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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, bisexual and queer women

Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Graeme Reid

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Human Rights Council pursuant to Council resolutions 32/2 and 59/5. In the report, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Graeme Reid, examines violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, bisexual and queer women worldwide. This investigation addresses the distinct and intersecting forms of violence and discrimination that lesbian, bisexual and queer women face across diverse contexts globally. The Independent Expert concludes the report by offering recommendations on how to uphold international human rights obligations and ensure inclusive, rights-based responses.



I. Introduction

1. Violence and discrimination against lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women are widespread and persistent across all regions. LBQ women experience systemic violations of their rights to health, property, inheritance, freedom of movement, access to justice and family life. These abuses reflect enduring misogyny across institutions and the broader structural subordination of women.

2. Less than 5 per cent of women worldwide live in countries that provide “anything close to full legal equality”.¹ No economy affords women equal economic opportunities, and one third restrict women’s freedom of movement.² Two fifths of countries limit women’s property rights,³ and in more than 40 countries inheritance rights for men and women are unequal.⁴ Nineteen countries legally require women to obey their husbands and 65 maintain unequal rights to remarriage.⁵ In 14 countries, women cannot leave the marital home or travel domestically on equal terms with men, and in many others they cannot pass nationality to their children or spouses.⁶ The privileging of heterosexual family forms remains so pervasive that the equality of unmarried women is rarely measured, let alone ensured. In many contexts, marriage to a man and conformity with reproductive norms continue to function as conditions for women’s full legal recognition.

3. Violence and discrimination against LBQ women are shaped by common structural features: rights are conditioned and mediated through patriarchal institutions; compliance with gender norms often operates as a prerequisite for access to the public sphere; women who challenge these conditions face verbal abuse, online harassment, physical attacks and sexual violence; and institutional minimization of these harms perpetuates cyclical gaps in data and policy responses.

4. International human rights law provides clear protections for all women, including those who identify as LBQ, guaranteeing rights to equality and non-discrimination, bodily autonomy, health, family life, property, inheritance, work, freedom from violence, and access to justice. These obligations are directly engaged where LBQ women are denied rights or subjected to violence because they do not conform to expected gendered and reproductive roles.

5. Despite these protections, LBQ women are largely absent from official data, resulting in gaps in policy, programming and law. Women’s rights mechanisms have historically focused on discrimination within heterosexual family structures, while frameworks focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse (LGBT) persons have largely centred men’s sexuality, health and recognition. As a result, normative constructions of both women and LGBT persons contribute to LBQ women “falling between different rights frameworks”⁷ in areas such as healthcare, asylum, labour protections and gender-based violence services. The data gap concerning LBQ women is further reinforced by methodological biases that characterize LBQ women’s experiences as too complicated, private or insufficiently evidenced to document. These rationales reflect broader patterns in which research on women is discounted, and gender-based exclusion is recast as neutral methodology, resulting in the systematic omission of women from data collection, analysis and policy frameworks.

¹ See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2d98382b-4cc6-43ba-b140-06ea4ca9a51e/content>.

² Ibid.

³ See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/de98b164-a3b1-449b-aa4d-0d78dc01ed4e/content>.

⁴ See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/9bc44005-2490-41f8-b975-af35cbac8b9a/download>.

⁵ See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2d98382b-4cc6-43ba-b140-06ea4ca9a51e/content>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Submission from Women in Refugee Law.

6. In this context, the Independent Expert expresses appreciation for the more than 200 submissions received in response to the call for inputs, through which LBQ human rights defenders, States, national human rights institutions and individuals provided extensive evidence and documentation.⁸ Additional input was received during a consultation, on 13 March 2026, with the Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex (LBTI) Caucus on the margins of the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, and during an expert meeting held online on 23 March 2026.

7. The present report identifies measures to better protect persons subjected to violence and discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, by examining misogyny, constraints on women's autonomy, LBQ women's access to the public sphere, and the regulation of gender norms through violence. It shows how differently situated persons experience discrimination and violence across intersecting factors, including location, disability, race, migration status, occupation, gender expression and other forms of marginalization.

8. The report contributes to the mandate's evidence base by adopting a holistic and intersectional approach to examining the material consequences of discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity on LBQ women. It recognizes that LBQ identities encompass a wide diversity of lived experiences, including those of transgender women who identify as lesbian, bisexual and/or queer. Accordingly, the Independent Expert also considers information and documentation that reflect the intersecting dimensions of gender identity and sexual orientation in shaping patterns of discrimination and exclusion. A limited number of submissions expressed objections to this inclusive framing, advocating for definitions of women based solely on sex; some of these submissions did not substantively engage with the issues addressed in the report and will be made available alongside the other submissions in the interest of transparency.⁹

II. International legal framework

9. International human rights law establishes clear obligations on States to eliminate gender-based discrimination and ensure women's full equality in law, policy and practice. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women requires States to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women (art. 5). The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also require States to eliminate discrimination and ensure substantive equality.¹⁰

10. In *Flamer-Caldera v. Sri Lanka*,¹¹ the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women found that criminalization of same-sex conduct constituted discrimination. The Committee held that criminalization is rooted in entrenched patriarchal norms that fix women's roles and reduce them to reproductive functions; falls within the scope of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and breaches States' obligations to ensure non-discrimination and access to justice for women. The significance of the decision extends beyond decriminalization. It makes clear that laws and practices regulating women's sexuality are not separate from broader systems of gender inequality. Rather, the criminalization of same-sex conduct is one of the mechanisms through which sex-based hierarchies are enforced. The decision offers an instructive framework for the broader application of the Convention. By locating criminalization within the

⁸ The submissions will be available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2026/call-input-thematic-report-hrc62-violence-and-discrimination-experienced>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See also Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, arts. 15 and 16; and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, art. 4.

¹¹ CEDAW/C/81/D/134/2018.

Convention's requirements to eliminate discriminatory social norms, ensure substantive equality and guarantee access to justice, the Committee affirmed that rights for LBQ women fall squarely within States' core obligations. It also provides a direct basis for applying women's rights frameworks to patterns of exclusion, coercion and violence affecting LBQ women and LGBT people more broadly, particularly where access to housing, livelihoods, protection, immigrant or refugee status, and public life is conditioned on conformity to heterosexual and reproductive expectations.

11. LBQ women who seek to build and sustain lives outside of these narrow, socially sanctioned pathways are often threatened with or subjected to acts of physical and sexual violence. These forms of violence target LBQ women with the specific aim of interfering in their personal integrity and autonomy.¹² The Human Rights Committee,¹³ the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women¹⁴ and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, among other United Nations bodies, have highlighted such abuses as violating the fundamental principle of non-discrimination in the application of international human rights law.¹⁵ International law protects core aspects of personal autonomy, including the right to freely choose a spouse and enter into marriage with full and free consent, under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. Forced marriages implicate the rights, set out in several instruments,¹⁶ to education; to freedom from physical, mental, and sexual violence; to health; to equality and non-discrimination; to information; and to an effective remedy when rights are violated.¹⁷

12. International law requires States to ensure that health services are available, accessible, acceptable and of good quality, without discrimination and without financial or informational barriers.¹⁸ This includes sexual and reproductive health, which is essential to the realization of women's rights and interdependent with other human rights.¹⁹

13. LBQ women's access to housing, land and economic security is often conditioned on or mediated through relationships with men, undermining both their autonomy and their ability to live safely and openly. States' responsibilities to eliminate discrimination include enacting legal and budgetary reforms to ensure equal rights to administer land, particularly for women and Indigenous Peoples, recognizing this as foundational to the rights to food, housing and economic stability.²⁰ States have a responsibility to address unequal power relations in decision making and community life,²¹ ensure equal treatment for women in land and agrarian reform, and address discriminatory customary systems and barriers to rural women's participation.²²

¹² See also [A/HRC/44/53](#).

¹³ [CCPR/C/KOR/CO/4](#), paras. 14 and 15.

¹⁴ [CEDAW/C/MYS/Q/3-5](#), para. 21.

¹⁵ For example, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 1.

¹⁶ Among others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

¹⁷ General Assembly resolution 71/175.

¹⁸ See [E/C.12/2000/4](#).

¹⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 22 (2016), paras. 10 and 25.

²⁰ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 26 (2022), paras. 32 and 35.

²¹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 34 (2016), para. 54 (c).

²² Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, art. 14 (2) (g).

14. States also have an obligation to address violence against LBQ women.²³ This is hampered by a lack of official disaggregated data, which is a necessary precondition for understanding the root causes of violence and responding appropriately, so that perpetrators do not feel motivated and enabled to suppress or punish diversity.²⁴

III. Conditional access to rights

15. In many contexts, women's access to rights and resources is mediated through their relationships with men. In some cases, this is explicit, in the form of laws that define marriage, parenthood and property rights in exclusively heterosexual terms. In others, it operates through administrative systems and service provision that assume the presence of a husband, male partner or male-headed household. This diminished status may also be reflected in research and funding priorities that prioritize the experience of men. Many LBQ organizations report that access to funding is often conditioned on alignment with male-centric LGBT priorities, limiting resources for LBQ-specific work and constraining the development of sustained, independent advocacy. This conditionality of rights and resources limits single, unmarried and queer women's ability to independently claim property, access healthcare, secure housing, form families, obtain legal protection and even fund their organizations.

A. Freedom of movement

16. Legal provisions limiting women's freedom to decide "where to go, travel and live" still exist in 30 per cent of world economies.²⁵ Male guardianship systems require women to obtain permission to travel, work, study or access healthcare.²⁶ Indicators that track women's ability to leave the marital home or travel domestically on equal terms with men²⁷ assume the existence of a marital home. In doing so, they reinforce heterosexual marriage as the central mechanism not only for access to rights, but also for defining women as legitimate subjects of political analysis. Single, unmarried and queer women fall outside the knowable bounds within which women's equality of movement can even be measured.

17. LBQ women experience compounded restrictions on their freedom of movement that are not captured by these frameworks. Upon discovering or suspecting same-sex relationships, families may confiscate phones and monitor communication to prevent contact with partners. Marriage to a man is often the only way to escape this surveillance. For LBQ women who have married or had children with men, fathers' legal authority to impose travel restrictions on their children may also be used to limit women's own movement. Anticipating that such restrictions may be imposed, some women leave before the violence they have been subjected to can be reported and fully documented. This form of preventive departure can undermine their ability to meet evidentiary thresholds in asylum procedures, leaving LBQ women constrained by systems that condition both their movement and their ability to prove harm in relationships with men.

B. Land, property, housing and inheritance

18. As noted above, two fifths of countries worldwide limit women's property rights. In many countries, discriminatory laws restricting women's ability to access, own and administer property originated under colonial rule. While analyses of the effects of colonialism on the rights of LGBT persons often focus on the criminalization of same-sex

²³ See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 35 (2017).

²⁴ See [A/HRC/41/45](#).

²⁵ See <http://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/moving-freely-moving-closer-gender-equality>.

²⁶ Submission from Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ Organization. See also [CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4](#) and [CEDAW/C/AFG/4](#).

²⁷ See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/4407cff6-6c6b-44cf-b89b-d1260f1a0700/download>.

conduct, colonial-era laws curtailing women's property rights are equally impactful. Women continue to face significant legal and institutional barriers to owning, inheriting or retaining property, particularly in the wake of divorce or widowhood. Women in sex work, women experiencing homelessness and displaced women face additional barriers to stable housing when property and rental systems are structured around patriarchal family models.

19. Unmarried women are often denied access to systems that allocate property and resources. LBQ women have been excluded from women's cooperatives and microfinance schemes that require verification of marital status, resulting in downstream exclusion from communal development plans and national poverty reduction strategies that distribute housing support, livelihood assistance and community resources.²⁸ Unmarried women seeking to rent a flat alone may be denied²⁹ or repeatedly questioned about their marital status.³⁰ In some cases, landlords have refused to rent to queer women with disabilities unless a male guardian is named on the lease.³¹

20. Housing precarity and homelessness resulting from discrimination within families have been widely documented by LGBT organizations, international bodies and States globally.³² For LBQ women, the economic, social and legal barriers to renting or owning property render them particularly dependent upon and vulnerable to their families of origin. In Brazil, the Federal Public Defender's Office has documented evictions from family homes and loss of access to shared property following disclosure of LBQ women's sexual orientation.³³ Human rights organizations have documented cases of lesbian couples who were evicted by their families after neighbours reported suspicions of same-sex relationships³⁴ and deprived of access to family property and inheritance as punishment.³⁵

21. Women's unequal access to land and inheritance heightens the importance of being able to jointly purchase and administer land as a same-sex couple. However, across many contexts, women's ability to acquire and retain property is constrained by a combination of structural and legal barriers, including the persistent global gender pay gap, limited access to land and, in some countries, discriminatory laws governing property rights. These constraints disproportionately affect single women, who may lack the financial means to purchase or maintain property independently. In contexts where same-sex relationships are not legally recognized, LBQ women are further precluded from jointly owning property, entering into shared contracts or securing tenancy rights. Such legal frameworks may also enable landlords to refuse to rent to same-sex couples or terminate leases when relationships become known. As a result, LBQ women may be denied access to housing as a couple while simultaneously lacking the means to secure it as individuals.

22. In numerous jurisdictions worldwide, inheritance regimes continue to differentiate between male and female spouses, often to the detriment of women.³⁶ In addition, where same-sex relationships are not legally recognized, partners are excluded from spousal status and therefore lack automatic inheritance rights under intestacy law. In such contexts, partners must rely on costly private legal arrangements to transfer assets, which may not provide tax treatment, exemptions or legal protections equivalent to those available to married couples. Inheritance exclusion becomes acute in situations of crisis, conflict and war.³⁷ When same-sex partners are killed, surviving partners are often not recognized as family members. As a result, they may be excluded from funeral decisions, denied access to mortal remains and lack standing to claim reparations or survivor benefits. Women who are simultaneously excluded from family inheritance (whether as a form of punishment for their sexuality or under inheritance regimes that prioritize male heirs) face compounded discrimination. The

²⁸ Submission from Avenir pour tous-MERE-ENFANT (A.M.EN).

²⁹ Submission from Negotiating Queer Identities following Forced Migration.

³⁰ Submission from Women Enabled International and others.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See <https://www.mdpi.com/resolver?pii=ijerph16152677> and <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/ijoh/article/view/24160/18643>.

³³ Submission from the Federal Public Defender's Office of Brazil.

³⁴ Submission from Avenir pour tous-MERE-ENFANT (A.M.EN).

³⁵ Submission from Asociación Lambda.

³⁶ Submissions from Sarajevo Open Centre; and Human Rights in China.

³⁷ Submission from Insight.

lack of legal recognition for LBQ relationships also has significant consequences for LBQ women who are sex workers, unhoused or otherwise at heightened risk of violence. When these women are killed, their partners often encounter serious obstacles to criminal investigations or the return of remains, which prevents those closest to the victims from receiving effective reparations.³⁸

C. Health

23. Many LBQ women experience significant violations of their right to health. These include denial of abortion, refusal of fertility treatment, unnecessary prescription of contraceptives, breaches of confidentiality, requests for husband or family permission prior to care, and State surveillance of women's sexual practices through mandatory reporting laws.³⁹ LBQ women may be denied Pap smears and screenings for sexually transmitted infections because they are not having sex with men, treated as irresponsible for not using birth control, or misinformed about their health risks; in one case, a woman was told "lesbian women don't get uterine cancer, it's been proven, they did studies with nuns".⁴⁰ Medical and scientific research concerning women's bodies and relevant to LBQ populations almost invariably fails to disaggregate data by sexual orientation. Civil society organizations also report limited training for health professionals, in both public and private systems, on the specific health needs of LBQ populations.⁴¹

24. Notably, most of the services LBQ women are routinely denied are neither specialized nor unique. They are standard preventive and reproductive health procedures, including Pap smears, cancer screening, testing for sexually transmitted diseases, and routine gynaecological care. What is distinct is not the nature of these needs, but the conditions under which access is granted. These structural exclusions translate into measurable disparities in health outcomes. Disproportionate numbers of LBQ women are overdue for cervical, breast and bowel cancer screenings,⁴² and in some contexts, nearly half of lesbian women report not attending gynaecological appointments.⁴³ The historic focus on gay and bisexual men in LGBT health research and service provision has left LBQ women comparatively understudied. HIV prevention is often, incorrectly, regarded as irrelevant to LBQ communities, limiting access to appropriate care.⁴⁴ In some instances, local health bodies have contracted organizations primarily focused on gay men to develop policies and protocols addressing LBQ women's health.⁴⁵

25. Public health and psychological research on cisgender LBQ women has often focused heavily on substance use and mental health outcomes, with comparatively limited attention to the role of medical neglect in producing these outcomes. Exclusion from care and mistreatment by providers can lead many LBQ women to self-manage health conditions, seek private care where available or avoid healthcare altogether.⁴⁶ Managing untreated or costly health conditions, together with the associated psychological distress, can in turn limit LBQ women's ability to sustain employment, pursue education and participate in public and political life.

³⁸ Submission from Red de Litigantes LGBTI+.

³⁹ Submissions from Global Health Justice Partnership; Sphere Foundation; and Movement Advancement Project.

⁴⁰ Submission from Québec Lesbian Network.

⁴¹ Submissions from Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey (ERA LGBTI), Women Loving Women Caucus; Agrupación Lésbica y Bisexual Rompiendo el Silencio, Fundación Poderes and Red Lesbofeminista; Colombia Diversa; Faculty of Law, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul; Red de Litigantes LGBTI+; Organizando Trans Diversidades and Corporación Humanas; and Arquivo de Identidade Angolano and Articulação Brasileira de Lésbicas.

⁴² Submission from Thorne Harbour Health.

⁴³ Submission from Agrupación Lésbica y Bisexual Rompiendo el Silencio, Fundación Poderes and Red Lesbofeminista.

⁴⁴ Submissions from Asia Feminist LBQ Network; and Agrupación Lésbica y Bisexual Rompiendo el Silencio, Fundación Poderes and Red Lesbofeminista.

⁴⁵ Submission from Lesbincidencias.

⁴⁶ Submission from Québec Lesbian Network.

26. Rates of psychological distress among LBQ women are more than double those of women in the general population, with substantial proportions reporting anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. Many report clinical diagnoses alongside elevated levels of substance use, limited access to affordable and affirming services, and fear of violence, contributing to stress, isolation and constrained life choices. Transgender lesbians report patterns of abuse and denial of care that similarly push them into isolation and reliance on unsafe, informal procedures. Some describe being subjected to invasive medical examinations, psychological assessments and degrading documentation requirements by healthcare providers. These practices occur alongside broader barriers to accessing gender-affirming care,⁴⁷ including hormone therapy.⁴⁸ In this context, some transgender individuals report resorting to unregulated interventions, including the use of industrial silicone or other unsafe procedures, with serious reported health consequences, including infection, tissue damage and other long-term complications.⁴⁹

D. Gender-based violence services

27. Mainstream conceptualizations of gender-based violence commonly rely on binary constructions of female victims and male perpetrators, which are often codified into law. Domestic violence laws, reporting mechanisms, data collection and pathways to justice are largely structured around heterosexual frameworks. As a result, access to protection services is frequently conditioned on the presence of a male perpetrator. LBQ human rights defenders in more than a dozen countries have documented a persistent lack of inclusive shelters, trained staff and confidential reporting procedures for LBQ survivors of intimate-partner violence.⁵⁰ In practice, queer women are often turned away from shelters and denied access to protection services, including in emergency situations. In some contexts, transgender LBQ women are disproportionately affected, where shelters operate on sex-based exclusionary criteria that may restrict their access to protection and support services. Some survivors of abuse within LBQ relationships report being told that, because both partners are women, they are “both responsible” for violence, or that services “don’t deal with that”, thereby dismissing and minimizing abuse that is not perpetrated by men.⁵¹

E. Parental rights

28. LBQ women face significant barriers in exercising their right to form and maintain a family within systems structured around heterosexual partnerships. Access to reproductive care and insurance coverage is often conditioned on the presence of a male partner,⁵² with some protocols requiring several months of heterosexual intercourse to establish infertility. In certain contexts, spousal consent or the presence of a male partner is explicitly required before fertility counselling or in vitro fertilization treatment is provided.⁵³ Reproductive services are often limited to married couples. In settings where same-sex couples cannot legally marry, LBQ women are excluded by default. High costs, combined with the absence of inclusive public policies, can push lesbian women towards unsupported home insemination, potentially exposing them to avoidable legal and health risks.⁵⁴ Additionally, several federal and subnational legal frameworks restrict fertility treatment to married individuals, creating substantial, and often prohibitive, barriers for LBQ women.

⁴⁷ Submission from Equality Network.

⁴⁸ Submission from Organizando Trans Diversidades (OTD) and Corporación Humanas.

⁴⁹ Submissions from Organizando Trans Diversidades (OTD) and Corporación Humanas; and SAQFE and North African Trans Alliance (NATA).

⁵⁰ Submissions from Asia Feminist LBQ Network; Piravi and Queer Judgments Project; Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey (ERA LGBTI), Women Loving Women Caucus; EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community (EL*C); Colombia Diversa; Red de Litigantes LGBTI+; 4Métrica; Amnesty International; and Women Enabled International and others.

⁵¹ Submission from Thorne Harbour Health.

⁵² Submission from Sarajevo Open Centre.

⁵³ Submission from Women Enabled International and others.

⁵⁴ Submission from Arquivo de Identidade Angolano and Articulação Brasileira de Lésbicas.

Non-biological mothers in same-sex relationships are often rendered legally invisible and socially stigmatized under such policies, contributing to a sense that they “have no place in society”.⁵⁵

29. Civil registration systems designed around heterosexual models often prevent two women from being recognized as legal parents. Official forms and administrative procedures typically require designation of a “mother” and a “father”, obliging families with one or two mothers to repeatedly explain their family structure to authorities and ensure it is corrected.⁵⁶ These constraints result in distinct legal consequences. First, children born to same-sex couples may face barriers to birth or citizenship registration where only one mother can be legally recognized, potentially undermining their ability to acquire a nationality. Second, the non-recognition of one parent can have separate implications for custody, inheritance and related legal protections, particularly in the event of the recognized parent’s death. Together, these gaps may leave families navigating parallel vulnerabilities: securing the child’s legal status⁵⁷ on the one hand, and ensuring continuity of parental recognition and associated rights on the other.⁵⁸

30. Custody disputes and child-protection proceedings often challenge the legitimacy of LBQ motherhood in ways that explicitly invoke sexual orientation. LBQ mothers report heightened scrutiny in custody cases and threats of child removal, leading some to conceal their sexual orientation in order to protect their families.⁵⁹ In *Atala Riffo and daughters v. Chile*, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found that Chile had violated a lesbian mother’s rights after domestic courts terminated her custody of her children on the basis of her sexual orientation.⁶⁰ In some legal systems, LBQ women are explicitly barred from adopting children.⁶¹ Even where no formal prohibition exists, many LBQ women believe they are ineligible to apply and refrain from doing so, due to prevailing social narratives that portray households headed by two women as inadequate.

IV. Restricted access to the public sphere

31. Marriage continues to function as the primary marker of adulthood for women, positioning those who are single, unmarried or queer as perpetually available for unpaid care work rather than as independent participants in public life. Those who seek to enter the formal economy may face discrimination in hiring, promotion and retention based on perceived sexual orientation and gender expression, often compounded by the absence of legal protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Limited access to employment and income further constrains LBQ women’s ability to live independently, participate in public life and establish social and political presence. Stigmatizing media narratives, together with the chronic underrepresentation of women in politics, contribute to a climate that restricts LBQ women’s ability to appear and be recognized in the public sphere. Their experiences remain frequently undocumented or misrecognized, and this absence is then used to justify the lack of targeted protections, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion.

A. Expectations of care labour

32. LBQ women experience distinct forms of erasure in relation to independence and adulthood, with direct implications for the care work they are expected to perform within their families of origin. In societies where marriage to a man is treated as the default path out of the family home and into recognized adulthood, remaining unmarried is often seen as

⁵⁵ Submission from Legebitra.

⁵⁶ Submission from Québec Lesbian Network.

⁵⁷ Submission from Promsex.

⁵⁸ Submission from Human Rights in China.

⁵⁹ Submissions from Frontline AIDS, Ltd., Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination, and Sexualities, Women and Genders; and Coming Out.

⁶⁰ See https://corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_239_ing.pdf.

⁶¹ Submission from Feminita.

signalling ongoing availability for family care responsibilities from which their married siblings are exempt.

33. Even where LBQ women have left the family home, are in long-term partnerships or provide financial support to others, they may not be recognized as having attained adult status. Many report being expected to assume continuous caregiving roles – emotional, logistical and financial – that are not imposed on their heterosexual siblings. Lesbians, in particular, describe being treated as single despite long-term partnerships, and therefore presumed responsible for caring for ageing parents; these expectations are not typically codified in law but are enforced through gendered and familial norms often experienced as effectively mandatory. Bisexual women describe a persistent presumption that they will ultimately enter a heterosexual marriage, which positions them as “not yet” married and thus available for disproportionate shares of care labour.⁶² In this context, LBQ cisgender women report a form of “double social pressure”, whereby they experience discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation while simultaneously being expected to demonstrate heightened “family care, emotional restraint, and the prioritization of others’ needs over their own”.⁶³ The construction of single, unmarried and queer women as natural caregivers limits their ability to form partnerships, live independently and participate in paid work, reinforcing cycles of economic dependence and delayed social recognition.⁶⁴

B. Discrimination in the workplace

34. LBQ women face discrimination in hiring, promotion and retention. While women are often channelled into care professions, such as nursing, teaching and roles involving children, LBQ women working in these sectors report heightened scrutiny and exposure to allegations that their sexual orientation harms their employers’ reputation, and in some cases have been dismissed on grounds framed as “immoral” behaviour.⁶⁵ This reflects a broader tension in which gendered expectations simultaneously steer women towards caregiving roles while rendering LBQ women particularly vulnerable to exclusion within them. In the United States, over one third of LBQ cisgender women report having been fired or denied employment at some point in their careers, and approximately one quarter report being denied promotions or receiving negative evaluations.⁶⁶

35. Masculine presenting, transgender and gender-nonconforming LBQ women often encounter fewer opportunities for advancement and greater employment precarity. Rigid expectations regarding femininity, dress codes and gender expression further shape and constrain the sectors in which LBQ women are able to work. They experience high rates of unemployment, precarious work and poor working conditions, and are disproportionately concentrated in lower-paid sectors.⁶⁷ Many are pushed into informal or insecure labour without contracts or social protection, including underpaid care work and sex work.⁶⁸ The absence of explicit protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity compounds existing barriers to women’s economic participation. These structural constraints limit LBQ women’s access to independent income, reinforce dependence on family and marriage structures, reduce their ability to refuse coerced marriage and restrict their participation in public life.

⁶² Submission from Asia Feminist LBQ Network.

⁶³ Submission from Coming Out. See also submission from 4Métrica.

⁶⁴ Submission from Geledés – Instituto da Mulher Negra; Asia Feminist LBQ Network; and Mexico.

⁶⁵ Submission from Amazing People.

⁶⁶ Submission from the Williams Institute.

⁶⁷ Submissions from Coming Out; International Commission of Jurists; and TGEU (Trans Europe and Central Asia).

⁶⁸ Submissions from TGEU (Trans Europe and Central Asia); Frontline AIDS, Ltd., Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination, and Sexualities, Women and Genders; SAQFE and North African Trans Alliance (NATA); Colombia Diversa; and Sphere Foundation.

C. Political representation

36. LBQ women are underrepresented at all levels of government. Slow progress towards gender parity more broadly has undermined LBQ women's participation in government, policy forums, debate and electoral processes. Globally, only a small number of countries have achieved parity or near parity in national legislatures,⁶⁹ and even fewer at the local level.⁷⁰ According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years" if current trends continue.⁷¹

37. Barriers to LBQ political advancement persist across all levels and branches of government, including supreme courts, city councils and municipal bodies. Against this backdrop, examples from States – such as, in Canada, openly lesbian elected officials including a Member of Provincial Parliament, a lieutenant governor in New Brunswick, a former police chief, and a transgender lesbian serving on a town council – remain exceptions rather than the norm.⁷² Disparities in women's economic conditions further constrain the ability to sustain political campaigns, build constituencies and expand networks. In some cases, LBQ women's participation in political processes is limited to advisory roles, with their contributions described as partial or rendered effectively invisible.⁷³

38. Where LBQ women enter public roles, visibility is often met with hostility.⁷⁴ High-level declarations portraying LGBT persons as threats to the nation, including statements that they "should be stoned to death",⁷⁵ create a climate that affects LBQ politicians and candidates in specific ways. Such rhetoric can render public service both inaccessible and dangerous for those who seek or hold office.

D. Hostile narratives and stereotypical representation

39. LBQ representation in media is frequently shaped by stereotyping. Bisexual and queer women are often portrayed as unstable, harmful or morally suspect, while non-traditional relationships are depicted as fragile or deviant. Acceptable visibility is commonly narrowed to characters who conform to dominant norms – typically thin, white and conventionally feminine – thereby reinforcing heteronormative standards and marginalizing LBQ people who fall outside these representations.

40. In many contexts, LGBT people are targeted by "false and dangerous narratives"⁷⁶ that portray them as threats to tradition, family, children and the nation. High-level rhetoric, media campaigns and public discourse frame queer visibility, education and participation as harmful, often invoking the purported need to protect "children's innocence".⁷⁷ Prior reporting under the present mandate has identified these narratives as forms of misinformation and scapegoating; however, such analysis is often framed in gender-neutral terms.⁷⁸ For LBQ women specifically, accusations that queerness harms children directly undermine their claim to personhood and contribute to their exclusion from public life. Just as women's legal status has historically been mediated through their relationship to men, their social legitimacy is often tied to assumptions about maternal potential. When LBQ women are portrayed as corrupting children, "recruiting" youth or undermining families,

⁶⁹ See https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_month=1&date_year=2026.

⁷⁰ See https://localgov.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/2026-03/UN_WOMEN_LOCALGOV_Poster2025%20final_0.pdf.

⁷¹ See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation>.

⁷² Submission from Québec Lesbian Network.

⁷³ Submission from Lesbincidencias.

⁷⁴ Submission from LGBTIQ+ Task Force, Helem and MOSAIC MENA.

⁷⁵ Submission from Avenir pour tous-MERE-ENFANT (A.M.EN).

⁷⁶ See A/HRC/56/49.

⁷⁷ See A/76/152.

⁷⁸ Ibid., A/HRC/56/49 and A/HRC/59/43. See also <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/brief-un-women-submission-on-electoral-participation-and-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-en.pdf>.

such claims mobilize bio-essentialist assumptions that condition women's personhood on conformity to norms of femininity, childbearing and child protection. In this framing, LBQ women are rendered unintelligible within dominant gender norms and positioned as failing to meet the criteria through which social recognition and legitimacy are conferred.

41. These narratives are operationalized through law, policy and social practice. In *Flamer-Caldera v. Sri Lanka*,⁷⁹ the Women and Children's Bureau reportedly attributed rising child abuse to a "growing homosexual culture", positioning lesbian identity itself as a threat to children and directing that slur at a lesbian human rights defender. Some governments have eliminated comprehensive sexuality education, restricted or banned LGBT-related content in school curricula, removed queer content from media and blocked access to related online resources. In parallel, social hostility has intensified in some contexts, including increased support for punitive laws targeting same-sex conduct, harassment of women in public spaces and harassment of LBQ women and girls in sports and recreation environments.⁸⁰ LBQ women may be excluded from caregiving roles and professions involving children – including teaching, mentorship, adoption and certain religious or community functions – through both formal restrictions and informal practices, such as workplace restrictions on interacting with minors or dismissals following allegations regarding sexual orientation. These dynamics extend across many social and religious institutions, where strands of exclusionary nationalist or religious discourse cast LBQ women as incompatible with the very social structures they are expected to sustain. For LBQ girls, these narratives position queerness outside the bounds of childhood itself. They are socialized toward childbearing as a defining role while being told their potential queerness is dangerous; they may be deprived of inclusive education, subjected to disciplinary action or exclusion from school and, in some cases, pushed out of education altogether⁸¹ – reinforcing longer-term patterns of economic dependence and precarity.⁸²

V. Violence and harassment as regulatory tools

42. In 1997, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, observed that to strive to live and work outside the watchful gaze of the family and community is to risk becoming a target for male violent behaviour.⁸³ She further noted that communities "police" women, and that those who choose to live out their sexuality in ways other than heterosexuality are often subjected to violence, degrading treatment and punishment. Across public spaces, workplaces, homes, healthcare settings and schools, violence against LBQ women operates as a mechanism of regulation. It enforces compliance with gendered expectations and punishes attempts to access rights outside of male-mediated systems. In response, many LBQ women report self-policing their behaviour and limiting their engagement in public life to mitigate the risk of violence. Many stakeholders describe the need for caution, including avoiding displays of affection in public.

A. Violence perpetrated by family members

43. LBQ women report being subjected to threats and acts of physical and sexual violence by family members intended to discipline or "correct" their sexual orientation. Sexual violence, including rape, is at times framed by perpetrators as "corrective",⁸⁴ purportedly intended to "cure" LBQ women.⁸⁵ These acts may be carried out by relatives, intimate partners or community members, and are often accompanied by language invoking the

⁷⁹ CEDAW/C/81/D/134/2018.

⁸⁰ Submission from European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation.

⁸¹ Submissions from EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community (EL*C); Colombia Diversa; and Organizando Trans Diversidades (OTD) and Corporación Humanas.

⁸² See A/80/183; and submission from ReportOUT.

⁸³ See E/CN.4/1997/47.

⁸⁴ Submissions from Equality Network; Bilitis; Pink Armenia; ILEX-Acción Jurídica; and ILGA World and others.

⁸⁵ Submission from Justice Work.

preservation of “family honour”.⁸⁶ Such violence – recognized under international human rights law as potentially amounting to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment⁸⁷ – is predicated in part on the false premise that same-sex attraction or gender variance should be changed. For LBQ women, it is also closely linked to efforts to prevent them from living autonomous lives and forming relationships outside male-controlled structures.⁸⁸

44. Although such violence is sometimes triggered by the discovery of a same-sex relationship,⁸⁹ many LBQ women live in contexts where forced marriage of women and girls is prevalent irrespective of sexual orientation. In these settings, women and girls may be coerced into unwanted marriages by being subjected to beatings, starvation, isolation or confinement until they comply. The pattern of abuse suggests that practices described as “corrective” are not solely directed at perceived sexual deviance, but more broadly serve to enforce conformity with patriarchal norms, including entry into marriage. In this sense, violence operates as both a disciplinary and regulatory mechanism.

B. Violence in public

45. Violence in public space functions as a mechanism of regulation, enforcing compliance with gendered expectations and punishing LBQ women who form relationships with women or are perceived to deviate from heterosexual norms. Women may be targeted for holding hands, showing affection, or being identified as lesbian based on appearance. Reported incidents include harassment, intimidation, threats of so-called “corrective” rape, mob intimidation, physical assault and killings.⁹⁰ Perpetrators often explicitly frame such violence as a response to the visibility of same-sex relationships, intimacy or partnership.⁹¹ Gender expression frequently operates as a primary trigger of violence. Masculine-presenting women may be targeted even in the absence of any visible relationship, while transgender and non-binary lesbians report heightened levels of violence in public spaces. Harassment linked to clothing, hairstyle and other markers of gender expression is widespread, often enforcing conformity to normative femininity as a condition of safety. Law enforcement personnel frequently minimize or dismiss reports of public assaults, and failures to intervene or register complaints can normalize such violence and signal that gender nonconformity and same-sex relationships fall outside effective State protection. In response, many LBQ women report structuring their daily lives around risk avoidance – limiting where they go, how they present themselves and whether they disclose relationships. This may include avoiding public displays of affection, altering appearance or maintaining “double lives” to reduce exposure.⁹²

C. Violence in medical settings

46. Medical settings can function as sites of surveillance and even punishment for LBQ women. Reports indicate that sensitive information – such as HIV status, sexual orientation and personal histories – has in some instances been shared with law enforcement under the pretext of public health or epidemiological investigation.⁹³ In certain contexts, psychologists are subject to legal requirements to report clients who disclose so-called “deviant behaviour”, effectively transforming confidential care into a mechanism of control.⁹⁴ United Nations human rights bodies, including the Committee against Torture, have affirmed that gynaecological examinations may constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and, in

⁸⁶ Submissions from 6Rang; Amazing People; and ReportOUT.

⁸⁷ See [A/HRC/44/53](#). See also [CCPR/C/KOR/CO/4](#), paras. 14 and 15; and [CEDAW/C/MYS/Q/3-5](#), para. 21.

⁸⁸ Submission from Women’s Alliance for Equality.

⁸⁹ Submission from OutRight Action International.

⁹⁰ Submissions from Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM Defensoras); Caribe Afirmativo; ILEX-Acción Jurídica; Campaign Against Homophobia; Lesben und Alter; and Fundación Arcoiris.

⁹¹ Submission from Asociación Lambda.

⁹² Submission from 6Rang.

⁹³ Submissions from LGBTIQ+ Task Force, Helem and MOSAIC MENA; and Amazing People.

⁹⁴ Submission from Amazing People.

some cases, torture when they are non-consensual, coerced or performed under pressure; lack a legitimate medical purpose; are used to control, punish, or verify sexuality; or are conducted in a humiliating, degrading or abusive manner.⁹⁵ LBQ women, and bisexual women in particular, report being treated with suspicion and contempt during gynaecological examinations. Nurses, doctors and other health professionals may subject them to verbal abuse, characterizing them as irresponsible for not using contraception or referring to gender-diverse patients as “deviant”. Bisexual women also report being subjected to degrading remarks and intrusive questioning about their number of partners, even when they are monogamous.

D. Violence in the workplace

47. LBQ women experience verbal abuse and sexual violence in the workplace that both responds to and targets their sexual orientation, while constraining their professional advancement. Some report sexual violence by colleagues and supervisors who explicitly frame these acts as a response to the victim having publicly identified as queer. In one case, a lesbian narrowly escaped rape by a colleague who told her she was “lying” about her sexuality and “couldn’t be gay”.⁹⁶ The language used by perpetrators indicates that such violence is not only intended to “correct” or punish perceived deviation, but to override a woman’s own understanding of herself. In workplace environments where women’s credibility and expertise are frequently undermined by male colleagues, this violence functions to assert both sexual and epistemic dominance over LBQ women’s self-identification.

48. Colleagues may refuse to work with LBQ women, subject them to comments reflective of prejudice against lesbians, mockery and persistent stereotyping as hypersexual, masculine, unclean or unsafe. This conduct produces forms of exclusion that are both structural and interpersonal, effectively cutting women off from informal decision-making networks and opportunities for advancement. When LBQ women attempt to report harassment or violence, responses from supervisors and human resources departments have, in some cases, included suggestions that they find a boyfriend, comparisons to male perpetrators, victim-blaming or even disciplinary measures against the complainant.

E. Criminalization, and violence by security forces

49. Criminalization of LBQ women operates through overlapping legal frameworks that regulate their lives, relationships and visibility, including colonial-era penal codes, morality and public order laws, and restrictions on expression, assembly and organizing.⁹⁷ Approximately one third of countries and more than half of Commonwealth States criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct. Globally, most of these statutes originate in colonial-era laws and at least 40 jurisdictions explicitly criminalize same-sex sexual conduct between women; however, such criminalization is not limited to historical legacies, as some States have in recent years retained, reinforced or introduced new legal provisions to similar effect.⁹⁸ Potential penalties may include fines, corporal punishment, imprisonment and, in some cases, death by stoning. Even where laws formally target sexual conduct between men, they often underpin broader policing practices that extend across LGBT communities, exposing LBQ women to arrest, detention and surveillance.

50. Morality, indecency and public-order laws enable authorities to police LBQ women’s lives even in the absence of explicit criminalization of same-sex conduct.⁹⁹ Women perceived

⁹⁵ See [A/74/137](#), [A/HRC/22/53](#) and [A/HRC/32/44](#). See also <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/5cfe0e11-b9de-4de3-985c-eed9d3607f40/content>.

⁹⁶ Submission from Québec Lesbian Network.

⁹⁷ Submissions from Youth for Change Network; Faculty of Law, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul; ReportOUT; International Commission of Jurists; Mawjoudin; and Amazing People.

⁹⁸ Submission from Human Dignity Trust.

⁹⁹ Submissions from International Commission of Jurists; and Agrupación Lésbica y Bisexual Rompiendo el Silencio, Fundación Poderes and Red Lesbofeminista.

to be lesbian have been arrested and detained for acts deemed “indecent”. Criminal provisions addressing same-sex conduct are often compounded by broader morality charges, such as provisions on “facilitating or promoting immorality” or offences framed as “corruption on earth”.¹⁰⁰ The application of these laws allows “non-normative intimacy”, including emotional closeness, physical affection or perceived same-sex attraction, to be treated as criminal. In practice, this extends punishment beyond specific sexual acts to encompass perceived deviations from a wider set of gendered norms and expectations.

51. Security forces have been reported to harass, arbitrarily detain and commit acts of physical and sexual violence against LBQ women.¹⁰¹ Across multiple regions, police, security forces and other authorities have beaten, raped, kicked and otherwise assaulted women they perceive to be queer or in violation of gendered norms, turning routine encounters, such as traffic stops and checkpoints, into sites of heightened risk, particularly for masculine-presenting, gender nonconforming and transgender lesbians.¹⁰² In a number of accounts, the violence is explicitly sexualized, with both cisgender and transgender LBQ women reporting that law enforcement officers have used devices such as pepper spray and tasers in ways targeting intimate areas of the body.¹⁰³ At border crossings, feminine-presenting LBQ women report being subjected to degrading and humiliating interrogations about their personal lives, and in some cases being propositioned for sex by security forces, police or immigration officials.¹⁰⁴ In custodial settings, authorities have been reported to facilitate or directly perpetrate abuse, including by inciting other detainees to sexually assault LBQ and transgender women or placing them in cells with known perpetrators of violence.¹⁰⁵ Transgender LBQ women are often detained according to their assigned sex at birth, exposing them to heightened risks of violence. Reports also document ill-treatment, including torture, and non-consensual HIV testing in detention contexts.

52. The manner in which States criminalize same-sex relations contributes to the broader construction of LBQ women as deviant, dangerous and deserving of violence or punishment, reinforcing narratives that associate queer identities with social harm and moral transgression. Legislation banning so-called “propaganda” or designating LGBT movements as “extremist” has enabled surveillance, raids and arrests, placing LBQ human rights defenders at heightened risk of violence in custody and during enforcement operations.¹⁰⁶ Amendments criminalizing public gatherings linked to “mass disorder” have further facilitated the targeting of workshops, health programmes and meetings, with defenders detained and abused. Denial of legal registration similarly forces organizations to operate informally, increasing exposure to raids, detention, and violence by security forces.¹⁰⁷ Defamation campaigns labelling women human rights defenders as “lesbians”, intended as a slur, demonstrate how “lesbian” functions as a marker of disobedience within social and political discourse – used to stigmatize women who challenge male authority, prescribed gender roles and heterosexual norms.¹⁰⁸ In this context, LBQ human rights defenders disrupt gendered norms governing public participation and resist systems that condition women’s rights on proximity to men. Violence against LBQ defenders therefore serves a broader regulatory function: deterring women from claiming rights, organizing collectively and appearing in public outside of male-mediated systems.

¹⁰⁰ Submission from 6Rang.

¹⁰¹ Submissions from Federal Public Defender’s Office of Brazil; Feminita; Coming Out; and Frontline AIDS, Ltd., Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination, and Sexualities, Women and Genders.

¹⁰² Submission from Migori Feminist Initiative.

¹⁰³ Submission from Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ Organization.

¹⁰⁴ Information provided to the Independent Expert during consultations with LBQ human rights defenders. See also <https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/border-criminologies-blog/blog-post/2024/12/some-reflections-gendered-nature-us-border-policies-and>, and https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/frontline_defenders_mexico_english_v2.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Submission from Mexico.

¹⁰⁶ Submission from Coming Out.

¹⁰⁷ Submission from Human Rights in China.

¹⁰⁸ See <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/written%20out.pdf>.

VI. Structural causes of the data gap concerning lesbian, bisexual and queer women

53. At the local, national and international levels, discrimination and violence against LBQ women are rarely reflected in official data, contributing to what the Federal Public Defender's Office of Brazil described in its submission as the "structural invisibility of LBQ women" in public policies, official statistics and service delivery systems.¹⁰⁹ Most national crime reporting systems do not consistently collect data on sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression, resulting in the misclassification of murders, physical attacks, sexual violence and other forms of harm.¹¹⁰ Killings of lesbian and bisexual women may be recorded as homicides of heterosexual women, while transgender LBQ women are often classified according to sex assigned at birth. As a result, the scale and patterns of violence affecting LBQ communities cannot be accurately assessed through State data. Policy responses are therefore shaped by what has been described as a "systematic distortion" of available data,¹¹¹ in which LBQ women are incorrectly presumed to face lower levels of risk than other groups of women or LGBT persons. This contributes to backlash and systemic inaction when LBQ women attempt to report abuse that is misclassified or disregarded, reinforcing underreporting and documentation gaps.¹¹² The LBQ data gap has several structural drivers, including the normative application of rights frameworks, the entrenchment of the public/private divide in international law,¹¹³ and persistent gender bias in research methodologies.¹¹⁴

54. Normative women's rights and LGBT frameworks often treat women and LGBT persons as separate categories, resulting in the systematic omission of LBQ women from data, policy and research. Women's rights approaches frequently presume heterosexuality, while LGBT frameworks tend to centre men who have sex with men, leaving LBQ experiences underdocumented and poorly understood. This siloed approach contributes to gaps in evidence and policy responses, as seen in labour and asylum systems that fail to capture the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by LBQ women or provide effective remedies.¹¹⁵

55. Violence against LBQ women occurring in the home is frequently dismissed by authorities as a private or family matter, limiting investigation, reporting and access to redress. The public/private divide in law and practice contributes to significant underreporting and data gaps, particularly on forms of violence such as so-called "corrective" abuse or conversion practices perpetrated by family members. At the same time, State policies and rhetoric that stigmatize sexual and gender diversity contribute to environments in which such violence is normalized, while responsibility is disavowed when it occurs. This dynamic further undermines documentation and weakens evidence-based policy responses.

VII. Conclusion

56. In 1995, South African human rights defender Beverley Ditsie became the first openly lesbian woman to address the United Nations. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, she urged Member States to affirm in the Beijing Platform for Action that "lesbian rights are women's rights and that women's rights are universal", and emphasized that "no woman can determine the direction of her own life without the ability to determine her sexuality".¹¹⁶ More than three decades later, many LBQ women remain at the forefront of intersectional movements for justice globally. Despite

¹⁰⁹ See also submission from the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights (RFSL).

¹¹⁰ Submissions from Human Rights Watch; and Venezuelan Observatory on LGBTIQ+ Violence.

¹¹¹ Submission from Red de Litigantes LGBTI+.

¹¹² Submissions from Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey (ERA LGBTI), Women Loving Women Caucus; and L-Support and LesbenRing.

¹¹³ See E/CN.4/2006/61 and A/HRC/23/49/Add.3.

¹¹⁴ Submissions from Black Femme Legal; and Egale.

¹¹⁵ Submissions from Rainbow Railroad; and OutRight Action International.

¹¹⁶ See <https://unlgbticoregroup.org/home/lgbti-milestones-at-the-united-nations/>.

advances in access to rights for both women and LGBT persons, LBQ women continue to face violence rooted not only in the policing of sexuality, but also in the persistent denial of women's autonomy.

57. As reflected in many of the inputs received to inform the present report, to address these issues, LBQ women, human rights defenders and communities have proposed a combination of longer-term measures aimed at transforming gender hierarchies and immediate, practical steps to improve daily living conditions. Many of these approaches are designed to be implemented without requiring broad shifts in societal attitudes towards sexual orientation. Submissions highlight the continuing impact of criminalization, gaps in anti-discrimination protections and barriers faced by queer couples in relation to relationship recognition, property and housing. Across more than 200 submissions, access to legal recognition of relationships is framed less as an end in itself than as a means of securing a range of associated rights, including inheritance, property ownership, parental recognition, healthcare and financial security. Exclusion from such recognition contributes to compounded forms of discrimination. At the same time, reliance on relationship status as the primary gateway to these rights does not address underlying inequalities where entitlements remain mediated through institutional frameworks rather than grounded in women's autonomy and equal legal recognition.

58. Accordingly, many proposals advanced by LBQ human rights defenders do not follow a linear model of LGBT rights advancement. Instead, they seek to enable progress even in contexts of State-sanctioned discrimination, and emphasize the transformation of gender hierarchies as a foundational element of broader equality. Their research, testimony and analysis indicate that LBQ women see their freedom as a precursor to the elimination of anti-LGBT discrimination, rather than something that must wait for it.

VIII. Recommendations

59. With regard to women's autonomy and unconditional access to rights, States should:

- (a) Remove legal, administrative and institutional requirements that condition access to healthcare, housing, property, parental recognition and essential services on marital status or relationship to men;
- (b) Develop comprehensive national action plans to end forced and coerced marriage;
- (c) Guarantee women's equal rights to own, inherit and administer land and property, including for unmarried women and same-sex couples;
- (d) Amend family laws to eliminate provisions requiring women's obedience to men, and to recognize marital property and ensure its equal division between spouses;
- (e) Abolish male guardianship laws, policies and practices that require a male guardian's authorization for women to exercise their rights, including decisions related to marriage, employment, health, education, property, housing and freedom of movement;
- (f) Ensure equal access to assisted reproductive technologies regardless of marital status or sexual orientation, including through provision within public health systems or, where not available, through coverage or reimbursement under public and private health insurance schemes;
- (g) Ensure that LBQ parents are recognized as legal guardians of their children on an equal basis to men, including full authority to open bank accounts, enrol children in school, make healthcare decisions and travel with them independently.

60. With regard to protection from violence and access to justice, States should:

(a) Investigate and prosecute acts of physical, sexual and psychological violence against LBQ women, including when perpetrated by family members, community actors or State officials, and recognize such violence, including within same-sex relationships and families, as a form of gender-based violence;

(b) Develop data collection and national reporting systems that capture violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, disaggregated by gender and other relevant factors, and that avoid misclassification of LBQ women;

(c) Safeguard the right of LBQ women to report crimes without facing the risk of arrest or harassment, and ensure that no victim is denied assistance, detained or subjected to abuse;

(d) Ensure that domestic and intimate-partner violence laws, shelters and protection services are inclusive of LBQ survivors, and that they are adequately resourced and staffed with trained personnel to provide effective protection;

(e) Ensure that asylum decision makers, as well as relevant security and justice actors, are trained to recognize the intersection of LBQ status with risks of persecution, including the cumulative impact of economic, legal and social discrimination on LBQ women as individuals and parents and on their families, and apply this understanding consistently in status determination, protection and access to justice processes;

(f) Prohibit the disclosure of individuals' sexual orientation or gender identity by law enforcement authorities without the individuals' free and informed consent.

61. With regard to the right to family life and family unity, States should:

(a) Repeal laws that prohibit single women, unmarried women and LBQ women from adopting;

(b) Ensure that civil-registration systems recognize and give full legal effect to diverse family forms, including families with two mothers;

(c) Adopt inclusive parental recognition laws that affirm the legal parenthood of non-gestational LBQ parents and eliminate requirements for them to adopt their own children;

(d) Reform discriminatory fertility laws and adopt anti-discrimination measures prohibiting insurance policies and clinic procedures that create disproportionate barriers for LBQ individuals and couples in accessing reproductive treatments, including in vitro fertilization, egg freezing and sperm donation.

62. With regard to LBQ human rights defenders, States should:

(a) Adopt legal frameworks for the protection of human rights defenders;

(b) Ensure the meaningful participation of LBQ organizations, including those representing diverse and marginalized groups, in policy development, implementation and monitoring;

(c) Ensure that LBQ human rights defenders can report threats and attacks without risk of harassment or retaliation, and that law enforcement provides safe, accessible and non-discriminatory reporting mechanisms;

(d) Repeal restrictions on access to foreign funding that impede the work of human rights defenders and organizations.

63. With regard to criminalization and violence by security forces, States should:

(a) Repeal all laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct and end arrests based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression;

(b) Repeal morality, public order and “indecent” laws used to police gender expression, relationships and visibility;

(c) Decriminalize sex work and remove criminal and administrative sanctions for related offences;

(d) Conduct prompt, thorough, independent and transparent investigations into acts of violence, including sexual violence, committed by police and security forces, ensuring accountability and access to remedies.

64. With regard to healthcare, States should:

(a) Prohibit discrimination, verbal abuse, coercion and non-consensual medical procedures in healthcare settings;

(b) Ensure access to non-discriminatory, confidential and informed healthcare for LBQ women, including preventive, reproductive and mental health services;

(c) Repeal laws and regulations requiring healthcare workers to disclose patient information related to sexual orientation or gender identity;

(d) Implement mandatory, ongoing training for healthcare providers on sexual orientation and gender identity;

(e) Decriminalize abortion in all circumstances and eliminate punitive measures against women, girls and healthcare providers.

65. With regard to participation in economic, political and public life, States should:

(a) Adopt and implement legislation affirming that women attain full legal capacity at the age of 18, and ensure that all laws, regulations and administrative practices recognize women’s legal capacity on an equal basis with men;

(b) Refrain from adopting or enforcing laws, policies, decrees and emergency measures that restrict women’s freedom of movement, and take effective measures to eliminate discrimination, in law and in practice, affecting women’s freedom of movement;

(c) Enact, implement and enforce comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education, housing and access to public services;

(d) Ensure effective enforcement of anti-discrimination protections;

(e) Ensure that LBQ women can participate safely and meaningfully in political and public life, free from violence, intimidation and retaliation, and conduct prompt, thorough, independent and transparent investigations into all threats and attacks against LBQ women in public roles, ensuring accountability and access to remedies.

66. In addition, the Independent Expert addresses the following recommendations to non-State actors:

(a) Multilateral organizations should strengthen the collection, analysis and dissemination of disaggregated data on violence and discrimination affecting LBQ women, in line with human rights standards on privacy and do-no-harm principles, integrate LBQ-inclusive approaches across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming, and support States in building evidence-based, rights-compliant policy responses;

(b) National human rights institutions should monitor and report on violations affecting LBQ women; receive and investigate complaints, provide accessible remedies and contribute to closing data gaps through independent research and engagement with affected communities;

(c) Civil society organizations, including groups led by LBQ women, should be supported to document lived experiences, provide services and referrals and engage

in advocacy and accountability processes, and donors and partners should ensure sustained, flexible and accessible funding that reaches LBQ organizations, including those operating in restrictive environments.
