



# THE CHALLENGES FACING LGBTQI+ REFUGEES IN KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP, KENYA

A report by the Organization for Refuge, Asylum & Migration (ORAM) and Rainbow Railroad | OCTOBER 2021



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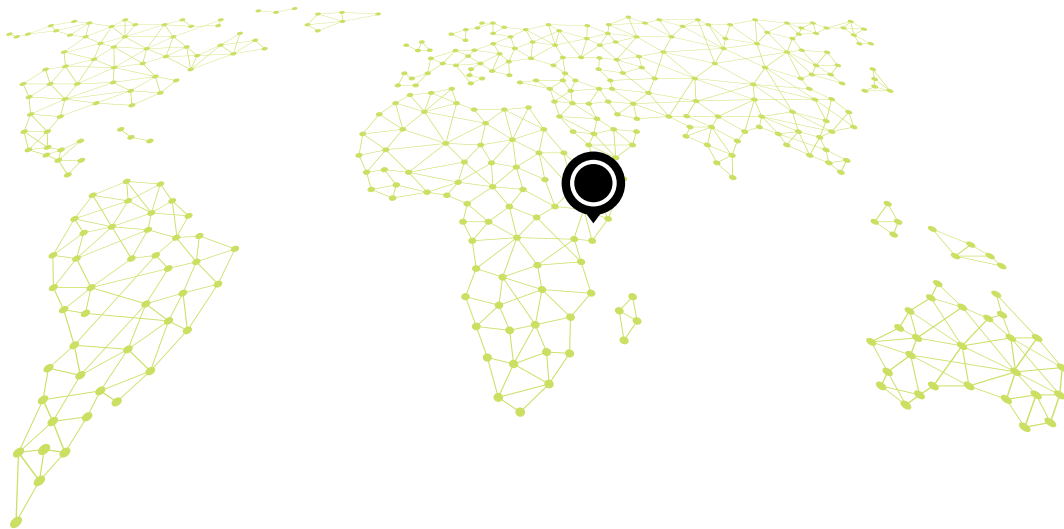
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There are numerous individuals, organizations and collectives providing support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) refugees in Kakuma, Kenya. We work in solidarity with them. We also acknowledge LGBTQI+ refugees in Kakuma who are bravely advocating for safe conditions and their resettlement in a climate that criminalizes same-sex intimacy.

Thank you to Steven Walker for financial support to conduct the study and produce this report. Special thanks to the 58 LGBTQI+ asylum seekers who volunteered to participate in the study. Their participation ensured that the report represents the experiences and recommendations of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. Our appreciation also extends to the 18 key informants, including focal points and resource persons from organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees, as well as religious and community leaders who provided valuable insights that have shaped this report. In addition, we are thankful to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other regulating organizations for allowing us to conduct research in Kakuma Refugee Camp and nearby areas.

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# Abbreviations

| Abbreviation   | Definition  |
|----------------|---|
| <b>AAH</b>     | Action Africa Help International  |
| <b>AHA</b>     | Anti-Homosexuality Act of Uganda  |
| <b>AHRC</b>    | African Human Rights Coalition  |
| <b>CSO</b>     | Civil society organization  |
| <b>DRC</b>     | Danish Refugee Council  |
| <b>GBV</b>     | Gender-based violence   |
| <b>IGA</b>     | Income generation activities  |
| <b>IRC</b>     | International Rescue Committee  |
| <b>JRS</b>     | Jesuit Refugee Service  |
| <b>KII</b>     | Key informant interviews  |
| <b>LGBTQI+</b> | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex                   |
| <b>LWF</b>     | Lutheran World Federation   |
| <b>NACOSTI</b> | National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation                |
| <b>NGO</b>     | Non-governmental organization   |
| <b>ORAM</b>    | Organization for Refugee, Asylum & Migration                              |
| <b>PSE</b>     | Population size estimation  |
| <b>RAS</b>     | Refugee Affairs Secretariat of Kenya                                      |
| <b>RefCEA</b>  | Refugee Coalition of East Africa  |
| <b>RSD</b>     | Refugee status determination  |
| <b>SOGIESC</b> | Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics |
| <b>UNHCR</b>   | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                             |
| <b>URM</b>     | Upper Rift Minorities   |
| <b>WFP</b>     | World Food Programme  |

# Executive summary

## Introduction

As of 2020, more than 84.2 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes due to a range of factors, including climate change, war, famine and persecution – the largest number since the end of the Second World War (UNHCR, 2020). Among the many reasons why people become forcibly displaced is a global lack of equal rights and protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people. In Africa, 33 out of 54 countries still criminalize same-sex relations (Mendos, 2019). LGBTQI+ individuals are frequently arrested and detained under these and other unrelated laws that are easily manipulated to challenge human rights and freedoms. Even when explicit anti-LGBTQI+ laws are not enforced, their very existence may encourage stigma or may be used as justification for various homophobic behaviors (OHCHR, 2011). This results in the persecution of LGBTQI+ people, who often flee to neighboring countries in search of immediate safety or eventual relocation to safer countries.

Kenya is one of the few African countries that accepts refugees who flee persecution due to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Currently hosting over half a million refugees who have fled violent conflicts in the Horn of Africa (acaps, 2021), it remains a safer alternative for LGBTQI+ persons fleeing persecution in various countries in the region. Kakuma Refugee Camp, in Northwestern Kenya, is home to a growing number of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees. This makes it crucial to understand their unique protection needs and plan for safe and dignified service delivery.

The Organization for Refuge, Asylum & Migration (ORAM) and other organizations have been researching and implementing meaningful and sustainable ways to support the LGBTQI+ refugee community in Kakuma. Rainbow Railroad and civil society partners in Canada have been working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government of Canada to resettle refugees. For this reason, ORAM and Rainbow Railroad conducted an assessment to fully understand the situation in Kakuma Refugee Camp so that future programming effectively responds to the needs of the LGBTQI+ population.

## Methodology

A formative assessment, service mapping and size estimation study was conducted in Kakuma in May 2021. Fifty-eight LGBTQI+ asylum seekers from nine different countries, along with 18 key informants, were interviewed. While the term LGBTQI+ is used throughout this document as an umbrella term, among the asylum seekers interviewed, 38 per cent were lesbian, 24 per cent were gay, 28 per cent were bisexual and 10 per cent were transgender. No respondents self-identified as queer or intersex; however, one guardian of an intersex minor participated in the study as a key informant. The key informants included representatives of various refugee-serving organizations, community and religious leaders, LGBTQI+ activists and community-based organization representatives.



## Findings

The study established that there are an estimated 350 LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in both Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement (estimates vary between 280-419 persons). Just over 71 percent of the LGBTQI+ asylum seekers fled their home countries due to SOGIESC persecution. On average, the respondents who fled due to LGBTQI+ persecution had been asylum seekers for an average of 2.7 years (range 0-9 years), compared to 12 years (range 2-21 years) for respondents who fled civil conflicts. The data illustrated societal stigma and discrimination as well as self-stigma and physical violence among LGBTQI+ persons in the camp. The camp and neighboring settlements were very intolerant of sexual and gender diversity. Over 90 per cent of the asylum seekers reported having verbal insults directed at them, while over 80 per cent reported having been physically assaulted. The high levels of homophobia, transphobia and biphobia prevented them from accessing livelihood programs as they tried to avoid the hostility from fellow refugees and the host community. To bridge the gap, the UNHCR and civil society organizations (CSOs) have been providing basic necessities, including food, shelter, sanitation services, healthcare and protection services.

Among the priority needs expressed by LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are enhanced safety and protection services, access to specialized healthcare services that were not readily available at the camp, increased opportunities to earn an income through employment or skills building and fast-tracking of refugee status eligibility determination to reduce the length of time spent in Kenya.



**From this assessment, ORAM and Rainbow Railroad have made 10 recommendations for CSOs, governments and the UNHCR who seek to support the LGBTQI+ community in Kakuma Refugee Camp.**

1. The Refugee Affairs Secretariat of Kenya (RAS) must fast-track refugee status determination (RSD) of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers with further support from UNHCR.
2. RAS and UNHCR must create more responsive and sensitive protection services for LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya.
3. CSOs and their supporters should provide livelihood support and other support to meet the immediate needs of LGBTQI+ refugees in Kakuma.
4. Governments of resettlement countries must resume and fast-track resettlement of LGBTQI+ refugees from Kenya.
5. UNHCR and CSOs must continue to build skills development programs for employability.
6. LGBTQI+ CSOs should work more closely with refugee-led organizations and collectives to build self-protection services.
7. Donor communities should participate in more long-term development programming for LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya.
8. LGBTQI+ CSOs providing support to refugees in Kenya must coordinate more closely.
9. LGBTQI+ CSOs and refugee-led organizations should continue to advocate for human rights in Kenya.
10. Civil Society must continue the push for LGBTQI+ human rights globally, including decriminalization of same sex intimacy.



# Introduction

As of 2020, more than **84.2 million people have been forcibly displaced** from their homes due to a range of factors, including climate change, war, famine and persecution – the largest number since the Second World War (UNHRC, 2020).

Under international law, anyone with a well-founded fear of persecution is entitled to protection as a refugee (ICJ, March 2007). The persecution may be based on race, nationality, religious beliefs, political opinion or membership in a particular social grouping (UNGA, 1951). UNHCR considers people targeted for their gender identity or sexual orientation as eligible for this protection (UNHCR, 2012). There are 69 countries globally that criminalize same-sex relationships (Mendos, 2019). Cultural and religious prejudices against individuals who do not fit in the gender binary of male and female also mean that LGBTQI+ people continue to face stigma and discrimination in many parts of the world (Ghoshal, 2020).

**In Africa, 33 out of the 54 countries still criminalize same-sex relations** (Mendos, 2019). Most countries retain anti-sodomy laws from the colonial era, while other countries have recently passed new laws – such as the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) of 2014 in Uganda, which was later declared invalid by a constitutional court (Zomorodi, 2016). The existence of these laws encourage stigma or may be used as justification for dangerous homophobic behaviors.



Kenya still retains colonial-era anti-sodomy laws. However, it is also one of the few African countries that accept refugees fleeing SOGIESC persecution. Although Kenya, which is currently hosting over half a million refugees who have fled violent conflicts in the Horn of Africa (acaps, 2021), remains a safer alternative for LGBTQI+ persons fleeing persecution in various countries in the region, asylum seekers and refugees in Kenya are not immune to pervasive anti-LGBTQI+ attitudes in the community. As the number of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees increases rapidly, it is important to understand their unique protection needs and plan for safe and dignified service delivery to meet those needs.

ORAM was one of the first international organizations to assist people fleeing SOGIESC persecution. ORAM works to support LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees at every step of their journey, working along displacement routes and in transit countries such as Kenya. Rainbow Railroad is a global not-for-profit organization that helps LGBTQI+ people facing persecution find pathways to safety.

Together, ORAM and Rainbow Railroad have been looking into meaningful and sustainable ways to support the LGBTQI+ refugee community in Kakuma. ORAM and Rainbow Railroad mutually acknowledge the myriad complexities involved in serving the population living in Kakuma and believe that evidence-based approaches to advocacy and program design are essential. For this reason, this study was conducted to fully understand the situation in Kakuma Refugee Camp in order to help guide future programming that effectively responds to the needs of the LGBTQI+ population.





# Study objectives



The objectives of the study are to:

1. Provide a mapping and population size estimation (PSE) of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees in the Kakuma Refugee Camp.
2. Define and understand the LGBTQI+ community in Kakuma, their experiences and factors that increase their vulnerability.
3. Describe the primary services available to LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees in the camp.
4. Provide recommendations to address gaps in access to critical services for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees.

# Context

Kenya has had a protracted refugee and asylum seeker situation due to an influx of refugees fleeing violence in various East and Central African countries since the 1990s.

All people who are forcibly displaced face challenges. However, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees face multiple forms of discrimination not experienced by other refugee communities (UNHCR, 2010). They may be inappropriately treated or denied access to health care and other social services, including housing, education and employment. In some instances, they may be subjected to arbitrary detention (O’Flaherty, 2008). Violence is triggered where LGBTQI+ individuals are seen as not behaving according to societal norms that dictate what is “proper” to men and women, and they may be insulted, assaulted or killed for their appearance, manner or dress (UNHCR, 2011). For these reasons, many avoid seeking protection in fear of further harm. Their protection needs often go unmet and they are unable to participate in activities or access support that could benefit them (UNHCR, 2011).

A significant number of LGBTQI+ persons reside in the Kakuma Refugee Camp and the surrounding community face heightened protection risks (Pincock, 2020). Caseloads for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are on the increase. The most durable solution for this group has been resettlement, which requires a long period of waiting and dependency on assistance, and the capacity to meet their particular protection needs is stretched. There is a need to focus efforts to address the unique concerns and challenges faced by LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, such as support for scattered-site housing options in Kenya and the development of training and income generation programs (Zomorodi, 2016). There is

also a need to strengthen policies of confidentiality and non-discrimination towards asylum seekers and in delivering services to LGBTQI+ persons of concern during registration, working with partner service organizations to identify LGBTQI+ refugees and their specialized needs in terms of housing, health care and financial services (Hersh, 2016). However, it is crucial to note that protection strategies that may work for a small number of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers may be difficult to scale up or sustain with larger numbers.

By understanding and giving attention to the distinct risks of LGBTQI+ refugees through targeted programming, humanitarian agencies can maintain a protection mainstreaming approach while addressing individual vulnerability (H.K.V, 2019). A review of existing literature shows that substantive and timely research regarding the experiences and access of LGBTQI+ people to protection, resettlement and services while in transit is lacking. This scarcity of reliable information that can be utilized to build impactful and equitable programming for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers points to greater systemic discrimination in global academic, philanthropic and policy spaces. The following research aims to contribute to bridging this gap.





# Research design and method



## Data collection methods

In line with the research objectives, the following qualitative and quantitative data collection tools were used:

### Structured behavioral questionnaire

To understand LGBTQI+ asylum seekers' and refugees' background, socio-demographics, reasons for asylum seeking, access to and availability of services and safety and security experiences, a questionnaire was administered to LGBTQI+ persons residing in different blocks within the Kakuma Refugee Camp. A section of the questionnaire was used to collect data that assisted in estimating the overall LGBTQI+ population size through "the wisdom of the crowds" method. The survey was conducted in English or Kiswahili, as preferred by the respondents. A total of 58 LGBTQI+ respondents were interviewed.

### Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews (KII) were held with selected individuals who are experts, officials or have the richest information about LGBTQI+ issues in Kakuma. These key informants included focal points and resource persons from organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees, religious leaders and community leaders. KIIs were also an integral element of LGBTQI+ mapping and PSE. A total of 18 key informants were interviewed for the survey.

## Recruitment of respondents and sample size

Members of the LGBTQI+ community in Kakuma Refugee Camp have often been victims of violence by fellow refugees and the host community. This made it difficult to reach them through conventional general population survey methods. As a result, the study used purposive and snowball sampling.

- 1. Purposive sampling:** Guided by purposive sampling principles, the researcher worked with two known LGBTQI+ asylum seekers to identify potential study participants. The two were supported to identify potential respondents from the various areas of residence within the camp.
- 2. Snowball sampling:** Snowball sampling was the second method used. The first group of respondents who were identified to participate in the study was requested to refer their peers or other LGBTQI+ persons known to them who were willing to participate in the survey.

## Sample size – LGBTQI+ respondents

Using the above sampling techniques, the study aimed at interviewing a minimum of 10 people drawn from various groups among the LGBTQI+ community or until saturation point was reached. The total sample size was set at 60 people, with representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer asylum seekers and refugees from different countries of origin. This was to ensure that the study gave a full picture of LGBTQI+ experiences and allowed analytical comparisons across groups.

## Sample size – key informant interviews

For KIIs, purposive sampling was used to select respondents. Based on the information collected from the quantitative questionnaire, key informants, including block leaders, religious leaders and other stakeholders were purposely selected and interviewed in each sector of the camp. Key informants included purposely selected stakeholders to represent an assortment of experts: service providers, activists and representatives of organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees.



# Data management and analysis

## Data collection

The researcher used a structured questionnaire to collect data from the LGBTQI+ persons who volunteered to participate. Standardized interview guides were used for KIIs. All data were collected through an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Where observance of COVID-19 prevention protocols was possible, face-to-face interviews were conducted with LGBTQI+ participants. All KIIs were conducted online through Zoom or Google Teams applications.

## Data analysis

The quantitative data collected through questionnaires was analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Frequency tables were generated and cross-tabulations of findings by key areas were completed. The quantitative analysis was based on specific variables.

Thematic analysis, guided by the objectives, was used to analyze qualitative data from key informant interviews. This is conventional practice in qualitative assessments, which involves searching through data to identify any recurrent patterns. It entails identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.



# Eligibility criteria for study participants

All respondents were asked for self-identification after the informed consent phase. Any person who self-identified as LGBTQI+ was eligible to participate if they met the following eligibility criteria:

- Adults above the age of 18 years at the time of the interview
- Asylum seekers or refugees from any country apart from Kenya
- Residents within Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement or outside the camp among the host community
- Able to provide verbal consent (e.g., not under the influence of alcohol or drugs)

The following exclusion criteria were used:

- Anyone below 18 years of age
- Did not self-identify as LGBTQI+
- Was not an asylum seeker or refugee
- Was a Kenyan national
- Could not provide informed consent

## Ethical and security considerations

In line with the objectives and standard ethical practice in research involving human subjects, an ethical clearance application was sought and received from Daystar University Ethics Review Board. The approval was granted on February 23, 2021. A research permit was received from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) on March 4, 2021. Camp clearance from appropriate regulating organizations was obtained.



The study also adhered to all ethics guidelines, including obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing respondents' privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and data security. Considering that LGBTQI+ persons are often victims of violence from the community, all interviews were scheduled and conducted in strict confidentiality in a location outside the refugee camp that had been identified as convenient and secure for the respondents. No data that could identify the individual respondents, such as names, descriptions or any other identifiers, was collected.

The researcher was an independently hired consultant with no affiliation to ORAM or Rainbow Railroad. Participants were informed that they could express themselves freely and that their participation was voluntary and would not in any way affect access to services provided by the two organizations. UNHCR was also made aware of the production of this report but had no influence in the process or its findings.

It should be noted that this study reports conditions in Kakuma through the subjective opinions of the interviewees; this report does not seek to verify these opinions but aims to identify trends on which the recommendations are based.

# COVID-19 prevention measures

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Considering the COVID-19 situation in the country, various prevention measures were taken to prevent the acquisition or transmission of the virus to the researcher, respondents or stakeholders. Appropriate prevention measures, including hand hygiene, use of face masks and physical distancing, were strictly observed during face-to-face interviews. No gatherings exceeding three persons were held for the study.

## Study limitations

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Implementation of this study was delayed for almost four months while awaiting ethical approval and the research permit. Kakuma Refugee Camp was also inaccessible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This limited the ability of the researcher to observe, document and verify some of the information provided by the respondents. The high levels of stigma, discrimination and violence towards the LGBTQI+ community also made it difficult to achieve the desired representation. For example, two intersex persons identified as potential respondents by the mobilizer declined to participate due to fear of moving from their locations to the interview venue. No respondent self-identifying as queer or intersex was interviewed. The only intersex person who was willing to participate was a minor and therefore ineligible to participate in the study. However, the minor's guardian participated as one of the key informants.





# Findings and discussion

## Kakuma Refugee Camp

According to the UNHCR website, Kakuma Refugee Camp was established in 1992 to host refugees fleeing civil strife in South Sudan (UNHCR, 2021). The camp is located in Turkana West Sub-County in Turkana County of Kenya. In the same year as the camp's establishment, Ethiopians fled their country in large numbers after the fall of the Ethiopian government. Somalia had also experienced high insecurity and civil strife, resulting in a huge influx of refugees to Kenya. In 2014, Kakuma exceeded its capacity and a new settlement, Kalobeyei, was established 20 kilometers away from Kakuma to cater to the growing population (UNHCR). As of January 2021, Kakuma hosted 160,000 refugees from South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia and Uganda (Beltramo, 2021).

## Organizations working in Kakuma Refugee Camp

UNHCR works in partnership with the Government of Kenya, through RAS, to run refugee camps in Kenya. UNHCR is also assisted by various organizations to provide services to asylum seekers and refugees in the camp. Most of the organizations work with the refugee and host communities. Among the organizations working in the camp, four were reported to be working with LGBTQI+ asylum seekers directly to address various needs.

African Human Rights Coalition (AHRC) provides monthly food support to augment the rations received in the camp, provides COVID-19 relief supplies and supports mental health services in partnership with Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). Thirty-five volunteers were trained and supported to work with asylum seekers on substance abuse and suicide risk assessment. Individuals with alcohol dependency are linked to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, while those with suicidal tendencies are linked to available mental health services and provided with continuous psychosocial support by trained volunteers. Under AHRC's food support initiative, 368 LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are being supported every month.



Refugee Coalition of East Africa (RefCEA) brings together 19 community-based organizations in Nairobi and manages a medical cashbox of US\$500 per month to support LGBTQI+ persons who require additional medical support beyond what is available under the camp's health services. Caseworkers in the camp among the LGBTQI+ community refer cases to the partner organization in the camp for assessment and further support. RefCEA also implemented initiatives on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, individual empowerment through skills training and advocacy with stakeholders on the plight of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers. Two organizations that are members of RefCEA, Refugees in Color and the Refugee Coalition of Kakuma, were reported to be active in the camp.

Upper Rift Minorities (URM), a human rights and development organization, supports economic empowerment programs and advocacy efforts.

ORAM, together with URM, supports the LGBTQI+ refugee community through economic empowerment. In 2019, ORAM began supporting two livelihood initiatives in the camp; soap making and poultry farming. Through these initiatives, they provide culturally relevant and sensitive training, capacity building around grant making, sustaining livelihood initiatives and seed funding. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, they provided emergency relief and supplies.

The main service providers to asylum seekers, refugees and the host community, in partnership with UNHCR, are listed in the table below.

**Table 1: List of organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees in Kakuma**

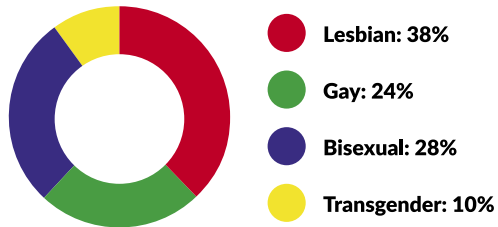
| <b>Organization</b>                                 | <b>Activities</b>  |
|---|--|
| <b>Action Africa Help International (AAH)</b>       | Supports small and micro-enterprises and small-scale agriculture production systems.                       |
| <b>Center for Victims of Torture</b>                | Mental health and psychosocial support.  |
| <b>Danish Refugee Council (DRC)</b>                 | Protection initiatives for vulnerable refugees and empowerment projects for women, girls and young people. |
| <b>Film Aid International</b>                       | Delivers information through films. Supports development of skills in film and communication.              |
| <b>International Rescue Committee (IRC)</b>         | Health care services.  |
| <b>Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS)</b>                | Special needs education, protection and livelihoods.   |
| <b>Lutheran World Federation (LWF)</b>              | Reception center management, education, child protection and peace and protection.                         |
| <b>National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK)</b> | Housing and shelter.   |
| <b>Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)</b>              | Education, information, counseling and legal assistance, livelihoods and food security.                    |
| <b>Salesians of Don Bosco</b>                       | Vocational education.  |
| <b>Waldorf Kakuma</b>                               | Education.   |
| <b>Xavier Project</b>                               | Livelihoods and life skills courses.   |

| <b>Organizations with a focus on LGBTQI+ asylum seekers</b>   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>African Human Rights Coalition (AHRC)</b>                  | Monthly food support, COVID-19 relief supplies and mental health services. |
| <b>Organization for Refuge, Asylum &amp; Migration (ORAM)</b> | Economic empowerment, emergency food, shelter and medical assistance.      |
| <b>Refugee Coalition of East Africa (RefCEA)</b>              | Food and emergency support, GBV response and economic empowerment.         |
| <b>Upper Rift Minorities</b>                                  | Human rights and economic empowerment.                                     |

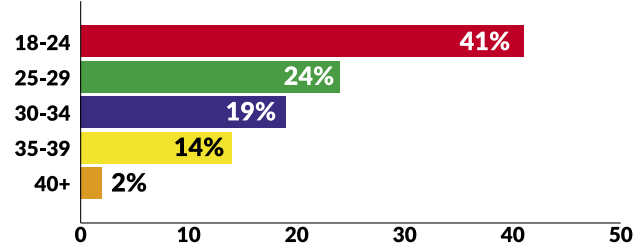
## Social and demographic profile of respondents

Table 2: Socio-demographic profile of respondents (n=58)

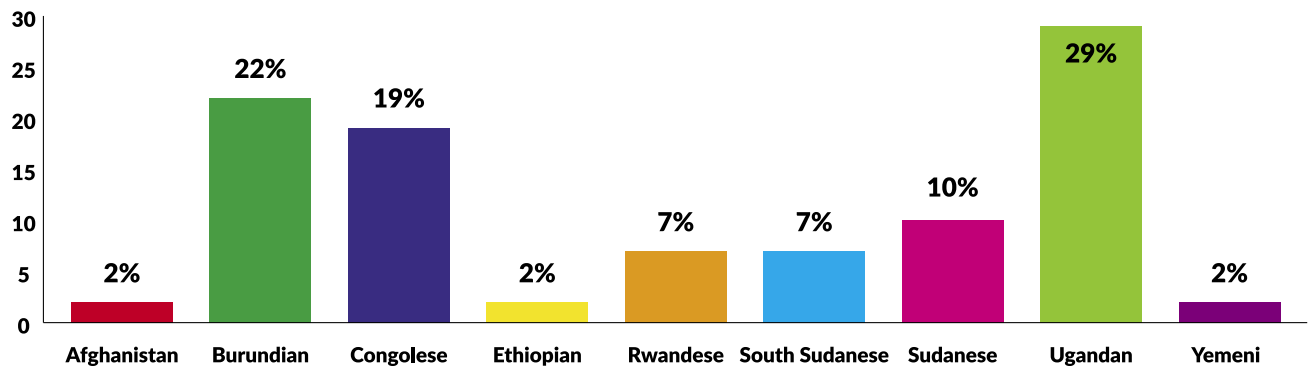
### Sexual Orientation / Gender Identity



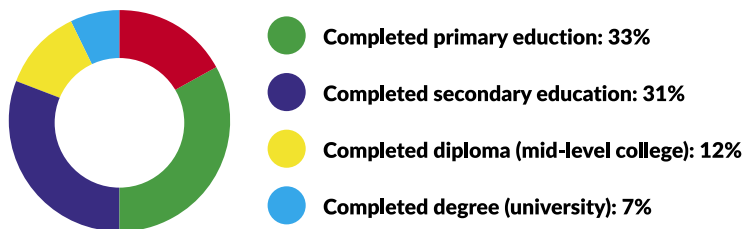
### Age



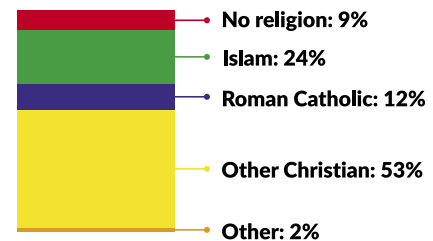
### Citizenship



### Education Level



### Religion





In terms of citizenship, 29 per cent of respondents were Ugandan, followed by Burundians at 22 per cent, Congolese at 19 per cent, Sudanese at 10 per cent, South Sudanese at seven per cent and Rwandese at seven per cent. Afghan, Yemeni and Ethiopian citizens were one percent each. All foreign nationals who self-identified as LGBTQI+ and were seeking asylum in Kenya were eligible for inclusion in the study.

Most of the respondents had some level of formal education, with only 17 per cent reporting never having attended school. 33 per cent reported having completed primary education, 31 per cent had completed secondary level education, 12 per cent had a diploma and seven per cent had completed a first degree. Overall, 90 per cent of the respondents were functionally literate (could read and write), while 10 per cent could neither read nor write.

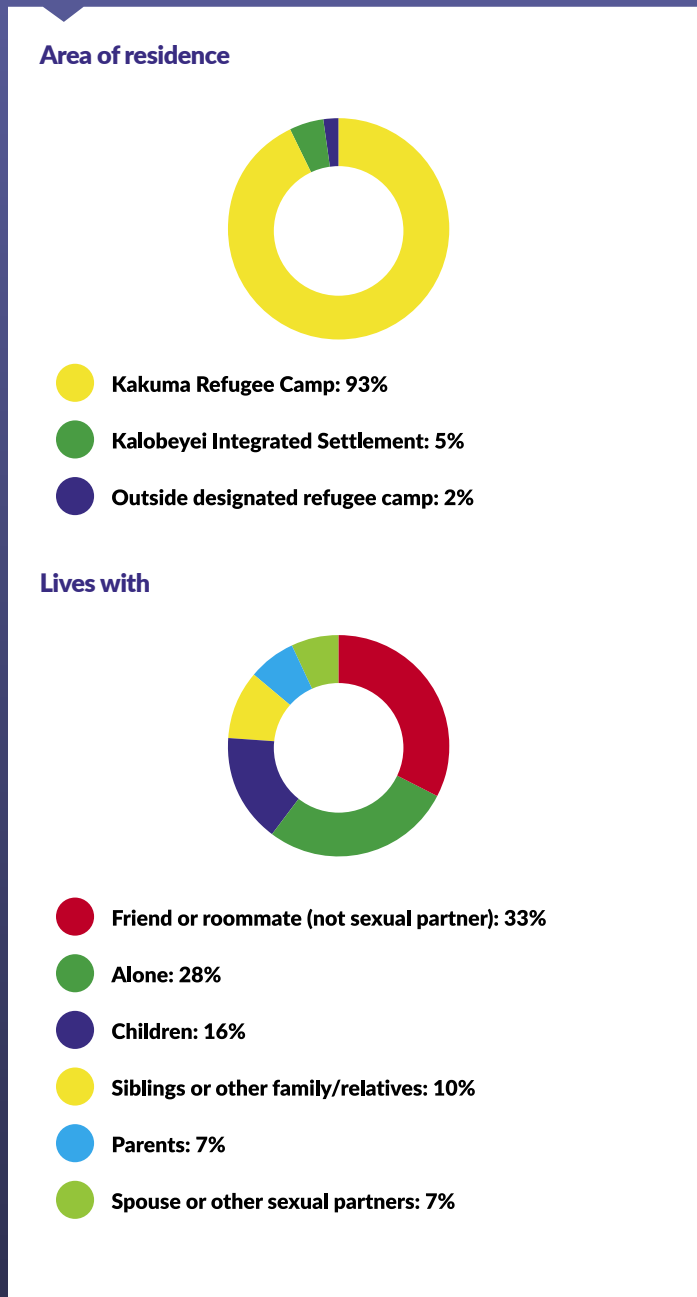
As for religious beliefs, 53 per cent of the respondents reported being either Protestant or Evangelical Christians, 24 per cent were Muslim, 12 per cent were Roman Catholic and nine per cent did not ascribe to any religious belief.

## Current residence and living arrangements

All but one of the respondents were residing within the designated refugee camp, having been allocated shelters at the camp like all other asylum seekers and refugees. Four respondents (seven per cent) reported having moved out of their allocated shelters due to insecurity posed by neighbors, with one of them living in a rented house outside the camp, courtesy of the support of an individual donor, and three reporting having no fixed abode. Ninety-four per cent of the respondents reported having been allocated shelters and living within the Kakuma Refugee Camp, while six per cent were living in the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. Three of the four respondents (six per cent) reported having moved out of their designated shelters due to fear of insecurity and were housed by friends within the camp.

Thirty-three per cent of the respondents reported living with a friend or roommate who was not a sex partner, while 28 per cent reported living alone. Only seven per cent reported living with a spouse or other sexual partner. Sixteen per cent reported living with either biological or adopted children, while another 16 per cent reported living with either a parent, sibling or other relatives. Most of the respondents who reported living with parents, siblings or other relatives were those who sought asylum due to conflicts in their countries of origin as opposed to being persecuted for their sexual orientation.

**Table 3: Residence and living arrangements (n=58)**



Out of the 57 respondents who were living within the designated refugee camp or integrated settlement, a plurality (32 per cent) were living within Block 13. Block 1 hosted 12 per cent, while Blocks 2 and 12 each hosted 11 per cent of the respondents. The other respondents were living in different blocks within the camp, while five per cent were living in the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. However, a majority reported having moved from their allocated shelters to the current blocks of residence to stay closer to friends and for security reasons.

## Reasons for asylum seeking and duration

Overall, 71 per cent of the respondents fled their countries of origin due to persecution of LGBTQI+ persons, and another 26 per cent reported fleeing due to war. Only three per cent reported having fled for other reasons such as political, ethnic or religious persecution. Uganda had the highest proportion of asylum seekers who fled due to persecution of LGBTQI+ persons (39 per cent), followed by Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, at 22 per cent each. All but one Ugandan asylum seeker reported having fled the persecution of LGBTQI+ persons.

**Table 4: Reasons for asylum seeking and country of origin**

| Country of origin            | Reason for fleeing country of origin |                                |   |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
|                              | Civil war                            | Persecution of LGBTQI+ persons | Persecution due to ethnic, political or religious affiliation |
| Afghanistan                  |                                      | 1                              |   |
| Burundi                      | 4                                    | 9                              |   |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | 2                                    | 9                              |   |
| Ethiopia                     |                                      | 1                              |   |
| Rwanda                       |                                      | 3                              | 1   |
| South Sudan                  | 4                                    |                                |   |
| Sudan                        | 5                                    | 1                              |   |
| Uganda                       |                                      | 16                             | 1   |
| Yemen                        |                                      | 1                              |   |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>15</b>                            | <b>41</b>                      | <b>2</b>  |

Asylum seekers who reported fleeing their countries for other reasons besides persecution of LGBTQI+ persons had fled their countries as early as 1996. However, a majority of those who reported fleeing due to persecution based on their SOGIESC fled their countries beginning from the year 2012. A majority (51 per cent) reported having fled their country in 2019. On average, the respondents who fled due to persecution of LGBTQI+ persons had been asylum seekers for an average of 2.7 years (range 0-9 years) compared to 12 years (range 2-21 years) for the respondents who fled civil conflicts.

Most of the asylum seekers (79 per cent) never sought asylum in any other country apart from Kenya. This was reflected in both the asylum seekers who fled LGBTQI+ persecution and those who fled due to civil conflicts in their country.

On arrival in Kenya, 57 per cent of the respondents reported having disclosed their SOGIESC during registration as asylum seekers. Those who fled due to persecution of LGBTQI+ persons were more likely to disclose their sexual orientation (73 per cent) compared to those who fled civil conflicts (19 per cent). Most of the respondents reported having disclosed their SOGIESC to either UNHCR or the RAS during their first registration as asylum seekers.

On disclosing their sexual orientation, only a minority (12 per cent) reported having been informed of organizations that serve LGBTQI+ asylum seekers. They reported having been referred to HIAS, JRS, LWF or DRC, where they accessed support for accommodation, living expenses or medical support as they may have required at that time.

## Health care services

UNHCR works with various partners to provide health care services in the Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement. There are eight health facilities, which include one general hospital, two health centers and five dispensaries (also referred to as clinics). All health facilities in the camp are run by IRC. The facilities provide a comprehensive package of services that include primary health care, consultations for adults, nursing services, laboratory services, pharmacy, mental health, post-GBV care and HIV and AIDS services. All health services in the facilities are provided at no cost to all asylum seekers, refugees and members of the host community.

Among the respondents, 93 per cent reported having required health care services within the last 12 months. All reported having received health services from the health facilities within the camp. The HIV and AIDS services provided at the main hospital under IRC were the most utilized, with over 70 per cent reporting having visited the facility. The respondents praised the facility for providing LGBTQI+-friendly services, including community outreach services that reached out to members for routine HIV tests and treatment services for those living with HIV. Over 85 per cent reported that they preferred to seek all other health services beyond HIV and AIDS services at the main hospital, since the facility was friendly and provided a stigma-free environment for the LGBTQI+ community in the camp. Respondents reported traveling long distances in order to visit the main hospital.

Thirty-four per cent of the respondents reported having been stigmatized in some of the health clinics. This included being referred to as *shoga* (a derogatory Kiswahili term used to refer to homosexuality) either by staff members or other refugees in the waiting room while waiting to see a provider, or some providers just directing them to the main hospital with snide remarks about how they do not entertain LGBTQI+ persons in their facility. Seven per cent of the respondents reported having required health services but did not seek them due to fear of being ridiculed, mainly by fellow refugees or asylum seekers, at the facilities.

## Livelihoods

Various livelihood programs are implemented for all asylum seekers, refugees and the host community, mainly by UNHCR and its partners, including other non-governmental and community-based organizations. The livelihood programs are aimed at creating self-reliance opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to live with dignity and create a future for themselves and their families. They include vocational training, business development services, financial inclusion, market development and agriculture, among others.

Vocational training was available through a range of vocational training institutions and short courses sponsored by various organizations. UNHCR partners with AAH and DRC to facilitate vocational training. The Don Bosco Vocational Training Center and St. Clare Training Institute are among the major technical and vocational training institutions that serve both refugees and members of the host community. Other organizations, such as AHRC, ORAM, RefCEA and others, also support various skills-building training such as soap making, poultry farming, sandal making and food preparation.

Improved access to agriculture using optimal irrigation approaches through infrastructure development, training and support was a major livelihoods program, especially in the Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement. Promotion of kitchen gardens for improved nutrition and transforming incomes were other projects implemented by various partners within Kakuma.

Business development services, including business incubation, training in business management, bookkeeping and access to loans, are some of the available services provided to refugees, asylum seekers and the host community. However, the livelihood programs experience various challenges considering that Kakuma and Kalobeyi are an emerging market with low purchasing power and high production. This means that there are limited job opportunities and limited infrastructure development to cover the entire population, among other challenges.

Among the respondents, only 16 per cent were enrolled in vocational training, but 50 per cent of those who were not currently enrolled expressed interest in acquiring skills. Among those currently enrolled, 78 per cent were enrolled in formal technical and vocational colleges, including the Don Bosco Vocational Training Center, while 12 per cent were apprentices learning from established businesspeople. Those who were not currently enrolled expressed interest in fashion, hairdressing and beauty (20 per cent); automotive mechanics (15 per cent); information communication technology (10 per cent); hotel and catering services (10 per cent); and agriculture (seven per cent); among others.



**Table 5: Participation and preferences on livelihood programs (n=number of persons)**

**Vocational training and income generation activities (IGA) (n=58)**



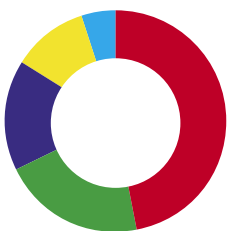
- Currently enrolled in vocational training: 16%
- Currently engaged in income generation activities: 33%
- Not engaged in vocational training or IGA: 52%

**Preferred training opportunities (n=25)**



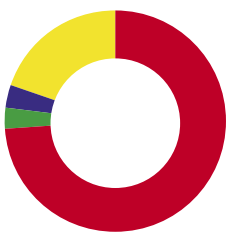
- Fashion, beauty and hairdressing: 28%
- Information communication technology: 28%
- Automotive mechanics: 16%
- Professional courses (nursing, counseling, etc.): 16%
- Food production: 4%
- Soap making: 4%

**Current income generating activities (n=19)**



- Formal employment (teaching, health promotion, clerical, etc.): 47%
- Production (soap making, jewelry) : 21%
- Trade in goods (food, alcohol, clothes): 16%
- Services (hairdressing and clothing repairs): 11%
- Sex work: 1%

**Reasons for not engaging in IGA (n=40)**



- Stigma towards LGBTQI+: 68%
- Lack of capital : 3%
- Lack of essential skills: 3%
- Currently engaged in training: 18%

Thirty-three per cent of the respondents were currently engaged in an income-generating activity. Among them, 47 per cent were in formal employment with various organizations working within the camp, 21 per cent were involved in soap and jewelry production and sales, 16 per cent ran small businesses such as grocery stalls or alcohol outlets and 11 per cent provided hairdressing and tailoring services to fellow camp residents. Only one respondent reported engaging in sex work to earn an income, although it should be noted that given concerns about legality of sex work, there is a possibility participants might not be willing to disclose such information.

It is noteworthy that a majority of the respondents (68 per cent) who were neither enrolled in vocational training nor engaged in income-generating activities identified stigma towards LGBTQI+ persons as the reason for not engaging in either vocational training or income generation activities. Only six per cent identified a lack of skills or capital as the main obstacle. Considering that the livelihoods programs implemented in the camp were open to all asylum seekers, refugees and members of the host community, the low uptake by LGBTQI+ asylum seekers due to their fear of stigma and violence from fellow refugees and host communities may require attention by implementers to ensure equal access.

All the respondents reported accessing food rations distributed to all camp residents by the World Food Programme (WFP). Those engaged in income-generating activities reported being comfortable supplementing their rations with food from the market since they had some extra income. All respondents reported receiving periodic food support. They also reported receiving COVID-19 prevention supplies, such as hand sanitizers and face masks, among other supplies from AHRC and ORAM in addition to the services available in the camp.

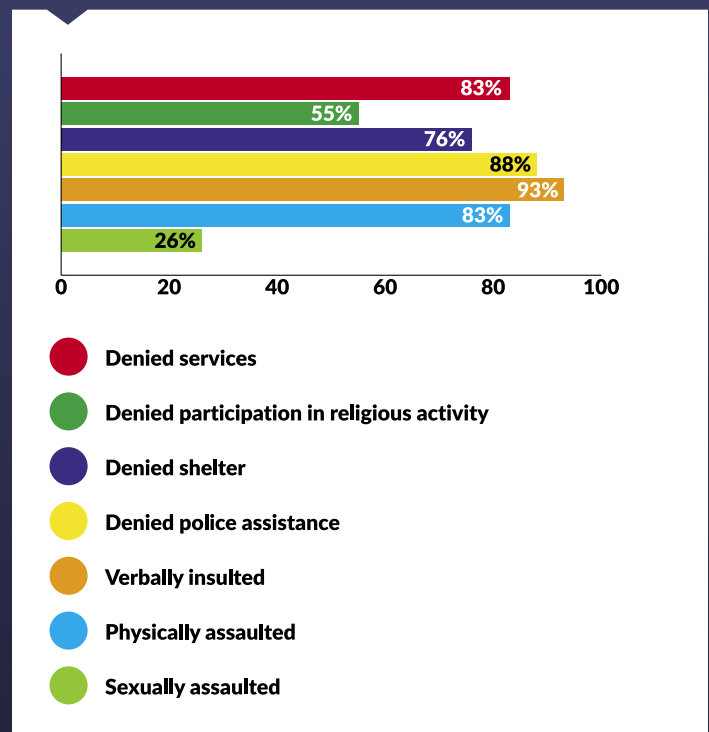
When asked to rank their level of satisfaction with the services provided at the camp, 24 per cent of the respondents reported being moderately satisfied with the fact that the camp provides them with shelter, food and the basic amenities to live a dignified life. The 44 per cent who reported being very dissatisfied with life in the camp attributed their feelings to the stigma and violence perpetrated by fellow refugees due to their SOGIESC.

## Experiences of stigma and violence in the camp

The data illustrates societal stigma and discrimination, as well as self-stigma and physical violence among LGBTQI+ persons in the camp. Over 90 per cent of the respondents reported having been verbally insulted, 83 percent reported being denied services in shops or markets, 55 per cent reported being denied an opportunity to participate in religious activities and, out of the 58 respondents, 88 per cent reported being denied police assistance due to their sexual identity. More than 45 per cent of the respondents reported having relocated from their allocated shelters to alternative accommodation due to the constant abuses directed at them by neighbors.

Community and religious leaders interviewed mentioned that most refugees in the camp were from cultural and religious backgrounds that are non-accepting of LGBTQI+ persons. They also pointed out that a majority were afraid that LGBTQI+ persons could influence the life choices of young ones in the community. The community leaders, especially block leaders who are tasked with some security responsibilities, including conflict resolution and filing complaints with the police, reported trying to provide protection services but were overwhelmed by the negative attitudes among most of the refugees towards LGBTQI+ persons.

**Table 6: Experiences of stigma, discrimination and violence (n=58)**



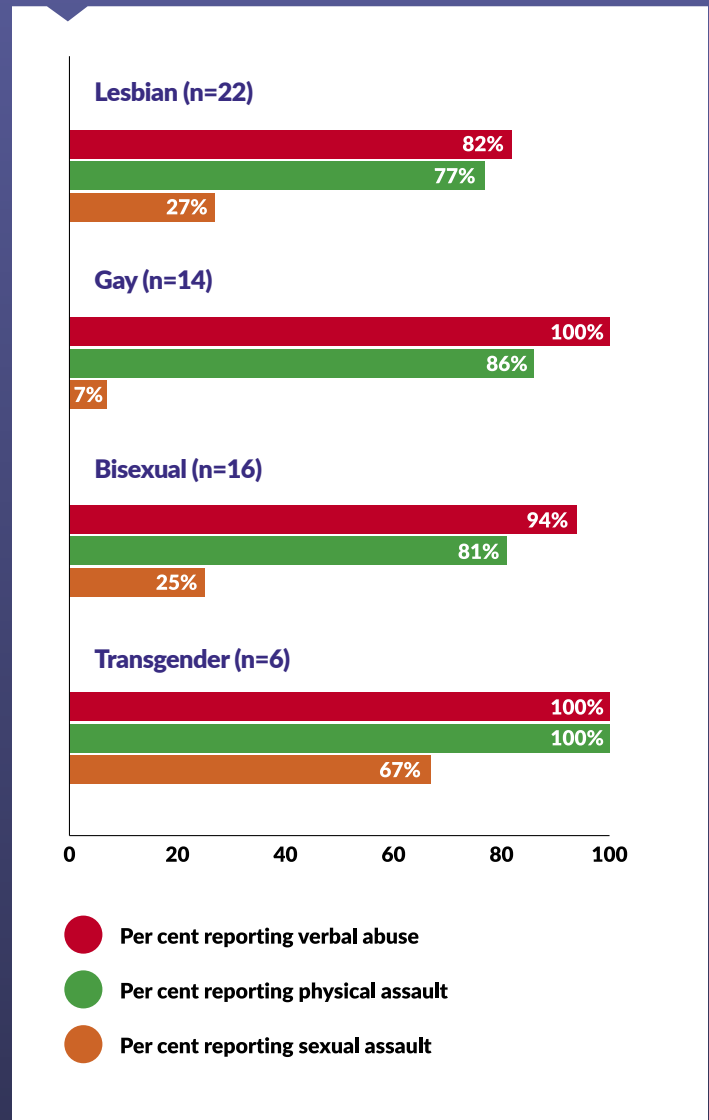
Physical violence was reported by 83 per cent of the respondents, with 26 per cent reporting sexual assault. The physical assaults were attributed mainly to fellow refugees in the camp (87 per cent). Members of the host community and family members of LGBTQI+ persons were responsible for seven per cent and six per cent of the violence reported respectively. The same trend was noted in the sexual assaults, with other refugees in the camp reported to be responsible for 73 per cent, host community responsible for 20 per cent and relatives responsible for seven per cent. The sexual violence reported included mainly rape perpetrated by fellow refugees with a stated goal of attempting to change the victim's sexual orientation. One person who self-identified as transgender narrated their experience with neighbors in their allocated area of residence.

***“Four men who were living in my block stormed into my shelter one evening accompanied by a young lady who looked terrified. They were armed with sticks. They beat me up and ordered me to undress as they undressed the lady. They forced me to have sex with the lady. They then lectured me on the need to get married and have children of my own. They left me traumatized. Two days later they asked the lady to come and stay with me as my wife. That is when I escaped from the block and moved to live with a friend in an area far from my allocated shelter. I did not report the incident since I was afraid the police would equally stigmatize me for who I am.”***

**– A 26-year-old transgender individual living in Kakuma Refugee Camp**

All the transgender respondents reported having experienced physical assault, with 67 per cent reporting sexual assault (n=6). Among lesbian-identified informants, 77 per cent reported physical assault, while 27 per cent reported having been sexually assaulted (n=22). Bisexual and gay respondents reported 81 per cent and 86 per cent that they have experienced physical violence, and 25 per cent and seven per cent reported that they have experienced sexual assault respectively.

**Table 7: Experiences of verbal abuse and physical and sexual assault by identity**



There was no significant difference in the experiences of stigma or violence between the asylum seekers who fled their countries of origin due to LGBTQI+ persecution and those who fled with their families due to civil conflicts. All reported high levels of stigma and experiences of violence based on their SOGIESC.



The respondents painted a picture of unresponsive security services, with over 88 per cent reporting having been denied services by the police. One respondent narrated:

***“When I arrived at the camp, I was allocated space in Block 1 and provided materials to construct my shelter. On the same day, some other refugees came to my site. I thought they were welcoming me and assisting me to put up my shelter. They spoke to me in Kiswahili but I responded in English. One of them started shouting at me, calling me shoga. They took away my materials and chased me from the location. I went back to the reception to report my experience. I was referred to the police to record a statement. On getting to the report desk and explaining my situation, the officer manning the desk gave me a reference number and told me to go sort out my problems. He told me he is tired of dealing with homosexuals and I should consider going back to my country.”***

**– A 29-year-old Ugandan asylum seeker**

Reports of police declining to assist or demanding bribes from the asylum seekers were quite rampant. Most reported not being able to pay the bribes.

## **LGBTQI+ asylum seekers' integration with other asylum seekers**

LGBTQI+ asylum seekers were allocated space and shelters in the camp like other asylum seekers finding refuge in Kakuma Refugee Camp. Most of the respondents who reported having fled violent conflicts in their countries of origin were well-integrated and living among individuals of the same nationality in the camp. Most were rarely identified as LGBTQI+ in the community and could participate in any activity within the camp.

However, 29 per cent of the respondents reported living among a community of LGBTQI+ in Kakuma Block 13. All of them reported having experienced physical violence perpetrated by other refugees in the camp. It was reported that Block 13 is an area where LGBTQI+ residents openly display their sexual orientation and gender identity, fly rainbow flags and host many LGBTQI+ meetings and parties. This area was also reported to have experienced various security incidents, including an arson attack on some of the shelters.

***“Block 13 is the home of LGBTQI+ advocacy in Kakuma. Those of us who believe in our right to self-expression, those who believe we deserve equal treatment and those who are willing to stand up to oppression live in Block 13. We will do all that we can to attract the world's attention to our plight until we are relocated to a safer and more accommodative environment.”***

**– A transgender asylum seeker living in Block 13**





One key informant, a former asylum seeker and resident of Block 13, attempted to provide some context to the situation. He explained that attacks experienced by LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in the camp led them to start living as a small group to watch over each other. Due to fear of venturing out to access supplies and other services in the camp, they started reaching out through social media to well-wishers outside the camp for financial assistance. As the assistance began trickling in, more LGBTQI+ asylum seekers moved from their allocated shelters to Block 13 in order to easily access supplies. Other LGBTQI+ asylum seekers who had fled civil strife alongside their families, and who were facing persecution by their family members due to their sexual orientation and identity also moved in with their friends at Block 13. As the numbers grew, they realized they could use their numbers to advocate for better treatment and rights.

Explaining the frequent attacks on LGBTQI+ residents of Block 13, one respondent noted that the fact that most residents of the camp associate Block 13 with the LGBTQI+ community made them an easy target for homophobic attacks. He also alleged that some attacks were perpetrated by relatives of some of the LGBTQI+ asylum seekers who live in the camp and who resented one of their own associating with the LGBTQI+ community.

A small percentage of the respondents residing in other parts of the camp outside of Block 13 (eight per cent of those living outside Block 13) said that the activism in Block 13 was affecting the overall relationship between LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and service providers in the camp. They expressed concern with some activities conducted as part of their activism. For example, they alleged that some activists were conducting staged attacks on individuals and false claims of violence to attract media attention as part of their advocacy. Three key informants also reported having received reports of staged attacks on residents of Block 13. They attributed the activism in Block 13 to a belief by the asylum seekers that being LGBTQI+ is their ticket to a better life in a safer country for LGBTQI+ people. It is important to consider that many more may be affected by the actions of Block 13 but are hesitant to openly share their experiences due to potential consequences to their safety. It is also important to note that allegations of activity from activists in Block 13 have not been confirmed.

Some of the key informants interviewed observed that LGBTQI+ activists from different countries have been supporting the advocacy in Block 13 without considering the local context and potential negative or unintended consequences. They allege that the advocacy has been antagonizing LGBTQI+ members with other refugees in the camp and service providers. For example, some of the LGBTQI+ asylum seekers were reported to have deserted their allocated shelters, moved to Block 13 and were persistently demanding new shelters.

Forty-one per cent of the respondents residing in Block 13 identified relocation to a safer place as a priority. They proposed moving their shelters to an exclusive area either within or outside the camp. They felt this would ease the provision of services to LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and allow them to engage in various economic or personal development activities without the fear of attacks that they currently experience.

## LGBTQI+ population size estimation

For security reasons, UNHCR does not publish data on the number of LGBTQI+ persons in the camp. This makes it difficult to quantify the number of LGBTQI+ persons in the camp. To help determine the estimated population size of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees residing in Kakuma Refugee Camp, all respondents were asked for an estimate of the people they know in their area of residence. Respondents were also asked about any established networks of LGBTQI+ persons that they were involved in. Service providers in different sectors and community leaders were also asked for the number of persons they were reaching with services. There were no formally registered networks of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in the camp. This was attributed to the fact that the asylum seekers could not meet the requirements to register an organization in the country before their refugee status determination. However, one informal group, referred to as Great Lakes Trans Network, was reported to be engaging with transgender people in the camp.

Each respondent was asked to give an estimate of the number of LGBTQI+ people that they knew in their blocks of residence. The interviewer probed for those that they knew by name, those who the respondent was willing to introduce to the interviewer for participation in the study and any other LGBTQI+ people the respondent may know within their residential block. The data is summarized in the table below.

**Table 8: Population estimates by residential area**

| Area of residence | Number of respondents interviewed | Minimum estimated population | Maximum estimated population |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Block 1</b>    | 7                                 | 10                           | 15                           |
| <b>Block 2</b>    | 6                                 | 14                           | 15                           |
| <b>Block 3</b>    | 1                                 | 5                            | 6                            |
| <b>Block 4</b>    | 3                                 | 8                            | 10                           |
| <b>Block 6</b>    | 2                                 | 25                           | 32                           |
| <b>Block 7</b>    | 5                                 | 20                           | 25                           |
| <b>Block 9</b>    | 1                                 | 1                            | 1                            |
| <b>Block 10</b>   | 1                                 | 60                           | 65                           |
| <b>Block 12</b>   | 6                                 | 65                           | 70                           |
| <b>Block 13</b>   | 17                                | 90                           | 165                          |
| <b>Kalobeyi</b>   | 3                                 | 10                           | 15                           |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>52</b>                         | <b>308</b>                   | <b>419</b>                   |

Among the four LGBTQI+-focused organizations, two organizations reported having identified 345 LGBTQI+ persons during emergency food distribution services as part of their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while a community outreach worker in the camp reported approximately 280 LGBTQI+ persons participating in their education outreaches. Most organizations interviewed reported not keeping any records specific to LGBTQI+, as they supported all asylum seekers and refugees equally. Others attributed the lack of records to security considerations in case of an accidental release of information that can potentially identify people by their SOGIESC.

Going by the above information, the estimated population of LGBTQI+ persons in the camp at the time of this study averaged about 350 persons, with a range between 280 and 419 persons. A majority of LGBTQI+ persons were residing in three blocks of the camp namely (in order of number of people): Blocks 13, 12 and 10. Block 13 was especially notable due to the high concentration of LGBTQI+ persons living there and had recorded several security incidents in the recent past associated with the presence of the community there as confirmed by various block leaders, religious leaders and study respondents.



# Challenges experienced by LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in Kakuma

## Safety and protection

Over 80 percent of LGBTQI+ persons interviewed identified safety and protection as their priority needs. With the high rates of verbal abuse and physical assaults reported, most felt that addressing the safety and protection needs would allow them to access other essential services within the camp that can improve their standards of living.

Respondents confirmed that there was a 24-hour hotline managed by UNHCR, through which they would report security incidents. They also confirmed the availability of post-violence care, including psychosocial support and ambulance services to transport victims to health facilities. However, they felt the police services were the weakest link in responding to violence. The respondents felt that there was a need to ensure the police respond to all complaints filed with them, ensure aggressors face the law to discourage further aggression and institute prevention measures, such as enhanced police patrols. A lesbian who was raped while hawking clothes emotionally narrated her ordeal:

***“The emotions that I experience every time I step out and see the men who raped me walking freely in the camp is just too much to handle. I can no longer run my small business or run errands in the camp for fear of a repeat encounter with them. Why couldn't the police arrest them, yet I reported to them and even identified the rapists? Why do they treat me like a lesser human being? What will stop those men from raping another woman when they know nothing will happen to them?”***

Some community leaders interviewed thought that LGBTQI+ persons should be allocated separate living spaces away from the rest of the refugees to reduce the incidences of violence reported. There was a split opinion among the respondents on the benefits of moving LGBTQI+ persons to an exclusive part of the camp. While some felt that it would be easier for the police and the camp authorities to provide security while all were within a defined area, others felt that it might result in resentment among other refugees and make them an easier target for the aggressors.

Most of the LGBTQI+ leaders interviewed proposed initiatives to address homophobia in the refugee and host communities. They proposed dialogue sessions that would promote harmony among all residents of the camp. They felt it was important to educate all community members on the need to respect human rights.

Orientation sessions for LGBTQI+ persons on reception at the camp were identified as another opportunity to educate the community on the security measures they can take to remain safe in the community. Most of the LGBTQI+ activists recommended cultural sensitivity and security orientations to ensure that asylum seekers avoid the scenarios that made them flee their countries in the first place. A 24-year-old Ugandan transgender asylum seeker explained how prioritizing their safety has worked well for him:

***“When I arrived in Kenya, I thought I was free to express myself even in public. However, on two occasions, I was attacked in the streets of Nairobi. I learned my lesson. When I came to Kakuma, I went about my business in the camp without attracting anyone's attention. I try my best and behave like all the other men in the streets. When I get back to my shelter or when I am with my friends in appropriate venues, I am free to don my dress and be myself. I have never been attacked by anyone since then. I think most LGBTQI+ people in the camp may need to be sensitized to prioritize their safety. I want to be myself, but the environment is hostile, so I prioritize my safety.”***

Provision of safe houses for survivors of violence, including sexual assault or those facing an ongoing risk of attack, was another recommendation made by the respondents. They thought people at high risk or who have recently experienced a traumatizing event would benefit from a safe house as they heal or wait for the aggressors to be brought to justice. Fear of reprisals from aggressors was seen as one of the reasons victims fail to report and pursue justice.

Lesbians living with their children, biological or adopted, also raised the concern of child protection services. They felt that lesbian and bisexual women with children faced challenges that increased their vulnerability. They reported that the stigma and discrimination projected to them was also extended to their children, who may end up becoming traumatized. One mother showed the healing scars on her 2-year-old daughter who was scalded with hot water by a neighbor to stop her from playing with the neighbor's children.

## Access to specialized health care services

As much as health care services are available at the eight health facilities run by UNHCR partners, there are still unmet health care needs. Specialist services were limited, with some cases that required specialized surgery or the services of cardiologists taking too long to be attended to.

Several organizations were complementing the services available in the camp through the provision of emergency medical funds or facilitating visits to the camp hospitals by specialists. One respondent reported having benefited from surgery through a surgeon flown into the camp with support from the AHRC. Other respondents reported having received support for medical services from ORAM and RefCEA.

However, the needs among LGBTQI+ persons in the camp may be higher than the resources available and additional support may be required to complement the available services in the camp.

## Livelihoods

Considering only 33 percent of LGBTQI+ respondents were actively engaged in economic activity at the time of the study, a majority depended on the food rations distributed in the camp. To improve the standard of living, there is a need to increase opportunities for asylum seekers to earn an income.

The respondents and key informants agreed on the need to increase job opportunities for asylum seekers and increase opportunities for vocational training to boost incomes and prepare for life after asylum. However, they felt the environment within the camp, with homophobia prevalent in the refugee community, was the main obstacle to their inclusion in the ongoing livelihoods program. Appreciating that attitude change in the community may not be achieved in the short term, a majority felt the issue would be addressed through fast-tracking of the eligibility interviews to determine eligibility for refugee status. Getting a determination would assist them in acquiring documents and work permits to help them to engage in economic activities outside of the camp.



# Recommendations

Through the trends identified in this report, ORAM and Rainbow Railroad have compiled 10 recommendations. The following recommendations can guide the future direction and programming for the LGBTQI+ asylum seeker and refugee community living in Kakuma Refugee Camp and in the neighboring areas, while ensuring that the programming effectively responds to the specific needs of the community in a safe and dignified manner:

- 1. RAS must fast-track RSD of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers with further support from UNHCR and CSOs.**
- 2. RAS and UNHCR must create more responsive and sensitive protection services for LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya.**
- 3. CSOs and their supporters should provide livelihood support and other support to meet the immediate needs of LGBTQI+ refugees in Kakuma.**
- 4. Governments of resettlement countries must resume and fast-track resettlement of LGBTQI+ refugees from Kenya.**
- 5. UNHCR and CSOs must continue to build skills development programs for employability.**
- 6. LGBTQI+ CSOs should work more closely with refugee-led organizations and collectives to build self-protection services.**
- 7. Donor communities should participate in more long-term development programming for LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya.**
- 8. LGBTQI+ CSOs providing support to refugees in Kenya must coordinate more closely.**
- 9. LGBTQI+ CSOs and refugee-led organizations should continue to advocate for more inclusive human rights in Kenya.**
- 10. Civil Society must continue the push for LGBTQI+ human rights globally, including decriminalization of same sex intimacy.**



# Recommendations



1.

## **RAS must fast-track RSD of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers with further support from UNHCR and CSOs.**

Due to the large number of asylum seekers and refugees fleeing to Kenya, it was noted that the backlog in case processing was quite high. There is a need for various partners to support RAS to build their capacity to facilitate processing and refugee status determination for asylum seekers. This would reduce the need for keeping asylum seekers in camps for long periods and fast-track relocation to safer and more accommodative environments for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers.



2.

## **RAS and UNHCR must create more responsive and sensitive protection services for LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya.**

To address the high prevalence of violence targeted at LGBTQI+ persons in the camp, there is an urgent need to prioritize protection services. Recommendations were made to consider establishing UNHCR-led safe houses away from the camp for survivors of physical and sexual violence, sensitivity training for law enforcement officers and LGBTQI+ community policing teams that can follow up on cases and ensure perpetrators are prosecuted. Ensuring that police officers managing the GBV desk in the police station were sensitized on sexuality and sexual identity was identified as one of the low-cost activities that can form an entry point towards enhancing protection services for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers. Continuous education on sensitivity to diversity should also be extended to staff in all government departments and NGOs engaging with LGBTQI+ asylum seekers.

# Recommendations



3.

**CSOs and their supporters should provide livelihood support and other support to meet the immediate needs of LGBTQI+ refugees in Kakuma.**

The limited access to work opportunities, especially for LGBTQI+ persons, was cited as a major obstacle to meeting their daily needs. Therefore, there is an urgent need for various actors to supplement the services provided by UNHCR and other partners in the camp. Concerted efforts should be made to ensure that basic needs such as food, health care and shelter are adequate. Facilitating livelihood opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees in a safe and accommodative environment should be prioritized. Further support should be given to CSOs, activists and loose collectives providing these services.



4.

**Governments of resettlement countries must resume and fast-track resettlement of LGBTQI+ refugees from Kenya.**

Most of the respondents felt that the only durable solution for them was relocation to countries that are tolerant and accommodative to LGBTQI+ people. Acknowledging the challenges of travel and relocation posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, they recommended that the RAS should facilitate refugee status determination to allow for relocation opportunities and governments must work with UNHCR and CSOs to facilitate resettlement of LGBTQI+ refugees.

# Recommendations



5.

## **UNHCR and CSOs must continue to build skills development programs for employability.**

The period spent in the camp provides an opportunity for asylum seekers and refugees to learn and develop skills that can help them sustain themselves later in life. There is a need to address the obstacles that deny LGBTQI+ asylum seekers the opportunity to utilize existing vocational and other training and educational opportunities. Some of the recommendations made include provision of scholarships to technical institutions away from the camp, providing targeted short courses in various skills such as sandal or soap making, and creating safe spaces within or outside the camp where skills-building training can be conducted.



6.

## **LGBTQI+ CSOs should work more closely with refugee-led organizations and collectives to build self-protection services.**

In addition to responsive protection services, there is a need to assist asylum seekers and refugees in prioritizing their safety. Orienting asylum seekers on cultural sensitivity and ways to prevent incidents of violence is critical. Establishing a specific intake protocol for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees reporting to the camp that includes mandatory orientation informing asylum seekers about safety guidelines, available protection services, legal aid and mental health services was strongly recommended. This can be implemented through existing LGBTQI+ organizations and engaging individuals with lived experiences in the camp.



# Recommendations



7.

## Donor communities should participate in more long-term development programming for LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya.

Due to reduced donor funding, obstacles occasioned by COVID-19 and other challenges, service providers felt that there was a need to shift the service delivery model from emergency and relief to a development-focused model allowing members to live outside of the camp. Implementers felt the provision of relief was unsustainable and should only be provided for the short-term while empowering community members through various livelihood programs. This requires a significant investment by donor communities to support LGBTQI+ CSOs, refugee-led collectives and organizations developing programs. This was cited as the best approach towards ensuring asylum seekers live a dignified life.



8.

## LGBTQI+ CSOs providing support to refugees in Kenya must coordinate more closely.

It was observed that several partners were supporting LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees to access various services. However, there was inadequate coordination between the different partners. As a result, there was a risk of failing to optimize the resources available.

In the absence of a formal coordination platform between the partners, there is a risk of some individuals benefiting multiple times from the support, with others not receiving any support. To ensure that support is optimized, organizations working with LGBTQI+ asylum seekers need to consult and coordinate their services to optimize coverage and ensure equitable access for all asylum seekers.

Establishing a working group of civil society organizations in collaboration with UNHCR would facilitate routine review of the needs of asylum seekers and ensure a coordinated response. This would include the establishment of a centralized database where all LGBTQI+ focused organizations can routinely report on their activities, available resources and gaps.

# Recommendations

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9.

## **LGBTQI+ CSOs and refugee-led organizations should continue to advocate for more inclusive human rights in Kenya.**

Respondents felt there was a need to continuously work towards changing Kenya's attitudes towards gender diversity. Regular community engagement and dialogue sessions between LGBTQI+ refugees and other refugees, as well as host community members, were also recommended to address the existing hostility towards them. Most respondents acknowledged that social change is a long and slow process, but felt it was time to start the process for the benefit of future generations of LGBTQI+ persons in the community.



10.

## **Civil Society must continue the push for LGBTQI+ human rights globally, including decriminalization of same sex intimacy.**

Most of the respondents recommended continuous advocacy to decriminalize and protect sexual minorities in their home countries. They proposed engagement with various organizations, such as the African Union and other regional bodies, to raise awareness on the negative consequences of discriminative laws in the region and the need to respect human rights. They felt that engaging regional bodies would ensure that most countries amend discriminative laws and facilitate legislation that supports and protects minorities. This would be a sustainable solution towards reducing the number of LGBTQI+ people who must flee their homes and seek asylum in other countries and facilitate the safe return of asylum seekers to their home countries.

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