

# **DATA, DIRECTIONS, GAPS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF LITERATURE ON QUEER FORCED DISPLACEMENT**

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## About Rainbow Railroad

Rainbow Railroad is a global not-for-profit organization that helps at-risk LGBTQI+ people get to safety worldwide. Based in the United States and Canada, we're an organization that helps LGBTQI+ people facing persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. As a result of Rainbow Railroad, more LGBTQI+ individuals can access lives free from persecution, and ultimately, we envision a world where LGBTQI+ people can live lives of their choosing, free from persecution. Since our founding, we've helped over 20,000 LGBTQI+ individuals find safety through emergency relocation, crisis response, cash assistance, and other forms of assistance.

## About the QFDI

The **Queer Forced Displacement Initiative** (QFDI) is a project to co-create an international network on LGBTQI+ forced displacement — a critically needed long-term platform to coordinate efforts to advance protection and solutions for LGBTQI+ people in forced displacement.

The network will adopt a multi-stakeholder approach — engaging people with lived experience, grassroots LGBTQI+ organizations, academics, international organizations, and key government stakeholders — to collaborate on improving access to protection and durable solutions for forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals and communities. In addition to generating lasting research and policy recommendations, the QFDI will provide a forum for relevant actors to proactively mobilize response efforts at the early onset of crises that affect LGBTQI+ communities.

As part of its wider multistakeholder approach, the network aims to center the experiences, expertise, and participation of people who are directly impacted by forced displacement, and to build on the critical work already being spearheaded by LGBTQI+ leaders, human rights defenders, and civil society organizations locally and regionally.

Ultimately, the QFDI aims to build a sustainable, coordinated global response to LGBTQI+ forced displacement, grounded in the broader movements for queer liberation and migrant justice around the world.

## About the Author

Nora Noralla is a prominent researcher and consultant in the field of human rights. Her expertise encompasses the domains of sexual and bodily freedoms, as well as the complex intersection of Sharia law and human rights in Muslim-majority countries, with a particular emphasis on the Middle East and North Africa region. She currently serves as the executive director at the Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute and is pursuing her PhD at the University of Bern, where she is investigating the lived experiences of transgender individuals in Egypt. Noralla has authored a significant number of scholarly papers, analyses, and reports, including "Gender Trouble in the Land of the Nile: Transgender Identities, the Judiciary, and Islam in Egypt" and "The MENA Trans Archives Series: Understanding the Judicial Directions and Practices on Legal Gender Recognition in Middle Eastern and North African Case Law."

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# Glossary

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ASYLUM SEEKER	An individual who has sought international protection and is currently awaiting a determination regarding their refugee status.
CHOSEN FAMILIES	Informal networks established by queer displaced persons that provide critical emotional, psychological, and practical support, often in response to rejection from their biological families.
CONTINUUM OF PERSECUTION	The pervasive and multifaceted nature of persecution in countries of origin that compels individuals to flee. This includes systemic violence, criminalization of SOGIESC identities, economic precarity, and increased vulnerabilities during periods of conflict.
CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENTS	The process through which asylum authorities evaluate the veracity of an applicant's claims. In the context of queer displacement, these assessments are frequently flawed, relying on stereotypical "coming out" narratives and Western-centric expectations.
FORCED DISPLACEMENT	The involuntary relocation of individuals from their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events that critically disrupt public order. In the reviewed literature, this term is almost exclusively employed to describe asylum-seeking.
HOMONATIONALISM	A theoretical framework wherein Western states, while portraying themselves as progressive and "gay havens," may utilize this façade to rationalize restrictive immigration policies and reinforce biases by selectively admitting queer individuals who conform to Western norms.
HOST COUNTRY	A nation that receives and provides refuge to displaced individuals. The report highlights a research focus on Western host countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.
IDPs (INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS)	Individuals who have been compelled to flee their homes for reasons similar to those affecting refugees but remain within the borders of their own country.
IN-TRANSIT COUNTRY	A nation that displaced individuals traverse on their journey to a final destination. These locations are often temporary while awaiting further movement, with Turkey and Lebanon identified as significant in-transit hubs.

INTERSECTIONALITY/ INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION	The compounded discrimination experienced by individuals at the intersection of their SOGIESC identities and other identifiers such as race, ethnicity, and religion.
LGBTQI+	An acronym representing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex individuals. The '+' denotes the inclusion of other sexual and gender diverse identities. The report employs "queer," "SOGIESC," and "LGBTQ+" interchangeably.
PSG (PARTICULAR SOCIAL GROUP)	A category under the 1951 Refugee Convention utilized as a basis for asylum claims. The recognition of SOGIESC as a valid ground for asylum has primarily occurred through the interpretation of "membership in a particular social group.
QUEER-BLIND	An individual who has crossed an international border to escape persecution, conflict, or violence.
REFUGEE	An individual who has crossed an international border to escape persecution, conflict, or violence.
SOGIESC	An acronym for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics. It is employed to describe the grounds upon which queer individuals experience persecution. The report uses "queer," "SOGIESC," and "LGBTQ+" interchangeably.
SOURCE COUNTRY	The country of origin from which a forcibly displaced person has fled. The report identifies nations such as Syria, Uganda, Iran, Afghanistan, and Nigeria as frequently cited source countries.
SOUTH-TO-SOUTH DISPLACEMENT	The movement of displaced individuals from one country in the Global South to another. The report observes that while this represents the majority of global displacement, it is underrepresented in the research literature in favor of "South-to-North" narratives.
UNHCR (UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES)	The UN agency tasked with protecting refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless individuals, as well as assisting in their voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to a third country.

# Executive Summary

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This report presents a comprehensive mixed-methods approach to reviewing literature, incorporating both qualitative elements of a scoping review and quantitative aspects of a meta-analysis concerning queer forced displacement. It offers critical insights into the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and other sexual and gender diverse (LGBTQI+) individuals who are compelled to leave their homes due to persecution. The study synthesizes findings from 275 academic and grey literature sources, identifying salient themes, quantitative trends, and significant gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

**Methodology and Key Quantitative Findings:** This review utilized an innovative methodological framework that integrates elements of meta-analysis and scoping reviews to evaluate the current landscape of research on queer forced displacement over a period of five years from 2019 to 2024. The principal quantitative findings are as follows:

- **Expanding Field:** The volume of scholarly publications addressing queer forced displacement has shown a consistent upward trajectory over the past five years, with over 50 publications per year in the last two years, reflecting a growing scholarly interest in the topic.
- **Empirical Emphasis:** Approximately 64% of the studies reviewed employed empirical data, with a predominant focus on qualitative methodologies (150 studies). This prevalence underscores the appropriateness of qualitative approaches for exploring intricate personal narratives. In contrast, quantitative studies are limited (14 studies), highlighting the difficulties associated with gathering large-scale numerical data within this population.
- **Demographic Concentration:** The majority of the research primarily concentrates on cisgender queer men, followed by cisgender queer women, with increasing attention to transgender individuals. Yet, identities such as intersex, non-binary, and asexual individuals remain significantly under-researched.

- **Geographic Concentration (Host Countries):** The research exhibits a pronounced concentration in Western host countries, particularly the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany. This is in stark contrast to global displacement statistics, which indicate that most displaced individuals are hosted in the Global South (e.g., Iran, Türkiye, Colombia). This suggests a potential bias towards “South to North” displacement narratives, while substantial “South to South” movements are neglected.
- **Geographic Concentration (Source Countries):** Source countries are closely aligned with regions experiencing significant conflict and persecution, frequently citing Syria, Uganda, Iran, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. This underscores the severe legal and social challenges faced by LGBTQI+ individuals that contribute to their displacement.
- **Displacement Journey Stages:** The literature predominantly focuses on the “settling” phase (arrival in the destination country, often associated with awaiting or having received asylum) with 128 studies examining this stage. The “in-transit” experiences are addressed in 27 studies, while “pre-journey” (7 studies) and “post-settling” (14 studies) phases are notably underrepresented, indicating an overemphasis on the legal asylum process within Western contexts.

**Thematic Analysis: Five Principal Themes:** The report delineates five recurring themes that encapsulate the experiences of queer forcibly displaced individuals:

- **The Continuum of Persecution as the Driver of Flight:** This theme elucidates the pervasive and multifaceted nature of persecution in countries of origin, encompassing systemic violence (physical, sexual, and murder), the criminalization of SOGIESC identities, economic precarity stemming from discrimination, and heightened vulnerabilities amid conflict and crisis.
- **Systemic Failures in the Asylum and Legal Processes:** Asylum systems frequently perpetuate

marginalization through flawed credibility assessments (which require stereotypical “coming out” narratives), prolonged and re-traumatizing procedures, unsafe detention conditions, and legal barriers arising from inconsistent recognition of SOGIESC grounds.

- **The Pervasive Impact of Intersectional Discrimination:** Queer displaced individuals encounter compounded discrimination at the intersection of their SOGIESC identities with race, ethnicity, and religion. Racial bias within asylum systems, religious and cultural conflicts, and marginalization within host country communities—including mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces—compound their challenges.
- **Inadequate Services and Gaps in Humanitarian Response:** Mainstream humanitarian and social service systems largely fail to address the acute needs of queer displaced individuals due to a lack of SOGIESC-specific competency. This includes “queer-blind” mainstream programs, insufficient training for UNHCR personnel, barriers to healthcare access, and systemic obstacles in obtaining legal aid, housing, and employment.
- **Resilience, Agency, and the Centrality of Informal Networks:** Despite systemic failures, queer forcibly displaced individuals exhibit considerable resilience. They establish “chosen families,” rely on grassroots LGBTQI+-led organizations (which often face under-resourcing), utilize digital media for support and information, and navigate complex identity negotiations while pursuing integration within host communities.

#### **Key Recommendations Emerging from the Literature:**

The report offers actionable recommendations across four domains:

- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Procedures:** Advocating for the explicit recognition of gender expression and sex characteristics as valid grounds for asylum, implementing trauma-informed credibility assessments, reducing reliance on detention, and expediting processing times.
- **Enhancing Service Provision and Access:** Mandating SOGIESC-specific training for all relevant personnel, establishing safe and affirming housing, improving access to tailored healthcare, and developing dignified employment pathways.
- **Supporting and Empowering Community-Led**

**Initiatives:** Ensuring sustained funding for grassroots LGBTQI+-led organizations and formally incorporating their expertise into broader humanitarian responses.

- **Improving Data Collection and Research:** Implementing systematic and disaggregated data collection on SOGIESC populations and investing in future research focused on long-term integration, specific sub-groups, and the effectiveness of interventions.

#### **Main Gaps and Future Recommendations for Research:**

The report identifies critical gaps and provides detailed recommendations for future research:

- **Methodological Gaps:** Calls for comprehensive quantitative mapping, increased participatory research, longitudinal studies encompassing the entire displacement journey, and the development of new frameworks that transcend the definition of “forced displacement” as solely asylum-seeking.
- **Thematic Gaps:** Recommends nuanced investigations into the drivers of displacement (e.g., climate change), specific legal vulnerabilities (such as those faced by intersex individuals), experiences within non-traditional contexts (urban refugee settings in the Global South), post-resettlement dynamics, the roles of diverse actors, and the impacts of anti-rights movements and right-wing governments.
- **Demographic Gaps:** Emphasizes the necessity for research on under-represented SOGIESC identities (intersex, asexual, non-binary, bisexual men/women), age-specific experiences (children, youth, elderly individuals), practical applications of intersectionality, and the experiences of queer Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those displaced through non-asylum pathways (activists in exile, students).
- **Geographic Gaps:** Advocates for a decolonization of the research lens, prioritizing studies conducted in countries of origin and diverse transit points, as well as increasing investigations into “South-to-South” and “North-to-North” displacement dynamics, to achieve a more comprehensive global understanding.

# Introduction

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Forced displacement represents a significant humanitarian crisis in contemporary society, affecting millions globally. The phenomenon of global forced displacement has surged to unprecedented levels, with tens of millions of individuals compelled to vacate their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events that severely disrupt public order. By the close of 2023, an alarming 122.6 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, a statistic that highlights a deepening international crisis (UNHCR 2024a). This population encompasses various groups, each defined by distinct legal criteria: refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people (IDPs), among others. The most recent comprehensive data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) illustrates the magnitude of this global challenge. The total number of refugees defined as individuals who fled their countries to escape persecution, conflict, or violence, reached 43.4 million by the end of 2023 (UNHCR 2024b). This figure includes 37.6 million refugees and others in need of international protection, as well as 5.8 million Palestine refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (UNHCR 2024b). In addition to the refugee population, millions of asylum seekers—individuals who have sought international protection and are awaiting a decision on their refugee status—were recorded, with the global number standing at 6.9 million by the end of 2023 (UNHCR 2024a). However, the largest segment of the forcibly displaced population remains IDPs, defined as individuals forced to flee their homes for reasons akin to those faced by refugees but who remain within their own national borders. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported 75.9 million IDPs at the end of 2023, the highest number ever documented, with significant new displacements occurring due to conflicts in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Palestine (IDMC 2024). By mid-2024, the estimated number of IDPs had risen to 72.1 million, although this figure from UNHCR reflects changes only in the 36 countries where it operates and likely represents an underestimation (UNHCR 2024a).

Within this expansive context, the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and other sexual and gender diverse (LGBTQI+) individuals represent a crucial yet often overlooked aspect. These individuals are

compelled to abandon their homes due to persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC). They embark on perilous journeys and confront systemic barriers that are frequently exacerbated by intersecting vulnerabilities. This review synthesizes findings from a comprehensive array of academic and grey literature to provide a nuanced understanding of queer forced displacement, encompassing its root causes, the intricate challenges associated with asylum processes, and the complexities of integration within host countries.

The motivations for forced displacement among LGBTQI+ individuals are rooted in severe and multifaceted persecution. In numerous nations, consensual same-sex relationships or specific gender expressions are criminalized, with penalties that may include imprisonment or even death (Venturi 2023; Papadopoulos, Castro Romero, and Semlyen 2024). In addition to legal hostility, these individuals encounter pervasive violence, including physical and sexual assault, threats, extortion, and murder, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, including family members, community groups, and armed entities (Nilsson et al. 202; Pincok 2021; Espinosa et al. 2024). This violence is often intensified by socio-economic exclusion, compelling individuals to adopt precarious survival strategies (Canal Laiton 2024; Golembe et al. 2021; França 2023). Though there is no concrete data on the number of individuals experiencing forced displacement due to their SOGIESC, some countries, such as the UK, have published reports on asylum claims based on sexual orientation. In 2022, 2% of all asylum claims in the UK (1,334 claims) included sexual orientation as part of their basis. The number of claims based on sexual orientation nearly doubled in 2022 (an 89% increase) compared to 2021, but remained 26% lower than in 2019. However, such reporting is not common and cannot be representative of the total claims based on SOGIESC or specifically sexual orientation.

In seeking international protection, LGBTQI+ individuals confront asylum systems that, despite evolving legal frameworks, often fail to adequately meet their needs. The recognition of SOGIESC as a basis for asylum is a relatively recent advancement in international refugee law. Historically, the 1951 Refugee Convention did not explicitly include SOGIESC as a ground for persecution, and it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that states began to formally acknowl-

edge it. This evolution has primarily occurred through the interpretation of “membership in a particular social group” (PSG) as defined in the Convention. Notable developments in this legal evolution include the pivotal role of the UNHCR in advocating for SOGIESC recognition through their landmark Guideline 9 on “Refugee Claims Relating to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.” Despite these significant legal advancements, the practical application of these laws remains profoundly challenging. Asylum interviews are often protracted and intrusive, demanding intimate details and linear “coming out” narratives that frequently conflict with diverse cultural experiences and the realities of trauma (Badali 2019; Vogler and Rosales 2023; Ferreira 2022). Decision-makers often rely on Western, heteronormative stereotypes, resulting in disbelief and rejection of claims that do not conform to these frameworks (Verhaeghe, Jacobs, and Maryns 2023; Selim et al. 2025). This issue is compounded by the phenomenon of homonationalism, wherein Western states, while ostensibly progressive, may inadvertently reinforce biases by selectively including certain “deserving” queer subjects, often neglecting racialized or less conforming identities (Karimi 2020a; Rodriguez 2019).

Beyond the formal asylum process, the journey to safety is characterized by substantial mental health burdens arising from cumulative trauma and ongoing stressors such as prolonged legal limbo, unsafe detention conditions, and housing insecurity (MicroRainbow 2024; Fox, Griffin, and Pachankis 2020; Tschalaer 2022). Access to adequate services remains severely limited, with significant gaps in SOGIESC-sensitive legal, medical, and psychosocial support, often due to a lack of trained professionals, stigma, and fear of disclosure (Venturi 2023 Schröder 2025). Detention and accommodation facilities frequently lack safety, leading to abuse, misgendering, and re-traumatization (Heidari et al. 2024; Quinan, Theewis, and Cienfuegos 2019; Dustin and Held 2021).

This review aims to systematically map and analyze these critical dimensions of queer forced displacement. By synthesizing existing knowledge, it seeks to identify key thematic areas, pinpoint existing gaps in research, and offer actionable recommendations to enhance legal protections, improve service provision, and ultimately foster more humane and equitable outcomes for LGBTQI+ individuals compelled to seek safety away from their homes.

It is important to note that throughout this study, the researcher will use the terms “queer,” “SOGIESC,” and “LGBTQI+” interchangeably to describe individuals who are forcibly displaced due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics. It is important to acknowledge that the term “queer” possesses significant fluidity, as it can encompass all members of the LGBTQI+ community or may be specifically referenced in relation to sexualities such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the context in which the term is employed in order to fully understand its intended meaning, as the literature also utilizes the term “queer” interchangeably in various instances. It is also important to note, as will be further discussed in the methodology section, that while the term “queer forced displacement” was intended to encompass various forms of displacement—including internal displacement, living in exile, and asylum seeking—limitations within the existing literature, which primarily focuses on asylum seeking as the sole form of queer forced displacement, necessitated a more narrow approach. Consequently, the review predominantly addresses the experiences of queer individuals seeking asylum.

# Methodology

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The current analysis is situated within a well-established body of literature that reviews issues related to queer forced displacement. Previous scholarship has laid the groundwork for this research by examining the topic from various perspectives. Among these contributions are systematic reviews addressing health and safety concerns (Yarwood et al., 2022), regional analyses focused on health outcomes such as HIV (Tinatin and Kasianczuk 2019), critiques of prevailing research trends (García Rodríguez, 2023), and evaluations of overarching data requirements (Williams Institute, 2022).

This study expands the scope of review through a new methodological approach that incorporates both meta-analysis and scoping review elements to analyze the issue of queer forced displacement from multiple intersectional layers, with the aim of synthesizing the most recent academic and non-academic (grey) literature on the topic. Through this analysis, the study will synthesize key findings from relevant studies, quantify available data where possible, and identify research gaps to guide future investigations on this issue. Therefore, the primary research question is: What is the current state of research on queer forced displacement? From this question, the analytical model was established to focus on identifying certain areas that can be quantified into statistical results, including: the volume of studies published per year in the past five years; the most and least studied regions and countries; the various stages of forced displacement; the percentage of studies focusing on empirical data; and which populations under the LGBTQ+ umbrella receive the most focus in the literature. While these quantitative data were extracted for this study, the initial focus also included an analysis of the methods of entry into a host or in-transit country, whether formal or irregular. However, it became apparent during the review that most literature does not investigate this specific area, leading to its removal due to a lack of data. In addition to the synthesis of quantitative data, the study also employed qualitative thematic analysis of the key themes explored in the literature, which will be discussed in detail in the following section. Key themes include credibility assessments, race, culture and religion, mental health, services, formal and informal support networks, among others.

Furthermore, in addition to the analytical model developed for this study, a data collection model was also estab-

lished, focusing on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

## **Inclusion Criteria:**

1. Research focused primarily on the forced displacement experiences of individuals identifying as queer, whether using Western terms such as LGBTQI+ or local terms such as Khawaja Sira or Fa'afafine.
2. Research published within the last five years (2019-2024) to ensure that synthesized findings are as up-to-date as possible.
3. Research employing any methodological framework, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, or innovative approaches that may not align with traditional academic structures.
4. Research discussing one or all stages of forced displacement: internal displacement, home country, in-transit, and resettlement.
5. All types of research are considered, including peer-reviewed literature and grey literature with full-text availability.

## **Exclusion Criteria:**

1. Research that only partially focuses on queer displacement, including studies that involve LGBTQI+ individuals as part of a larger sample when examining issues affecting asylum seekers presents challenges. The findings and results may be conflated with those of non-queer asylum seekers, complicating the understanding of which outcomes specifically pertain to the experiences of queer individuals facing forced displacement..
2. Research older than five years i.e. research published before 2019 and not published in English.
3. Materials lacking research methodology, such as short-format essays, media articles, and op-eds.
4. Research that does not comply with the stated inclusion criteria; systematic reviews, literature reviews, meta-analyses, and scoping reviews will not be included.

At the beginning of the study, the term “forced displacement” was intended to be used fluidly to capture forced displacement beyond seeking asylum, including individuals who are internally displaced, those who choose exile but reach host countries through means other than asylum, and those temporarily displaced due to environmental disasters. However, as the data collection phase commenced, it became apparent that while some studies do use the term “forced displacement,” it is almost exclusively employed to describe asylum-seeking as the singular method of forced displacement, with very few studies expanding that definition to include IDPs in relation to queer forced displacement. Consequently, despite the researcher’s best efforts, the majority of the literature findings pertained solely to queer individuals seeking asylum.

For data collection, various key terms were employed to search for relevant literature, which were combined to ensure that all studies meeting the inclusion criteria could be identified. These key terms included:

IDENTITY	FORCED DISPLACEMENT	REFUGEE	ASYLUM	RESETTLEMENT	INTERNALLY DISPLACED
QUEER	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
TRANSGENDER	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LESBIAN	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
INTERSEX	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GENDER IDENTITY	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BISEXUAL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
LGBTQ	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The platforms utilized for collecting academic literature included Scopus, Google Scholar, and PubMed, while grey literature was sourced from SOGICA, ReliefWeb, and Refworld. The primary challenge encountered when collecting grey literature was the lack of a unified database for all research publications from non-academic outlets, necessitating visits to the websites of international organizations to further search for publications that met the inclusion criteria. After data collection was completed and organized using Zotero, the analytical phase commenced, during which a

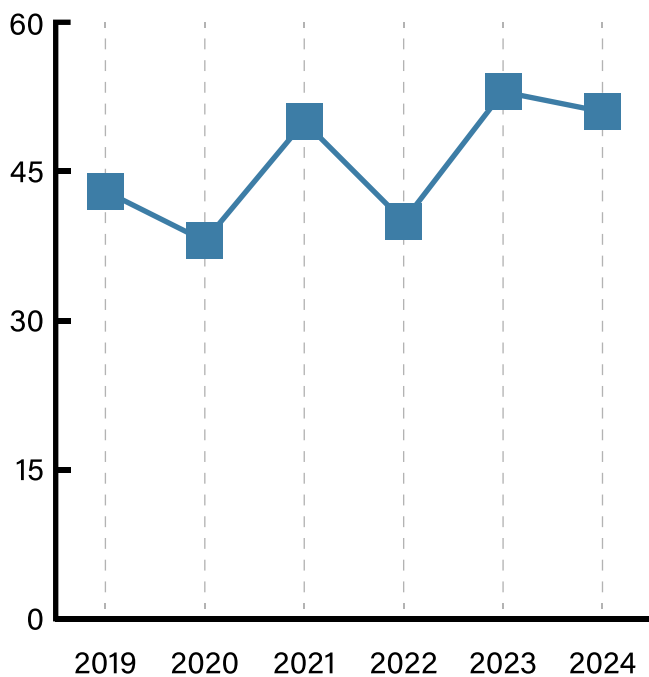
further review of literature was conducted to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria. The analysis was performed using Excel and Python, with quantitative data undergoing additional manual review to ensure accuracy.

The following section will discuss the quantitative data gathered from the literature for this study, which totals 275 research outputs, including 213 academic works and 62 pieces of grey literature.

# Analysis of Quantitative Data

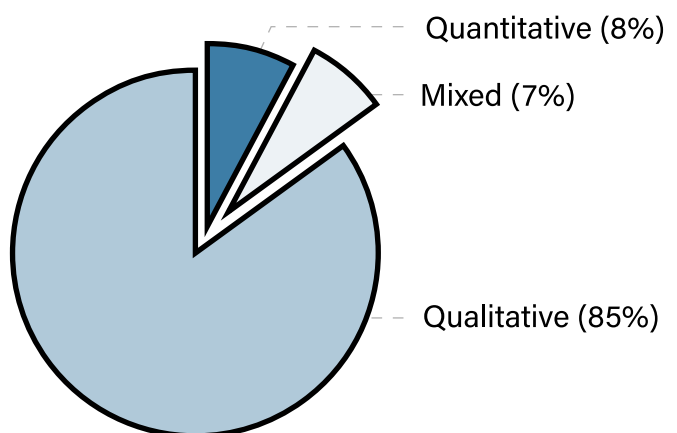
Queer forced displacement studies has been gradually establishing itself as an emerging interdisciplinary distinct field within migration and refugee studies. As it continues to develop, the number of publications has been steadily growing, as illustrated in Figure 1. Over the past two years, the number of publications has consistently exceeded 50, indicating a burgeoning interest in this area, which still presents numerous gaps to be addressed. An important consideration for researchers seeking an academic home for their future inquiries into this topic is the identification of journals that have been most prolific in publishing relevant studies. The top ten journals in this field are as follows: Journal of Refugee Studies; Ethnic and Racial Studies; Sexuality & Culture; Sexualities; Journal of Lesbian Studies; International Migration; Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling; and Refugee Survey Quarterly.

Figure 1: Publication Per Year



The evaluation of the field has been significantly enhanced by the introduction of new empirical data that captures the unique experiences of queer individuals facing forced displacement globally. Of the 275 studies reviewed, approximately 64% relied on empirical data, the majority of which is qualitative (see Figure 2). The sustained prominence of qualitative research (150 studies) underscores its appropriateness for exploring the complex and often sensitive experiences of queer individuals who are forcibly displaced. A substantial portion of the literature, approximately 36% or 98 studies focuses on foundational and policy-oriented work, contributing to both theoretical understanding and legal analysis, while also comprising a significant body of research aimed at informing policy and practice. Conversely, the underutilization of quantitative methods is evident, as the comparatively low number of purely quantitative studies (14) reflects an ongoing challenge in gathering large-scale, generalizable numerical data for this population, likely due to their marginalized and often concealed status. Overall, the interdisciplinary nature of the field is affirmed by the diversity of methods employed, indicating that queer forced displacement is a complex area of study that draws from various academic disciplines to address its multifaceted challenges.

Figure 2: Empirical Data Methods (N=177)



Upon closer examination of the empirical data, specific information can be extracted that elucidates current focal points within the field, including demographics and identities. The studies that explicitly identify the demographic focus number 187, encompassing those that, while theoretical, address the legal realities faced by particular populations, such as transgender individuals seeking asylum in the United States. While this analysis primarily focuses on which identities within the LGBTQ+ umbrella have received the most scholarly attention, it is important to acknowledge that numerous studies also emphasize intersectional identities through their demographic analyses.

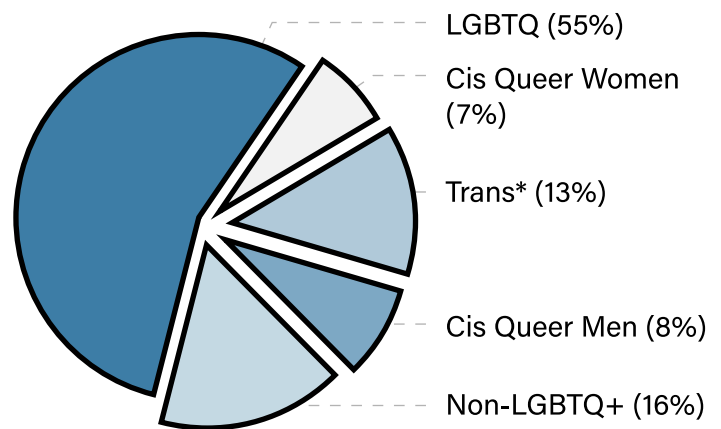
In addition to sexual orientation and gender identity, characteristics such as HIV status, a history of torture, and engagement in sex work are prominent markers often highlighted due to their intersection with increased vulnerability and racial and ethnic disparities; therefore, there are intersectional vulnerability markers introduced in the studies. However, there is a focus on 'LGB' and 'trans' identities, resulting in certain gaps in the representation of identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. The majority of studies providing detailed breakdowns of SOGIESC predominantly center on the experiences of cisgender LB men, followed by cisgender LB women, and increasingly, transgender women and men in the literature reviewed between 2019 and 2024. Other identities, such as intersex, non-binary, or asexual individuals, are less frequently disaggregated or specifically researched. It is crucial to note that the legal grounds for applying for asylum based on gender identity differ from those based on sexual orientation. While it varies by country, the literature distinguishes between credibility assessment and the evidence required when evaluating requests based on gender identity as opposed to those based on sexual orientation. This distinction is particularly significant given that the legal basis for acquiring asylum solely on the grounds of gender identity is a relatively new concept in several major host communities in the United States. Historically, gender identity was often conflated with sexual orientation in the review of LGBTQI+ asylum-seeking cases.

Consequently, studies addressing LGBTQ+ issues generally focus primarily on cisgender queer men and, to a lesser extent, cisgender queer women. This explains why, although statistically more studies focused on transgender individuals (N=24) than on cisgender queer women only (N=14), or cisgender men only (N=15), cisgender queer women and men are more represented in broader LGBTQ+ studies (N=103). A challenge in collecting data on identities from the literature arises when studies use the term "trans" as a catch-all for all transgender individuals, neglecting the nuances of differing experiences among transgender women, transgender men, non-binary individuals, and other groups under the transgender umbrella. Nonetheless, this issue remains a significant concern in research on queer forced displacement, as the data indicates a heavy dominance of cisgender

queer men's experiences.

In addition to the demographics within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, a limited number of studies (N=30) primarily focus on two groups: those organizing for the rights of queer forcibly displaced individuals, including volunteers, lawyers, and activists in NGOs and INGOs dedicated to queer forced displacement, and, to a lesser extent, a second group that highlights individuals managing the asylum systems, including caseworkers.

**Figure 3: Identities Per Publication (N=187)**



An examination of host countries reveals that 163 studies explicitly identified the country context relevant to host and in-transit nations. This review, limited to English-language literature, illustrates the dominance of Western countries among the top ten, with the following rankings: United States (22), United Kingdom (15), Germany (14), Canada (11), Greece (9), Italy (8), Sweden (7), Turkey (7), France (6), and Lebanon (5). Notably, all countries in the top ten are Western, with the exceptions of Turkey and Lebanon, which serve as significant in-transit hubs, particularly for Syrian refugees. As will be discussed later, Syrian refugees constitute the predominant group when analyzing the source countries of forcibly displaced queer individuals.

Few studies have addressed IDPs in the context of queer forced displacement, with examples such as one study from Pakistan investigating the forced mobility of Khawaja Sira sex workers as a form of IDP (Bano 2024). Another study focused on Lebanese queer IDPs resulting from recent Israeli attacks in southern Lebanon in 2024 (Diab 2024).

However, the literature's emphasis on host and in-transit countries does not align with international figures regarding the countries hosting the most forcibly displaced individuals. The top five countries hosting such populations are as follows: Islamic Republic of Iran (3.8 million), Türkiye (3.1 million), Colombia (2.8 million), Germany (2.7 million), and

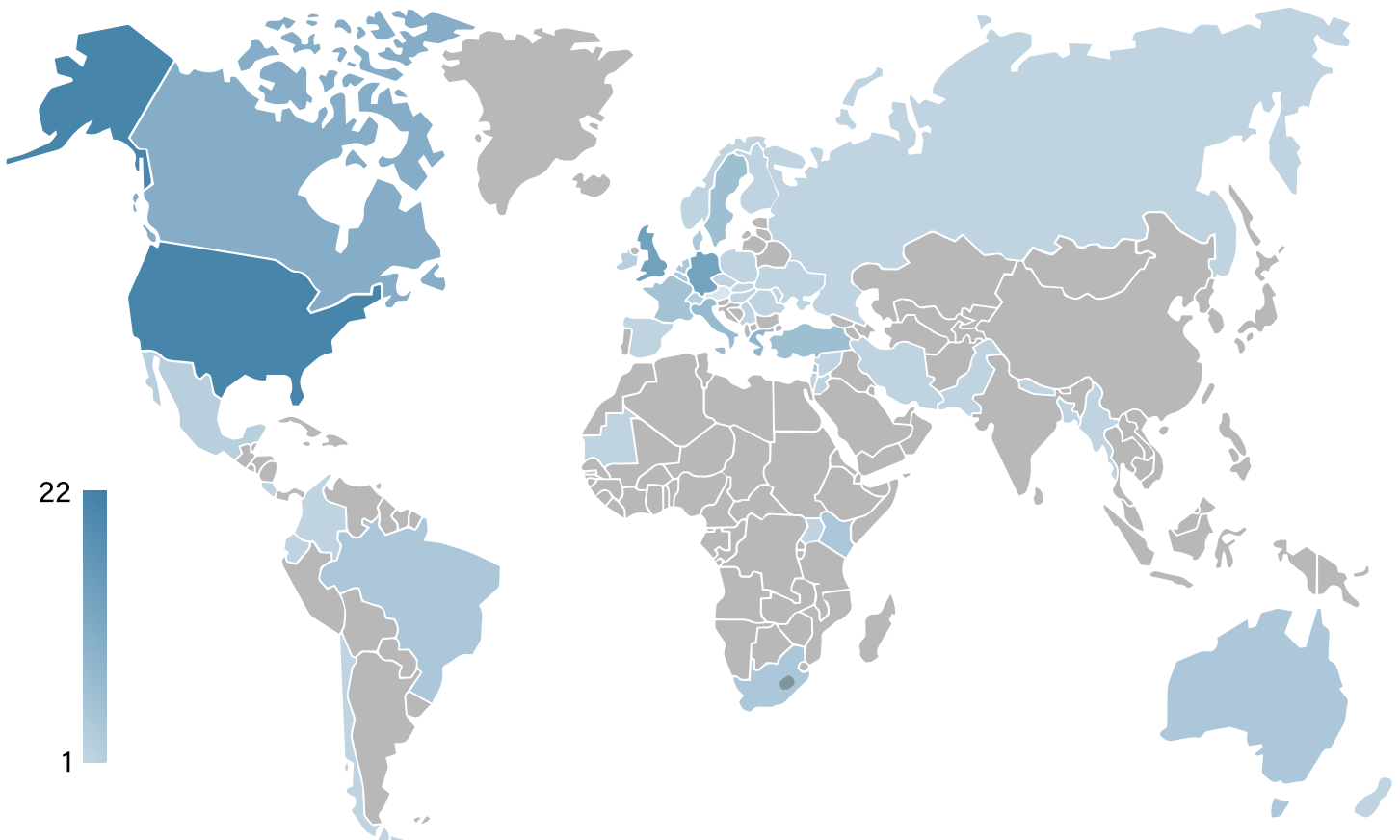
Uganda (1.7 million) (UNHCR 2025). Additionally, several countries experience significant issues related to IDPs, with major hubs including Syria, Sudan, Ukraine, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Myanmar, all currently grappling with armed conflict, whether involving external powers or civil war.

Thus, as illustrated in the accompanying heat map, the emphasis on host countries does not accurately reflect the actual locations of forcibly displaced individuals. Research is predominantly concentrated in major traditional Western asylum-receiving nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, indicating that these are the primary sites of investigation for the studies reviewed. This concentration perpetuates the misleading narrative that the majority of forced displacement occurs from South to North, rather than the more accurate representation of South to South, which better reflects global forced displacement figures.

The lack of focus on South-South displacement may stem from the challenges associated with conducting research in major IDP or transit countries such as Sudan or Iran; nonetheless, this represents a significant gap in the discourse surrounding narratives of forced displacement. While some

studies have addressed South-South displacement, considerable attention is directed towards key refugee-hosting and transit countries, particularly Kenya, Lebanon, and Turkey, which highlight the challenges faced by queer individuals in these immediate host environments. Other studies have also investigated understudied contexts within South-South forced displacement, such as Brazil (Su 2023; Andrade 2018). Nevertheless, while Kenya, Lebanon, and Turkey emerge as significant research locations, there may be other crucial transit countries or initial host environments that receive insufficient academic attention. The analysis primarily emphasizes the “end points” of displacement or major transit hubs, potentially neglecting the experiences and challenges encountered along less-documented routes. Additionally, some studies adopt a European-wide perspective, with the European Union frequently cited as a collective study location, suggesting a broader regional scope within Europe. The following heat map illustrates the distribution of countries based on their frequency of mention in the literature:

**Figure 4: Host and In-Transit Countries**



When examining the source countries of individuals who are forcibly displaced (excluding IDPs residing within the host and in-transit countries previously mentioned), the latest figures from the UNHCR indicate that 65%, or nearly two-thirds, of all refugees under UNHCR's mandate, as well as other individuals in need of international protection, originate from only four countries: the Syrian Arab Republic (6.3 million), Venezuela (6.2 million), Ukraine (6.1 million), and Afghanistan (6.1 million). The literature identifies 152 source countries of queer forcibly displaced individuals distributed across the globe. Numerous studies have engaged participants from various countries and regions, with the most frequently cited countries including Syria (33), Uganda (28), Iran (20), Lebanon (19), Afghanistan (18), Russia (21), Pakistan (17), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (14), Egypt (13), Nigeria (23), Tunisia (12), Iraq (23), and Morocco (12). In addition to individual countries, some studies have focused on broader regions or specific geographical identifications, such as the Middle East and North Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, various African nations, and post-Soviet states. It is important to note that the combined heat map presented herein for the countries' most frequently identified as sources of queer forced displacement did not have the option to include specific regions within these countries, which have been discussed as independent contexts, such as Kurdistan in Iraq, Tibet in China, and Chechnya in Russia (Dhoest 2020).

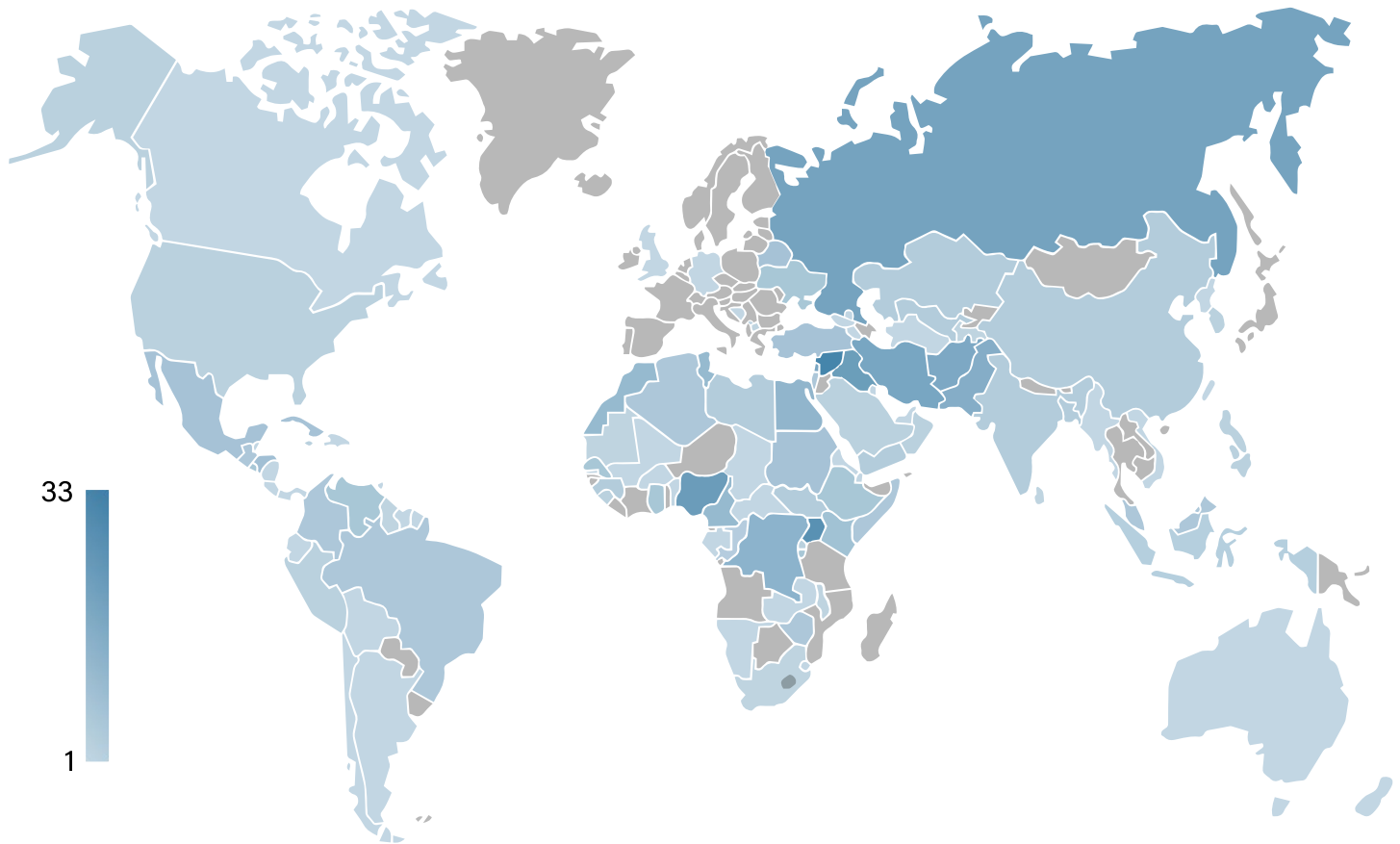
Unsurprisingly, the largest representation originates from countries within the Middle East and North Africa, a region characterized by significant instability due to ongoing crises, including the Syrian civil war, which concluded in 2025. This region is also marked by severe anti-LGBTQ+ legal and social environments, including the criminalization of LGBTQ+ identities. In certain countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, homosexuality is punishable by death. In addition to the Middle East, other notable source countries include Afghanistan, which has historically been a major origin for forcibly displaced individuals and presents a particularly hostile environment for LGBTQ+ individuals, worsened since the Taliban's takeover in 2023, and Uganda, which is experiencing a growing anti-LGBTQ+ climate, typified by the introduction of the anti-homosexuality bill. The DRC, while primarily recognized as a source country for IDPs, has long faced instability due to internal conflict; LGBTQ+ individuals, who often encounter multiple forms of violence, may opt to leave rather than navigate the IDP process, which is not designed to ensure their safety.

Thus, the source countries emphasized in the literature are consistent and provide a fairly accurate representation of the situation, as indicated by global data on forced displacement, in contrast to the lists of host and in-transit countries. This analysis highlights concentrations in conflict and persecution zones, with the most frequently mentioned countries experiencing significant conflict (e.g., Syria, Iraq)

or known for severe anti-LGBTQI+ legislation and societal persecution (e.g., Nigeria, Uganda, Iran, Pakistan). However, notable gaps remain regarding major source countries for forced displacement, such as Ukraine and Venezuela, which are mentioned fewer than eight times each. There is also a significant representation of Central and South American, as well as Caribbean countries, indicating forced displacement due to violence from gangs, familial pressures, and societal discrimination, even in nations without explicit criminalization of SOGIESC. Furthermore, in the context of post-Soviet states, Russia and other former Soviet bloc countries are mentioned, indicative of state-sponsored homophobia and social discrimination.

Therefore, while certain concentrations exist, the overall diversity of countries of origin emphasizes that queer forced displacement is a global phenomenon, not confined to a limited number of specific regions. There has been a limited number of studies addressing forced displacement based on SOGIESC that occurs through unconventional migration pathways, such as North-North immigration. In these instances, individuals who identify as queer may opt to relocate abroad due to the challenges associated with being openly queer in their countries of origin. Relevant research includes the examination of queer South Koreans migrating to Australia or Europe, where their sexual orientation significantly influences their decisions regarding immigration (Gilbert 2022), as well as the movement of American, Canadian and Australian individuals to European nations such as Iceland (Sólveigar- og Guðmundsdóttir 2024). The following heat map illustrates the distribution of countries based on their frequency of mention in the literature:

Figure 5: Countries of Origin



The final area examined in this review from a quantitative perspective is the force-displacement journey stages. To facilitate this analysis, the researcher established four primary categories to group the various stages discussed in the literature:

- 1. Pre-journey:** This category encompasses literature that explores the circumstances preceding the forced displacement of individuals, including the context that compelled them to leave and the preparations made prior to their movement.
- 2. In-transit:** This category pertains to literature focusing on transit hubs, where participants explicitly indicated that they view their current host countries as temporary solutions while awaiting further movement toward their final destination.
- 3. Settling:** This category denotes individuals who have relocated to their final destination and are in the process of settling. This includes those applying for asylum, awaiting a decision, or having recently received a decision and now preparing to establish a life in the host country. In the few studies addressing

IDPs, these individuals were classified under “settling,” as they have already relocated and are temporarily establishing themselves in their final internal destination.

- 4. Post-settling:** This category is reserved for literature discussing the experiences of queer individuals after they have established a new life in the host country. It examines how they managed to build that life and the challenges they faced after receiving their refugee status. This phase typically commences following the recognition of an individual’s asylum status by the relevant authorities, at which point they obtain legal residency. This status enables them to progress in their lives and pursue employment, education, and other opportunities. The duration for recognition by authorities varies significantly by country, as indicated in the literature. Consequently, this phase may begin for some individuals as soon as one year after their asylum application, while for others, it may take up to five years or more.

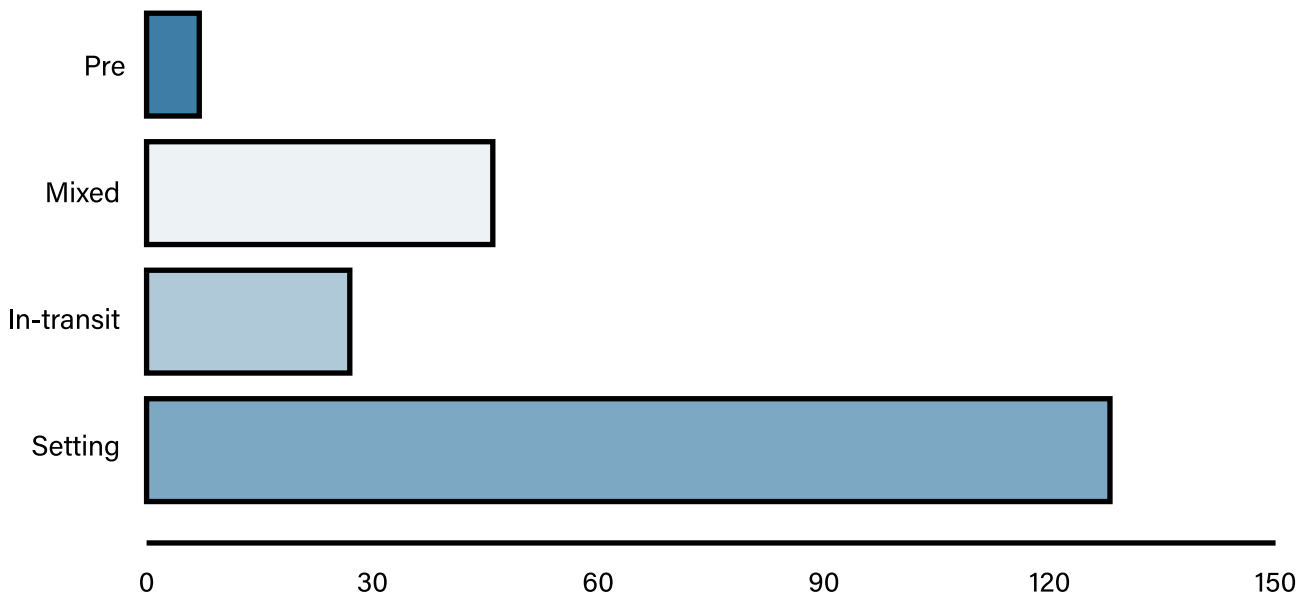
Additionally, a fifth category was designated for literature addressing mixed stages of the forced displacement jour-

ney (see Figure 6). Not all studies focused on the asylum journey phase; therefore, only 222 were analyzed, including those discussing the legal process of asylum from a non-empirical perspective. This may have contributed to the dominance of the “Settling” phase, which received an overwhelming focus (N=128). Literature addressing mixed phases (N=46) consistently incorporates the settling phase, underscoring that a significant portion of the scholarship pertains to the experiences of queer individuals after their arrival in a destination country, often while awaiting or having received asylum. This includes research on their integration into host societies, access to services, mental health, and the challenges associated with rebuilding life post-displacement. This observation aligns with the previous finding that study locations predominantly occur in Western host countries.

There is also significant attention to “In-transit” experiences, as the “in-transit” phase (N=27) receives notable focus. This underscores the recognition of the severe dangers and vulnerabilities encountered during the journey, including violence, exploitation, and precarious living conditions, particularly in transit countries (Le Bellec 2024; Menetrier 2021; Heidari et al. 2024).

However, there is an overall underrepresentation of all phases outside the settling phase; the in-transit category accounts for only 27 studies, the post-settling phase includes 14, and the pre-journey phase comprises only 7. This suggests an overwhelming emphasis on the legal process of obtaining asylum and the circumstances surrounding it in primarily Western countries, where conducting such research is considerably easier than in transit countries. As previously mentioned, major transit hubs present significant challenges for research focused on queer individuals. Moreover, in the pre-journey phase, there appears to be an oversimplified assumption that any queer person will only face forced displacement due to risks associated with their queer identities, neglecting an intersectional analytical approach to the complexities of decisions leading to forced displacement, which can include economic, societal, legal, familial, and other factors.

**Figure 6: Distribution of Publication by Forced Displacement Phase (N=222)**



# Thematic Analysis

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Based on a thematic analysis of the existing literature, the experiences of queer individuals facing forced displacement can be synthesized into five principal themes. These themes encapsulate the recurring challenges, dynamics, and responses encountered by LGBTQI+ individuals throughout their journeys from their countries of origin to transit and host nations. The five themes provide an overarching understanding of the key areas of focus within the literature; however, within each theme, there are intersectional subthemes that offer a more comprehensive analysis of the various issues confronting queer individuals in forced displacement.

## **THEME 1:** **The Continuum of Persecution as the Driver of Flight**

The primary catalyst for the forced displacement of LGBTQI+ individuals is pervasive and multifaceted persecution within their countries of origin. This persecution encompasses not only state-sanctioned actions but also societal and familial abuse, thereby creating an environment in which flight becomes the sole means of ensuring survival.

- **Systemic Violence and Discrimination:** LGBTQI+ individuals endure a broad spectrum of violence, including physical assault, sexual violence, threats, harassment, extortion, and murder. Such violence is perpetrated by state actors, including police and military officials, as well as non-state actors such as family members, community groups, and extremist organizations (the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International 2023; Women’s Refugee Commission 2024; Camminga 2021; Lasowski et al. 2023). The violence is frequently rooted in non-conformity to dominant norms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIESC). Transgender women, in particular, are subject to extreme violence, including transfemicide (Canal Laiton 2024; Ghoshal and Cabrera 2020).
- **Criminalization and Lack of State Protection:** Laws that criminalize consensual same-sex relations

or specific gender expressions serve as significant drivers of displacement. These laws, often remnants of colonialism, not only result in legal prosecution—including imprisonment and the death penalty—but also cultivate a societal climate in which violence and discrimination are condoned, leaving individuals without state protection (Marnell 2023; Redcay, Luquet, and Huggin 2019; Pincock 2021).

- **Economic Precarity:** Discrimination in access to formal employment, education, and housing exacerbates poverty, compelling many LGBTQI+ individuals to engage in precarious or illegal work, such as sex work, for survival. This, in turn, exposes them to further violence and exploitation (Pincock 2021; Rosati et al. 2021).
- **Impact of Conflict and Crisis:** Conflicts and political crackdowns intensify the existing vulnerabilities of LGBTQI+ individuals, resulting in heightened risks and disrupted support networks. They are frequently overlooked by mainstream humanitarian responses, which typically lack SOGIESC sensitivity, thereby creating significant gaps in protection and aid (Ropi-anyk and D’Agostino 2021; Diab 2024; Rainbow Railroad and ILGA Asia 2023).

## **THEME 2:** **The Continuum of Persecution as the Driver of Flight**

Upon arrival in transit and host countries, the asylum and immigration systems often perpetuate marginalization instead of providing a safe haven. These systems are characterized by legal, bureaucratic, and procedural barriers that are fundamentally flawed and inadequately protect queer applicants.

- **Flawed Credibility Assessments:** Asylum systems consistently rely on rigid, ethnocentric, and stereotypical expectations to validate one’s SOGIESC. Applicants are frequently required to present a linear “coming out” narrative that aligns with Western ideals,

a process that is culturally irrelevant and can be re-traumatizing (Llewellyn 2021; Abbey 2023). Decision-makers may dismiss claims if applicants do not exhibit sufficient shame or conform to a particular narrative of suffering, reflecting a colonial perspective. Nonconformity can lead to disbelief and higher refusal rates, reinforcing colonial notions that valorize Western “queer liberalisms.” This homonationalist approach to queer asylum seeking creates a hierarchy that favors individuals who are more familiar with Western models of queerness, enabling them to express themselves in ways more readily understood by those within Western homonationalist systems. Consequently, stereotypes of queerness persist within the asylum systems, compelling queer individuals to perform in accordance with the expectations of asylum caseworkers regarding queerness (Danisi et al. 2021; Lunau and Andreassen 2023; Ghosh 2024). Individuals who have a history of or are currently engaged in heterosexual relationships, regardless of their identity or whether these relationships are consensual, face increased scrutiny from authorities. This situation suggests that the concept of sexual fluidity—encompassing identities such as bisexuality, pansexuality, or queerness—is not fully comprehended by authorities, who often employ rigid definitions of sexuality when conducting credibility assessments. Furthermore, this highlights a lack of understanding regarding the social realities of queer individuals in countries where queerness is criminalized and stigmatized, potentially leading them to enter into heterosexual relationships against their will.

- **Prolonged and Re-Traumatizing Procedures:** The asylum process is often protracted, spanning months or even years, resulting in prolonged uncertainty, significant psychological distress, and precarious legal status. This “stolen time” can lead to considerable suffering. The interviews themselves are frequently intrusive, demanding intimate details and compelling a “forced coming out” in a high-stakes environment, which can be re-traumatizing (Mulé 2022; Yildiz 2022).
- **Intrusive and Traumatizing Interview Process:** The interview process for asylum seekers is often characterized by significant discomfort, commencing with prolonged waiting times before the interview itself, followed by sessions that may extend over several hours. Asylum officers typically request highly detailed and sensitive personal information regarding the applicant’s sexual orientation, gender identity, and experiences of persecution (Llewellyn 2021; Attia et al. 2022; Gottvall et al. 2025). These inquiries can include deeply personal questions concerning sexual practices, relationships, and emotional responses. Furthermore, interviewers frequently lack adequate

training in trauma-informed methodologies, which impedes their capacity to recognize the impact of trauma on memory, coherence, and emotional expression (Lunau 2019; Schuhmann and Knibbe 2019). As a result, authentic distress may be misconstrued as dishonesty. Additionally, inadequate or biased interpreters can significantly distort testimony, obstructing applicants’ ability to accurately articulate their experiences. Interpreters may be deficient in specific terminology related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIESC), or may possess cultural biases that render them unsafe for handling sensitive disclosures (Pelters et al. 2022; Karimi 2020).

- **Detention and Unsafe Accommodation:** LGBTQI+ individuals in immigration detention face disproportionately high rates of abuse, sexual violence, misgendering, and denial of essential medical care, including gender-affirming treatment and HIV medication. Many detainees endure prolonged periods of solitary confinement (Vogler and Rosales 2023; Ballin 2023; Lopes Heimer 2020). Similarly, accommodation centers for asylum seekers often present unsafe environments due to the prevalence of homophobia and transphobia exhibited by other residents, which forces individuals to conceal their identities and can lead to isolation and re-traumatization. Housing policies frequently prioritize cisgender family units, neglecting the specific needs of queer individuals (Lins França and Nzinga Ribeiro 2023; Hiller 2022). Furthermore, individuals encounter a dilemma when applying for asylum based on SOGIESC: they are expected by asylum authorities to disclose their queerness, yet are not provided with safe environments in which to do so. In addition to the risk of violence, many queer asylum seekers are often placed in small rural areas that lack the requisite queer infrastructure to engage in local queer activities, as anticipated by the asylum authorities (Ropianyuk and D’Agostino 2021; Bhagat 2023; Tschalaer 2023). Transgender individuals in detention encounter distinct challenges, including difficulties in obtaining gender-affirming healthcare, susceptibility to sexual abuse perpetrated not only by fellow asylum seekers but also by staff members, and an increased risk of physical and verbal abuse from other asylum seekers due to their visible queer expressions.
- **Legal and Interpretive Barriers:** Although sexual orientation and gender identity are now recognized as valid grounds for asylum under the “membership in a particular social group” (PSG) category, their application remains inconsistent across legal systems. Many jurisdictions lack explicit recognition of “gender expression” and “sex characteristics,” resulting in insufficient protection for certain individuals. Furthermore, the absence of adequately trained

legal representatives and culturally competent interpreters significantly impairs the ability of applicants to effectively articulate their cases. Additionally, individuals who identify as bisexual, pre-transition transgender persons, and queer women with children often face heightened scrutiny in the asylum process due to the perceived heteronormativity held by asylum authorities, who frequently lack a comprehensive understanding of the fluidity of queer identities and expressions (Rosati et al. 2024; NOVITSKAYA 2021).

### THEME 3:

#### The Pervasive Impact of Intersectional Discrimination

The experiences of queer forcibly displaced individuals are profoundly influenced by the intersection of their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) with other identity markers such as race, ethnicity, and religion. This compounded discrimination generates distinct and intensified challenges both within the asylum process and in daily life in host countries.

- **Racial Bias in Asylum Systems:** A pervasive racial bias exists in credibility assessments, wherein non-white applicants, particularly those of Black African descent, encounter increased skepticism and are evaluated against Western, implicitly white, standards of “queer” identity. This aligns with a “homonationalist” framework, in which Western states position themselves as “gay havens” to justify restrictive immigration policies (McNeal 2019). This narrative selectively includes “deserving” queer individuals who conform to white norms while marginalizing others. This phenomenon is particularly evident for queer African women, who often experience forced marriages and have children, leading to further doubts from asylum authorities regarding their queer identities, based on the prevailing assumption that a woman who has been or is married and has children cannot possibly identify as queer (Gauderman and Torres 2023; Tschalaer 2020a; Luibhéid 2020).
- **Religious and Cultural Conflicts:** Conservative religious doctrines frequently function as primary justifications for the persecution of individuals in various countries of origin. In host countries, these individuals may continue to experience persistent homophobia from co-ethnic and diaspora communities, resulting in profound social isolation. Asylum adjudicators often misinterpret cultural nuances, expecting applicants from religious backgrounds to articulate a specific narrative of “shame” or “inner conflict,” and may question their credibility if they do not conform to these expectations (Rodriguez and Giametta 2024). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced for appli-

cants from Muslim backgrounds, who are anticipated, and at times required, to renounce Islam as their faith. If they are found to be practicing Islam or remaining adherent to it, they may encounter scrutiny and skepticism from asylum authorities (Tschalaer 2020b; Farhadi Langroudi and Skinta 2019).

- **Compounded Marginalization in Host Countries:** Racialized queer individuals face multiple layers of discrimination when accessing housing, employment, and healthcare. They frequently encounter racism within mainstream LGBTQ+ communities, which obstructs their ability to establish robust support networks. Trans women of color, in particular, endure the most extreme forms of violence and marginalization due to these intersecting prejudices. This marginalization can adversely impact their asylum processes, as asylum authorities often expect them to be active participants in local queer communities as proof of their genuine belonging to LGBTQ+ populations (Barotz 2020; Dustin and Held 2021).

### THEME 4:

#### Inadequate Services and Gaps in Humanitarian Response

There exists a significant and systemic failure within mainstream humanitarian and social service systems to adequately address the acute needs of queer forcibly displaced individuals. Service provision is characterized by a lack of SOGIESC-specific competency, resulting in critical gaps in care, which the literature reported primary in the in-transit and settling phases, as the pre-journey phase literature did not go into details into services available at home countries.

- **Failure of Mainstream Systems:** Mainstream humanitarian programs often lack sensitivity to SOGIESC issues, leading to insufficient targeted interventions and a failure to collect data on LGBTQI+ populations. This “queer-blind” approach perpetuates the marginalization of these individuals within the broader refugee response (UNHCR 2022; Women’s Refugee Commission 2024).
- **UNHCR:** The existing literature has explored the operations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) concerning the resettlement process. Notably, the UNHCR has frequently been criticized for the inadequate training specific to sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC) provided to frontline personnel. This deficiency has resulted in instances of homophobic and transphobic behavior during the registration and interview processes. Furthermore, bureaucratic impediments, prolonged delays, and a prevailing “culture of disbelief” significantly under-

mine the effectiveness of their operations (Winton 2023; Broqua et al. 2021). Limited transparency and the prioritization of funding may also contribute to perceptions of inequity or insufficient assistance by the UNHCR (Pincock 2021). The resettlement process facilitated by the UNHCR often remains opaque, lacking transparency for queer forcibly displaced individuals. This topic has yet to be thoroughly examined in the literature, hindering the establishment of clear guidelines for accessing resettlement. Such guidelines should be publicly accessible, enabling individuals seeking resettlement to understand the process, including an estimated timeline.

- **Barriers to Healthcare:** Access to both physical and mental healthcare remains severely constrained for this population. A critical shortage of practitioners trained in SOGIESC issues and trauma-informed care exacerbates this situation. Consequently, many individuals experience discrimination, misgendering, and breaches of confidentiality from healthcare providers, which discourages them from seeking support for prevalent conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Farhadi Langroudi and Skinta 2019; Gottvall et al. 2025).
- **Systemic Obstacles:** Access to essential services—including legal aid, housing, and employment—is obstructed by systemic barriers. These obstacles include a lack of culturally competent and adequately trained professionals, fear and distrust of formal institutions rooted in past persecution, and language barriers (Alessi et al. 2025; Murray 2020).

## THEME 5: Resilience, Agency, and the Centrality of Informal Networks

In the face of significant systemic failures and discrimination, queer forcibly displaced individuals exhibit remarkable resilience and agency. They actively cultivate their own support systems, which frequently serve as crucial lifelines for their survival and well-being.

- **Community Building and “Chosen Families”:** Many individuals, often rejected by their biological families, establish “chosen families” and robust peer networks with other queer displaced persons. These informal networks provide essential emotional, psychological, and practical support, mitigating the profound isolation that characterizes their experiences. Such networks are crucial, as many queer forcibly displaced individuals may encounter isolation in their new environments, unable to rely on established communities from their countries of origin that may be marred by homophobia or transphobia. Further-

more, they may find themselves estranged from local queer communities due to cultural differences and experiences of racism and discrimination from local members of those communities (Kim and Feyissa 2021; Soloaga 2021; Ritholtz and Buxton 2021).

- **The Role of Grassroots Organizations:** Local, LGBTQI+-led grassroots organizations play a pivotal role in addressing the deficiencies left by formal institutions. They provide safe spaces, direct humanitarian assistance, legal coaching, and culturally sensitive psychosocial support that mainstream systems often fail to deliver (Greatrick 2019; Badali 2019; Castleyn 2024). However, these organizations frequently face under-resourcing and operate under precarious conditions. Additionally, the literature indicates problematic practices among some NGOs, including the reproduction of queer homonationalism and stereotypes when queer forcibly displaced individuals seek support during the asylum process, potentially facing rejection for not conforming to these NGOs’ ideals of queerness (Yildiz 2022). Studies also highlight the dynamics present in grassroots organizing, including power imbalances and allegations of corruption and misuse of funds against certain members (Reda and Proudfoot 2021).
- **Digital Media as a Lifeline:** Social media and digital platforms serve as essential tools for maintaining transnational connections with support networks, accessing critical information regarding asylum and services, and forming online communities. However, they also represent a double-edged sword for queer forcibly displaced individuals who may not be out to their families in their countries of origin (Dhoest 2020; Wimark 2021a). This necessitates a careful balance between being openly queer in their new environments and remaining closeted in their previous ones, resulting in the creation of a dual digital existence. Some queer individuals who are forcibly displaced are coerced into maintaining a distinctly queer digital presence, as the absence of such a presence can be detrimental during the credibility assessment process conducted by authorities surveilling their online accounts. This situation reflects a lack of understanding of the complexities associated with being openly queer in digital spaces, particularly for individuals who are not out to their immediate communities in their home countries. Consequently, this can be regarded as a de facto forced outing by the authorities. (Karimi 2020b; Andreassen 2021; Lunau and Andreassen 2023).
- **Navigating Identity:** The journey of displacement necessitates a complex negotiation of personal identity. Many individuals derive strength from reconciling their SOGIESC with their cultural or religious back-

grounds. In this process, they may discover support within inclusive faith communities or redefine their relationship with their faith. This reflects a significant capacity for navigating intricate personal and social landscapes.

- **Integration into Host Communities:** Queer forcibly displaced individuals often endeavor to integrate and establish new lives within their host communities by seeking employment, housing, healthcare, and education. However, numerous challenges arise during the integration process, including a lack of recognition for prior educational qualifications and barriers to accessing new educational opportunities, which further impede economic and social integration (Hucke 2021; Balaguera 2023). Additionally, discrimination based on both refugee status and SOGIESC—such as transphobia and racism—creates substantial obstacles to obtaining dignified employment (Jones 2024; França 2023). This perpetuates financial insecurity, limits opportunities for self-sufficiency, and may compel individuals into exploitative or illegal work, thereby further marginalizing them (Rosati et al. 2024; Heidari et al. 2024).

# Key Recommendations from the Literature

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Based on a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature, several key recommendations consistently emerge, advocating for systemic reforms and more inclusive practices to enhance the protection and well-being of queer forcibly displaced individuals. These recommendations encompass legal frameworks, service provision, community support, and research methodologies.

## I. Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Procedures

- **Expanded Legal Grounds:** Explicitly recognize gender expression and sex characteristics as valid grounds for asylum in all pertinent legislation, thereby ensuring comprehensive protection for all LGBTQI+ individuals (Redcay, Luquet, and Huggin 2019; Dustin and Ferreira 2021).
- **Trauma-Informed Credibility Assessments:** Implement trauma-informed and intersectional credibility assessments that transcend stereotypical “coming out” narratives. This should include the prohibition of intrusive questioning, the acknowledgment of diverse identity formations across cultural contexts, and the recognition of the impact of trauma on narrative coherence (Chelvan 2021; Prearo 2021; Rinaldi and Fernando 2019).
- **Minimized Detention:** Reduce the use of detention for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and ensure humane, SOGIESC-affirming conditions with access to appropriate medical care when detention is unavoidable (Marquez-Velarde et al. 2024; Vogler and Rosales 2023).
- **Reduced Processing Times:** Expedite asylum processing times to alleviate the severe psychological and economic precarity experienced by applicants in prolonged legal limbo (Tschalaer 2020a; Tschalaer 2023).

## II. Enhancing Service Provision and Access

- **Mandatory SOGIESC Training:** Implement **comprehensive and ongoing SOGIESC-specific training** for all asylum authorities, humanitarian personnel, legal professionals, healthcare providers, and interpreters. This training must encompass cultural competence and anti-racism initiatives to combat biases (Jones 2024; Zisakou 2024; Casteleyn 2024).
- **Safe and Affirming Housing:** Establish **dedicated and safe housing options** that are SOGIESC-affirming and protect against discrimination from other refugees or host communities (Dustin and Held 2021; Patterson and Leurs 2019; Ropianyck and D’Agostino 2021).
- **Tailored Healthcare Access:** Enhance **access to comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and affordable physical and mental healthcare**, including specialized services for HIV and gender-affirming care (Golembe et al. 2021; Ghabrial et al. 2024; Wimark 2021b).
- **Dignified Employment Pathways:** Develop **targeted employment programs** that address discrimination and provide pathways to dignified work, recognizing the specific economic vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQI+ refugees (Karimi 2020b; Chossière 2021).

## III. Supporting and Empowering Community-Led Initiatives

- **Sustained Funding for Grassroots Organizations:** Allocate **sustained and increased funding** to LGBTQI+-led grassroots organizations, acknowledging their indispensable role in providing direct, culturally competent support and advocacy where mainstream systems fall short (Reda and Proudfoot 2021; Lins França and Nzinga Ribeiro 2023; Diab and Samneh 2024).

- **Formal Integration of Grassroots Expertise:** Formally **integrate grassroots organizations** into broader humanitarian response and policymaking processes, ensuring their expertise and lived experiences inform strategies (Capous-Desyllas, Loy, and Koffink 2025).

#### IV. Improving Data Collection and Research

- **Systematic Data Collection:** Implement **systematic and disaggregated data collection** on LGBTQI+ populations throughout the forced displacement cycle to better understand their needs, vulnerabilities, and outcomes
- **Future Research Focus:** Invest in **further research** that explores long-term integration, the specific needs of diverse sub-groups (e.g., intersex, asexual, elderly queer refugees), and the effectiveness of various interventions. This should include more quantitative and longitudinal studies.

# Main Gaps and Future Recommendations for Research on Queer Forced Displacement

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Based on a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature, several key recommendations consistently emerge, advocating for systemic reforms and more inclusive practices to enhance the protection and well-being of queer forcibly displaced individuals. These recommendations encompass legal frameworks, service provision, community support, and research methodologies.

## I. Understanding the Current Gaps in the Literature:

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature, several critical gaps are identified in contemporary research concerning queer forced displacement, necessitating specific recommendations for future inquiry. These gaps encompass methodological approaches, thematic coverage, demographic representation, and geographical focus.

### A. Methodological Gaps

- **Scarcity of Systematic Quantitative Data:** There exists a significant deficiency of robust, large-scale quantitative data regarding the global population of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ individuals, including their precise demographics and comprehensive long-term outcomes across diverse contexts. This deficiency impedes the establishment of prevalence, trends, and the broader statistical impact of various influencing factors.
- **Participatory Research Approach:** While numerous studies indicate the use of collaboration with local forcibly displaced queer individuals and organizations in conducting research, participatory research methods remain underutilized in the examination of the current literature on queer forced displacement.
- **Insufficient Longitudinal Studies:** Research rarely tracks individuals throughout their entire displacement journey—spanning pre-flight, transit, various host countries, and post-resettlement—over extended periods. Most studies tend to be geographically or temporally constrained, thereby preventing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and evolving experiences over time.
- **Moving Beyond the Legalities of Asylum Seeking and the ‘Settling’ Phase in the Asylum Journey:** Innovative methodological approaches are necessary to reconceptualize forced displacement as a process that occurs both prior to and subsequent to the legal framework of asylum seeking. Future research should aim to present data regarding the livelihoods of queer forcibly displaced individuals during the pre- or post-settlement process.
- **Evaluation Deficit for Interventions:** Despite numerous recommendations for interventions and support programs, there exists a general lack of empirical research evaluating their effectiveness, impact, and cost-efficiency on queer forcibly displaced individuals.
- **Introducing Nuanced Understandings of Queer Forced Displacement:** A methodological issue persists in that “forced displacement” within queer contexts is predominantly approached as an asylum-seeking process. New methodological frameworks that challenge the definition of queer forced displacement as exclusively asylum seeking are required to present data that elucidates the multifaceted nature of queer forced displacement.

## B. Thematic Gaps

- **Nuance in Drivers of Displacement:** While broad categories of violence and criminalization are well-documented, more detailed and disaggregated research is required on the specific mechanisms of socio-economic exclusion, nuanced forms of psychological persecution (e.g., “conversion” practices beyond explicit violence), and the direct, long-term impacts of climate change as a distinct driver of queer forced displacement.
- **Specific Legal Vulnerabilities:** Despite the extensive discourse surrounding credibility assessments, there exists a paucity of research specifically addressing the legal challenges encountered by intersex individuals within the framework of asylum law. Furthermore, there is a need for a detailed examination of the implementation of “safe third country” policies and their differential impacts on various SOGIESC identities.
- **Experiences in Non-Traditional Contexts:** There is a pressing need for further investigation into the experiences of queer individuals within diverse refugee contexts, extending beyond prominent examples such as Kakuma. This includes urban refugee environments in the Global South and internally displaced scenarios within countries of origin that may not be classified as explicit conflict zones.
- **Post-Resettlement Dynamics:** A comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding long-term integration, ongoing identity negotiation, and evolving social dynamics—such as challenges within “chosen families,” experiences of aging within queer diaspora communities, and long-term economic stability—necessitates deeper qualitative and longitudinal studies.
- **Role of Specific Actors:** Additional research is essential to elucidate the specific roles, policies, and challenges experienced by various international actors, beyond the UNHCR, as well as by local government entities in the Global South and private sector organizations in addressing issues related to queer forced displacement.
- **Organizing and Resources:** Further research is required to enhance understanding of how queer forcibly displaced individuals mobilize for their rights, the resources upon which they rely, the services they seek or have access to, and the types of funding and resources necessary for future support. Conducting needs assessments across diverse populations of queer forcibly displaced individuals would significantly inform future policy development regarding their concerns.
- **Resettlement and Relocation:** The majority of existing research has concentrated on queer forcibly displaced individuals who have already reached host countries, with the experiences of those in transit receiving insufficient attention. There is a critical need for new research that provides data on the processes through which queer forcibly displaced individuals depart their countries of origin and enter new host nations, highlighting the variations in experiences associated with ‘legal’ versus ‘irregular’ entry. Additionally, new studies should investigate the operational frameworks of resettlement and relocation systems, whether implemented by the UNHCR or other international non-governmental organizations, detailing the criteria employed for relocation and the support necessary for enhancing service efficacy.
- **Role of Media:** There is a significant need for research focused on the role of media in shaping narratives surrounding queer forcibly displaced individuals, particularly in light of the recent proliferation of anti-rights and anti-gender narratives propagated by right-wing media in Western nations, which represent traditional host countries.
- **The Impact of Right-Wing Governments and Parties on Queer Forced Displacement:** While existing research has begun to address the influence of the US Trump administration on queer forced displacement, there is a pressing need for further investigation into the role of ascendant right-wing governments and parties, as well as their proxies, on a global scale, particularly in nations such as Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany.
- **Anti-Rights and Anti-Gender Global Organizing:** There exists a notable gap in the discourse surrounding the effects of emerging, well-organized anti-rights and anti-gender movements worldwide on queer forced displacement, which calls for a more thorough exploration of this phenomenon.

## C. Demographic Gaps

- **Under-Representation of Specific SOGIESC Identities:** Although the body of literature focusing on gay men and transgender women is expanding, the experiences of other diverse SOGIESC identities, including intersex individuals, asexual individuals, non-binary persons beyond the binary, and bisexual men and women, remain largely under-researched with respect to specific demographic data.
- **Age-Specific Experiences:** Research frequently neglects the distinct vulnerabilities and needs of queer children and youth—particularly unaccompanied minors beyond their initial arrival—as well

as elderly queer refugees, whose experiences of displacement and integration may differ markedly from those of other demographic groups.

- **Intersectionality in Practice:** Although the concept of intersectionality is widely acknowledged, research often encounters challenges in quantitatively and qualitatively disaggregating data to elucidate the interplay of SOGIESC with specific racial, ethnic, religious, or disability identities, thereby failing to demonstrate the concrete compounded impacts.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** There is an urgent imperative to investigate the experiences of queer internally displaced individuals, who until now have been notably underrepresented in the literature concerning queer forced displacement.
- **Queer Forced Displacement Beyond Asylum Seeking:** The experiences of queer individuals who undergo forced displacement through means other than asylum seeking are conspicuously absent from the literature. This gap includes activists living in exile, who may possess greater privilege than other community members to leave their home countries via immigration rather than asylum seeking, as well as queer students who leverage their academic pursuits as a means of escaping their home countries due to their SOGIESC, thereby entering a state of forced displacement.

#### D Geographic Gaps

- **Limited Focus on Countries of Origin and In-Transit Countries:** Current research is predominantly concentrated in Western host countries and select key transit hubs, resulting in a significant under-exploration of numerous countries of origin (where initial persecution occurs) and lesser-known transit routes.
- **South-to-South Displacement:** There exists an urgent imperative for further research focused on South-to-South displacement, particularly concerning queer individuals who migrate from one Global South country to another. This research should address the distinctive challenges and support structures present within these contexts.
- **North-to-North Displacement:** Additionally, there is a necessity for increased scholarly attention to North-to-North queer forced displacement, which is a phenomenon that occurs. Although these populations may generally represent more privileged individuals with relatively lesser needs for support services, it remains crucial to incorporate empirical data regarding these groups into the literature. Such inclusion will enrich the understanding of queer forced displacement as an experience that transcends conventional

anti-LGBTQ+ environments.

## II. Strategic Recommendations for Future Research

To address the identified gaps, future research on queer forced displacement should follow these strategic recommendations, organized by priority area.

### A. Methodological and Data Priorities

1. **Prioritize Quantitative and Longitudinal Data:** Fund and conduct large-scale quantitative surveys to establish baseline data on the global queer displaced population. Complement this with longitudinal studies tracking individuals throughout their displacement journey—from their country of origin, through transit, to post-settlement integration—to understand long-term outcomes.
2. **Embed Participatory Action Research (PAR):** Transition from extractive research models by systematically integrating PAR methodologies. Ensure that forcibly displaced queer individuals and community organizations are partners in co-designing research questions, collecting data, and analyzing results.
3. **Expand the Definition of ‘Forced Displacement’:** Develop and apply new research frameworks that examine displacement beyond the legal asylum process. This should include investigating the experiences of activists in exile, students fleeing persecution, and those who are internally displaced.
4. **Conduct Rigorous Program Evaluation:** Systematically evaluate the effectiveness, impact, and cost-efficiency of existing support programs and humanitarian interventions to establish an evidence base for best practices.

### B. Thematic Research Priorities

1. **Investigate Nuanced Drivers and Under-Researched Contexts:** Move beyond broad narratives of persecution to focus on specific drivers such as socio-economic exclusion, “conversion” practices, and climate change. Expand research to non-traditional settings, including urban refugee environments in the Global South and internal displacement camps.
2. **Analyze Specific Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Conduct targeted research into the unique legal challenges faced by intersex individuals in asylum claims. Investigate the differential impacts of “safe third country” policies and the operational criteria of UNHCR and INGOs regarding resettlement and relocation.
3. **Scrutinize the Influence of Political and Social Actors:** Examine the role of actors beyond the

UNHCR, including local governments in the Global South and private sector entities. Critically analyze how media narratives, ascendant right-wing governments (e.g., in Italy, the UK, and Germany), and global anti-rights movements impact policy, public perception, and the safety of queer displaced persons.

4. **Focus on Long-Term Integration and Community Agency:** Research the long-term dynamics of post-settlement life, including economic stability, aging within diaspora communities, and the evolution of “chosen families.” Conduct needs assessments to map community organization, resource utilization, and service requirements.
5. **Uncover the Influence of Anti-Rights Movements:** Address the latent threat posed by organized anti-rights movements. There is an urgent necessity for research to explore the effects of emerging, well-networked anti-rights and anti-gender movements on queer forced displacement, particularly in light of their increasing influence on public policy and discourse.

### C. Demographic and Geographic Priorities

1. **Center Under-Represented Populations:** Prioritize research that specifically focuses on the experiences of intersex and asexual individuals, bisexual men and women, non-binary persons, queer youth (especially unaccompanied minors), and the elderly. Apply robust intersectional analysis to understand the compounded effects of race, religion, and disability.
2. **Expand the Geographic Scope:**
  - **Shift focus** from Western host nations to emphasize countries of origin and diverse, lesser-documented transit routes.
  - **Increase investigation** into South-to-South displacement corridors, analyzing specific protection gaps and support networks in these contexts.
  - **Initiate research** on North-to-North displacement to ensure a comprehensive global understanding of the phenomenon.

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