97 unique participants on Day 2, with some individuals attending both days.

During Day 1, a total of 94 participants completed the voluntary pre-event survey. The demographic composition presented below is based on these survey responses (n = 94). The composition of these participants ensured that the dialogue was driven by those executing the work and living the reality: 41.5% represented CSOs, 38.3% identified as Human Rights Defenders, and 36.2% possessed direct lived experiences of forced displacement. The aggregated demographic data of these participants, illustrating diverse and intersectional representation across gender identity, sexual orientation, and leadership experience, is detailed in the table below.



Participant mapping of root causes of LGBTQI+ forced displacement, Day 1 of Mexico City roundtable.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTED ACROSS ALL FIVE ROUNDTABLES

Note on Intersectional Representation: It is essential to acknowledge that many participants possess multiple, overlapping identities and roles (e.g., a grassroots defender who is also a refugee and a transgender activist). While the demographic table categorizes respondents to offer a clear, aggregated overview, these figures reflect intersectional lived experiences that often encompass various advocacy areas and identity markers.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	TOTAL	DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC	TOTAL
Gender Identity (N=94)		Lived Experience Type (N=34)	
Agender	9 (9.6%)	Asylum seeker	17 (50%)
Cisgender Man	31 (33%)	Refugee status	17 (50%)
Cisgender Woman	14 (14.9%)	Internally displaced person	6 (17.6%)
Gender Non-conforming	10 (10.6%)	Stateless person	6 (17.6%)
Genderfluid	4 (4.3%)	Environmental/climate displacement	3 (8.8%)
Intergender	1 (1.1%)	Returnee	1 (2.9%)
Intersex	1 (1.1%)	Other lived experience	4 (11.8%)
Transgender Man	7 (7.4%)		
Transgender Woman	15 (16%)	CSO Leadership Representation (N=27)	
Other	1 (1.1%)	LGBTQI+	18 (66.7%)
No Answer	5 (5.3%)	Refugee	9 (33.3%)
		Heterosexual/allies	7 (25.9%)
Sexual Orientation (N=94)		Sex worker	6 (22.2%)
Asexual	1 (1.1%)	Feminist	5 (18.5%)
Bisexual	11 (11.7%)	Trans	4 (14.8%)
Gay	39 (41.5%)	Queer woman	1 (3.7%)
Heterosexual/Straight	13 (13.8%)	Intersex	1 (3.7%)
Lesbian	11 (11.7%)	Other	1 (3.7%)
Pansexual	5 (5.3%)		
Queer	16 (17%)		
Other	2 (2.1%)		
No Answer	1 (1.15%)		
Category of Work (N=94)			
Civil Society Organization (CSO)	39 (41.5%)		
Activist/Human Rights Defender	36 (38.35%)		
Lived Experience of Forced Displacement	34 (36.2%)		
Government	18 (19.1%)		
Academic	8 (8.5%)		
Other	6 (6.4%)		

While the aggregated data from these five convenings provides a robust and diverse foundation for this initiative, it is crucial to acknowledge the methodological scope and limitations of this consultation process. The sample of 94 stakeholders represents a qualitative, highly targeted snapshot of frontline expertise rather than an exhaustive quantitative survey of all displaced LGBTQI+ populations. Future iterations of this work must continue to aggressively address ongoing barriers to participation, such as language accessibility, digital security risks, and the inclusion of critically underrepresented indigenous or rural refugee communities.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND DATA COLLECTION

To ensure accountability, the project implemented a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, utilizing robust, voluntary pre- and post-event surveys administered on Day 1. These instruments established knowledge baselines and captured critical demographic cross-sections—such as discrepancies between citizenship and current location, gender identity, sexual orientation, and civil society organization (CSO) leadership structures—while evaluating shifts in policy understanding and consolidating strategic consensus for the Global Network.

SECURITY PROTOCOLS AND TRAUMA-INFORMED FACILITATION

Given the real risks of exposure, reprisal, and violence faced by participants due to their intersecting identities, all the roundtables were conducted under stringent security and data collection protocols, including strict adherence to the Chatham House Rule and participant anonymity in all reporting. Additionally, the onsite environments employed trauma-informed facilitation to prioritize psychological care and foster mutual support while discussing difficult issues. All participation was voluntary, and sessions were structured to balance documentation of challenges with a meaningful focus on solutions and forward-looking recommendations, rooted in the expertise and agency of those most directly affected.

STRUCTURAL LIMITATIONS AND REPRESENTATION GAPS

This report provides a time-bound snapshot of complex and evolving realities across five contexts; as a consultation with a limited scope, it cannot purport to capture the full breadth of experiences within these corridors.

Importantly, the thematic prevalence identified throughout this report (e.g., “3 out of 5 locations”) directly reflects the specific priorities and time-constrained discussions of the stakeholders present. The absence of a particular theme in the summary of one roundtable does not imply that the challenge does not exist within that displacement corridor; rather, it indicates that other urgent survival priorities took precedence during those two days.

Beyond thematic considerations, physical representation encountered structural obstacles. The precarious nature of displacement, compounded by severe mobility restrictions in hostile environments, resulted in the exclusion of some of the most marginalized individuals, despite roundtables being intentionally organized in-country transit locations. Additionally, certain stakeholder groups were underrepresented or absent from the roundtables; for instance, participants from South Africa and Thailand specifically emphasized that future methodologies should expand representation to include faith-based activists and a broader array of marginalized refugee populations. Even with the provision of translation and interpretation services, a persistent structural challenge was the reliance on English as a bridging language for complex policy discussions, which alienated some grassroots participants — a concern further exacerbated by translation inaccuracies in the written survey instruments. Survey participation was voluntary, and item-level nonresponse was permitted; as such, findings reflect available responses and may not represent the full participant cohort. This is particularly relevant for the SOGIESC data presented above, which was collected through pre-event surveys and is therefore subject to self-selection and disclosure bias. Given the sensitivity of these identity markers in contexts of persecution and insecurity, the resulting dataset constitutes a partial and non-representative sample, and should be interpreted with caution.

Lastly, with the exception of Mexico and South Africa, host-government representatives were notably absent from the roundtables - a gap that must be addressed as the network develops. Transforming protection systems ultimately requires bringing into dialogue the very state actors who design and enforce them.

SYNTHESIS OF PRIMARY CHALLENGES BY THEME

For LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons, the systems purportedly established to provide sanctuary often serve as secondary sites of trauma, criminalization, and exclusion. An examination of the six themes below reveals that while regional contexts influence the specific mechanisms of exclusion, the overarching framework of marginalization confronting LGBTQI+ displaced persons exhibits a striking consistency on a global scale.

A disconcertingly uniform narrative emerged from these consultations: the mechanisms of marginalization are not merely isolated administrative failures but rather manifestations of deliberate, structural violence. By highlighting the unembellished realities of those on the frontlines, this synthesis unveils an international apparatus that routinely ensnares displaced LGBTQI+ individuals in a continuum of persecution.

The data presented below, complemented by direct testimonies from participants who navigate these hostile environments daily, uncovers six deeply entrenched challenges that transcend national borders.

Theme 1: Systemic Barriers to Protection, Legal Documentation and Durable Solutions (5/5)

- **South Africa:** Although a domestic asylum system is in place which recognizes SOGIESC based persecution, its effectiveness is severely hindered by administrative paralysis and discrimination. Severely backlogged systems, deliberate obstruction of the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process and significant barriers to obtaining basic documentation leave LGBTQI+ individuals in a state of indefinite legal and social limbo.
- **Thailand:** As a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Thailand does not offer any formal legal avenue for asylum seekers to obtain international protection. UNHCR registration and recognition is the primary alternative, but provides no legal status in Thailand, and does not prevent detention or deportation. Consequently, displaced individuals exist in a state of perpetual precariousness, classified as illegal migrants irrespective of the urgency of their protection needs.



Participants from the Day 2 roundtable in Pretoria, South Africa, November 2024

- **Türkiye:** The state’s maintenance of the geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention restricts non-European asylum seekers to a “conditional protection” status permitting only precarious, temporary residence until third-country resettlement. This structural barrier obstructs access to long-term integration and rights, establishing a system that is designed to “contain rather than protect.”
- **Kenya:** Despite being the only country in the East and Horn of Africa to offer asylum based on SOGIESC-based persecution, participants reported near-total exclusion from the protection system in Kenya. The domestic RSD system is characterized by intentional delays in processing LGBTQI+ claims and a systematic refusal to register and adjudicate them, rendering the legal right to asylum functionally nonexistent.
- **Mexico:** Access to the asylum system is obstructed from the outset by bureaucratic inefficiencies, misinformation, and a lack of LGBTQI+-specific policies. Administrative refugee determination frameworks are rigidly structured around binary (male/female) gender categories, a structural exclusion that impedes the processing of trans and gender-diverse individuals and effectively denies them access to meaningful protection.
- **Kenya, Thailand, and Türkiye:** For LGBTQI+ displaced persons with no viable pathway to safe integration or protection in their host country, third-country resettlement represents the primary durable solution — yet drastically reduced quotas from receiving countries, an absence of complementary pathways and the effective closure of the United States resettlement program have left LGBTQI+ refugees trapped in dangerous transit contexts for decades on end.

Theme 2: Criminalization and Hostile Legal Environments (4/5)

- **Kenya:** The criminalization of same-sex activity in the Penal Code establishes a baseline of state-sanctioned hostility, providing legal justification for the violence and harassment of LGBTQI+ refugees, and leading directly to their exclusion from refugee protection.
- **Thailand:** The classification of asylum seekers as “illegal migrants” effectively criminalizes LGBTQI+ displaced persons regardless of their protection needs,

exposing them to arrest, detention, and deportation. These risks are compounded by the fact that existing legal protections for LGBTQI+ citizens do not extend to precarious status migrants.

- **Türkiye:** Vaguely worded “public order” and “public morality” provisions in the law are weaponized to repress LGBTQI+ rights, and to justify the arbitrary arrest and deportation of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees, irrespective of the grave risks they face if returned to their countries of origin. LGBTQI+ individuals in immigration detention are exposed to sexual violence and torture related to their sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **South Africa:** Although the Constitution protects LGBTQI+ rights, widespread violence and discrimination remains rampant, and the limited legal protections for LGBTQI+ citizens do not extend to migrants and refugees. Displaced LGBTQI+ persons face the additional weight of aggressive immigration enforcement that criminalizes their status and disregards their protection needs entirely.

Theme 3: Discrimination, Abuse and Impunity by State Actors (4/5)

- **South Africa:** Officials within the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) routinely subject LGBTQI+ asylum seekers to “humiliating questioning” and denial of services, with personal religious beliefs and stereotypical assumptions directly leading to the rejection of claims. Police engage in arbitrary detention and extortion, exploiting the precarious legal status of migrants with no institutional accountability. In carceral settings, LGBTQI+ individuals face systematic mistreatment on the basis of their identity.
- **Mexico:** While legal protections may exist at the federal level, pervasive institutional bias actively prevents their enforcement at the state and local levels. This severe disconnect creates a culture of absolute impunity, wherein frontline bureaucrats (such as COMAR officials) can obstruct processing through transphobic discrimination, and border police can subject migrants to arbitrary “preventative detention” without ever facing institutional accountability.

- **Türkiye:** LGBTQI+ migrants face arbitrary arrest and detention by law enforcement, including documented instances of individuals being deported to countries of persecution on discriminatory grounds without legal foundation. Entrenched anti-LGBTQI+ bias within asylum adjudication results in the routine denial of SOGIESC-based claims, while the erosion of judicial independence ensures these abuses occur without meaningful legal recourse.
- **Kenya:** Police persecution is an everyday reality, encompassing extortion, targeted raids on safe houses, and arbitrary arrest. Law enforcement are frequently complicit in community violence, either through active participation or a systemic refusal to investigate crimes against LGBTQI+ refugees.
- **Türkiye:** A hardening climate of anti-migrant sentiment and rising xenophobia has normalized violence against LGBTQI+ displaced persons, enabling civilian perpetrators to act with impunity.
- **Mexico:** Violence is multi-directional throughout the transit journey, encompassing extortion by state actors, organized crime, sexual violence, and hostility from within migrant and LGBTQI+ communities themselves. Entrenched xenophobia and institutional homophobia render existing legal protections largely ineffective in practice. LGBTQI+ human rights defenders face distinct and heightened risks in this environment, advocating publicly in contexts where doing so invites retaliation and threat.

Theme 4: Xenophobia, Stigma and Societal Violence (5/5)

- **South Africa:** Widespread, state-sanctioned xenophobia violently intersects with transphobia and homophobia, resulting in a precarious condition of “double marginalization.” LGBTQI+ migrants are not only targeted by local host communities, but are also frequently ostracized and threatened by their own diaspora and migrant communities. This phenomenon leaves them in a state of isolation and compels a continual state of exhausting hyper-vigilance.
- **Thailand:** Displaced individuals encounter a dual-layered threat of geopolitical and localized violence. The region is characterized by the looming threat of transnational repression, a phenomenon wherein individuals are compelled to flee their home countries, only to be targeted and surveilled across borders by the same hostile actors. Additionally, participants underscored the quotidian reality of intersecting LGBTQI+ discrimination and xenophobia from local Thai host populations.
- **Kenya:** Attacks and assaults targeting LGBTQI+ refugees based on their visible, intersecting identities are reported as commonplace from state and non-state actors, with violence most acute within refugee camps and along transit routes. Unable to obtain meaningful protection from state authorities, participants described a pervasive sense that there is nowhere safe to rest or establish a life free from threat.

Theme 5: Denial of Essential Services and Severe Economic Marginalization (5/5)

- **Mexico and Kenya:** Participants described a landscape in which desperately needed health services, such as mental health care, emergency services, addiction treatment, HIV medication and gender-affirming care remain inaccessible to precarious status migrants. Widespread homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia from employers and landlords alike further entrenches exclusion from the formal economy, and prevents access to safe housing for LGBTQI+ migrants.
- **South Africa:** A malfunctioning and discriminatory refugee determination system leaves many individuals trapped in an undocumented status, which in turn bars them from shelter, healthcare, education, and formal employment — further pushing them into informal labor markets where exploitation is rampant.
- **Thailand:** The near-total absence of legal pathways to protection leaves most LGBTQI+ displaced persons in a state of permanent precarity. The few regularization programs that exist are expensive and complex, leaving formal employment, healthcare, and education effectively out of reach. Anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination in service settings compounds this further, with hospitals and institutions refusing services based on identity alone.
- **Türkiye:** Participants highlighted acute economic insecurity and the severe denial of healthcare, most critically, the denial of continuous, life-saving HIV



Participants from the Day 2 roundtable in Mexico City, Mexico, September 2024.

treatment. They described the harrowing reality of having to make lethal choices between safety from physical persecution, securing daily livelihoods, and accessing vital medicine.

Theme 6: Under-Resourced and Marginalized Civil Society (5/5)

- **Mexico, Kenya and Türkiye:** Grassroots LGBTQI+ organizations are bearing the weight of service gaps left by the state, operating without sustainable funding or institutional support.
- **Thailand:** LGBTQI+ displaced persons fall through the gap between two inadequate systems, where LGBTQI+ organizations lack migration expertise, and refugee organizations lack SOGIESC competence. Chronic underfunding across both sectors further reduces capacity, entrenching the coordination failures that leave communities without adequate support.
- **South Africa:** A fragmented civil society landscape defined by resource competition, organizational silos, and a leadership gap disconnected from lived experience, leaves LGBTQI+ displaced persons without coordinated or effective support. Exclusion from queer spaces due to xenophobia compounds this isolation, stripping migrants of critically needed community solidarity.
- **Türkiye:** Participants identified profoundly inadequate community support systems. The few operational grassroots networks are severely overwhelmed by compounding crises and operate under the constant threat of state crackdowns, leaving displaced individuals deeply isolated. Funding instability deeply undermines existing services.
- **Kenya:** Large institutional bodies frequently overlook the expertise of refugee-led organizations, resulting in top-down, disconnected interventions that fail to address the on-the-ground realities. Excluded from both funding and decision-making, grassroots actors are expected to deliver services without the resources to do so, while fragmentation among civil society further weakens collective advocacy and impact.

PREVALENCE OF PRIMARY CHALLENGES ACROSS QFDI CORRIDORS

	MEXICO	SOUTH AFRICA	THAILAND	TÜRKIYE	KENYA
1. Systemic Barriers to Protection & Documentation	●	●	●	●	●
2. Criminalization & Hostile Legal Environments		●	●	●	●
3. Institutional Discrimination, Police Violence & Impunity	●	●		●	●
4. Systemic Violence, Xenophobia & Insecurity	●	●	●	●	●
5. Denial of Essential Services & Economic Marginalization	●	●	●	●	●
6. Under-Resourced & Marginalized Civil Society	●	●	●	●	●

SYNTHESIS OF ACTION PLAN PILLARS BY THEME

The systemic failures documented above demand more than incremental reform; they require a fundamentally different kind of response. Participants across all five roundtables were clear that the emerging global network must not replicate the extractive, top-down structures that have consistently failed LGBTQI+ displaced persons, but must instead operate as a genuine vehicle for collective power, survivor leadership, and transnational solidarity. What emerged from these consultations is a concrete, unified vision for how that network should be built, governed, and held accountable. Synthesized into eleven foundational pillars, the action plan that follows defines what this network must do, how it must be governed and structured, and how it must remain answerable to the communities whose safety and survival depend on its effectiveness.

Pillar 1: Establish Inclusive, Lived-Experience-Led Governance (5/5)

- **Kenya:** Leadership must be drawn from forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ communities in the Global South rather than defaulting to well-resourced international actors. Dedicated board seats and decision-making positions formally reserved for LGBTQI+ people from displacement corridors will help ensure that the network is guided by those who “understand the context and have the firsthand experience of challenges.”
- **Türkiye, South Africa, Mexico, and Thailand:** The network must embed concrete mechanisms into design, such as refugee advisory groups and participatory governance structure, to keep forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ persons “at the heart of all decision-making and action.” This is a critical component of ensuring that the network remains accountable above all to the communities whose safety and well-being depend on its effectiveness.
- **South Africa and Mexico:** Rotating chairs, co-leadership models, and an independent secretariat

to coordinate efforts are essential safeguards against power consolidation. Clear protocols and consequences when leaders or organizations fail to meet established standards should be in place.

- **Thailand:** Participants cautioned against over-defining governance structures during the network’s early phases. The network should prioritize creating spaces for dialogue and shared values to emerge organically, adopting an iterative approach that allows governance to evolve responsively as the network grows.

Pillar 2: Design Membership for Genuine Participation, Accessibility, and Safety (4/5)

- **Kenya, South Africa, Mexico and Thailand:** The network must actively work to reach those who face structural exclusion from decision making spaces and global advocacy platforms. This includes people in camps or in transit, people living with HIV, transgender and gender non-conforming persons, people with disabilities, and those without access to technology. Language barriers must be addressed from the outset, with interpretation, translation, and communication methods accessible to people at varying levels of technological literacy embedded in network design.
- **Kenya and South Africa:** Membership should engage a broad and diverse range of voices across sectors, including non-traditional actors such as judiciary allies, religious leaders, legal experts, and business communities. However, breadth must be balanced with strategic discernment, bringing in only those with genuine intentions, relevant expertise, and a demonstrated record of commitment, while maintaining robust verification procedures, data protection measures and options for anonymous participation to protect those in high risk contexts.

Pillar 3: Prioritize Complementarity and Avoid Duplication (3/5)

- **Thailand, Türkiye, and Kenya:** The network's primary value lies in coordination, advocacy, and collective influence — not direct program implementation. It must begin by mapping existing local and regional efforts, identifying where gaps are concentrated, and directing its energy there rather than creating parallel structures that compete for scarce resources.
- **Türkiye:** The network must maintain realistic expectations about what international advocacy can achieve, particularly in hostile and repressive contexts where states are insulated from accountability. It must function as one strategic tool among many — complementing legal strategies, humanitarian support, and local organizing rather than positioning itself as the primary driver of systemic change.

Pillar 4: Safeguard Against Risks and Power Imbalances inherent to Multi-Stakeholder Engagement (5/5)

- **South Africa, Thailand, and Türkiye:** The network must implement robust safeguards to prevent powerful actors such as governments, UN agencies, and large international organizations, from dominating community-led priorities. Community members must hold greater decision-making power than institutional actors, with participation criteria designed to actively redress the power imbalances that characterize existing global platforms.
- **Kenya, Mexico and Türkiye:** The network must develop clear strategies for engaging state actors, including those actively hostile to LGBTQI+ people, recognizing that governments hold “the key to systemic change” and cannot be excluded from a network designed to transform the conditions LGBTQI+ displaced persons face. This engagement must be carefully and strategically approached, grounded in rigorous preparation, a clear understanding of where governments have shown willingness to shift, and robust protocols to ensure that information shared cannot be weaponized against vulnerable individuals or communities.

Pillar 5: Implementation of a Decentralized Regional Hub Coordination Model (4/5)

- **Kenya:** The network should begin by comprehensively mapping existing efforts at country and regional levels, identifying country focal points who understand local contexts and can act as network representatives. Regions experiencing the most acute forced displacement crises should hold proportionally greater influence within the network's governance structures.
- **Thailand, Mexico and South Africa:** Regional hubs and issue-specific working groups should address locally focused challenges while remaining accountable to the centralized platform, with clear channels for communication, resource sharing, and collective advocacy on issues that transcend borders.

Pillar 6: Build a Shared Data Infrastructure and Evidence Platform (5/5)

- **Kenya, Thailand, and Mexico:** The network must establish a centralized data collection mechanism, such as a global dashboard, research hubs, and searchable databases, to make LGBTQI+ displacement visible and generate the evidence base required for sustained advocacy. Data collection must transcend national borders to map regional trends and track global patterns, while community-led monitoring mechanisms must ensure that funded programs are held accountable to actual results.
- **Türkiye and Kenya:** In contexts where civic space constriction makes public reporting dangerous, the network must function as a critical buffer, enabling data and documentation generated by frontline actors to reach international audiences without exposing local human rights defenders and CSOs to retaliation.
- **South Africa and Mexico:** Research processes within the network must actively challenge existing biases, ensuring that knowledge production is not North America-centric or extractive. The network should develop effective counternarratives to combat hostile messaging around LGBTQI+ rights and forced displacement.

Pillar 7: Drive Coordinated Advocacy, Lobbying, and Diplomatic Engagement (5/5)

- **Kenya and Mexico:** Targeted, collective lobbying efforts must be a primary network tactic. The network should identify specific decision-makers and pressure points, coordinate sustained pressure across member organizations, and engage governments at all levels. Where federal governments are unwilling to act, local and regional governments must be engaged directly.
- **South Africa, Thailand, and Mexico:** The network must establish a dedicated presence in international forums, such as the Global Refugee Forum, Universal Periodic Review processes, and UN treaty body reporting and ensure that LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons can advocate on issues affecting them at the highest levels of decision-making. Diplomatic actors must be connected to grassroots realities and evidence to strengthen state-led advocacy.
- **Türkiye and Kenya:** The network must build collective, cross-border advocacy agendas to pressure states on shared challenges. Examples include organically establishing issue-specific working groups on priorities such as HIV treatment access, resettlement advocacy, or legal protection in restrictive contexts

Pillar 8: Establish Emergency Support and Direct Crisis Response (4/5)

- **Türkiye and South Africa:** The network must establish rapid-access emergency funds with low-barrier, streamlined distribution mechanisms, enabling individuals fleeing violence, facing eviction, or requiring emergency legal representation to access support quickly.
- **Thailand:** The network should explore serving as a grantee with sub-granting capacity, distributing resources directly to grassroots actors with minimal intermediary layers. The network should aim to reach organizations and individuals in conflict zones, rural areas, and humanitarian blockades who are systematically excluded from traditional funding mechanisms
- **Kenya:** The network must develop a coordinated, cross-border crisis response system — a single platform through which emergency cases from multiple

countries can be flagged, documented, and routed directly to relevant organizations.

Pillar 9: Strengthen Frontline Capacity and Knowledge Exchange Across Movements (5/5)

- **Mexico, South Africa, and Thailand:** The network must facilitate systematic knowledge exchange — sharing best practices from successful LGBTQI+-centered policies and programs, strengthening referral mechanisms across organizations, and creating dedicated spaces where CSOs and LGBTQI+ displaced persons can share knowledge, skills, and resources.
- **Türkiye and South Africa:** The network should scale local peer-to-peer exchange models, and support targeted capacity building for frontline actors, such as skills building among legal advocates serving LGBTQI+ communities.
- **Kenya:** The network should actively draw connections across movements, learning from the sustained community-led mobilization of feminist organizing, sex worker rights networks, and drug user advocacy movements as models for building intersectional solidarity.

Pillar 10: Ensure Funding Independence, Long-Term Sustainability, and Institutional Resilience (3/5)

- **South Africa and Mexico:** The network must establish clear frameworks over what government and donor funding can and cannot dictate, and where it must draw firm lines to preserve independence and integrity. Diversifying funding across multiple sources emerged as critical to reducing vulnerability to any single funder's shifting priorities or political pressures.
- **Mexico and Kenya:** Network sustainability requires thinking creatively beyond financial resources alone. Investing in human capital through training, skills development, and mentorship within the network will also be essential to sustaining momentum beyond initial convenings.



Participant mapping of key challenges and root causes of LGBTIQ+ forced displacement in South Africa.

Pillar 11: Embed Accountability, Rigorous Self-Evaluation and Sunset Provisions (3/5)

- Kenya, Türkiye and Mexico:** The network must embed time-bound workplans and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) frameworks from the outset, with goals tied to measurable outcomes and clear follow-through mechanisms. Commitments must be concrete, action-oriented, and openly reported. Publicly sharing commitments made by governments and institutional actors can further strengthen a culture of accountability across the network.
- Kenya:** In perhaps the most radical demand for genuine accountability, participants argued that the network must not exist simply to sustain its own existence. It must be evaluated periodically to determine if its work is still relevant, effective, and community-led — and must be prepared to dissolve if it fails its mandate.

PREVALENCE OF THE ELEVEN STRATEGIC PILLARS ACROSS QFDI CORRIDORS

	MEXICO	SOUTH AFRICA	THAILAND	TÜRKIYE	KENYA
1. Inclusive, Live-Experience Governance	●	●	●	●	●
2. Accessible & Safe Membership Design	●	●	●		●
3. Complementarity & Avoiding Duplication			●	●	●
4. Safeguard Against Power Imbalances	●	●	●	●	●
5. Decentralized Regional Hub Model	●	●	●		●
6. Shared Data & Evidence Platform	●	●	●	●	●
7. Coordinated Advocacy & Response	●	●	●	●	●
8. Emergency Support & Crisis Response		●	●	●	●
9. Frontline Capacity & Knowledge Exchange	●	●	●	●	●
10. Funding Independence & Resilience	●	●			●
11. Accountability & Sunset Provisions	●			●	●

SYNTHESIS OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BY THEME

With the network's design and operational mandate established, the section that follows turns to the outward-facing demands that the QFDN will carry into its advocacy work. The findings from the five global roundtables make clear that the crises confronting LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons are not incidental — they are the direct consequence of policy decisions made by host and resettlement governments, international organizations, and institutional donors. The recommendations that follow are not appeals for incremental charity; they are unequivocal demands for human rights accountability and meaningful institutional reform, synthesized into seven primary areas of concrete policy intervention directed at the governments, international bodies, and donors whose decisions shape these realities.

Theme 1: Dismantle Hostile Frameworks and Affirm Legal Protections for LGBTQI+ Displaced Persons (5/5)

- **Kenya and Türkiye:** States must immediately repeal laws which actively criminalize LGBTQI+ identities,

and cease the systematic weaponization of public morality codes to criminalize by proxy. Affirmative anti-discrimination protections on the basis of SOGIESC identity must be enacted and applied to all persons regardless of migration status.

- **South Africa, Mexico, and Thailand:** Domestic LGBTQI+ rights frameworks too often remain inadequately enforced and fail to extend meaningfully to migrants and refugees in practice. Existing laws must be applied without discrimination on the basis of migration status. States and international bodies must vigorously “enhance legal protections for LGBTQI+ human rights defenders.”

Theme 2: Reform Protection Systems and Expand Pathways to Safety (5/5)

- **Thailand and Türkiye:** Thailand must accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol and establish comprehensive domestic frameworks that recognize SOGIESC-based persecution as grounds



Participants from the Day 1 roundtable in Bangkok, Thailand, March 2025.

for protection. Türkiye must remove its geographic limitation to the 1951 Convention, to ensure full protection extends to all asylum seekers regardless of nationality.

- **South Africa, Kenya and Türkiye:** Refugee authorities must end the deliberate, systematic obstruction of LGBTQI+ asylum claims. Determination processes must be timely, accessible and free of homophobia and transphobia. Mandatory SOGIESC training must be implemented across all frontline institutions, with enforceable consequences for discriminatory conduct.
- **Mexico:** Refugee policy frameworks must be expanded beyond binary gender definitions to ensure transgender and gender-diverse individuals can access protection with dignity. Key barriers to obtaining legal status and documentation must be urgently addressed.
- **Kenya, Thailand and Türkiye:** Receiving countries must urgently expand resettlement commitments and develop complementary pathways, including private sponsorship, humanitarian visas, and labor mobility programs, to address the scale of unmet need.

Theme 3: End Discrimination, Abuse, and Impunity Within State Systems (4/5)

- **Kenya, South Africa and Türkiye:** Police must cease the arbitrary arrest, extortion, raids, and targeted abuse of LGBTQI+ displaced persons. Mandatory SOGIESC training for police and security forces is required. Safe, accessible complaint mechanisms for LGBTQI+ refugees to report institutional abuse must be established.
- **Türkiye:** Immigration enforcement must not function as a tool of criminalization and abuse against LGBTQI+ asylum seekers. The state must uphold the principle of non-refoulement, end arbitrary detention and violations of procedural rights, and guarantee due process for all individuals facing removal.
- **Mexico and South Africa:** Existing legal, policy and human rights frameworks to protect LGBTQI+ people must be strengthened through robust accountability mechanisms, including thorough, independent investigations for human rights violations.

Theme 4: Combat State-Sanctioned Xenophobia and Societal Violence (4/5)

- **South Africa and Kenya:** Governments must publicly denounce and refuse to perpetuate xenophobic, homophobic and transphobic rhetoric which intensifies and enables extreme violence against LGBTQI+ refugees.
- **Kenya, Mexico and Türkiye:** States must establish accessible mechanisms for LGBTQI+ displaced persons to safely report incidents of violence, access justice for rights violations, and receive meaningful protection against further harm.

Theme 5: Guarantee Universal Access to Life-Saving Healthcare and Essential Services (4/5)

- **Türkiye:** State actors and health ministries must ensure continuous access to life-saving medical care. Advocacy must fervently demand policies that “ensure comprehensive HIV treatment access regardless of nationality or the circumstances of infection.” Medical confidentiality must be strictly enforced, with severe consequences for providers who disclose patient information to authorities.
- **Mexico:** Policymakers must explicitly “consider the establishment of dedicated spaces specifically for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons to access essential services safely,” thereby shielding them from broader institutional discrimination.
- **South Africa and Kenya:** Essential services, including healthcare and housing, must be fundamentally decoupled from the possession of finalized asylum documentation, ending the cycle in which bureaucratic failures produce destitution and physical danger.

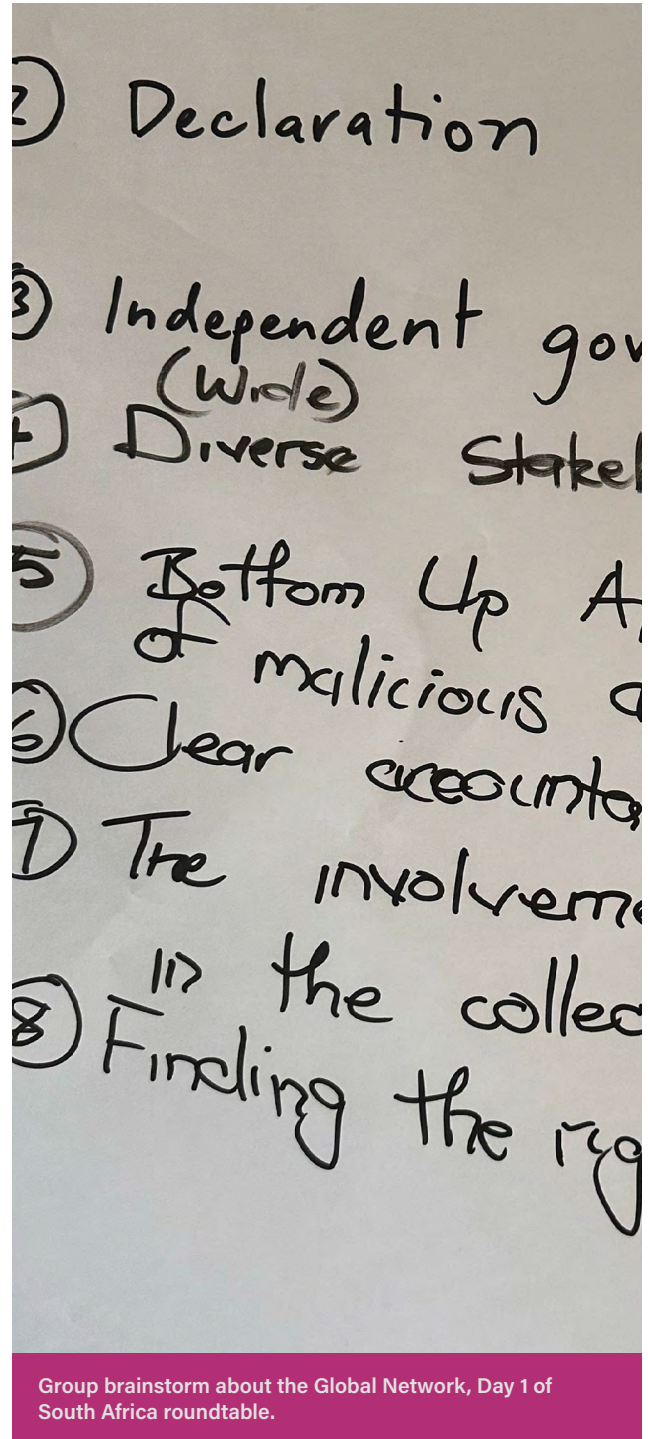
Theme 6: Drive Economic Inclusion and End Labor Market Exclusion (4/5)

- **Thailand and Türkiye:** Legal status must carry meaningful work authorization and freedom of movement. Where legal recognition does not confer the right to work, these barriers must be removed.
- **Mexico and Kenya:** Targeted economic inclusion programs providing dignified and sustainable livelihood opportunities must be urgently prioritized for LGBTQI+ displaced persons. Policymakers must actively include

grassroots actors in the design and implementation of plans for refugee integration within host communities.

Theme 7: Resource Frontline Civil Society and Center Lived Experience in Protection Policy Design and Implementation (5/5)

- **Türkiye, Thailand, Kenya, and South Africa:** The systematic erosion of humanitarian funding has decimated already limited services for LGBTQI+ displaced persons. International donors must restore and increase financial commitments, establish emergency funding mechanisms to ensure continuity of essential services, and provide multi-year funding cycles that reflect the long-term nature of protracted displacement.
- **Kenya, Türkiye and South Africa:** Donors must end the bypass of community-based and refugee-led organizations, channeling resources directly to frontline actors with demonstrated expertise. International organizations receiving funding must establish meaningful partnerships with grassroots actors, establishing accountability mechanisms — including community-led monitoring — to ensure resources reach the communities they are intended to serve.
- **Mexico, Thailand, Kenya, and South Africa:** Governments and international bodies must establish formalized coordination mechanisms between CSOs, governments, and international organizations to translate frontline expertise into responsive protection programming. LGBTQI+ people with lived experience of forced displacement must be meaningfully included in policy design and decision-making, structurally empowered to drive protection responses rather than consulted tokenistically.



PREVALENCE OF PRIMARY CHALLENGES ACROSS QFDI CORRIDORS

	MEXICO	SOUTH AFRICA	THAILAND	TÜRKIYE	KENYA
1. Dismantle Hostile Frameworks & Affirm Legal Protections	●	●	●	●	●
2. Reform Protection Systems & Expand Pathways to Safety	●	●	●	●	●
3. End Discrimination, Abuse & Impunity Within State Systems	●	●		●	●
4. Combat State-Sanctioned Xenophobia & Societal Violence	●	●		●	●
5. Guarantee Universal Access to Healthcare & Essential Services	●	●		●	●
6. Drive Economic Inclusion & End Labor Market Exclusion	●		●	●	●
7. Resource Frontline Civil Society & Center Lived Experience	●	●	●	●	●

