REPORT BACK

QUEER FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN TÜRKIYE

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON ROUNDTABLE #4 OF THE QUEER FORCED DISPLACEMENT INITIATIVE

JULY 21–22, 2025

RAINBOW RAILROAD

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GLOSSARY

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.
CONDITIONAL REFUGEE STATUS	Due to Türkiye's geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, non-European asylum seekers can only receive conditional refugee status, which provides temporary residence, basic rights, and protection from refoulement until third-country resettlement, but does not offer the prospect of long-term legal integration in Türkiye.
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
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".
NON-REFOULEMENT	Presidency of Migration Management: The Turkish government agency responsible for administering the national migration and asylum system, including registration of asylum seekers and conducting refugee status determination procedures.
PMM	Presidency of Migration Management: The Turkish government agency responsible for administering the national migration and asylum system, including registration of asylum seekers and conducting refugee status determination procedures.

GLOSSARY

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.
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 themself 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
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
STATELESS PERSON	A person is "stateless" if no State recognize 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

Note:

This report uses the terms "migrant," "refugee," "asylum seeker," and "forcibly displaced person" to encompass the diverse experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals who are displaced from their homes and forced to migrate elsewhere. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the report, except when referring to the specific legal statuses within Türkiye's protection framework, such as international protection applicants, conditional refugee or temporary protection status. Displaced LGBTQI+ individuals do not often conform to a single category, and many participants themselves used these terms interchangeably when detailing their own experiences navigating a lifetime of forced displacement and migratory experiences as LGBTQI+ persons.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes key insights and recommendations from the Queer Forced Displacement Initiative (QFDI) roundtable consultation held virtually on July 21-22, 2025, focused on the displacement context in Türkiye. The consultation was the fourth in a series of global roundtables convened 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 LGBTQI+ forced displacement.

Co-organized with SPoD (Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association), a Türkiye-based LGBTQI+ rights organization, the consultation brought together LGBTQI+ civil society and refugee-led organizations, and individuals with lived experience of forced displacement on Day 1. Day 2 expanded to include representatives from diplomatic missions, UN agencies, and international non-governmental organizations operating in Türkiye.

Türkiye occupies a critical position in the global migration sphere, hosting 2,318,935 registered Syrians under temporary protection as of February 2026. While Türkiye has signed and ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, it retained the geographical limitation from the 1951 Convention, meaning that for the vast majority seeking protection—non-Europeans from the Middle East, Africa, Central and South Asia—the only option is conditional protection status permitting temporary residence until third-country resettlement. The rights afforded under both conditional refugee and temporary protection statuses are limited, and critically, conditional refugees are not offered the prospect of long-term legal integration in Türkiye. Moreover, despite the absence of explicit criminalization, the Turkish government has consistently utilized vaguely-worded laws to restrict LGBTQI+ visibility, with Pride marches banned since 2015 and civil society space constricting dramatically. In early 2026, the Justice Ministry was reportedly working to revive legislation that would criminalize LGBTQI+ identities and expressions.

Key Challenges Facing LGBTQI+ Forcibly Displaced Persons in Türkiye

Roundtable participants documented systemic barriers across multiple domains for LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants in Türkiye. Legal status functions as the primary gatekeeper to protection, yet registration systems and refugee status determination procedures are exclusionary and discriminatory, characterized by routine denials and widespread anti-LGBTQI+ bias. Even those who obtain status face severe restrictions on movement, work, and access to vital health care. With third country resettlement representing the only viable pathway to safety, LGBTQI+ participants described years-long waits, stalled processes, and shrinking resettlement quotas, leaving them trapped in indefinite transit. Community support systems operate under severe constraints, with very few organizations creating spaces for LGBTQI+ refugees, who face exclusion in both refugee communities and LGBTQI+ spaces.

Vision for a Global Network

These systemic failures underscore the urgent need for coordinated international action. Participants articulated a vision for a global network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement grounded in principles of active solidarity, where collective support across borders fills critical gaps that existing systems cannot or will not address.

Participants stressed that the network must center lived experience through formal mechanisms including leadership positions for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people and participatory structures such as refugee advisory groups. They emphasized maintaining realistic expectations about what international advocacy can achieve, noting that in the context of Türkiye, geopolitical factors—including European countries' dependence on Türkiye for migration containment—severely undermine the willingness of regional actors to hold the government accountable for rights violations. Rather than positioning the network as a primary driver of structural reform, the network should uplift existing local efforts and function as one strategic tool among many.

Strategic priorities for the network identified include rapid-access emergency funding, documentation and research support in contexts where public reporting is dangerous, transnational coordination mechanisms on shared challenges such as universal HIV medication access, and targeted advocacy on resettlement expansion and sustainable funding for legal protection.

The expertise and insights shared by participants at the Türkiye roundtable affirmed the urgent need for an innovative, multi-stakeholder global platform that can address both immediate protection crises and long-term systemic barriers through coordinated transnational action, ensuring that LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people are no longer left to navigate these compounding dangers alone.

Finally, note that this report aims to provide a snapshot of conditions facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in Türkiye. However, it does not purport to offer an exhaustive understanding or comprehensive representation of the diverse realities and experiences of all LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees in Türkiye. 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 chose to share during the consultation, and it is acknowledged that many other voices, challenges, and contexts remain undocumented in this report.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TÜRKIYE 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 Türkiye:

Recommendations for the Government of Türkiye

- **Remove the geographic limitation to refugee status, and extend full protection to all asylum seekers regardless of nationality.** Türkiye's maintenance of the geographical restriction in the 1951 Geneva Convention means that LGBTQI+ asylum seekers from non-European countries - the majority seeking protection in Türkiye - can only access conditional or temporary protection. Removing the geographic limitation would align Türkiye with international protection standards and provide LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons with meaningful access to rights, protection from refoulement, and the possibility of long-term integration in Türkiye.

- **Address discriminatory practices in refugee status determination (RSD) procedures in Türkiye, to ensure fair assessment of protection claims.** LGBTQI+ asylum seekers face routine denial of applications for international protection due to arbitrary decision-making, and widespread anti-LGBTQI+ bias from adjudicators and immigration authorities. To address these abuses, implement mandatory training on SOGIESC issues for adjudicators and immigration authorities, and create enforceable consequences for discriminatory conduct.

- **Expand rights tied to conditional and temporary protection status to enable meaningful access to essential services and livelihood opportunities.** LGBTQI+ refugees with legal status face severe restrictions on movement, work, and healthcare that create precarious conditions and constant risk of detention for unintentional violations. Eliminate geographic mobility restrictions, remove barriers to work authorization, and end the policy that automatically cancels health insurance for international protection applicants after one year of registration.

- **Halt forced deportations and uphold the principle of non-refoulement for all refugees and asylum seekers in Türkiye.** Participants documented instances of LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers being returned to countries of persecution where they face grave danger or death. Türkiye must ensure that removals are not based on unfairly rejected asylum applications, positive HIV status, or engagement in sex work, and that all individuals have robust opportunities to challenge removal decisions before they are executed.

- **Establish independent oversight of voluntary return processes to prevent coercion and ensure protection of LGBTQI+ individuals.** Serious allegations exist of LGBTQI+ individuals from Syria being coerced into signing voluntary return forms, while others may be forced to return alongside family members unaware of their SOGIESC identity. Türkiye must permit independent investigations into allegations of forced returns and include third-party observers from UN agencies or non-governmental organizations in voluntary return interviews to identify LGBTQI+ individuals at risk, and ensure compliance with international protection standards.

- **Implement alternatives to detention for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, prevent rights violations in removal centers, and ensure civil society access to detention facilities.** LGBTQI+ individuals in detention face heightened risks of violence and abuse related to their gender identity or sexual orientation. Türkiye must prioritize non-custodial alternatives for vulnerable populations and establish mechanisms to prevent and address systematic abuses. CSOs and legal aid providers must be granted access to facilities, to support survivors of mistreatment and protect detainee rights.

- **Establish mechanisms to ensure LGBTQI+ asylum**

seekers and refugees can safely report violence and access justice without risk of detention or deportation. LGBTQI+ refugees, asylum seekers and migrants experience widespread violence and abuse in Türkiye, but are unable to seek protection from authorities, due to pervasive homophobic, transphobic, and xenophobic discrimination. Comprehensive mandatory training on SOGIESC issues for law enforcement is required, alongside the creation of accessible complaint mechanisms that guarantee LGBTQI+ refugees can report rights violations without facing punitive consequences for seeking protection.

- **Guarantee comprehensive healthcare access, including HIV treatment to all asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Türkiye.** LGBTQI+ refugees face systematic barriers to healthcare due to discriminatory policies and severe discrimination from providers. The policy requiring non-citizens to prove they contracted HIV in Türkiye or reside for six months before accessing free treatment creates life-threatening gaps in care, forcing refugees to pay unaffordable costs out of pocket or go without medication. Remove this policy and other barriers, and uphold the right to health regardless of nationality or legal status.

- **Enforce strict medical confidentiality protections and mandate SOGIESC training for all healthcare providers.** Multiple participants described devastating recent incidents where healthcare providers turned HIV-positive patients over to Turkish authorities, resulting in deportation and subsequent death. These egregious violations expose LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people to fatal danger in settings that should provide care and protection. Türkiye must prohibit healthcare providers from disclosing patient information to authorities, implement mandatory SOGIESC-specific training for all healthcare providers, and establish clear enforceable penalties for those who violate medical confidentiality.

Recommendations for International Actors

- **Ensure human rights compliance in European Union (EU) funded detention infrastructure and establish accountability for systematic abuses.** With the EU providing substantial funding for Türkiye's removal center infrastructure, member states bear direct responsibility for preventing and addressing the severe human rights violations occurring in these facilities. The EU must establish independent monitoring mechanisms with enforcement authority, mandate thorough investigations into systematic abuses including sexual violence and torture of LGBTQI+ detainees, and suspend funding to facilities where violations persist.

- **Expand resettlement quotas and scale complementary pathways for LGBTQI+ refugees trapped in indefinite transit.** In an increasingly restrictive global migration environment where third country refugee resettlement slots have been drastically reduced, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees remain trapped in extremely dangerous conditions in Türkiye for years on end. Refugee receiving countries must increase resettlement commitments and streamline procedures for this vulnerable population. Complementary pathways such as private sponsorship, educational pathways, and labor mobility programs are urgently required.

- **Channel resources to LGBTQI+ and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and strengthen collaboration to ensure grassroots expertise informs protection responses.** LGBTQI+ and refugee-led organizations possess direct frontline expertise on community needs, yet protection funding is predominantly channeled to larger international organizations. Donors must ensure that local organizations are sufficiently resourced to lead protection solutions, while international organizations receiving funding must establish meaningful partnerships that leverage this expertise to inform their programming and advocacy.

- **Increase emergency funding and restore financial safety nets for LGBTQI+ refugees stuck in transit.** The systematic erosion of financial assistance from international donors has left LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees without means to meet basic survival needs, forcing organizations to reduce or cease vital services. International donors must increase commitments and restore comprehensive funding to enable organizations to deliver essential cash transfers, housing support, emergency medical care, and material aid to LGBTQI+ refugees awaiting resettlement.

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:

Governance and Foundational Principles

- **Center lived experience in leadership, governance, and decision-making as a foundational design principle.** To avoid replicating exclusionary systems in existing global platforms, establish formal mechanisms for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people to hold leadership positions and meaningfully drive decision-making within the network. This includes designated leadership roles for individuals with intersectional backgrounds and the creation of accountability structures such as refugee advisory groups.

- **Maintain realistic expectations about the network's capacity to influence systemic reform in hostile country contexts.** The effectiveness of international advocacy is severely constrained in contexts like Türkiye, where geopolitical interests — including the European Union's reliance on Türkiye to contain migration flows in the region — insulate the government from accountability for human rights violations. The network should set instead set realistic goals, exert targeted pressure on strategic global actors, and the network should be understood as one tool operating alongside a diversity of tactics for long term systemic change.

Strategic Coordination and Collective Advocacy

- **Build on existing local and regional coordination structures rather than duplicating efforts.** Well-established coordination structures already exist in Türkiye and other contexts. The network should leverage these strengths, provide resources to amplify effective local work, and identify where current mechanisms fall short to develop targeted responses to unmet needs. This approach avoids creating parallel structures that compete for limited resources.

- **Amplify grassroots expertise through strategic multi-stakeholder coordination.** The network must create accessible communication channels between grassroots organizations, international NGOs, UN agencies, and resettlement countries to enable cross-regional and cross-sectoral solutions. Local organizations can provide data and documentation, while international partners leverage this evidence for collective advocacy, allowing community-generated knowledge to influence high-level policy discussions.

- **Create issue-specific coordination mechanisms to facilitate transnational collaboration on shared challenges affecting LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people across multiple contexts.** The network could establish cross-border working groups or solidarity networks focused on priorities such as universal access to HIV medication, legal protection strategies in restrictive environments, or emergency response coordination. These mechanisms enable collective advocacy, resource-sharing, and increase pressure on states to fulfill their obligations.

Evidence Collection and Crisis Responsey

- **Support documentation and research where civic space constriction makes public reporting dangerous.** Where human rights defenders, RLOs and CSOs face threats and reprisals for documenting or publicly reporting rights violations, the network can function as a critical buffer, enabling data and documentation to reach international audiences without exposing local activists to retaliation.

- **Establish rapid-access emergency funding for individuals and grassroots organizations facing acute crises.** LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face sudden urgent situations including fleeing violence, eviction threats, and need for emergency legal representation. The network should aim to create low-barrier emergency funds with streamlined distribution mechanisms, channeling resources directly to frontline actors who possess the expertise to identify needs and respond immediately.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

LGBTQI+ FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN TÜRKIYE

LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in Türkiye navigate multiple overlapping systems of exclusion and danger. The following section examines the legal and political frameworks governing refugee protection, migrant detention and deportation, and LGBTQI+ rights in Türkiye, and how these intersecting systems create acute and layered dangers for those who are both LGBTQI+ and forcibly displaced.

The Migration, Asylum and Protection Landscape

Türkiye occupies a critical position in the global migration sphere, consistently serving as one of the countries with the largest number of refugees in the world. The country hosts asylum seekers and refugees of varying nationalities, primarily originating from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, and most notably Syria, with Türkiye hosting upwards of 2.3 million registered Syrians under temporary protection as of 12 March 2026.[1] This creates a complex and tense protection environment, shaped by multiple legal frameworks, and immense socio-economic and political pressures.

Türkiye has signed and ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and the affiliated 1967 Protocol, and has a national migration and asylum system in place since 2014, administered by the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM).[2] However, upon accession to the 1967 Protocol, Türkiye retained the geographical limitation from the 1951 Convention, meaning that "only those fleeing as a consequence of "events occurring in Europe" may be given Convention refugee status".[3] As such, for the overwhelming majority of persons seeking protection in Türkiye - non-Europeans originating from the Middle East, Africa, Central and South Asia - the only option available is to apply for conditional protection status, which permits temporary residence in Türkiye until resettlement to a third country.[4] Asylum seekers must register with the PMM and undergo refugee status determination (RSD) procedures conducted by Turkish authorities. If accepted, they receive conditional refugee status providing access to basic rights and temporary protection from refoulement, and may then be referred to UNHCR for third-country resettlement consideration.[5]

Syrian nationals, stateless persons, and refugees fleeing events in Syria are eligible for Temporary Protection (TP) status pursuant to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), and can access basic rights including formal employment and healthcare services.[6] However, the rights afforded under both conditional refugee and temporary protection statuses are limited compared to refugee status, and most critically, conditional refugees are not offered the prospect of long-term social and legal integration in Türkiye.[7]

Since 2022, the Turkish government has effectively halted new registrations for temporary protection of Syrians, and a growing number of refugees have become undocumented, whether through administrative cancellations, inability to maintain registration requirements, or direct obstruction of access to the asylum system.[8] Moreover in December 2024, following the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, Türkiye began implementing a large-scale voluntary repatriation program for Syrians under the "Voluntary, Safe, Dignified and Orderly Return of Syrians under Temporary Protection" framework[9], raising renewed concerns about coerced and forced removals.[10]

Detention, Deportation, and Rising Enforcement

Alongside these restrictive asylum frameworks, Türkiye's treatment of migrants and refugees has grown increasingly harsh, driven by rising anti-migrant sentiments, stricter migration policies and economic pressures. Following violent anti-refugee riots in Kayseri in July 2024, the Turkish government responded by accelerating deportations—141,000 in 2024 alone, the highest annual figure to date.[11] A vast infrastructure of 32 removal centers operates throughout the country with a formal capacity of approximately 18,780. In 2024, 350,000 individuals were reportedly held in these facilities.[12]

Investigative reporting has exposed severe and systematic human rights abuses in EU-funded removal centers, including overcrowding, physical violence, torture, and coerced signing of "voluntary return" forms.[13] The European Union has allocated substantial funding for the construction and maintenance of these removal centers—at least €213 million specifically for removal center infrastructure, with nearly €1 billion total provided to Türkiye for migration management since 2016. Investigations documented detainees held in "cold chambers" as punishment, beaten to force signa-

with Syrians and Afghans being forcibly deported to active conflict zones. European diplomats acknowledged awareness of these conditions but reported that concerns were "systematically erased" from official EU reports.[14]

LGBTQI+ Rights and Restrictions in Türkiye

Being LGBTIQ+ in Türkiye is not a crime under the existing Criminal Code. Transgender individuals have been able to legally change their gender since 1988, following completion of medical procedures and court approvals.[15] However, LGBTQI+ individuals in Türkiye face high levels of discrimination and violence, with limited state protection or legal recourse.[16] Transgender individuals, particularly transgender women, face especially acute risks of physical violence, often linked to their gender identity and involuntary involvement in sex work due to systematic discrimination in formal employment settings. LGBTQI+ rights organizations tracking hate crimes have documented numerous murders of LGBTI+ individuals, many classified as hate-motivated, with perpetrators often receiving reduced sentences when courts accept claims of "provocation" based on the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity.[17]

Despite the absence of explicit criminalization, the Turkish government has consistently utilized vaguely-worded laws on public morality and public order to restrict LGBTQI+ visibility and organizing. Pride marches, which drew over 100,000 participants in Istanbul in 2014, have been banned since 2015. Restrictions intensified when President Erdoğan declared 2025 the "Year of the Family," describing LGBTQI+ activism as "harmful trends and perverse ideologies".[18] By June 2025, the Turkish Ministry of Health issued a directive banning hormone therapy for individuals under 21, citing protection of the traditional family.[19] ILGA-Europe ranked Türkiye 47th out of 49 European countries for LGBTQI+ rights in 2025, placing the country among the bottom five.[20]

Civil society space has also constricted dramatically, with LGBTQI+ organizations operating under constant threat—in February 2025, police detained the editor-in-chief of Kaos GL, one of Türkiye's oldest LGBTQI+ rights organizations,[21] while in 2026, the Chair of the 17 May Association faced prosecution for her activism related to intersex rights.[22] Organizations like SPoD work "as though a ban is in effect," avoiding public announcement of event locations to prevent raids.[23]

Moreover, in early 2026 the Justice Ministry was reported to be working to revive legislation proposing amendments to the Turkish Civil Code and the Turkish Penal Code, which would criminalize LGBTQI+ identities and expressions.[24]

At the Intersection: Compounded Risks

Within this context of severely limited protection pathways and escalating anti-LGBTQI+ hostility, forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ persons face multiple, deeply entrenched barriers to safety and protection.

From the outset, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers face systemic exclusion within the protection system, with lawyers and human rights advocates reporting that anti-LGBTQI+ bias among immigration officials and RSD adjudicators contributes to discriminatory and arbitrary denials of asylum applications based on SOGIESC identity.[25] This discrimination extends into humanitarian and social service provision, with LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers reporting experiences of homophobic and transphobic discrimination within refugee-serving organizations, creating isolation within what should be support networks.[26]

Even for those who manage to obtain conditional refugee or temporary protection status, meaningful long-term solutions such as third country resettlement remain out of reach, with the already limited refugee resettlement slots globally shrinking even more dramatically in 2025.[27]

Without viable integration options in Türkiye nor viable pathways to safety elsewhere, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers remain trapped in transit indefinitely, while navigating daily conditions of violence and severe insecurity. Without secure legal status, forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ persons cannot access HIV treatment and gender-affirming healthcare.[28] They face systematic exclusion from formal employment due to both anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination and restrictions on work permits for those with precarious legal status.[29] Many LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees are forced into sex work, which exposes them to further violence, exploitation, and health risks.[30] Those who experience homophobic, transphobic, or xenophobic violence cannot safely seek protection from police due to well-founded fears of detention, deportation, or further mistreatment from authorities themselves.

Perhaps most severely, lack of documentation means constant risk of detention, deportation, and in some cases, death upon being returned to countries of persecution. It is reported that LGBTQI+ individuals in removal centers experience not only the general abuses documented in these facilities but also heightened risks of sexual violence, humiliation, and torture specifically related to their gender identity or sexual orientation.[31] The deportation of LGBTQI+ individuals to countries where they face persecution or death, including Syria where extremist paramilitary groups control territory and Afghanistan under Taliban rule, represents a violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*.

These complex dynamics - the gap between legal protections and lived realities, the convergence of anti-LGBTQI+ hostility with restrictive migration policies, and the absence of meaningful durable solutions - position Türkiye as a critical site for understanding the needs facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons. The expertise of those navigating this landscape provides essential insights into what a global network must do to support LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers trapped in contexts of systematic restriction and danger.

METHODOLOGY

LOCAL PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

To organize this roundtable, Rainbow Railroad partnered with SPoD (Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association), a Türkiye-based civil society organization working to advance the rights and well-being of LGBTQI+ individuals. SPoD's involvement was essential throughout the planning and implementation of this consultation, providing critical support in identifying and reaching participants, coordinating logistics, assessing security risks, and facilitating sessions. This partnership ensured the roundtable reflected diverse community experiences while remaining responsive to local conditions and safety concerns. Additional planning support came from Canadian diplomatic staff in Türkiye, who assisted in connecting with other diplomatic missions and international organizations for the second day of consultations and helped navigate the complexities of the political environment.

ROUNDTABLE STRUCTURE

The Türkiye consultation was held virtually over two days on July 21-22, 2025. Originally conceived as an in-person gathering, intensifying anti-LGBT conditions in Turkiye - including the designation of 2025 as the "Year of the Family" and the revival of legislation criminalizing LGBTQI+ advocacy and identities - necessitated a shift to a virtual format, to mitigate heightened risks of participation. While this required condensing and adapting the planned agenda, the virtual format still enabled meaningful engagement on the challenges LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face in Türkiye and on participants' vision for a global network addressing these issues.

Day 1 of the roundtable brought together LGBTQI+ civil society representatives, refugee led organizations, human rights defenders, and individuals with direct experience of forced displacement. Day 2 widened to include staff from diplomatic missions based in Türkiye, including Canada, Australia, France, Mexico, Germany, New Zealand, Finland, as well as representatives from UN agencies (UNHCR and UNFPA), and personnel from international NGOs.

All sessions offered simultaneous interpretation in English, Turkish, and Arabic to reduce language barriers.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Note: Many participants possess multiple, overlapping identities and roles, and the survey allowed participants to select multiple categories under various questions (e.g., a grassroots defender who is also a refugee and a transgender activist). These multi-category responses are reflected in the overall counts.

Data collection was conducted through optional pre and post-event surveys, provided to Day 1 participants only. It must be noted this collection method introduced variability into the findings, with some participants opting out of providing detailed information.

13 individuals attended the Day 1 roundtable, representing nationalities of Türkiye (5), Syria (5), Iraq (2), Iran (1) and Azerbaijan (1). Participants were residing in Türkiye when the consultation took place, with the exception of one participant who had been resettled to Australia. Participants represented the following gender identities: cisgender men (4), cisgender women (3), transgender

women (2), agender individuals (2), gender non-conforming (1), and genderfluid (1). The majority identified their sexual orientation as gay (8), with others describing themselves as pansexual (2), queer (2), or bisexual (1). Over half of the Day 1 participants (7) had experienced forced displacement themselves, including three with recognized refugee status, two who were internally displaced, and one asylum seeker.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The consultation prioritized participant safety and confidentiality. Given the virtual format and heightened security risks in Türkiye, specific cybersecurity protocols were implemented to protect participants. All sessions were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed to identify patterns and key themes while safeguarding the identity and sensitive information of those who contributed. Partner organizations were given opportunities to review draft materials and offer corrections or clarifications before the report was finalized.

LIMITATIONS

This consultation captured important realities but cannot claim to represent the full spectrum of LGBTQI+ forced displacement experiences in Türkiye. With just thirteen first-day participants, certain nationalities, people held in detention or living in Temporary Accommodation Center (TAC) settings, and other perspectives are absent from this account. The virtual format, while necessary for safety, made it harder to build the trust and rapport that often emerge in face-to-face gatherings. The shortened length of the sessions relative to other roundtables may have affected how much participants felt able to share and how deeply certain topics could be explored.
Most conversations occurred through interpretation from Turkish and Arabic into English, which inevitably affects the precision and cultural specificity of language, particularly when discussing experiences that may not translate neatly across linguistic contexts.

Even with these limitations, the conversations were substantive and revealing. Participants shared their knowledge and experiences with remarkable openness and generosity. We remain grateful for the time, courage, and insight everyone brought to this process.

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

The following section examines the lived realities of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in Türkiye through participant testimony from the July 2025 consultation. Participants described a range of complex protection issues, including the absence of meaningful durable solutions, institutional discrimination and impunity, pervasive violence, and systematic exclusion from essential services. These challenges compound one another, creating conditions of profound vulnerability for those seeking safety on the basis of their SOGIESC identity.

BARRIERS TO LEGAL PROTECTION IN TÜRKIYE

Access to Legal Status: Early Exclusion from the Protection System

In order to access any form of protection from refoulement—whether through Temporary Protection (TP) status for Syrian refugees or conditional refugee status for non-Europeans applying for international protection—LGBTQI+ asylum seekers or refugees must first register with Turkish immigration authorities. However participants shared that many individuals face severe obstacles in completing even this initial step, cutting them off from the protection system at its very start. Barriers include prolonged wait times and mobility restrictions, and the inability to physically access registration offices. As one example, participants explained how LGBTQI+ Syrians eligible for TP status were confined to Temporary Accommodation Centres during the entire, lengthy registration process, resulting in many abandoning the process altogether and becoming undocumented as a result. With the recent policy shift effectively halting new registrations for Temporary Protection, LGBTQI+ Syrian refugees are now cut off from accessing this protection status entirely.

Once registered, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers applying for international protection must then undergo Refugee Status Determination (RSD) proceedings to determine if they will receive conditional refugee status - a process which several participants described as arbitrary, discriminatory and unfair. It was reported that protection applications based on SOGIESC identity are routinely denied, with a refugee lawyer noting that there are "very few effective evaluations, very different decisions across the board [and] very easy decisions to deport." Another advocate shared that for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, "applications are rejected without being heard, objections to deportation decisions are not listened to, and they're not granted the right to stay." Often, the bias and differential treatment is explicit, as one lawyer observed: "When I tell [the authorities] that my client is LGBTQI, I've seen the look on the faces of the judges. I've seen how they treat my clients. I've seen how the employees of the immigration authority look at my clients. Unfortunately people get victimized and harmed because of this."

One participant emphasized how LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are also disproportionately impacted by broader systemic dysfunction within Türkiye's legal institutions, noting that "With the increasing hostility towards LGBTQI+, there are a lot of people now, migrants, who become undocumented. One of the reasons is the corrupt legal system in Türkiye. Corruption harms the most vulnerable sections of society." As a result of these factors many LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers either remain undocumented or lose their status, Moreover without any protection status, they cannot be referred to the UNHCR for resettlement - effectively barring them from the primary durable solution available to them.

Legal Status without Meaningful Protection

Participants stressed that even for those who overcome the barriers described above to obtain legal documentation, the rights and protection that come with conditional or temporary protection status are extremely restricted, often creating new dimensions of harm for LGBTQI+ refugees.
It was reported that for conditional refugees and those under temporary protection, the freedom to move inside Türkiye is strictly regulated, with individuals subject to onerous reporting conditions, and being required to reside in a location prescribed by PMM authorities, such as in a camp setting or within the province of registration. This imposes extreme hardships and severely limits access to opportunities and services for LGBTQI+ refugees. One LGBTQI+ individual under temporary protection described the challenge and mental toll of being unable to relocate from their province of residence to an urban center:

"I can't go to Istanbul—why? Because I am registered in Adana. This on its own is generating a lot of psychological pressure for me. Because I am staying in the same place, and I cannot do anything new, I cannot do anything different."

As explored in later sections of this report, in addition to curtailed mobility rights, conditional and temporary protection statuses confer only precarious access to fundamental rights such as healthcare and work permits, leaving even documented individuals unable to access essential services or meet basic survival needs.

Critically, violating any condition tied to legal status can result in detention or deportation. As such LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers must live in a constant state of insecurity, aware that their protection is both inadequate and precarious.

Indefinite Transit: The Resettlement Crisis

Without options for stable protection or safe integration in Türkiye, the primary durable solution available to LGBTQI+ refugees is third-country resettlement—either through government pathways or private refugee sponsorships. Yet resettlement presents an extremely limited option available to very few, leaving the vast majority of asylum seekers trapped in an endless cycle of waiting, while facing constant threats to survival.

A UNHCR representative described the fundamental constraints facing resettlement as a durable solution, where even the best efforts of referring organizations are limited by what receiving countries will accept: "Resettlement countries provide us quotas, some of them pretty open, others with criteria, even nationality-wise. And then amongst the refugee population in the host country, we try to identify those that can fit the criteria." The representative noted that resettlement processing involves extensive checks and requirements from receiving countries, and emphasized that even when UNHCR refers someone, "we cannot guarantee resettlement."

The situation became even more pronounced following the effective shutdown of resettlement to the United States—previously a major refugee-receiving country—in early 2025. A growing trend among other refugee-receiving countries to reduce intake compounds the crisis, with one participant observing that "recently, we see that the refugee LGBTQI+ people are resettled less."

Participants pointed to extremely long wait times and seemingly stalled resettlement processes. One stated: "UNHCR files are not progressing, not at all." Another described waiting since 2011: "I came to Türkiye, I was first accepted by UNHCR, but then my application got overturned, no reason as to why." Alternative options, such as independent private sponsorships, are not accessible and similarly protracted and uncertain: "I waited for years until I found a sponsor, and only then could I leave Türkiye. Unfortunately, the process is not easy."

Participants also expressed frustration at the lack of transparency from referring organizations about how resettlement is determined, and questioned how the unique hardships faced by LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people are considered within the process. Several participants shared that referring organizations, such as UNHCR and Rainbow Railroad, often fail to effectively communicate with applicants and update them on the status of their files, leaving individuals without any timeline or path forward. This problem is compounded by experiences of circular accountability, with participants reporting being directed between UNHCR and Turkish authorities without clarity about who is responsible for decisions.

Ultimately, these barriers leave LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people to survive for years on end without a durable solution in sight. In an increasingly restrictive global migration environment, participants underscored the urgent need for alternative protection pathways and complementary solutions to be developed and scaled.

DETENTION, DEPORTATION AND SYSTEMIC IMPUNITY

A System Without Accountability

When LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people lose legal status—or never obtain it in the first place—they face detention and/or deportation, often to countries where persecution and death await. Participants were keenly aware that the abuses that characterise Türkiye's detention and deportation system are enabled by deep-rooted dysfunction at both national and international levels, including a legal system that cannot or will not provide remedy, and geopolitical forces that insulate Türkiye from meaningful scrutiny.

Lawyers described a fundamental breakdown of the legal system and erosion of judicial independence, where even those who wish to operate within the parameters of the law are silenced and prevented from doing so:

"Just like in every other area, in the field of refugee law, prosecution is no longer functioning. There are executive orders that actually contravene the law...these directives are sent by the central government to the authorities and are put into practice. This is an arbitrary process, and there is no effective judiciary who would say no to this, who would have oversight. The judiciary is not independent in Türkiye. There are judges who would like to act according to what the law stipulates, but then they are either made outcast or they are punished."

The repressive environment constrains advocacy possibilities by silencing those who document and speak out against abuses. One person working in refugee rights for many years explained how pressure and reprisals from the state impede data-based advocacy: "There IS data on violations. There is data on police violence and what happens in removal centres. However, these are only internally reported, not shared publicly. [There] is a threat to civil society organizations who monitor the process [in] public. Even lawyers, when they share something in public, are being threatened by authorities. It has a bad implication for activists, for CSOs [and] for the individuals in question."

Türkiye is further insulated from accountability for rights violations by regional and geopolitical forces. Multiple participants highlighted that removal centers are almost entirely funded by the European Union and international organizations—funding which is driven by the widespread erosion of the right to asylum, restrictive border policies, and anti-migrant sentiment across Europe. As stated by one participant: "There is a lack of pressure on Türkiye, and one of the most important reasons is that Türkiye is right now the gatekeeper of the European Union. That's the role of the country. So what they call the 'crisis', [or] the 'refugee issue'—it's like a threat to Europe. The EU says: 'Just keep the migrants [in Türkiye], the rest is irrelevant.'"

One participant shared that despite reporting about detention conditions and rights violations to the EU, they received no response or follow-up, likely because of the political negotiation in the background. Another articulated the sense of futility when seeking accountability at global platforms: "International organizations like the European Union or the United Nations will not listen to us. We can't do any advocacy activities at those platforms. We see that internationally-speaking, there is a lot of racism and people are against migrants all over the world. That's an international issue."

Detention, Deportation and Abuse

While being processed by authorities for removal to their countries of origin, LGBTQI+ migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are commonly detained in removal centers plagued by severe overcrowding, violence and abuse. One participant from an LGBTQI+ solidarity organization described a facility designed for approximately 100 people that was holding close to 1,000, with individuals transferred from other cities and concentrated in the same center.

The conditions inside are harsh, with widespread reports of psychological and physical violence, ill-treatment, horrendous living conditions and long-term, indefinite detentions. "Hygiene is absent. People are kept there for months, despite the fact they don't need to be kept there," said one participant. "And no alternatives are discussed for them." Participants additionally shared that for LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees, "the removal centres are places [where] people fear sexual harassment."

From these detention centers, LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants from all nationalities are being forced to return to countries of persecution, due to rejected asylum applications, lack of documentation and practices of arbitrary removal by Turkish authorities. Participants shared the example of a trans woman who was deported for practicing sex work, and several instances of removal on the basis of positive HIV status. The regional context makes deportation particularly dangerous, as many of the countries surrounding Türkiye—such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Georgia—have laws against LGBTQI+ people, creating a geography where safe return is impossible.

LGBTQI+ Syrians: Forced Removal Under the Guise of Voluntary Return

While deportations affect all nationalities, multiple participants highlighted that the situation for LGBTQI+ Syrians has intensified dramatically since approximately December 2024, when the Turkish government began implement-

ing the mass voluntary return program for Syrians under Temporary Protection. In practice, participants reported that LGBTQI+ Syrians are being coerced into signing voluntary removal forms, despite ongoing, severe risks to their lives.

One LGBTQI+ service provider described how removal centers are being rapidly expanded in their city, with people from multiple cities all being pooled in one massive facility. The participant further shared that this is part of the government's operation to systematically and forcibly deport Syrian refugees: "The removal centre [in my city] is huge...and we have been informed they are going to build an even bigger one. We understand they are going to send the people in the other removal centers back to Syria, making them fill out forms of voluntary return. And thereby they will eliminate the people at these centres."

Oftentimes, the speed of deportation also outpaces any possibility of external intervention. An LGBTQI+ participant with TP status noted that neither "an organization nor the lawyers" could help his friends in repatriation centers. "They just arrest that refugee and he's deported to Syria," they said. "He was killed in Syria by his own family and the toppled regime there." Tragically, participants emphasized, such outcomes are not isolated incidents within the community.

Others shared the complex situation of LGBTQI+ individuals who may be forced to return to Syria alongside family members, without being able to disclose their SOGIESC identity or the risks they face. As a representative from UNHCR explained, "in the return process, we've seen situations where the head of household decides to go back, but there are some members of the family who are LGBTI+, without the others knowing about it," requiring a delicate, and careful approach to any potential interventions.

While recognizing the severe and devastating impact of the Syrian voluntary returns program in recent years, participants stressed that protection concerns for all LGBTQI+ refugees in Türkiye "are continuing and not disappearing." As such, sustained focus and funding must address the ongoing needs of those trapped in indefinite transit, unable to live safely or integrate in Türkiye, and unable to return to Syria or any other country of origin.

VIOLENCE AND LACK OF SAFETY

An Environment of Hostility

Access to healthcare is determined by migration status, Roundtable participants universally identified violence and insecurity as defining features of daily life for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people in Türkiye fueled in large part by widespread homophobia and transphobia, entrenched at societal and institutional leave in Türkiye. As stated clearly by a transgender participant with lived experience, Türkiye is "a country that is really dangerous for LGBTI+ people." Another legal service provider participant confirmed that "Türkiye unfortunately cannot provide safe conditions for neither its own citizens nor LBGTQI+ citizens."

For many, possessing legal documentation does not translate to safety. One participant shared how, despite having TP status in Türkiye, their visible LGBTQI+ identity places them at distinct risk: "I was exposed to problems because of the way I look, the way I speak, the way I move. I look a bit different from the people in Türkiye. They cannot accept that a person has long hair with some earrings, or something a bit different than what they are accustomed to. For me, for the LGBTQI+ community, Türkiye is not a safe place at all." The added dimension of migrant identity adds to this risk, with a service provider explaining that, "In general for refugees - not only LGBTQI+ refugees - when they become too visible, they become the target of violence in one way or another."

Participants observed that existing conditions have intensified in recent years, driven by growing anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and hate speech around the world, and in particular from the United States. These regressive global trends manifest as "increased hostility towards LGBTQI+ individuals [in Türkiye]", with participants underscoring the need for heightened vigilance and "careful protection" of this community.

No Recourse or State Protection

Participants shared numerous accounts of witnessing or directly experiencing violence, from harassment in public spaces, to attacks occurring while attempting to meet basic survival needs. However it was consistently reported that LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants cannot safely seek protection from this violence, as attempts to report abuse often

result in detention, deportation, or further mistreatment. A legal service provider explained the impossible situation: "Let's say a client is assaulted, and wants legal counsel. I cannot really direct them to go to the police because I know that they will be discriminated [against], there will be xenophobia, racism. And although they are victims, they could be taken under administrative jurisdiction." Another individual from a refugee-led organization described how some refugees face abuse even seeking counseling services, and are left without recourse: "[They] are harassed, or abused, or being assaulted, even raped. They go to the police, and the police just make fun of them or they deport them."

In one particularly brutal account, a LGBTQI + participant under Temporary Protection described being assaulted by eight people inside a public gas station, where they were hit on the head and sustained serious injuries. Despite reporting the incident to the police with clear video evidence of the attack, no action followed: "I went to the hospital. I have issued a report of the incident, and I have also issued a report of harassment. Until this moment the police have done nothing about it."

These experiences underscore a systemic pattern where LGBTQI+ refugees face violence from multiple directions—community members, perpetrators who act with impunity, and the very authorities who should provide protection. The intersection of anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination and xenophobia creates a system in which seeking help from state institutions itself becomes a source of danger, leaving LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people to face these profoundly unsafe conditions alone.

DENIAL OF HEALTHCARE AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Participants identified widespread barriers to accessing essential services of all kinds, including legal aid, psychological support, employment services, housing assistance, and healthcare. This section focuses primarily on the pressing healthcare-specific barriers identified by participants, while recognizing they operate within a broader system of exclusion from services.

Legal Status, Language Barriers and Gaps in Care

Access to healthcare is determined by migration status, with participants sharing that registered asylum seekers, conditional refugees and those under temporary protection are each afforded a different scope of rights, often with complex and shifting conditions. One representative from an international organization explained that, "Access to health is not automatic for persons registering as international protection applicants. It is inactivated after one year, it can be reactivated under some conditions." It was noted that while those with TP status should theoretically have access to healthcare, they still face substantial barriers compounded by the fact that many refugees do not speak Turkish, which "creates a big gap in terms of services."

The difficulty in accessing gender-affirming healthcare was also highlighted as a major issue, further exacerbated by lack of documentation. As shared by a participant from an international organization operating in Türkiye: "I think trans friends are experiencing a lot of barriers in accessing trans-specific healthcare, and this is also linked to legal protection. They are facing administrative sanctions, or lack of access to registration, which is why they're not able to access HIV medication, or consultations at hospitals, or hormone therapy."

Mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) are almost entirely absent, despite the pressing needs that exist within the community. "We lose a lot of friends due to suicides and self-harm. And there is almost no program in Türkiye supporting people when it comes to MHPSS, especially LGBTQI+ people." Participants emphasized that mental health services are desperately needed to address the impacts of trauma, displacement, and social isolation within the community.

Severe Discrimination in Healthcare Settings

Participants shared experiences of widespread, institutionalized discrimination within healthcare provision, operating at the intersection of LGBTQI+ identity, health status, and nationality. A trans individual with lived experience described the overt nature of these occurrences: "I am HIV [positive]. I found it very difficult at hospitals. I can't receive the treatment. Doctors, or employees and staff of hospitals treated me in a terrible way [because] I am an LGBTI+ individual and I have HIV and I am a refugee." Due to the severity of discrimination, this person shared that they could only access medication with the help of an intermediary organization.

Participants also reported difficulties obtaining appointments and stressful experiences of excessive, invasive questioning by medical professionals, particularly when HIV status becomes apparent. Many avoid seeking medical care entirely due to past experiences of mistreatment.

In the absence of systematic, reliable healthcare access, LGBTQI+ refugees are left to find their own solutions, such as relying on sympathetic individual providers. An activist from a refugee-led organization described the precarity created by such stopgap measures: "There were people who had HIV status who cannot find safe healthcare organizations or safe doctors...We tried to find safe spaces—we found a professor of medicine who tried to solve our problems, but when that professor isn't there, then who will take over? How will they provide medication to these people?'"

HIV Treatment: Policy Barriers and Treatment Disruption

The inability to access HIV care emerged as an especially critical issue, with participants noting that existing services are inadequate to meet needs within the LGBTQI+ community: "We've had many people who were living with HIV and lost their lives in our country. They're not migrants only, they're usually trans women, from the LGBTQI+ community. So migrants and refugees have a very challenging situation here in terms of health care and treatment."

Participants pointed to a specific policy barrier preventing access to treatment and care, whereby in order to qualify for free HIV treatment from the government, individuals must either reside in Türkiye for at least six months, or they must establish that they contracted HIV in Türkiye. Participants shared how this creates dangerous gaps in treatment and care, with individuals being forced to wait for six months before resuming treatment, or others having to travel back to countries of persecution to access medication. Another participant, a forcibly displaced person living with HIV further explained how housing instability prevented them from registering their address with Turkish authorities, resulting in the deactivation of their ID and health insurance, which blocked access to free treatment. As a result of these combined barriers LGBTQI+ refugees described being unable to afford vital medication, interruptions to treatment and constant uncertainty about continued access—issues which are life-threatening for many.

Breach of Confidentiality Leading to Death

Several participants reported deeply disturbing incidents where healthcare providers unlawfully disclosed the positive HIV status of refugee community members to Turkish police, as a result of which those individuals were detained, and sometimes deported. In one specific case, despite efforts from local and international organizations to intervene on his behalf with Turkish authorities, an HIV positive individual was deported to Syria and subsequently killed by his family. This form of gross professional misconduct in healthcare is not isolated, and rather reflects a broader disregard for confidentiality obligations to the LGBTQI+ patients: "We had a big deal of difficulties about the hospital processes with our [beneficiaries]," said one participant. "Yesterday, we heard that some people, their information was disclosed in the hospital. They were given over to the police just because they were HIV positive. They were deported. One of these friends was killed after being deported."

Such egregious violations and senseless loss of life has deep, ongoing reverberations within the community. One LGBTQI+ participant under temporary protection shared their profound pain and sorrow after their housemate was sent back to Syria and killed:

"He was my closest friend. We had been together in the same house. He is not just my friend, he is my friend from the LGBTQI+ community."

The realities shared by roundtable participants underscore just how precarious the lives of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people are in Türkiye, where healthcare settings—intended to provide care and protection—instead become sites of fear, exposing individuals to detention, deportation, and even death.

ECONOMIC INSECURITY, LIVELIHOODS, AND SURVIVAL

Barriers to Legal Employment and Erosion of Financial Safety Nets

Due to legal status barriers—the inability to obtain or maintain documentation as outlined in previous sections—many LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers cannot secure work permits and have no legal right to work, severely limiting income generation opportunities. One participant, an inter-

national protection applicant, shared that after excelling at work with the same organization for three years, he was forced to leave because of status barriers: "I have lost my job, there was no work permit. I had very strong criteria. But because I was a foreigner I had to leave employment."

Participants also reported being refused work and facing "huge pressures" as a result of layered discrimination based on SOGIESC identity and migration status. Trans refugees and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable, with one participant sharing "I suffered a great deal at work from being trans."

The broader socioeconomic conditions in Türkiye deepen individual precarity, with some noting that the economic crisis in Türkiye has created an already restrictive labor market, made worse for LGBTQI+ refugees who may be unable to even afford public transportation to access potential job sites.

With limited access to livelihood opportunities, financial support from local and international refugee-serving organizations acts as a critical lifeline for asylum seekers. As stated by one forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ participant: "We've heard that many people from the LGBTQI+ community, especially trans people, were denied the chance to work. And the financial aid that they were receiving was vital for them." However, in recent months and years, this support has been systematically eroded. Severe funding cuts from major international donors have critically reduced the capacity of humanitarian organizations globally, and within Türkiye to meet growing needs.

One representative shared that in the wake of this crisis, UNHCR attempted to mitigate the impact of lost funding by maintaining key services such as legal aid and psychosocial support and prioritizing the most vulnerable people, including LGBTQI+ individuals, for ongoing assistance. However, it was acknowledged that the loss of cash-based and material assistance has left many "in a terrible and dire situation," unable to meet basic needs.

While waiting indefinitely for resettlement, the financial void is deeply felt. An applicant for international protection shared their experience: "Currently I have applied for a third country in Canada. This has been for over 6 months. Canada was identified as a host country, but nobody is helping me financially. My financial status is terrible. One of my friends said we used to receive a salary from the United Nations, but this has been cut."

Survival Strategies and Compounding Harm

Without access to legal employment or financial support, LGBTQI+ refugees must work in informal sectors with no protections, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Participants described being forced into exhausting, low-paid, and insecure work far below their qualifications, with no recourse when abused or underpaid. Others resort to high-risk survival strategies to meet basic needs like housing. As an LGBTQI+ individual awaiting resettlement shared: "I live with a person. I practice sex with him, just because I want a shelter. I have said this to everyone, but no one listens to me." Another participant awaiting third country resettlement described the severe emotional toll and sense of desperation they feel as a result of these conditions: "Living here, there is a pressure, psychological pressure. Everything is difficult, and I can't find a solution. I am trying, trying, trying, and I always find that I am on my own. I don't have a source of income, I don't have anything. And I am threatened with killing here in Türkiye. Please, I need a solution."

INADEQUATE COMMUNITY SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Community Networks Under Strain

Participants consistently pointed to the integral role of strong community networks and CSOs in shaping outcomes for LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees in Türkiye. In the absence of effective government support systems, CSOs bear primary responsibility for serving refugees and migrants in Türkiye, filling critical gaps. Participants emphasized that solidarity networks provide essential infrastructure for accessing basic rights and navigating daily challenges from obtaining HIV tests, to transferring utility bills, to addressing legal issues.

But in spite of this vital role, it was noted that there are few organizations that create spaces for LGBTQI+ refugees, and those that do struggle with sustainability and capacity. Moreover, forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people often face exclusion on all sides, as one participant described: "Refugees and migrants are isolated in their own communities because they're LGBTQI+ [and] in their LGBTQI+ communities, they are ostracized because they're refugees and migrants." Participants also noted that a root cause hinder-

ing access to rights and services is the lack of refugee-led, LGBTQI+ organizations, informed by community members with lived expertise on how to tackle these uniquely layered challenges.

Even where services are available, participants stated that they often fail to address the urgent material and medical needs that people actually face. In the context of health service delivery, one participant noted that "the majority [of organizations], distribute pamphlets, or condoms, or health awareness material," but provide no substantive help when needed. Sharing the experience of a friend and refugee from Iran who required HIV medication, a participant noted how "he communicated with so many NGOs, no one helped. Even when they helped, they helped with only one pack of medicine. This is dangerous. We need to make [LGBTQI+ refugees] feel secure, safe, and that their cause is important."

The disconnect between what is needed by communities on the ground and how institutions respond also extends to the global sphere, with one LGBTQI+ activist noting that increased communication and collaboration is required between more resourced international organizations and local grassroots actors to ensure that protection solutions are relevant and reflective of community needs.

Systemic Barriers Preventing Effective Support

Local CSOs and RLOs operate under severe constraints, including "limited funds and constricted spaces," as well as the challenges inherent to working under a "heterosexist regime", hostile to LGBTQI+ rights, freedom of expression, and any form of dissent.

This repressive environment limits the effectiveness of CSO advocacy and creates a chilling effect for engagement. One participant from an LGBTQI+ solidarity organization reported that when their organization attempted to bring legal cases to challenge rights violations, some community members were too afraid to continue participating, as they were concerned that the organization's positions could put them at risk. The participant shared that meetings that once had ten people now have only three or four in attendance. Funding structures also undermine service delivery in concrete ways, with participants describing how bar associations receiving international funding to serve refugees may not deliver services when funding is delayed, resulting in major gaps for LGBTQI+ refugees. As documented earlier in this report, LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face human rights violations through detention, deportation, and forced repatriation, and the legal protection mechanisms that should defend against these violations are themselves underfunded and fragile. A representative from an international organization stressed that targeted resourcing for such critical service sectors is therefore vital: "It's very important to try to advocate for organizations that are supporting the legal protection aspects of what people are experiencing, such as legal aid bureaus, or LGBTQI+ commissions under the bar associations. People are trying to carry out great projects but they need sustainability."

Finally, participants underscored the importance of recognizing frontline expertise and channeling resources directly towards local, community-based organizations to deliver services: "When we talk about protection funding, linking it to solidarity, I think it should be community-based protection funding, and we should be empowering communities rather than organizations."

PART 2: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A GLOBAL NETWORK ON LGBTQI+ FORCED DISPLACEMENT

In response to the systemic barriers documented in Part 1, participants articulated recommendations for establishing a global network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement. The following section captures their vision for a multi-stakeholder platform designed to build solidarity across borders, amplify marginalized voices, and coordinate responses to protection gaps. Participants emphasized that such a network must be grounded in principles of collective support and mutual aid, led by those with lived experience, and realistic about what it can achieve within hostile political contexts. Above all, the network must remain accountable to the individuals and communities whose safety and survival depend on its effectiveness.

NETWORK PURPOSE AND CORE PRICIPLES

Solidarity as Foundation

On both days of the roundtable, participants pointed to the lack of effective local, national, and international solidarity networks, emphasizing that this should be the primary role of the new global network. Particularly in a context where systemic failures are pervasive and existing systems often harm LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people, collective support across borders emerges as a survival necessity. As one participant emphasized: "I think solidarity is very important, especially where the existing system works to harm the group. Solidarity saves lives."

When grappling with the question, "What does true solidarity look like?" participants described it as being grounded in principles of collectivity and mutual support, guided by the goal of helping people in urgent need. At its core, participants recommended that the global network should strive to be a platform for taking concrete, tangible actions towards solidarity with affected communities, across issues and borders.

Realism About Scope and Limitations

While recognizing the need to build global coordination and support for LGBTQI+ refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, participants consistently cautioned against overestimating what the proposed global network can achieve, particularly regarding systemic reform in Türkiye. Multiple participants expressed deep skepticism about the effectiveness of international advocacy platforms in shifting domestic conditions, particularly in hostile and repressive country contexts. For many participants, the geopolitical realities discussed in Part 1, including Türkiye's role as Europe's gatekeeper, the lack of international pressure and widespread anti-migrant sentiment shape what is possible for this network to accomplish. Participants emphasized that "all the problems... are structural issues that affect LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants even more. And I don't think that we can solve these issues in the short-term because the international community will not get involved in the situation in Türkiye."

This assessment shaped how participants understood the appropriate scope of a global network. Rather than positioning it as a primary driver of structural reform, participants emphasized that it should be understood as one tool among many, operating alongside legal strategies, humanitarian support, and resettlement pathways. Fundamentally, participants recommended that the network be guided by the effectiveness of its interventions, and be honest about what it can and cannot accomplish.

Centering Lived Experience

The identified limitations in existing global advocacy platforms raised another critical question for collective discussion: What could this network do differently to avoid replicating existing systems and platforms? In response, participants all emphasized that from the outset, the centering of lived experience must be a core intention—actualized in how the network operates, governs itself, and determines priorities. A service provider from a humanitarian organization stressed that this requires "directly and organically including people who are forcibly displaced into this network," noting that directly affected communities are most often excluded from these spaces. "This is usually what is lacking in terms of bringing people together," they said. "Usually it's international organizations, NGOs, etc, coming together."

One participant with lived experience expressed that "the network should work among people who are vulnerable" and always remains grounded in the severity of their daily realities: "We have to remember that people are not in a safe space in Türkiye. They cannot even enjoy their basic rights and freedoms. We should always remember that." Only by remaining grounded in these realities can the network avoid replicating the disconnection between grassroots expertise and organizational responses that participants identified as a critical failure in existing systems.

MEMBERSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE

Formal Mechanisms for Lived Experience in Leadership and Decision-Making

Participants emphasized that in order for the network to actualize its aspirations of improving protection solutions, the platform must have leadership positions for LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people themselves. Participants highlighted the need to consider compounded vulnerabilities documented in Part 1. As one participant stated: "if such a network is achieved, it would be good to have a queer person with multiple intersectional backgrounds leading the network."

Beyond leadership opportunities, participants stressed that the network must implement concrete mechanisms to allow for the meaningful participation of LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people in decision-making. It was suggested that the network draw on formal mechanisms such as "advisory groups, or some other agile groups, that would be meaningfully integrated into that network, which will provide the space for those who are directly impacted to provide first-hand information regarding how the policies should look, and how they should respond to [their] day-to-day needs."

Multi-Stakeholder Participation: Opportunities and Tensions

Participants recognized that the network's strength lies partly in its multi-stakeholder composition, bringing together diverse actors who can engage strategically on different fronts. Communication channels between and across stakeholders—grassroots organizations, international NGOs, UN agencies, resettlement countries—create opportunities for cross-sectoral solutions and strengthen collective responses. Participants provided concrete examples of how multi-stakeholder coordination can amplify grassroots expertise to benefit affected communities, with one participant exploring how local organizations with access to frontline data could provide this evidence directly to an organization like Rainbow Railroad, to support advocacy efforts with resettlement countries.

Another highlighted that an accessible international platform could enable direct communication between grassroots actors and international decision-makers with actual authority, rather than limiting advocacy to country-level offices. Using the 2018 decision to cut cash assistance as an example, they noted that key decisions were made at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, and that having a structured channel to share evidence and community impact data directly with those decision-makers could allow for more strategic and effective advocacy.

Alongside these opportunities, participants identified significant tensions inherent in multi-stakeholder engagement. As directly relevant in the context of Türkiye, the question of how to work collaboratively with hostile governments emerged as particularly challenging. As one participant raised: "In Türkiye, we have a government that's basically against all LGBTQI+ people. So it's very difficult when you're talking about advocacy for LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants. So how can we turn this into a discussion? I believe in the short-term it's not possible to discuss this [or] even bring this up." This also raises critical safety considerations: engaging with hostile actors could expose network members, particularly those with lived experience or operating in repressive contexts, to surveillance, retaliation, or harm.

Still, it was recognized that governments' central policy-making and decision-making role makes their involvement critical. Navigating this tension, between the need to engage powerful actors who shape people's lives and the risk of those actors co-opting or undermining community-centered priorities, will require careful attention to governance structures and accountability mechanisms that participants emphasized in the network's core principles. This remains a live question that will need ongoing collective discussion and careful thought and consideration as the network evolves in the next few years.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL COORDINATION

Mechanisms for Multi-Directional Information Flow

For the network to work effectively and as a truly global platform, it must establish structures for the flow of information in all directions: from global platforms down to regional and country levels, and from local realities up to international decision-making spaces.

Participants emphasized that establishing continuous and accessible communication channels is essential to ensure that people with lived experience—whether formally part of the network or not—can feed information into decision-making processes: "There should be a continuous line for communication where there's reporting about the issues that the refugees face."

Participants shared that in Türkiye, there are already some well-established local and regional coordination structures within the protection sector, which are focused on forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ refugees. However, the effectiveness of their work is limited by a lack of global coordination or information-sharing platforms, and as such once operational, "it would be important for this network to have everything trickle down to regional and country-levels" so that they can leverage existing strengths, better support local protection needs, and "create pressure from the ground up." Participants also emphasized that the network should build on and complement existing local and regional coordination structures, rather than replicate them, and help identify responses to urgent situations when existing mechanisms fall short.

Issue-specific coordination

Participants proposed that the network could establish internal coordination on cross-cutting issues affecting LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people globally, as one way to operationalize regional and global collaboration.
One participant shared the novel idea of starting a cross-border network focused on health, to support access to medication and care through international solidarity when domestic systems fail them.

"Establishing a global, trans-national and multilateral health solidarity network is crucial. For example, I haven't had access to HIV treatment in Türkiye for a long time, and I rely on friends abroad to get my medication. I may be relatively privileged because I have personal networks, but this is not the case for everyone. That's why we need a sustainable and inclusive health network that goes beyond 'emergency' support and includes all migrants and refugees who lack access to HIV care."

Importantly, participants emphasized that creating alternative support systems must not become an excuse for states to abdicate their responsibilities. As the same participant noted: "At the same time, we must not ignore the structural problems within Türkiye and should increase pressure on the state to ensure the right to health."

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES OF THE NETWORK

Participants identified concrete functions the network can serve, grounded in the challenges LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face in Türkiye while recognizing that similar barriers exist across regions. The recommended activities below emerged from the specific Turkish context—where systemic gaps, hostile environments, and stalled protection create acute needs—but are reflective of broader patterns that network activities could address globally.

Direct Support and Crisis Response

In contexts where local organizations are under-resourced, operating under repression, or unable to respond quickly, the network could provide emergency assistance to individuals facing immediate crises and fill existing gaps. As one participant with lived experience described: "I'd like this network to help the very emergency cases, the same way when I fled my home, my family's home, and I communicated to all the NGOs in Istanbul, none of them helped me at all."

Participants proposed that the network could establish mechanisms for rapid-access funds to support people in urgent situations, such as when someone must flee violence, needs emergency legal representation, or faces eviction. As one participant noted: "small funds could be created quickly. And they may be very instrumental in individual cases." This reflects a broader need across contexts where LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people face sudden crises but existing systems cannot respond with the speed or flexibility required.

Research, Documentation and Visibility

Participants expressed that the network could serve a critical role in generating data, which could then be leveraged for a range of different goals. "We have very little literature when it comes to queer people who are forcibly displaced," said one service provider. "Trying to use research as a tool within that network...especially where we have gaps" could help "encourage donors to fund research." They highlighted the need for research that feeds into policy and service provision, creating connections between evidence, advocacy, and practice.

Participants also suggested that the network could help fill capacity gaps by supporting documentation and reporting work that local organizations often lack the resources or safety to undertake: "I think it would be good to also to talk about how the network could support NGOs, CSOs, or local initiatives which are led by or supporting LGBTQI+ people in reporting human rights violations. We don't have research...but we also don't have NGOs and CSOs [with] the financial capacity to carry out such work. And without such human rights reporting, it's really problematic."

Documentation and data collection emerged as particularly important in Türkiye, where civic space constriction makes public reporting dangerous. As outlined in Section 1, human rights defenders and advocates in Türkiye often face threats and reprisals from state authorities, which impedes the use of data for advocacy. Participants stated that the network could function as a form of buffer, enabling data and documentation generated by frontline actors to reach international audiences without exposing local activists to retaliation. As a social worker participant explained: "I believe international networks may be helpful in terms of creating visibility: reporting, documentation...most reports are internal reports, and they don't even have visibility in Türkiye. And there are some dangers surrounding making them visible. But if there's an international network, it may be helpful in that sense."

A Platform for Sharing Best Practices and Capacity Building

Participants emphasized the value of sharing strategies and tactics between contexts, sharing how peer-to-peer exchange already happens informally at the local level, and strengthens both service provision and frontline workers' resilience - models which could be adopted by the global network. Beyond information sharing, participants identified that the network could support specific capacity-building needs, including training on strategic litigation for lawyers working in restrictive environments, sensitization to reduce discrimination from health professionals, and building skills among bar associations and legal advocates who serve LGBTQI+ communities.

STRATEGIC ADVOCACY

While maintaining realistic expectations about the network's ability to shift domestic conditions in places like Türkiye, participants identified strategic advocacy priorities where coordinated international action might make a difference.

Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

Resettlement emerged as a core protection challenge requiring urgent network attention. Participants identified that the network could work collectively to push for more resettlement slots, advocate for complementary pathways beyond traditional resettlement, and pressure receiving countries to open new pathways.
It was highlighted that local organizations often lack reliable information on alternative and complementary pathways, underscoring the need for the network to support information-sharing: "It's important to have the network help local contexts in terms of having accurate information when it comes to referral pathways. Because in Türkiye... people may not know that much information when it comes to alternative pathways."

In tandem, participants stressed that the network must remain responsive to the realities of extended resettlement timelines:"I think we should be advocating for more funding or sustainable funding for socioeconomic empowerment because people will stay in Türkiye for a while until they're either resettled or they find alternative pathways."

Beyond resettlement, individuals identified two additional advocacy priorities as core focuses for the network: health-related advocacy—including efforts to ensure comprehensive HIV treatment access regardless of nationality or how infection occurred—and donor advocacy to ensure sustainable funding for legal protection mechanisms, such as legal aid bureaus and bar association LGBTQI+ commissions.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The recommendations captured in this consultation reflect participants' understanding of both the urgent challenges facing LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced persons in Türkiye and the coordinated responses needed to address them. Participants articulated a vision for a network grounded in solidarity as a survival necessity, built on realistic expectations about what international advocacy can achieve in hostile political contexts, and structured to ensure LGBTQI+ forcibly displaced people drive decision-making rather than being excluded from it.

Implementing these recommendations demands sustained commitment, adequate resourcing, and political will to transform vision into concrete action. As participants reminded us throughout the consultation, this work must always remain grounded in the realities of those trapped in Türkiye without durable solutions, facing violence and navigating systems designed to contain rather than protect them. The path forward requires honesty about what can be accomplished, strategic focus on filling gaps that existing mechanisms cannot address, and unwavering accountability to the communities whose safety and survival depend on the network's effectiveness.

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