



REPORT BACK

QUEER FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN THAILAND

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON ROUNDTABLE #3
OF THE QUEER FORCED DISPLACEMENT INITIATIVE
BANGKOK, THAILAND

MARCH 5-6, 2025



RAINBOW
RAILROAD

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GLOSSARY

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
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.
CSO	Civil Society Organization
HRD	Human Rights Defender
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILO	International Labor Organization
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, other identities not specifically listed, such as asexual, pansexual, nonbinary, two-spirit, and more.
NO LEGAL STATUS	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".
NSM	National Screening Mechanism: An administrative framework created by the Thai government to identify individuals unable to safely return to their countries and designate them as "protected persons."
PERMANENT RESIDENT	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.

GLOSSARY

REFUGEE

A refugee is 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.

RLO

Refugee Led Organization

RSD

Refugee Status Determination

RTG

Royal Thai Government

SOGIESC

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics

STATELESS PERSON

A person is “stateless” if no State recognizes them as a citizen. Stateless persons lack critical protections and are deprived of many basic rights such as education, healthcare, and the ability to travel outside of their country.

TEMPORARY RESIDENT

A foreign national who is legally authorized to enter and live in a certain country for temporary purposes (work, studies, etc.).

UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes key insights from the Queer Forced Displacement Initiative (QFDI) roundtable consultation held in Bangkok, Thailand, on March 5-6, 2025. The Thailand roundtable was the third in a series of global consultations convened by Rainbow Railroad to understand the challenges facing LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants in transit country contexts, and to gather expert input on the creation and design of a coordinated, multi-stakeholder global network on queer forced displacement.

The roundtable convened LGBTQI+ civil society organizations (CSOs), migrant-led groups, individuals with lived experience, and human rights defenders, alongside representatives from diplomatic missions in Thailand, UN agencies, and international organizations. The consultation provided an opportunity to identify priority concerns, examine systemic and structural drivers of displacement, and to explore the value and feasibility of establishing a global network to strengthen protection, knowledge sharing, and advocacy.

Thailand occupies an important geopolitical position at the crossroads of Southeast Asia and has served as both a major destination and transit country for people fleeing conflict, political persecution, discrimination, and economic instability. In recent years, the escalating crisis in Myanmar has dramatically increased cross-border movement, with Thailand receiving large numbers of displaced people, including LGBTQI+ individuals seeking safety. While Thailand is widely perceived as a comparatively progressive setting for LGBTQI+ rights—having decriminalized homosexuality in 1956, enacted gender equality legislation, and recently passed marriage equality—roundtable participants emphasized that these protections do not extend to migrants without legal status. As one participant noted during the consultation, “that safety is not for migrants.”

For LGBTQI+ migrants and asylum seekers, Thailand’s non-accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention creates a deeply insecure protection environment. Without a comprehensive legal framework for refugee recognition, asylum seekers are classified under domestic law as “ille-

gal migrants,” leaving them vulnerable to detention and deportation regardless of their protection needs. This gap between Thailand’s progressive domestic LGBTQI+ legal framework and the precarious reality facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons formed a central tension throughout the roundtable discussions.

This report distills the core issues surfaced through the consultation process, and contextualizes them with publicly available evidence on Thailand’s migration landscape, legal and policy environment, and challenges facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people. It concludes with participant input on the design and priorities of a global network on queer forced displacement. The collective data and findings emerging from Thailand, alongside insights from all other regional consultative roundtables, will be integrated into the design, focus, and function of the multi-stakeholder network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement, which will be officially launched in 2026.

For more information about the QFDI, visit <https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/qfdi>.

Note: This report aims to provide a snapshot of conditions facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in Thailand. However, it does not purport to offer an exhaustive understanding or comprehensive representation of the diverse realities of all forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ persons in Thailand. As a limited scope consultation, certain perspectives, nationalities, and lived experiences are inevitably absent from this account. The findings herein reflect what these specific participants experienced and chose to share during the consultation, acknowledging that many other voices, challenges, and contexts remain undocumented in this report.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE THAILAND ROUNDTABLE

Recommendations for Policy Makers

The following recommendations emerged from participant testimony regarding urgent reforms needed to address systemic barriers facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in Thailand and the broader Southeast Asian region:

Recommendations to the Royal Thai Government

- **Accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol and establish comprehensive domestic asylum frameworks that recognize SOGIESC-based persecution as grounds for refugee status.** As a non-party to the Refugee Convention, Thailand lacks a legal foundation for refugee protection, leaving asylum seekers classified as “illegal migrants” and vulnerable to detention and deportation regardless of their protection needs. Thailand and other non-signatory states in the region must accede to these international instruments or, at minimum, develop domestic legal mechanisms for refugee recognition to ensure that LGBTQI+ individuals fleeing persecution are protected against refoulement.
- **Reform and expand the National Screening Mechanism (NSM) to provide robust, meaningful protection and a pathway to permanent residence.** The scope of protection offered through the NSM is severely restricted—access to the process is only available to individuals held in immigration detention, and “Protected Person” status confers only temporary stay in Thailand and protection from refoulement. Reforms to the NSM must include expanding access to protection those outside of detention, guaranteeing freedom of movement and work rights to Protected Persons, and establishing clear pathways to durable solutions.
- **Grant legal status, work authorization, and protection from refoulement to UNHCR-recognized refugees.** UNHCR refugee recognition in Thailand does not confer legal status, work authorization, or long-term residency, and critically, does not protect against detention or removal. Thailand must ensure that UNHCR-recognized refugees receive legal status that includes work rights, freedom of movement, and protection from deportation. UNHCR must also work to streamline registration and determination processes, reduce barriers to accessing RSD procedures, and ensure SOGIESC claims are assessed with cultural competency.
- **Simplify and expand regularization pathways to ensure LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people can access legal status.** In the absence of a comprehensive refugee protection framework in Thailand, LGBTQI+ individuals must pursue alternative routes for legal status that are prohibitively expensive, administratively complex, and governed by constantly shifting regulations. Thailand must develop accessible regularization pathways that reduce cost and documentation barriers, expand work authorization beyond restrictive labor categories, and offer routes to permanent residence in Thailand.
- **Ensure that existing LGBTQI+ legal protections and anti-discrimination measures extend to migrants and asylum seekers.** While Thailand has enacted progressive domestic LGBTQI+ legislation, including marriage equality and gender equality laws, participants emphasized these protections do not extend to non-citizens. As a result, LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face discrimination when accessing healthcare, housing, employment and other essential services without legal recourse. Thailand must ensure that anti-discrimination protections apply regardless of migration status.

- **Operationalize domestic laws against torture and enact comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation.**

Thailand must strengthen the implementation of the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act B.E. 2565 to prevent deportation of individuals at risk of torture. Thailand must also enact comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation and establish mechanisms to combat cross-border human trafficking to protect LGBTQI+ refugees vulnerable to exploitation.

- **Implement alternatives to detention for irregular arrivals and ensure LGBTQI+ individuals are not placed in facilities based on sex assigned at birth.** Participants identified immigration detention to stigmatize and dehumanize migrants, with transgender and gender nonconforming individuals facing heightened risks of sexual harassment and violence when detained. Thailand must prioritize community-based alternatives to detention and ensure that when detention is unavoidable, placement decisions respect gender identity rather than sex assigned at birth.
- **Strengthen regional protection frameworks and accountability mechanisms to counter transnational repression and protect human rights defenders.** ASEAN's principle of non-interference — which prohibits member states from intervening in each other's domestic affairs — constrains Thailand's willingness to provide comprehensive protection to asylum seekers. Regional frameworks must prioritize protection obligations over diplomatic non-interference, with accountability mechanisms to prevent states from using bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries to circumvent refugee protection responsibilities. This includes establishing safeguards to protect human rights defenders from retaliation, criminalization, and refoulement.

Recommendations for International Actors

- **Expand resettlement opportunities and develop complementary pathways for LGBTQI+ refugees.** In the context of shrinking global resettlement quotas and increasingly limited protection opportunities, LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face prolonged limbo without durable solutions. Resettlement countries must increase intake specifically for LGBTQI+ refugees, prioritize SOGI-ESC-based persecution cases, and develop complementary pathways.
- **Increase funding and coordination support for LGBTQI+-inclusive refugee services and grassroots organizations.** Recent global funding reductions have decimated already limited services, leaving LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people without adequate support. Donors must provide sustained investment in specialized, intersectional service provision and facilitate coordination mechanisms that enable organizations to share expertise, make effective referrals, and collectively address the needs of LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees.
- **Ensure meaningful participation of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people in international forums and policy-making processes.** LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers remain significantly underrepresented in global discussions where key protection policy decisions are shaped. International bodies and governments must create accessible mechanisms for people with lived experience to participate in policy development, provide concrete support for their engagement, and ensure their perspectives fundamentally guide protection responses.

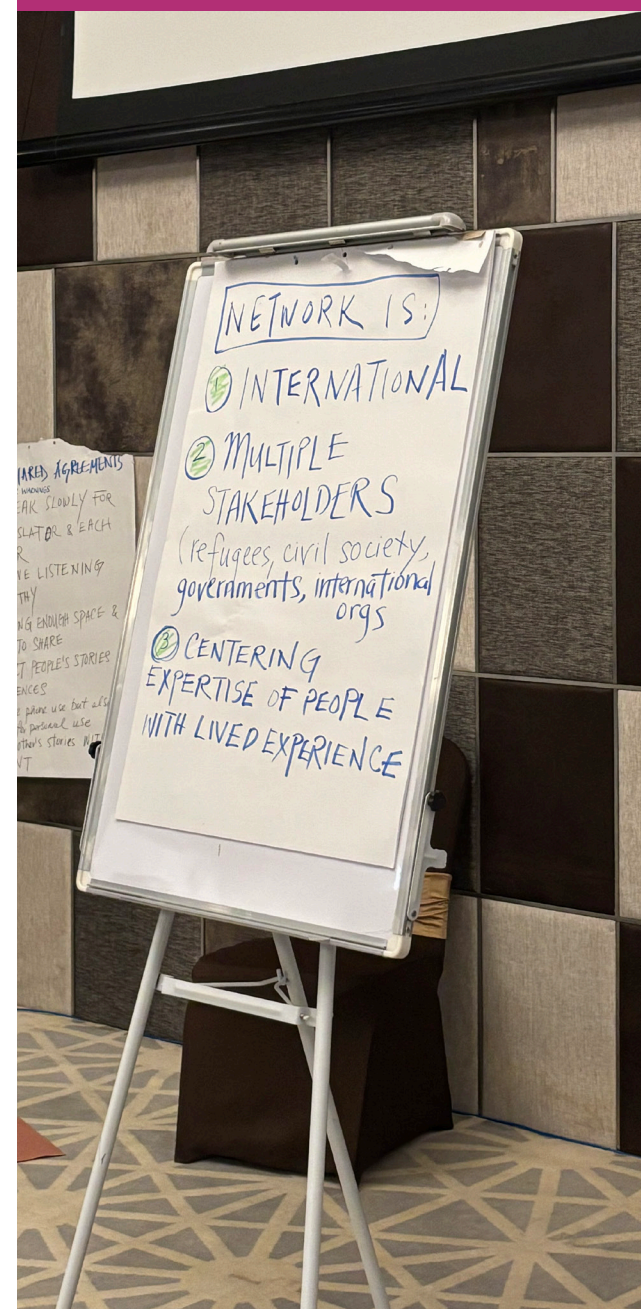
Recommendations on the Global Network on LGBTQI+ Forced Displacement

Drawing from participant input on network design, governance, and strategic priorities, the following recommendations provide guidance for establishing and sustaining an effective global platform:

- **Center the expertise and leadership of local organizations and people with lived experience in all aspects of network design and governance.** Participants emphasized that meaningful change requires centering those with direct experience of forced displacement, and ensuring the network addresses root causes rather than imposing top-down solutions. Decision-making must be rooted in local experience and the network must intentionally platform unheard voices, including disabled LGBTQI+ migrants who are often excluded from decision-making spaces.
- **Design the network around the principle of complementarity, filling gaps that individual organizations cannot address alone.** The network should focus on activities that single actors cannot accomplish, creating collective power and achieving shared goals beyond individual organizational capacity. Participants cautioned against duplicating existing work, emphasizing the need to leverage and optimize efforts already underway rather than reinventing the wheel.
- **Establish multi-stakeholder membership with safeguards against institutional co-optation and power imbalances.** While multi-stakeholder coalitions can shift power dynamics and leverage diverse expertise across sectors, participants identified significant risks, including government or UN agency domination, Global North agenda-setting, and exclusion of grassroots actors. The network must implement clear governance structures and accountability mechanisms to ensure community-led priorities are not undermined by more powerful actors.
- **Create flexible governance structures with rotating leadership and community-centered decision-making.** Participants recommended against over-defining the network structure during early phases, advocating instead for a loose, organic framework that can evolve responsively. A secretariat should coordinate activities and information-sharing, with decision-making roles rotating to ensure power remains evenly distributed and new voices are continuously elevated.
- **Prioritize trust-building and relationship cultivation during nascent years before rigid structures are imposed.** Participants emphasized that authentic connections around common goals are more likely to sustain engagement beyond initial convenings than imposed frameworks. The network should create spaces for dialogue where shared values emerge naturally, addressing network fatigue by identifying where resources exist, and strengthening capacity for genuinely safe and inclusive spaces.
- **Balance global coordination with local autonomy through bidirectional dialogue mechanisms.** Any global agenda must remain firmly grounded in local expertise and experiences, with formal mechanisms ensuring local realities directly inform network priorities. The network cannot become dictatorial or prescriptive, but must support local initiatives with full autonomy, strategically engaging with existing coalitions rather than duplicating efforts.
- **Develop the network as a “learning space” for knowledge exchange, data collection, and evidence building.** Participants identified the dearth of reliable data on migration and LGBTQI+ communities in Southeast Asia and globally as undermining evidence-based policymaking. The network should create searchable databases, facilitate access to data for resource-constrained organizations, and remove administrative burdens that prevent grassroots groups from focusing on frontline advocacy.

- **Coordinate strategic advocacy on concrete priorities including legal recognition in countries of arrival, NSM reform, and alternatives to detention.** The network should pursue specific campaigns grounded in documented challenges while also addressing underrepresentation of people with lived experience at forums like the Global Refugee Forum, ensuring LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people can advocate on issues affecting them at the highest levels of policy-making.
- **Explore innovative funding models that transform humanitarian access for marginalized populations.** Participants proposed the network serve as a grantee with sub-granting capacity, identifying grassroots experts and distributing funding directly with minimal intermediary layers. This approach could reach people in conflict zones, rural areas, and those facing humanitarian blockades who are excluded from traditional granting mechanisms.
- **Embed robust data protection protocols and security considerations in all network activities.** Security risks are paramount when working with LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees who face vulnerabilities including information leakage, imprisonment risks, and complex consent issues. Mitigation requires securing government buy-in, establishing comprehensive data protection, and ensuring safety is foundational to decision-making processes.
- **Diversify funding sources at local, regional, and global levels to ensure network sustainability.** Participants emphasized engaging multiple sectors, including private sector corporate social responsibility and public advocacy, to prevent competition among organizations for limited funding. The network should facilitate connections and provide technical assistance rather than implementing programs directly, positioning itself as a support mechanism rather than a resource competitor.

Roundtable Day 1: Activity to understand the key features of the proposed global network.





COUNTRY CONTEXT

LGBTQI+ Forced Displacement in Thailand

Migration Dynamics and Thailand's Role as Host Country

Thailand's migration landscape is shaped by its geographic position at the crossroads of Southeast Asia, sharing land borders with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. This positioning, combined with its status as a regional economic hub, creates distinct migration dynamics characterized by substantial labor migration through both regular and irregular channels, as well as significant flows of forcibly displaced individuals seeking refuge from civil wars, political repression, and other forms of persecution—including LGBTQI+ individuals fleeing SOGIESC-based persecution ([IOM, 2024](#); [UN Network on Migration, 2024](#)).

Thailand's role as a host country for refugees and asylum seekers became even more pronounced following Myanmar's 2021 military coup, which created a renewed forced displacement crisis with hundreds of thousands of individuals seeking refuge in Thailand. Recent data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicates Myanmar nationals constitute the largest migrant group in the country, with an estimated 1.3 million Myanmar nationals crossing the border in 2024, many in search of long-term safety from conditions of violence and persecution. ([IOM 2024](#)).

For more on LGBTQI+ rights without
Refugee Framework

Progressive LGBTQI+ Rights, Inadequate Protection Framework

Thailand may be particularly attractive to LGBTQI+ migrants given its reputation as one of the more progressive countries in the region regarding LGBTQI+ rights. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1956, and the [Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 \(2015\)](#) prohibits unfair gender-based discrimination against all persons including male, female, and LGBTQI+ persons ([UN Women, 2020](#)). The Marriage Equality Act entered into force in January 2025 ([Al Jazeera English, 2025](#)), and a Gender Recognition Act introducing legal gender recognition based on self-identification is currently progressing through parliament ([Lexology, 2024](#)).

However, for many LGBTQI+ migrants and asylum seekers, the promise of safety and freedom stands in stark contrast to the reality of an extremely insecure protection environment in Thailand. Despite receiving hundreds of thousands of refugees over the course of several decades, Thailand remains non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and lacks a comprehensive legal framework for the recognition of refugees ([UNHCR, 2025](#)). Rather than committing to global protection standards, the government has consistently managed mass displacement situations through bilateral arrangements or regional mechanisms ([IOM 2024](#)). Asylum seekers continue to be classified under domestic law as “illegal migrants” leaving them vulnerable to detention and deportation regardless of their protection needs. ([East Asia Forum 2025](#)).

As Thailand is a non-party to the Refugee Convention, “the mandate to grant refugee status in the country lies with the UNHCR” - the UN Refugee Agency. ([The New Humanitarian, 2025](#)). The UNHCR’s Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process is complex and lengthy, with waiting times of several months to years due to the large number of asylum applications ([Asylum Access, 2025](#)). Registering with UNHCR does not guarantee access to material assistance, which is extremely limited and unavailable to the vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand ([UNHCR, n.d.](#)). Critically, UNHCR recognition does not provide secure protection, confer legal rights or status in Thailand, nor does it prevent individuals from being detained or deported by Thai authorities ([UNHCR, n.d.](#)).

In 2023, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) launched the National Screening Mechanism (NSM), an administrative

framework operating independently from UNHCR’s registration and RSD process, designed to identify individuals unable to safely return to their countries due to fear of persecution, and designate them as “Protected Persons” ([Center for Asylum Protection, n.d.](#); [CRSP, 2024](#)). However, the mechanism’s legal scope remains severely limited, with the UN Network on Migration noting that, “Other than offering temporary stay and protection from refoulement, the legal status of a “Protected Person” remains unclear and does not include freedom of movement or the right to work” ([UN Network on Migration, 2024](#)). Independent assessments further note deficiencies in the mechanism’s clarity, delays in implementation, and restrictive eligibility criteria that excludes certain groups and undermines accessibility for vulnerable populations ([APRRN, 2021](#); [UN Network on Migration, 2024](#)). It was reported that these uncertainties within the NSM process have left asylum seekers feeling insecure and unable to plan for their futures ([APRRN, 2021](#)).

Thailand also maintains a network of immigration detention centers and long-standing refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, which are marked by heavy surveillance, movement restrictions, and shrinking humanitarian resources ([Global Detention Project, 2024](#); [APHR, 2025](#)). LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face heightened protection risks in carceral settings, including physical and sexual abuse ([Williams Institute, 2022](#)). Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals are especially at risk, as they are often placed in detention facilities according to their sex assigned at birth rather than their gender identity, and are exposed to severe violations of their fundamental rights ([Manushya Foundation, 2023](#); [UNDP, 2019](#)).

Barriers to Integration: Regularization, Discrimination and Overlapping Risks

In view of the lack of viable protection pathways, forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people often attempt to regularize their stay through alternative routes including labor schemes, education visas, and temporary documentation options. These pathways are governed by complex bilateral agreements and constantly shifting criteria ([IOM, 2024](#)), making them frequently inaccessible to those fleeing persecution and offering no durable solutions.

Individuals with diverse SOGIESC face direct and indirect discrimination affecting access to employment, essential services including healthcare, education, and mental health support, as well as broader social exclusion. LGBTQI+ women face particular difficulties accessing housing and healthcare, which are exacerbated by their migration status ([OHCHR, 2024](#)).

Finally, many LGBTQI+ individuals fleeing Myanmar do so amid overlapping risks extending beyond SOGIESC-based persecution, including political repression, retaliation for human rights work, and targeted violence under conscription laws introduced in 2024 ([ASEAN SOGI Caucus, 2025](#)). These intersecting drivers of displacement, combined with restrictive migration systems in Thailand, place LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people at the margins of already fragile protection structures.

Taken together, these dynamics underscore why Thailand is a critical location for understanding the experiences of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people in the region and highlight the urgent need for coordinated, multi-stakeholder approaches to address complex cross-border drivers of displacement, strengthen protection mechanisms, and ensure that LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees are not left behind.

Methodology

Local Partnership and Coordination

The Thailand roundtable was organized in partnership with the [Equal Asia Foundation](#) (EAF), Asia's only LGBTQI+ think tank, which addresses intersectional vulnerabilities including displacement through strategic foresight, advocacy, and capacity building. EAF provided critical support in identifying and reaching participants, tailoring content to the local context, and facilitating sessions during the roundtable. Additional planning support came from Canadian diplomatic staff in Thailand who assisted in connecting with other diplomatic missions for the second day of consultations and provided guidance on the regional political landscape. The roundtable utilized an inclusive, participatory approach that combined open discussions with focused breakout sessions to explore both the challenges facing

LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in Thailand and the design of a global network to address these issues. The roundtable expanded on the second day to include representatives from governments and international organizations, fostering collaborative dialogue and knowledge exchange between grassroots actors and institutional stakeholders.

Sessions were conducted with simultaneous interpretation in English, Thai, and Burmese.

Participant Demographics

The roundtable convened 37 participants representing CSOs, migrant-led groups, individuals with lived experience of forced displacement, and human rights defenders, alongside representatives from diplomatic missions in Thailand, UN agencies, and international organizations. Of the 19 day one attendees, 17 completed pre-event surveys and 13 completed post-event surveys.

Participants represented diverse gender identities, with notable representation of transgender women, cisgender men and women, and genderfluid individuals. Sexual orientations were similarly diverse, with gay and queer identities most represented. The majority of participants (16) were based in Thailand at the time of the consultation. Day one participants were predominantly from Myanmar (eight out of 17 survey respondents), with Thai nationals (six) and one Indonesian participant also present. This demographic composition largely reflects Thailand's migration context, where Myanmar nationals constitute the largest migrant and refugee group in the country. However, the predominance of Myanmar perspectives represents a limitation of the day one findings, as the experiences discussed may not fully capture the diversity of LGBTQI+ forced displacement across Southeast Asia.

Participants included nine individuals connected to civil society organizations, nine with lived experience of forced displacement (including six individuals with refugee status and four asylum seekers), and seven activists or human rights defenders. While the consultation did not include participants residing directly in border camps, it featured representation from CSOs that provide services in camp and border settings, offering important insights into those contexts.

Day two expanded to include representatives from diplomatic missions (including Canada, Belgium and the European Union), UN agencies (UNHCR, UN Women), and international organizations, adding institutional and policy perspectives to the grassroots insights gathered on day one.

Limitations and Language

This limited scope consultation reflects the perspectives and experiences of a small group of participants, and does not purport to comprehensively represent all LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people in Thailand or capture every dimension of their experiences. In particular, this consultation did not include the direct participation of individuals residing in refugee camps or detention centers, reflecting the structural challenges in accessing these settings. Thailand's refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border operate under strict confinement policies that severely restrict both refugees' freedom of movement and humanitarian actors' access to these populations ([Human Rights Watch, 2023](#)); ([APHR, 2025](#)). LGBTQI+ individuals in these closed settings face compounded barriers to engagement, making their perspectives significantly more difficult for researchers and advocates to reach. While CSO representatives with border-based programs provided important insights into camp contexts, the absence of direct testimonies from camp residents and detainees represents an acknowledged gap in the consultation's scope.

The majority of data collected was through simultaneous Thai and Burmese interpretation to English, which imposed certain limitations on the nuance and precision of participant statements, particularly regarding culturally specific concepts and experiences.

Finally, note that throughout this report, the terms Burma and Myanmar are used interchangeably, as are LGBTQI+, LGBT, and queer, reflecting the varied terminology used by participants during the consultation. This report also uses the terms "migrant, refugee, asylum seekers and forcibly displaced people" to encompass the diverse experiences of LGBTQI+ displacement individuals in Thailand. Many participants themselves used these terms interchangeably when detailing their own experiences navigating complex migratory experiences as LGBTQI+ persons.

Preliminary Note: Drivers of Displacement for LGBTQI+ Forcibly Displaced Persons from Myanmar

As noted above, the roundtable demographics reflected a majority of Myanmar nationals. As such it is helpful to examine more closely the displacement drivers affecting this population to contextualize the protection needs and experiences of LGBTQI+ Myanmar nationals who reach Thailand, as well as highlighting the plight of millions who remain trapped as internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Following the 2021 military coup, Myanmar has experienced escalating violence and state persecution that has driven mass displacement across the region. An estimated 19.9 million people in Myanmar—more than a third of the population—are in need of humanitarian assistance in that country, including more than 3.5 million internally displaced ([UN Myanmar, 2024](#)). With an estimated 1.3 million Myanmar nationals entering Thailand in 2024, the Thailand-Myanmar border remains "the largest country-to-country migration corridor in Southeast Asia" ([IOM, 2025](#)). Among the roughly 5.3 million non-Thai nationals in the country, at least 4 million originate from Myanmar as of 2024 ([IOM, 2025](#); [UN Network on Migration, 2024](#)). It is further estimated that upwards of 1.7 million Myanmar nationals in Thailand are undocumented, exposing them to "the constant threat of harassment, arrest and deportation" ([HRW, 2025](#)).

Participants described how the military junta's 2024 conscription law has created acute dangers for LGBTQI+ individuals who face being detained and forced into military service. One participant explained that transgender men, perceived as masculine by military officers, are particularly targeted for conscription despite widespread unwillingness to serve. Those conscripted are often placed on front lines as human shields, facing extreme human rights abuses and gender-based violence. Human rights organizations report that following the coup, LGBTQI+ individuals have been subject to extreme, systematic rights violations, including arrest, detention, torture and death ([Human Rights Myanmar, 2024](#)). In the wake of the military junta's 2024 Conscription Law, it is reported that LGBTQI+ individuals face increased risks of "violence, insecurity and exploitation", driving many to flee in order to avoid conscription ([Queers of Burma Alternative, 2025](#)). Roundtable participants described LGBTQI+ individuals in Myanmar being detained and forced into

military service. One participant explained that transgender men, perceived as masculine by military officers, are particularly targeted for conscription, and another participant shared that LGBTQI+ conscripted individuals are sometimes placed on the front lines as human shields, facing extreme human rights abuses and gender-based violence.

Participants shared that LGBTQI+ individuals in Myanmar also experience intensified verbal, physical, and sexual abuse specifically because of their identities, with transgender women facing especially severe violence. One participant noted, “I personally know a few people from the trans community who are on the run, and [there’s] no way to contact [them] at the moment.” The conscription law has also fueled increased human trafficking, as traffickers exploit the chaos of mass deportations and migration flows.

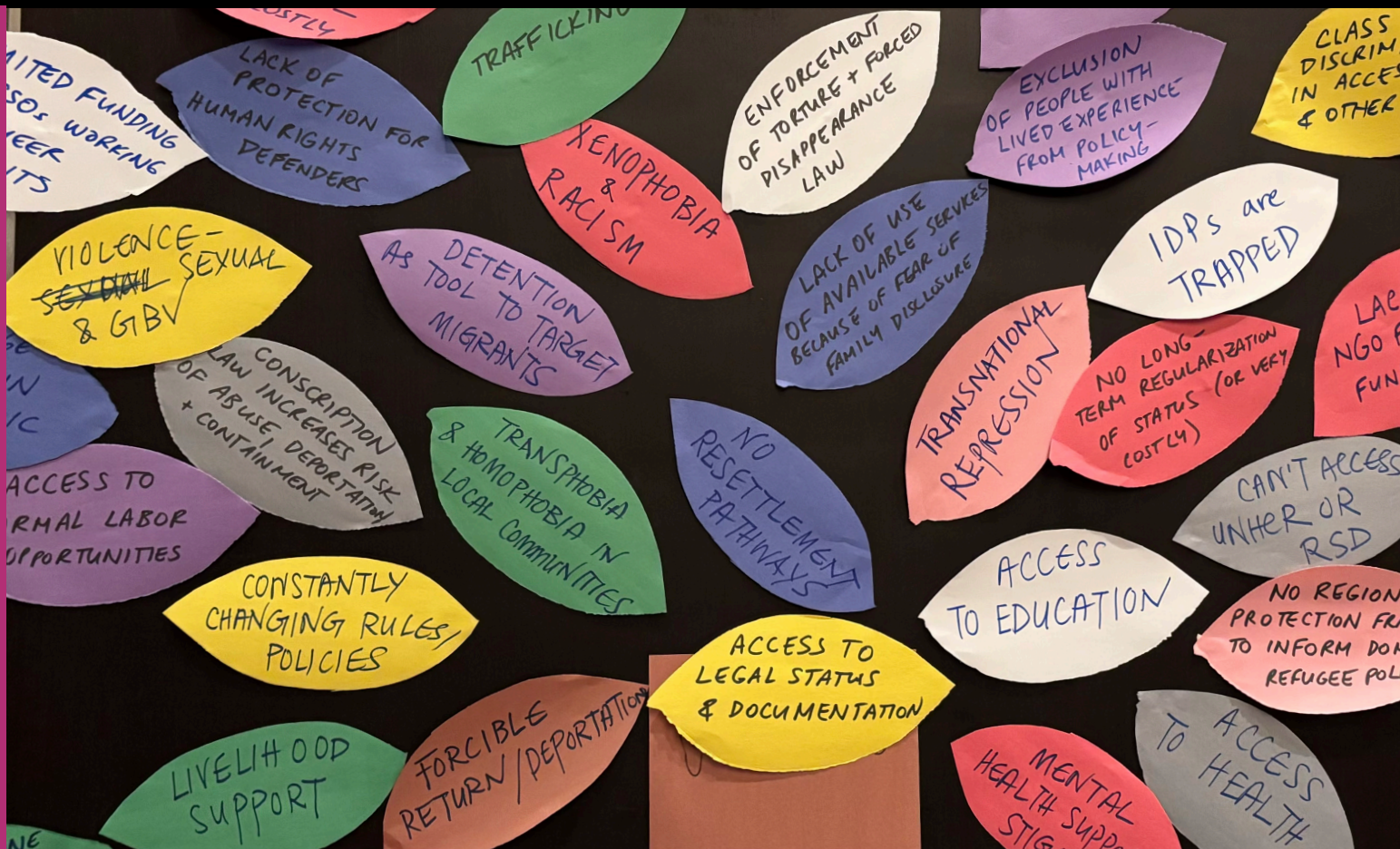
For those attempting to flee, barriers are formidable. Participants reported that obtaining passports is extremely difficult, travel costs are prohibitive, and movement is heavily restricted. Youth activists and pro-democracy advocates face particular scrutiny at borders and airports. One participant shared findings from their organization’s surveys indicating that before the conscription law, 93.1% of LGBTQI+ individuals were able to remain in Myanmar, but after its implementation, this dropped to 74%, with many now living in conflict zones or internally displaced camps. Others attempt to reach neighboring countries—China, Laos, or Thailand—either through regular channels by obtaining and extending visas (a costly process), or through irregular migration.

While the findings in this report focus primarily on the experiences of LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees in Thailand, participants repeatedly emphasized the dire conditions facing their LGBTQI+ friends and loved ones unable to escape Myanmar.

Swathi Sekhar, Director of Protection Initiatives at Rainbow Railroad, facilitating Day 1 roundtable in Bangkok.



Roundtable Day 1: Participant mapping of key challenges facing LGBTQI+ migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand.



PART 1: KEY CHALLENGES FACING LGBTQI+ MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THAILAND

Participants in the Thailand roundtable identified several interconnected challenges facing LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees. These issues stem from systemic barriers within Thailand's restrictive legal and policy framework for migration, compounded by regional and geopolitical dynamics, social discrimination, and insufficient support for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people. The challenges described below reflect the structural conditions that impact LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people navigating these systems.

Barriers to Accessing Legal Documentation and Asylum Status

Absence of Legal Pathways To Protection and Regularization

Among the most fundamental challenges facing LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees in Thailand is the absence of legal pathways to protection and regularization, which manifests in two primary forms: lack of access to asylum and formal protection systems, and the absence of viable pathways to regularization and durable solutions.

Lack of Access to Asylum and Formal Protection Systems

Individuals fleeing persecution, including SOGIESC-based persecution, have extremely limited options for obtaining formal protection status in Thailand, or being safeguarded against refoulement. This issue takes on particular urgency for LGBTQI+ refugees as they find themselves caught between progressive domestic protections for LGBTQI+ Thai citizens and a restrictive migration regime that offers no formal asylum pathway.

Participants noted that although the Thai government presents the country as an attractive destination where LGBTQI+ individuals can live safely, the reality of applying for protection and interfacing with the UN system ends up creating new forms of precarity:

"The representation from the Thai Tourism Authority is 'Go Thai, Be Free' so people come and want to overstay visas. But [they] have to wait for many years to get refugee status...lots of LGB and trans refugees feel [the] struggle."

Without a domestic asylum determination framework, the UNHCR has long been the only avenue in Thailand for individuals seeking safety to access refugee status determination (RSD) procedures and protection from refoulement. However, participants described long timelines, complex processes, and uncertain outcomes that impede meaningful access to protection. UNHCR registration and determination can take months or years, and not all registered asylum seekers receive RSD interviews. One participant noted that since contacting UNHCR Thailand for support several years ago, they only received one call back in 2022. Another stated that it is "very difficult to reach the UN," and recounted having to wait three months just for an initial

connection with UNHCR, only to be later told "not to come" to Thailand.

Participants also highlighted ongoing limitations within UNHCR's RSD process that create particular barriers for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, noting that "Being LGBT is not enough", and that applicants must also demonstrate that they are "highly functional and [under] constant threat of persecution...It's unfair and cruel. What needs to be advocated to UNHCR is that refugee status should be taken seriously whether they are two minutes away from death or not."

Finally, it must be noted that refugee recognition by the UNHCR does not confer legal status, work authorization, or long term residency in Thailand ([UNHCR Thailand, n.d.](#)), and perhaps most critically participants highlighted that even for those who do get it, UNHCR registration or status does not protect against removal. The result is an RSD process that offers recognition without meaningful protection.

Outside of the UNHCR system, the only other avenue for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in Thailand to access formal protection status comes through the recently implemented National Screening Mechanism (NSM), created by the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to identify vulnerable individuals and designate them as "protected persons." Established in 2019 and operational since late 2023, the NSM was intended to provide an avenue for protection outside of UNHCR processes. However, participants stated the NSM is currently a non-viable option for most LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people. Still in its very early stages of implementation, participants shared that as of the date of the roundtable in March 2025, fewer than ten cases had been approved through this mechanism. One participant, representing a resettlement country government, noted that the effectiveness and reach of the NSM has been severely limited:

"They have specific conditions to be able to apply, and only very few cases have gone through to reach 'protected persons' status."

It was further highlighted that the NSM is very restrictive in its scope, is only available to individuals held in immigration detention, and that applicants are required to pay their own bail if they wish to reside outside of detention.

The cumulative effect of these barriers, lengthy UNHCR processes that offer recognition without legal protection, and an NSM mechanism with extremely limited accessibil-