

**'You Are Scared of Society':
Internal and External
Displacement of LGBTQI+
Individuals in Türkiye and Nigeria**



ReportOUT



ReportOUT Response to UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Call for Input: Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to forced displacement. February 2025



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ReportOUT is a global SOGIESC human rights organisation

For more information, please visit our website: www.reportout.org

Registered Charity Number (England and Wales): 1185887

Contents

- Who are ReportOUT? 3
- Statement from Chair and Lead Trustee, Human Rights Research 4
- Our Research Team at ReportOUT 6
- Introduction 8
- Türkiye 9
- Nigeria 11
- Recommendations 13

Who are ReportOUT?

Since 2019, ReportOUT have been at the forefront of protecting the human rights of sexual and gender minorities in the United Kingdom and globally. As a registered charity in England and Wales (registered charity number 1185887) we are fearless, determined, and relentless in our belief that human rights are fundamental to advancing the lives of sexual and gender minorities, and their communities.

We recognise that we need to succeed in our aims and objectives by also using principles from international development alongside human rights frameworks, and we believe that both approaches should always include sexual and gender minorities as part of them. We align all our work with Agenda 2030, in that no one should be left behind.

ReportOUT's official aim and objectives are:

To promote human rights (as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent United Nations conventions and declarations) throughout the world for sexual and gender minorities by all or any of the following means:

- Eliminating infringements of human rights;
- Research into human rights issues;
- Raising awareness of human rights issues;
- Educating the public about human rights;
- Monitoring abuses of human rights;
- International advocacy of human rights;
- Providing technical advice to government and others on human rights matters.

Our guiding principles:

- Principle 1: No one should be left behind in delivering the articles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Principle 2: Every person has a part to play in achieving the goals and targets set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- Principle 3: Positive change should be led by communities within a nation state and ReportOUT will support them to do this.

Suggested Citation:

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Foreword from the Chair and Lead Trustee, Human Rights Research

Dear Dr Reid,

It is a privilege to submit ReportOUT's response to your call for contributions to your Report on violence and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities, in relation to forced displacement.

Founded in 2019, ReportOUT is a human rights research NGO based in the United Kingdom. We document the lived experiences of SOGIESC people and communities in different nations across the globe. We use our research to inform the public, educate others and to influence governments and organisations about SOGIESC human rights infringements. We are proud to have previously made submissions such as Calls for Actions on topics ranging from restrictions on core LGBTQ+ freedoms, unlawful killings and the intersex lived experience. We are delighted to have seen that our contributions have been cited multiple times in final reports and we look forward to continuing to support the UN Independent Experts in their goal of upholding and defending human rights across all member states.

By the end of H1 2025, ReportOUT will have published eight 'deep dive' projects into the lived experiences of SOGIESC communities in Belize, Ethiopia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe with further projects to follow on countries including Egypt, Nigeria (focused on trans and non-binary lived experiences) and Pakistan. We are proud to be an entirely volunteer-led charity, with over 100 volunteers and trustees originating from over forty nation-states, five of whom contributed to this report.

Our submission to this study focuses on Türkiye and Nigeria, two countries with documented history of both internal and external displacement of LGBTQI+ communities. Our research demonstrates how a combination of natural disasters, civil unrest and institutional attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities fosters a climate of violence and discrimination, which reaches its conclusion in both internal and external displacement of LGBTQI+ citizens. We include a piece of primary research, in the form of an interview with a Nigerian LGBTQI+ citizen who has been forced to flee their home as a result of this discrimination.

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Drew Dalton Chair of Trustees ReportOUT

With twenty years' experience in the NGO sector and in education, Drew was, until 2024, a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sunderland specialising in global LGBTQ+ rights, activism, international development, and global health. An award-winning teacher, trainer, and activist, Drew is currently the Founder and CEO of ReportOUT, an international human rights organisation, documenting human rights abuses against LGBTQ+ populations across the globe. Alongside this, Drew is the Chair of the UK Alliance for Global Equality, a 14 strong civil society group which lobbies governments to support global LGBTQ+ rights. He is a Company Director of Drew Dalton Consulting, a Trustee of a number of charities, and is currently writing a book called 'Broken Rainbow?' with Bloomsbury Publishers, discussing the nature of global queerphobia and what this looks like in different regions of the world. Drew was previously voted by the Pride Power List as one of the top 100 most influential LGBTQ+ people in the United Kingdom.

Foreword from the Chair and Lead Trustee, Human Rights Research *continued*

We trust that our research, compiled by our dedicated team of global volunteers will be a valuable contribution to your final report and we thank you and your team's work for investigating this topic that resonates so profoundly in countries across the globe today but where the intersectionality with LGBTQI+ identities has been historically under-researched.

Best wishes,

Drew Dalton, Chair of Trustees & Founder of ReportOUT
Phil Thomas, Lead Trustee, Human Rights Research



Phil Thomas
Lead Trustee

Human Rights Research

Phil Thomas became a Trustee of ReportOUT in November 2022 with responsibility for Global Human Rights Research portfolio. He is passionate about geopolitics and LGBTQI+ histories around the globe and has led research for ReportOUT on a diverse range of countries including Mongolia, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, as well as multiple submissions to the United Nations. Phil works full-time in London and holds a Masters Degree in international relations from University of Cambridge (UK), MBA from Duke University (USA) and a BA in Modern Languages from University of Durham (UK) alongside professional qualifications in project management. He currently resides in Cambridge, having previously lived and worked on four different continents, with his passion for travel and discovering new cultures continuing to this day.



Our Research Team at ReportOUT



Riley Campbell (Lead Researcher) (USA) An experienced Human Rights Researcher at ReportOUT, Riley (she/her) holds a Bachelor's in Social Sciences and graduated Cum Laude with a Master's in International Development Studies from the University of Amsterdam. She's lived in Germany, the Netherlands, Brazil, the US, and the UK, and focuses on LGBTQ+ and women's rights. Her research projects have spanned topics including homelessness in the US, Brazilian migrant women's views on gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights in Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Egypt. She currently works with a UK charity to enhance education access for low-income students.



Hilal Bektaş (Türkiye) is a Human Rights Researcher at ReportOUT and a professional translator working in English-Turkish, German-Turkish, and English-German language pairs. She holds a bachelor's degree in Translation and Interpreting from Hacettepe University and is currently pursuing a master's degree in the same field at Dokuz Eylül University, focusing on the translation of intersectional identities. Her research interests include intersectionality, gender and sexuality studies, feminist translation practice, critical race theory, post-colonialism, and minority literatures. She recently completed a research internship at TED University Center for Gender Studies in Türkiye and previously worked as a Research and Teaching Assistant. Through her work, Hilal seeks to foster empathy, encourage critical engagement with social inequalities, and amplify the voices of marginalised racial, gender, and sexual minorities.



Obinna Tony-Francis Ochem (Nigeria) Born in Lagos, Nigeria, and living in the same city, Obinna Tony-Francis Ochem (He/Him) is a Human Rights Researcher at ReportOUT. After completing his undergraduate degree in Marine Sciences (Fisheries major) and interning at the Environmental section of the Nigerian Ports Authority, he is now a freelance journalist and writer, exploring the subject of gender, sexuality, climate change, the intersection of queer identities and shapeshifting monsters when he writes fiction. As well as this, he is also an LGBTQI+ activist and advocate and has attended several trainings, programmes, and fellowships on writing, SRHR, LGBTQ+ identities, etc., both physical and virtual. He describes himself as a cisgender queer male because, in anglophone African countries, queer is not a slur; gay is.

Researchers continued overleaf

Our Research Team at ReportOUT

Georgina Barkas (UK) has recently graduated from the University of Exeter with a first class degree, where she studied Politics, Philosophy, and Economics. She is currently conducting research with the Oakland Institute focused on human rights in developing countries, as well as working as a human rights researcher with ReportOut. Her research projects have varied from exploring women's resistance under dictatorships to the World Bank's impacts on land rights.

Armağan Emel Hoy (Türkiye/Germany) Born in Turkey and now based in Germany, Armağan Emel Hoy (She/Her) is a master's student in Human Rights at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. She holds a bachelor's degree in European Studies and International Relations from Istanbul Bilgi University. Her research focuses on gender-responsive due diligence in business and human rights, with a particular interest in the intersection of LGBTI+ rights and corporate social responsibility practices. As an LGBTI+ activist, she has a background in NGO work in Turkey, advocating for inclusive policies and human rights protections.

A Note on Methodology and Approach

We have chosen to focus our response on two countries, Türkiye, and Nigeria: two countries with a demonstrable intersectionality between SOGIESC identities and forced displacement, both internal and external.

Word Count (excluding question titles and bibliography) 2,405 words

Introduction

Displacement occurs when individuals are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, persecution, or disasters (UNHCR, 2024). Internal displacement refers to those displaced within their country, while external displacement involves crossing international borders (UNHCR, 2024). An estimated 1.2% to 3.5% of the global population identifies as a Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) minority (Dhillion, 2021). In 2024, approximately 72.1 million people were internally displaced (IDPs), suggesting that 865,200 to 2,523,500 may be LGBTQI+ individuals (Dhillion, 2021; UNHCR, 2024). Similarly, 32 million externally displaced persons (refugees) were recorded, meaning 384,000 to 1,120,000 LGBTQI+ individuals may have experienced external displacement (Senghore, 2024).

However, these estimates assume LGBTQI+ people are displaced at the same rate as the general population, an unlikely scenario given their heightened risk of persecution. Eight of the ten countries with the highest IDP populations criminalize homosexuality, including Nigeria (Dhillion, 2021). As of 2024, 64 countries still criminalize same-sex relationships, with 12 imposing the death penalty (Human Dignity Trust, 2024). Despite widespread persecution, displacement frameworks fail to adequately protect LGBTQI+ individuals, particularly when intersecting with conflict, disasters, and other displacement drivers (IDMC, 2023).

This submission addresses this gap by analysing LGBTQI+ displacement through case studies on Türkiye and Nigeria. Using primary and secondary research, we explore the challenges faced in both internal and external displacement contexts and conclude with recommendations to strengthen protections for LGBTQI+ displaced persons.

Introduction

In Türkiye, LGBTQI+ individuals experience systemic discrimination, worsened by the government's growing anti-LGBTQI+ discourse and restrictive policies. Under President Erdoğan's authority, political and social hostility toward LGBTQI+ individuals has increased. This leads to forced internal displacement due to economic marginalization, housing discrimination, and violence. Additionally, Türkiye's role as a transit country for LGBTQI+ refugees fleeing persecution in neighboring countries exposes them to further suffering because of inadequate legal protections, social stigma, and state indifference. This section investigates the internal and external forced displacement of LGBTQI+ individuals in Türkiye, along with the social, political, and legal aspects contributing to their vulnerability.

Internal Displacement

Although internal displacement is often related to armed conflicts and natural disasters, its reflection on the queer community residing in Türkiye is more subtle for the most part. For many LGBTI+ individuals, displacement stems from systematic discrimination and sociopolitical dynamics, which are endorsed by the Erdogan regime. This discrimination is characterised by far-right conservative rhetoric, political Islamist disposition and populist hate speech. Under this regime, the queer community face hostility, forced evictions and economic marginalization which leads to internal displacement. These conditions disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, particularly transgender individuals, who often find themselves targeted by both state and societal prejudice (Kaos GL, 2020).

According to Turkish NGO Kaos GL's annual human rights reports, unusual and high costs are demanded from LGBTI+ people, especially trans women, both when acquiring and renting property, thus restricting the housing rights of these groups. In addition, 'sealing' the houses of trans women on the (false) grounds of sex work is a practice frequently resorted to by law enforcement agencies. These interventions were experienced more especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, trans women living in Istanbul's Bayram Street and Küçük Bayram Street were detained and their homes were sealed several times in 2021, by claiming that it is related to coronavirus measures (Kaos GL, 2023). Illegal and arbitrary sealing of sex workers' homes and prohibiting them from entering their homes result in trans women are deprived of both housing and employment opportunities. (May 17 Association, 2022)

In addition to state policies, which excludes a legal framework for establishing shelters for LGBTI+ community (May 17 Association, 2022), economic struggles also increase the vulnerability of displaced queer individuals. Employment discrimination remains widespread and queer communities struggle to secure jobs. With very little financial independence, many are forced to relocate to urban centers, where they experience disproportionate rents and substandard housing. (Kaos GL, 2020)

On February 6, 2023, an earthquake occurred in Türkiye that resulted in over 50,000 casualties. (AFAD, 2023) In the aftermath, both the Turkish and Syrian LGBTI+ community was heavily affected. LGBTQ+ Syrian refugees faced exclusion, discrimination and harassment in the aftermath of the February earthquake, which killed thousands and left millions displaced. (ILGA-Europe, 2024, p. 1) Attacks and threats against LGBTI+ individuals prevented those affected by the earthquake from residing in communal living spaces and tents. No efforts were made to ensure the safety of LGBTI+ individuals in any of the shelter areas. Many survivors shared that they wanted to seek refuge in collective shelters but felt forced to stay in their homes instead, afraid that being recognised for their LGBTI+ identity could put them at risk. (Association for Cultural Research for Peace & Keskesor Amed LGBTI+, 2024).

External Displacement

LGBTQ+ refugees who have fled their countries are subject to marginalisation and challenges based on both their status as a refugee and their identity as LGBTQI+. Within Türkiye, there has been an increasing political climate of resentment and stigma attached to both refugees and LGBTQ+ individuals (POLITICO, 2023) (CIVICUS, 2022). Türkiye's withdraw in 2021 from the Istanbul convention was justified on grounds that it 'normalized homosexuality,' which is 'incompatible with Türkiye's social and familial values', demonstrating Türkiye's increasing disinterest in providing protection for LGBTQ+ people. Erdogan has also made several anti-LGBTQ statements including "The AK Party has never been an LGBT supporter... We believe in the sanctity of the family", appealing to the Muslim conservative base to consolidate power and draw on polarisation (Nsar, 2022) (Peter Tatchell Foundation. 2025). Additionally, polls have demonstrated that anti-refugee sentiment is one of the few political positions that unites Turkish society, suggesting scapegoating of those with refugee status is common (CIVICUS, 2022).

Despite this, Türkiye receives many LGBTQI+ individuals seeking refuge from nearby countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iran. As Türkiye does not provide long term settlement, residence for refugees is intended to be temporary before finding a 3rd country (SARI, 2020). As a result, refugees not only face uncertainty about the location of their long-term residency but also face stigma and challenges in Turkey in the waiting duration. Refugees in Türkiye are commonly restricted to living in small towns where travelling requires a permit. Within these towns, LGBTQ+ refugees face discrimination, violence, and stigma, both from other refugees and local townspeople (SARI, 2020). Many have described fear of reporting discriminatory or violent events to police as, when reports were made, they were frequently ignored or responded to with abuse (SARI, 2020). When a trans woman in 2016 in the Turkish city Denizli, the police turned a blind eye to her complaint, justified by the fact "she was both trans and refugee" (SARI, 2020).

LGBTQ+ refugees also face discrimination when seeking housing and employment. Refugees are more likely to face workplace exploitation with inhumane conditions, low wages, and little health coverage due to lack of necessary protections (SARI, 2020). Additionally, if their sexuality or gender identity becomes known they risk their job being terminated, being evicted from their house or being denied housing in the first place (SARI, 2020). The Turkish government and NGO's fail to provide a benefits system for refugees; thus, they are left to find housing, financial means, and employment via their own means despite the discrimination they face (SARI, 2020).

Introduction

Nigeria is a very hostile country for LGBTQ+ individuals – state sanctioned persecution, societal discrimination in tandem with insurgency conflict and environmental crises culminate in large scale displacement both internally and externally.

Internal Displacement

In 2024, Nigeria had the fifth-highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Africa, with 3,421,000 forced from their homes (IDMC, 2024). While the exact number of LGBTQ+ IDPs is unknown, an estimated 41,052 to 119,735 may be affected (Dhillon, 2021).

Most IDPs are displaced from the northeast due to Boko Haram's insurgency, with flooding worsening displacement in the region. Legal persecution under the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act and Sharia Law, along with Kito culture (digital entrapment and violence), further targets LGBTQ+ people. Additionally, LGBTQ+ IDPs face exclusion from displacement services.

To understand these challenges and gain an insight for this submission, we interviewed Sandy (pseudonym), a trans Nigerian woman displaced by Boko Haram. "Before I moved to north central, I was in the northeast. It was not safe, very tragic, and a lot happened. I had to flee with a lot of people. As a trans person, you can imagine what happened to me."

Many IDPs flee to urban areas, straining infrastructure and services (Pape & Sharma, 2019). The World Bank estimates that 90% of IDPs live below the international poverty line (\$1.90/day) and are often food insecure (Pape & Sharma, 2019). Sandy initially sought shelter in an IDP camp but found it unsafe. "The first night was horrible for me. There was no inclusion for me as a trans person...I had to stay at the men's camp...I had to flee from the camp...I felt unsafe. I felt scared—I felt scared for my life." Rather than stay, she risked homelessness to find a safer space. She also described witnessing gender-based violence and noted lack of services, leading to negative mental health outcomes for other LGBTQ+ individuals.

Beyond Boko Haram, legal persecution and corruption drive LGBTQ+ internal displacement. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act and Sharia Law criminalise homosexuality, with punishments up to the death penalty (Salako, 2022). Sandy emphasised that LGBTQ+ Nigerians never feel safe, even in their own homes. "As a queer person, you can't really come out and even identify as queer because you are scared of society. You might get burned on the street, stripped naked, or the police may harass or imprison you." She recalled spending three nights in a prison cell due to her identity before being released.

Kito, a form of digital entrapment, further forces LGBTQ+ Nigerians into displacement (Nigeria, 2024). "Before you know it, people are coming to your house. They will tell you: 'You are gay.' ...They will beat you, blackmail you, and extort money from you, and make you call the police on yourself." Corrupt police often participate, demanding bribes or imprisoning victims (Nigeria, 2024).

Overall, Boko Haram's insurgency, flooding, legal persecution, Kito entrapment, and government corruption are key drivers of LGBTQ+ internal displacement. LGBTQ+ IDPs face homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, and health risks, yet IDP camps fail to meet their needs, leaving them without adequate support, protection, or access to essential services.

External Displacement

In 2024, the Nigerian government under President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan criminalised LGBTQ+ rights and prohibited public displays of same-sex sexual affection (Human Dignity Trust, 2025). This law, criminalising carnal knowledge against the order of nature and indecency, was inherited from the relics of British colonial-era legislation. The law, along with external factors, has contributed to the displacement of many LGBTQ+ Nigerian individuals. Asad et al. (2018) examined conflict and violence in Nigeria and discovered that religious violence is a contributing factor in displacement among people residing in Northern Nigeria. Additionally, internal factors such as poverty exacerbate these conflicts (Asad et al., 2018), further affecting LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigeria and leading to displacement.

Before Nigeria gained independence from British rule, migration was already a significant phenomenon within and beyond the country (Nwosu et al., 2022). In recent years, there has been an uptick in migration from Nigerians to the United Kingdom and other Western American and European societies, often through study routes. LGBTQ+ Nigerians are also increasingly using this migration wave to relocate out of the country to places where they can express their sexuality (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). This trend has led to widespread discussions on migration among Nigerian youths, prompting calls for policy actions and a deep dive into causations.

Folayan et al. (2023) explored socioeconomic inequality, health inequities, and the well-being of transgender people. In Nigeria, healthcare remains a luxury for the poor trying to survive and even a greater challenge for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking access to sexual and reproductive health services. This external factor has been a key driver for Nigerians seeking asylum, student visas, immigration pathways, or other means to secure a better quality of life outside the country. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities towards LGBTQ+ Nigerians, particularly trans-Nigerians (Folayan et al., 2023).

Government policies restricting LGBTQ+ rights have also contributed to the economic restriction of visibly presenting LGBTQ+ Nigerians (Human Dignity Trust, 2025), making it harder to secure a legally protected job unless they leave the country. In 2023, Nigerian authorities carried out a crackdown in which dozens of LGBTQ+ individuals were arrested for allegedly participating in same-sex weddings (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Such unjust arrests take a great toll on those affected, leading to displacement to flee the country in search of safer environments.

In 2017, after winning the Brunel Poetry Prize, Nigerian poet Rome Oriogun, well-known within the country's literary community on Facebook, was forced into hiding (Obi-Young, 2017). Romeo's win sparked controversy due to his manuscript exploring the theme of queerness and gay love. He ultimately sought asylum in the USA and left the country after being accused of winning a prize as a reward for promoting homosexuality in Nigeria (Obi-Young, 2017). Romeo's repeated death threats, real-life physical assaults, and other forms of persecution led to his forced displacement from Nigeria to the United States.

Conclusions and recommendations

Through the research, it is visible that LGBTQ+ individuals are particularly vulnerable to internal and external displacement both in Türkiye and Nigeria, yet existing outlines do not sufficiently address their needs. Many LGBTQ+ individuals are forced to relocate in both countries due to systemic discrimination, legal persecution, and social violence with few protections or resources.

Based on the cases of Türkiye and Nigeria, we present the following recommendations:

- 1) IDP camps and refugee support structures need gender affirming care, including mental health support and trauma-informed resources and services.**
- 2) Related to SOGIESC research, reliable data on LGBTQ+ displaced individuals is needed for more ethical and safe data collection as well as better policy responses.**
- 3) Legal advocacy should be strengthened to challenge homophobic laws in Nigeria, and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in Türkiye under international and national human rights frameworks.**
- 4) In northern Nigeria, almajiri system must be replaced with an inclusive education system to help curb religious insecurity.**
- 5) Collaboration with international NGOs can help a more inclusive perspective be integrated into displacement policies for LGBTQ+ forcibly displaced individuals.**
- 6) Strengthening of rights and protections in Türkiye, for both refugees and LGBTQ individuals, particularly in relation to employment, housing, and police responses.**

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