

**Humanitarian
Aid through a
Queer Lens:
LGBTI+ and
Refugee Rights
in Crisis**

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Humanitarian Aid through a Queer Lens: LGBTI+ and Refugee Rights in Crisis

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD: Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency

CSO: Civil society organisations

Kaos GL: Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association

KII: Key Informant Interview

LGBTI+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex (“+” represents any other SOGIESC diversity)

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

SOGIESC: Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics

HEVİ LGBTI+: LGBTI+ Association for Right, Equality and Existence

ŞÖNİM: Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centre

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Executive Summary:

Does “Everyone” Include LGBTI+ People?

After the earthquakes on 6 February, there was an increase in rights violations against LGBTI+ individuals and refugees affected by the disaster. This was evident both in the comprehensive reports prepared by other civil society organisations (CSOs)[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] and in KAOS GL’s previous report “The Impact of the 6th February Earthquakes on LGBTI+s”[6] , as well as in the reporting studies conducted by the Kaos GL Association’s Refugee Rights Programme in collaboration with UNHCR.

CSOs operating in the earthquake zone face numerous challenges regarding inclusivity. Organisations that sometimes emerge to address an acute need often struggle to develop institutional policies, and those that do develop such policies frequently fail to adequately include LGBTI+ individuals and refugees in their policy documents. While some documents contain anti-discrimination principles, along with in-house training and practices to reinforce these principles, these efforts remain extremely limited within CSOs. Similarly, the engagement of organisations with LGBTI+ individuals and refugees is also limited; however, the development of policies, directives, and training activities remains a significant need.

Based on the findings, it has been also observed that most CSOs that declare, in principle, that they do not discriminate against LGBTI+ individuals actually have no experience of working with LGBTI+ individuals or refugees. When they do engage with someone from these groups, the people who were interviewed emphasised that it often becomes a learning process for them in terms of working with an LGBTI+ individual. While referrals are frequently made to CSOs specialising in LGBTI+ and refugee issues, LGBTI+ refugees often hesitate to approach these organisations due to the absence of the aforementioned policies.

[1] Report prepared by the Women’s Human Rights (KİH): <https://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/deprem-bolge-si-psikososyal-destek-raporu.pdf>

[2] Report prepared by UNWomen: https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/her_aftermath_turkce-1.pdf

[3] Report prepared by CoE: <https://rm.coe.int/tur-2023-wa2j-deprem-bolgelerinde-toplumsal-cinsiyet-analizi/1680aefad>

[4] Report prepared by Women for Equality Platform (EŞİK): https://esik.org.tr/s/2547/i/ESIK_DepremRaporu_TCE_BakisAcisindan_GelecegeNotlar.pdf

[5] Report prepared by Women’s Coalition: https://kadinkoalisyonu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/6-Subat-Depremi-Sonrasinda-Afet-Bolgesinde-Kadinlar_Kadin-Koalisyonu-Raporu.pdf

[6] <https://kaosglidernegi.org/images/library/deprem-raporu-eng.pdf>

LGBTI+ individuals were forced to hide their identities in the earthquake zones. As a result, CSOs struggled to reach them, while those who disclosed their identities, as well as refugees, were left unprotected and vulnerable to violence. This violence was increased by the propaganda of organisations promoting discriminatory ideologies and anti-LGBTI+ hatred. Protective and supportive measures were not implemented to address rights violations such as hate speech, attempted lynching of refugees, expulsion from tented areas, and denial of services to LGBTI+ individuals.

The denial of field permits to organisations working with refugees and the restrictions imposed on organisations supporting LGBTI+ individuals highlight the oppressive environment in which civil society operates. On the other hand, only CSOs were able to provide services to refugees and LGBTI+ individuals. These efforts, driven by a sense of solidarity, empowerment and a gender equality perspective, have created vital breathing spaces for LGBTI+ individuals and refugees. Unfortunately, CSOs faced significant funding constraints to sustain their daily activities, while the LGBTI+ community and organisations experienced worsening poverty.

The support provided by LGBTI+ organisations in the aftermath of the earthquake was aimed not only at LGBTI+ survivors but also at strengthening the capacity of civil society. While attempting to meet the needs of those affected, CSOs also recognised the importance of coming together and learning from each other's experiences. As you will read in detail in this study, through the narratives of the participants, CSOs are calling for the removal of the barriers they face, for collaboration with those they serve and for increased unity within the sector. Such activities carried out by LGBTI+ CSOs have a positive impact on the inclusion of LGBTI+ individuals and refugees and encourage mainstream organisations to develop policies and initiatives in this area.

Introduction

Kaos GL's LGBTI+ Human Rights Violations Report for 2023^[1] highlights the ongoing struggles faced by the LGBTI+ community in Türkiye, including hate crimes, censorship, bans on freedom of expression and discrimination in accessing rights and services. These challenges are exacerbated by increasing government pressure, a deepening economic crisis, homelessness, and poverty. Prejudices held by decision-makers and practitioners create further barriers in accessing basic services, resulting in discrimination and violations in housing, healthcare, and employment. The absence of explicit constitutional and legal protections against discrimination, violence and hate crimes based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), coupled with the ineffective implementation of existing laws, deepens the experiences of marginalisation and discrimination for LGBTI+ individuals.

On 6 February 2023, the Kahramanmaraş-centred earthquake was recorded as one of the most devastating disasters in Türkiye's history. This multi-dimensional crisis further entrenched existing social inequalities and rights violations, leading to compounded and intersectional discrimination for the LGBTI+ and refugee communities, who were already grappling with discrimination and poverty. Particularly in regions affected by the earthquake, LGBTI+ individuals and refugees faced exclusion, social isolation, and difficulty accessing humanitarian aid and emergency support. Discriminatory narratives and policies, including those rooted in racism, anti-refugee sentiment, and anti-LGBTI+ rhetoric, underscored the lack of inclusive disaster management policies that consider the diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, Kaos GL conducted urgent studies to monitor and document human rights violations during the recovery period. This report builds on that work to examine the unique challenges and specific needs of civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in this context. Some of these CSOs were established immediately after the earthquake as volunteer-led initiatives providing vital support. While institutionalisation was not a priority during the acute crisis phase, these

[1] <https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/lgbti-larin-i-nsan-haklari-raporu-2023-1.pdf>

organisations demonstrated the crucial importance of their existence by responding to diverse needs and evaluating requests for support during the crisis. However, conducting rights-based work or delivering humanitarian aid in earthquake-affected regions, particularly regarding LGBTI+ and refugee issues, proved exceptionally challenging for both service providers and survivors.

The response to the earthquake demonstrated how inclusive, community-driven, and collaborative efforts can effectively address the unique challenges faced by LGBTI+ individuals in crisis settings. By leveraging local knowledge, intersectional approaches, and partnerships between grassroots and larger organizations, these initiatives showcased innovative and compassionate strategies for humanitarian aid and long-term support.

Comprehensive Support and Coordination: Organisations collaborated to provide essential aid, including temporary accommodation, food, and hygiene kits, often leveraging resources from multiple institutions. *"We facilitated evacuation and provided two months of accommodation, food supplies, and hygiene materials through in-kind contributions from other organisations."*

Inclusive Humanitarian Aid Practices: Humanitarian aid efforts incorporated intersectional approaches, addressing specific needs such as hormone supplies for trans individuals and creating safe spaces. *"On the second day of the earthquake, we sent tents, hormones, and medication to trans women. Stakeholders also focused on making planned container cities safe for LGBTI+ individuals."*

Coordination with Local Organisations: Strengthening partnerships with local groups enhanced support for LGBTI+ individuals and refugees. *"Instead of directly implementing programs ourselves, we prioritised strengthening and supporting local organisations through collaboration."*

Kaos GL Refugee Rights Programme as a Best Practice: Kaos GL's proactive outreach identified needs and referred individuals to resources such as UNHCR, while also offering legal and psychosocial counselling. *"We used our database and a snowball technique to contact LGBTI+ individuals in the affected zone, documenting their needs and reporting them to UNHCR."*

Trauma-Informed Support: Recognising the trauma experienced by survivors, organisations offered ongoing support to help them adjust and address potential issues. *"When relocated survivors arrived, we didn't leave them on their own. Accompaniment was necessary as they had experienced trauma and were unfamiliar with their new environment."*

Collaborative and Proactive Action: Grassroots initiatives, such as the Lubunya Earthquake Solidarity, exemplified effective crisis responses through resource management and community action. *"Independent queers with no prior experience came together and successfully managed resources and processes that even established organisations might struggle with."*

Reflecting on both shortcomings and achievements, this report aims to uncover the barriers faced by LGBTI+ individuals and refugees in accessing humanitarian aid systems and to explore the structural causes of these obstacles following the earthquakes centred in Kahramanmaraş.

Through a rights-based analysis grounded in its multifaceted work and intersectional approach, Kaos GL examines the discrimination, exclusion, and poverty experienced by LGBTI+ individuals and refugees, alongside the deficiencies in humanitarian aid provision.

The findings seek to raise awareness and contribute to policy development for decision-makers and civil society organisations at both national and international levels.

Methodology

25 representatives from CSOs were interviewed to explore the challenges faced by LGBTI+ individuals and refugee LGBTI+ persons during the crisis period following the earthquake, as well as the deficiencies and needs in service provision for these groups. The organisations engaged in this study varied in their focus and experience. Some work specifically on refugee rights, while others have a broader focus on refugees but possess little to no experience in addressing the specific needs of LGBTI+ refugees. In some cases, inclusive policies or practices for supporting LGBTI+ refugees have not yet been developed, whereas other organisations have implemented policies and programmes that actively include and support LGBTI+ refugees based on prior experience. For this reason, the report uses "LGBTI+ and refugees" as an umbrella term to reflect the diverse range of organisations we interviewed and their varying levels of sensitivity and experience regarding LGBTI+ refugees.

This study was conducted between September and December 2024, a significant period after the earthquake. However, the continuing unmet needs in the earthquake-affected regions demonstrate the lingering impact of the disaster on organisations and individuals. Many essential services remain inadequate, and the need for cooperation and inclusive approaches persists. The ability to rapidly establish contact with CSOs and their representatives highlights both the demand for collaboration and the openness of organisations to engage on LGBTI+ and refugee issues, despite the challenges that they face.

To facilitate open and honest contributions, the institutions and individuals we interviewed requested anonymity. This reflects the ongoing difficulties of working in the intersecting fields of LGBTI+ and refugee rights, particularly in the earthquake zone, where sensitivities and risks remain heightened.

We evaluated the data obtained from focus group discussions and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) (taking place face-to-face or online) with local and international CSOs operating in 13 cities across Türkiye (namely; Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Malatya, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Osmaniye, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Mersin, Ankara).

During the course of our work:

- We designed the questions for the KIs and focus group discussions to understand the organisational structure and policies of the interviewed CSOs.
- We held three focus group discussions with CSOs and activists in Ankara, Mersin and Hatay.
- Ankara: LGBTI+ activists and organisations in Ankara came together to form the Ankara LGBTI+ Earthquake Solidarity. The solidarity group has developed a model that offers support to LGBTI+ people both in the earthquake zone and those who relocated to Ankara from the earthquake zone. For this reason, we held one of the focus group discussions in Ankara.
- Mersin was chosen for our second group discussion due to its close proximity to the earthquake zone and the LGBTI+ association in Mersin offers effective support to those in need.
- As one of the most heavily affected cities in the earthquake zone, we selected Hatay for our third focus group discussion.
- We conducted in-depth interviews with a total of twenty-five CSOs working in the field of LGBTI+ rights, refugee rights and women's rights and direct humanitarian aid provision.

Identifying the challenges faced by CSOs working at the intersection of LGBTI+ and refugee rights is crucial for sustaining their work. It ensures that humanitarian aid and rights-based activities become more inclusive. This report aims to shed light on these issues, highlighting key problems and needs to support more inclusive service provision and policy development.

Research Analysis and Findings

CSO Structures and Policies

In the focus group discussions and KIIIs, the participants were asked whether the organisation they represent has any specific policies on LGBTI+ and refugee rights and what criteria they consider when taking decisions. The interview results revealed that:

- Neither rights-based nor humanitarian aid CSOs have developed a specific policy on working with LGBTI+ individuals.
- LGBTI+ organisations have limited experience in working with refugee LGBTI+ persons. In this regard, Kaos GL Association is the only civil society organisation directly working through its Refugee Rights Programme.[1]
- CSOs prioritise cooperation with women's organisations to strengthen the gender equality perspective in their operations. Although many organizations do not have explicit LGBTI+ inclusive policies, their general anti-discrimination policies often include LGBTI+ individuals. For organisations that do not work directly with LGBTI+ individuals or refugee LGBTI+ individuals, it is common practice to refer applicants to other civil society organisations that provide such support. This practice, often referred to as a “referral policy”, is widely used among CSOs providing social service support. Through these referral mechanisms, organisations aim to connect LGBTI+ individuals to local LGBTI+ associations or, where unavailable, with the nearest city where an operational LGBTI+ organisation exists.

“LGBTI+ survivors are certainly present in the city and, naturally, they have specific needs. At the moment, they may be facing significant challenges in protecting themselves and maintaining their visibility. The so-called “container city” consists of small 8-square-metre units, each housing a family. There is no space within this environment where an LGBTI+ young person, particularly someone who wishes to conceal their identity, can step outside, speak freely or simply have some time to themselves. Additionally, the economic crisis is worsening the situation. Transport is expensive, and public transport often fails to connect people from one location to another. These difficulties prevent individuals from directly accessing services related to children’s rights, elderly rights and other vital support. The inability to provide such services within the container city or even in other parts of the city is deeply frustrating and painful.”

[1] <https://kaosgldernegi.org/en/programs/refugee-rights-program>

● Although the CSOs do not have direct institutional policies on LGBTI+ and/or refugee inclusion, some organisations, drawing on their past experiences and internal dynamics, state that they can offer safe spaces for these communities. This finding underscores the indirect but significant role played by capacity-building events organised by LGBTI+ organisations. These events help create environments where LGBTI+ individuals feel relatively safe and valued, even in the absence of formal written policies.

For instance, one participant shared that:

“We are individuals/organisations who have long been engaged with feminist literature and the LGBTI+ movement, which are among our core values. However, if you ask whether we have a formal LGBTI+ policy document in place, the answer is no. That said, we are a local organisation operating in all districts, providing LGBTI+ individuals with a safe space where they can build connections and establish relationships.”

Similarly, another participant reflected on the informal practices and prior training sessions within their organisation:

“I have not observed any formal policy but some trainings were organised on this topic. These were also intended to improve understanding of the relevant terminology. If I am not mistaken, the focus of the training was more about informing participants on gender-related terms. I am unsure of how sufficient it was. Although there is no policy in place, I can say that it is somewhere that I can consider as a safe space. I also observed that this issue is not being neglected. However, I do not recall LGBTI+ individuals being specifically mentioned in the policies shared with us, which are meant to be followed.”

These quotes underline the gap in formalised institutional policies. On the other hand, they simultaneously demonstrate that prior engagement with feminist and LGBTI+ movements, fosters a degree of inclusivity within CSOs.

One participant reflected on the importance of supervision in their work:

“In the earthquake zone, at least in the areas where I work directly, this is not a situation I come across so often. I have not come across many LGBTI+ counsellors. I have only encountered a few people. Apart from that, in other fields, for example, deals with an LGBTI+ person and is unsure how to approach them, they definitely receive supervision support from the instructors, which I believe is important.. Our instructors here are also psychiatrists. Therefore, receiving supervision support from them is a significant advantage for us.”

This perspective underscores the value of having accessible supervision mechanisms for employees in the field, as these mechanisms not only enhance their understanding of LGBTI+ issues but also contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for those seeking help.

- Even if they do not work directly with LGBTI+ individuals or refugee LGBTI+s, CSOs can communicate more effectively with these individuals when they have adequate knowledge about the services and resources available for referrals. The research highlighted that CSOs in Türkiye generally have limited experience in working with local and refugee LGBTI+s. This lack of experience often creates challenges in building effective relationships with clients and addressing their specific needs. Organisations that aim to work in this field require support in two key areas: establishing clear and inclusive communication with individuals and being aware of the external resources or services to which they can refer them for additional support.

This finding underscores the importance of providing training and capacity-building opportunities for CSOs to enhance their knowledge and confidence in navigating these relationships, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and effective service provision framework.

- Another issue emphasised by the participants was the lack of social opportunities after the earthquake, which significantly impacted the visibility of refugees and LGBTI+ individuals. This invisibility also hindered their ability to benefit from the city’s opportunities or access CSO services that are typically discovered through social interactions. As a result, even when CSOs have mechanisms and policies that aim to ensure access to services, the structural and contextual challenges in the earthquake zone create barriers to effective implementation.

One participant shared their perspective on this challenge:

“Everyone can access all the services without having to make a specific decision about it. The entire team is well informed about this. We already hold regular supervision meetings, where we discuss topics such as how to interact with LGBTI+ individuals, how to engage with refugees, their potential special needs and the services we can offer. Therefore, in theory, it seems as though there are no barriers. However, I believe the real challenges arise after the initial encounter. Once we have an LGBTI+ individual seeking our support, questions begin to emerge regarding the extent of the services we can provide, to what extent we can advocate for them and whether we will follow through with these actions.”

This quote highlights the gap between having inclusive policies or processes in theory and the practical difficulties faced when implementing them in the field. The contextual limitations, such as restricted social opportunities and barriers to visibility, exacerbate these challenges and make effective advocacy and service delivery more challenging.

- Access to the support mechanisms offered to LGBTI+ refugees by CSOs supported by international institutions plays a vital role in the earthquake region. However, participants from feminist organisations with experience working with LGBTI+ organisations emphasised that the problems of refugees and LGBTI+ individuals are often rendered invisible in this field. They attributed this invisibility to two key factors: first, the social pressure faced by local organisations known to work in the LGBTI+ field, and second, the concern that openly addressing LGBTI+ issues might negatively impact the access of other groups in need to their services.

One participant elaborated on this challenge:

“‘How are societies affected by disasters?’ was an important perspective for us from a gender perspective. We had developed a political stance on how discrimination, exploitation, and violence are heightened in societies already shaped by gender inequality, and how these issues manifest during a disaster. In this context, LGBTI+s were a fundamental subject for us. We knew how they experienced the disaster, how they remained invisible in the response and reconstruction processes after the disaster. Although this was a core part of our political commitment, our direct engagement with LGBTI+ individuals in affected areas was limited. This is mainly when we got in contact with the LGBTI+ Earthquake Solidarity group, which led to the establishment of the Queer Adiyaman community in Adiyaman.”

This statement highlights that, despite organisational commitments to addressing LGBTI+ issues, the combined impact of social stigma and concerns about service accessibility for “other” affected groups often limit the visibility and inclusion of LGBTI+ individuals in local contexts. These barriers not only hinder direct support efforts but also create challenges for advocacy and the broader fight against discrimination.

Training, Awareness, Service Provision and Support

During the interviews, the participants were asked whether they had received any training on LGBTI+ rights and refugee rights within their organisations. Another question was whether the organisation has a guideline on the sensitivities that need to be taken into consideration when working with LGBTI+ individuals and refugees.

Feedback from participants revealed that LGBTI+ individuals and refugees were often overlooked during crisis periods, with gender equality deprioritised. As a result, no specific services or projects designed with gender equality in mind were identified. This has led to unequal access to services for women and LGBTI+ individuals during crises, such as earthquakes. While many organisations aim to be inclusive, their approach is often limited to referrals to established LGBTI+ organisations. As one participant noted, *“From time to time, there were applicants for counselling. They were mostly referred because our experience on this issue was insufficient.”*

Refugee rights organisations supported by international institutions were observed to have more structured policies and services, thanks to clear diversity and inclusion frameworks mandated by their international partners. In contrast, local organisations often struggle with limited resources and the absence of institutional mechanisms to address the needs of vulnerable groups.

Social media emerged as a vital tool for LGBTI+ individuals to discreetly access information and initial support. Participants emphasised that visibility of LGBTI+ inclusive policies on social media significantly enhanced trust and accessibility. However, a lack of proactive communication about such policies often leaves those in need unaware of existing anti-discrimination frameworks.

One participant described this dynamic: *“People from these (LGBTI+) groups often refrain from receiving face-to-face counselling due to the perception that these organisations do not fully include or address the needs of LGBTI+ individuals.”*

Finally, LGBTI+ organisations in cities like Diyarbakır, Mersin, and Ankara play a crucial role as resource institutions for local civil society organisations. Their expertise helps fill gaps in knowledge and practice, underscoring the importance of collaboration and capacity-building to ensure equitable and inclusive service provision for all vulnerable groups.

Cooperation and Partnerships

As part of the study, organisations were asked regarding international collaborations on LGBTI+ and refugee rights, including the outcomes of these partnerships and their plans for future initiatives.

Based on the answers that we have collected, it be stated that the CSOs experience significant difficulties in maintaining effective cooperation and partnerships with international humanitarian organisations to address the needs of LGBTI+ individuals and refugees. While some collaborations exist, there are noticeable gaps in coordination, particularly at local and regional levels. One participant from an international organisation stated that, *“The UN and other international organisations cooperate at the management level, but this cooperation is not sufficiently reflected at the field, regional or local level.”* Efforts to improve coordination through regional meetings have often had limited outcomes. Local organisations, especially in cities without dedicated LGBTI+ or refugee-focused CSOs, encounter challenges in providing adequate support. Many refer these individuals to organisations in other cities, though this approach poses difficulties, particularly when they cannot openly promote their connection to LGBTI+ organisations.

Participants emphasised the importance of stronger links between local organisations and national-level actors to address resource gaps and improve coordination. Regular national meetings and focus group discussions are seen as crucial opportunities for organisations to exchange information and develop connections. Public institutions’ participation in broader training sessions, where LGBTI+ issues are indirectly included, was also identified as a valuable way to initiate dialogue.

Local organizations, such as the Muamma LGBTI+ Association in Mersin, play a crucial role in addressing the unique needs of marginalized communities during crises, often demonstrating remarkable adaptability and resourcefulness. For example, in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Türkiye, Muamma took proactive steps to support LGBTI+ individuals by providing temporary accommodation and reallocating resources initially intended for other groups to meet their specific needs.

One participant from the organization explained, “We moved LGBTI+ people from other cities in Türkiye (Maraş, Hatay, Adıyaman) to Mersin. They stayed here temporarily for a month or two. We requested hygiene kits, and they gave them to us. In fact, when they thought about it, they had done it for cis hetero women, but we turned it into resources. We made such resources available to LGBTI+ persons.”

This example underscores the potential of local organizations to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies, even with limited resources. By leveraging local knowledge and community trust, they can adapt general humanitarian responses to ensure inclusivity and equity for vulnerable groups like LGBTI+ individuals. However, this case also highlights the critical need for stronger coordination and support from national and international stakeholders. International organizations can amplify the impact of such local initiatives by providing targeted funding, capacity-building opportunities, and technical expertise. Collaborative efforts should focus on creating frameworks that recognize the unique challenges faced by LGBTI+ communities in crisis settings and integrate their needs into broader response mechanisms.

Data and Monitoring

Another question posed to participants was whether their organisations had a method to identify the needs of LGBTI+ individuals and refugees, as well as a mechanism for service recipients to evaluate the support provided. Most organisations do not have a formal feedback system to collect complaints or suggestions from beneficiaries. Instead, they respond to issues on a case-by-case basis, taking immediate action when problems arise. While this reactive approach addresses specific challenges, it lacks the structure needed for continuous improvement or systematic evaluation of services by the recipients themselves.

Organisations such as Kaos GL and HEVİ, which work directly with LGBTI+ refugees, provide targeted support through supervision studies aimed at improving service delivery for CSOs. However, this supervision is more focused on guiding organisations than creating feedback mechanisms for beneficiaries. As one respondent noted, *"Our monitoring and evaluation system has not yet been established; it is a newly structured process."* Data analysis within most organisations tends to focus on project-based frameworks rather than client-centred systems, limiting the ability to track progress or provide tailored support.

Additionally, no CSO currently conducts in-depth data analysis at the intersection of earthquake, refugee, and LGBTI+ issues. Despite these gaps, even basic situation analyses contribute to raising awareness about the needs in this critical area. Kaos GL's Refugee Rights Programme offers an example of structured data collection and reporting. The organisation provides legal and psychosocial counselling to over 300 LGBTI+ refugees annually across more than 20 cities in Türkiye via e-mail, telephone, face-to-face and online meetings. They maintain the data on the number and content of counseling sessions, the means of communication and demographic information such as residence and self-declared sexual orientation and gender identity. Using this data, Kaos GL prepares quarterly and annual qualitative field observation reports, based on semi-structured interviews and counselling, to guide its efforts and share insights with the broader field.

Improvement & Support

To better understand the development and future strategies of the participating organisations, we asked about their plans for improving services to LGBTI+ individuals and refugees. The responses highlighted the following key areas:

- **Transformation of Safe Spaces:** Creating environments that are safe for both refugees and LGBTI+ individuals benefits all beneficiaries. Organisations recognised the importance of structuring their spaces to uphold human rights and promote gender equality. This transformation not only meets the immediate needs of marginalised groups but also contributes to fostering inclusivity and trust among broader communities.

● **Capacity Building through Training:** Representatives from civil society organisations (CSOs) benefit significantly from awareness-raising and specialised training offered by LGBTI+ organisations. For instance, the Kaos GL Refugee Programme provides targeted training on working with refugee LGBTI+ individuals and expert-level sessions for professionals. These initiatives enhance practical skills, deepen understanding, and create opportunities for collaboration across sectors. One participant noted: *"These trainings not only increase our knowledge but also allow us to connect with other organisations, helping us build a more inclusive and sustainable approach to our work."*

● **Lack of Public Awareness Efforts:** Despite progress within CSOs, there remains a lack of awareness-raising activities accessible to the wider public, particularly at the local level. Issues such as xenophobia and LGBTI+phobia persist, leaving refugee LGBTI+ individuals unsupported. Many organisations lack the resources or strategies to engage with local communities, perpetuating discrimination and social tensions. One participant remarked on the challenge: *"Refugees and LGBTI+ persons are scapegoated, bearing the brunt of societal problems. Addressing this requires not just improving services but ensuring they are accessible and inclusive, even amidst political and social pressures."* This statement underscores the broader societal and political barriers that hinder CSOs from fully addressing the needs of marginalised groups, stressing the urgency of inclusive service delivery in challenging contexts.

● **Challenges of Humanitarian Aid for LGBTI+ Associations:** LGBTI+ associations highlighted how crises exacerbate their existing vulnerabilities. After the earthquakes, many found themselves thrust into the humanitarian aid sector, an area where they lack experience. This inexperience has led to difficulties in resource allocation, coordination, and addressing the urgent needs of affected populations. One participant observed: *"The earthquakes have forced us to take on responsibilities we are not prepared for. International aid organisations do not support our field directly, making it even harder to sustain our work. Without targeted assistance, we're left to manage with very limited resources."* This lack of international support further strains these organisations, limiting their ability to implement long-term interventions. The combination of financial constraints, insufficient expertise, and a lack of external support poses significant challenges to maintaining impactful work.

The responses illustrate the dual pressures faced by organisations: the need to adapt and expand their services while grappling with systemic barriers. Transforming spaces, building capacities, engaging local communities, and securing consistent support are critical steps for ensuring effective and sustainable interventions. However, without addressing the underlying political and societal tensions, the progress achieved risks being undermined.

Challenges, Obstacles and Lessons Learnt

In order to understand the obstacles faced by organizations providing services to LGBTI+ individuals and refugees after the earthquakes, we asked participants to define them. Another question focused on the lessons learned from past experiences. Key findings include: Organisations supporting LGBTI+ individuals and refugees after the earthquakes face significant challenges, including inadequate inclusion policies, barriers in accessing public services, resource constraints, and systemic discrimination.

Barriers to Public Referrals: LGBTI+ refugees often encounter intersectional discrimination, making it unsafe to access public services. Bureaucratic hurdles, such as restrictive policies in regions like Hatay, further limit their access to aid. A participant observed, *“The governor's office does not grant permits for refugee work, prioritising the policy of repatriation.”*

Operational and Resource Constraints: Organisations struggle with limited funding, logistical difficulties, and inconsistent communication with public institutions. A lack of flexibility in donor funding adds to the challenge, as priorities are often driven by funders rather than needs on the ground. A participant remarked, *“Donors were slow in adapting their support to the earthquake. Flexibility should be provided in urgent circumstances.”*

Intersectional Discrimination: LGBTI+ refugees face compounded discrimination due to xenophobia and LGBTI+phobia, resulting in economic vulnerability and restricted access to housing, healthcare, and employment. In Hatay, hate speech and violence against refugees, including LGBTI+ individuals, were reported, with one participant stating, *“Efforts to deliver aid to refugee-populated areas were deliberately obstructed.”*

Housing and Safety Challenges: Trans individuals and other LGBTI+ survivors experienced exclusion from shared shelters and tent areas due to their identities. One account detailed how two trans individuals in İskenderun were denied shelter, forcing organisations to seek alternative accommodations.

Discrimination During Relocation: The relocation process for LGBTI+ individuals was fraught with challenges, including difficulties obtaining travel permits and limited support networks in new provinces. Participants highlighted ongoing needs despite the passage of time since the earthquake.

Socioeconomic Challenges: Poverty and economic instability were exacerbated for LGBTI+ individuals, particularly those unable to secure housing or employment due to their visibility. A participant shared, *“Many were subjected to violence due to their sexual orientation and gender identity, especially in shared spaces.”*

These findings underline the critical need for inclusive policies, improved coordination, and resource allocation to address the unique vulnerabilities of LGBTI+ individuals and refugees in disaster contexts.

Results and Recommendations

The study reveals that LGBTI+ individuals and refugees experience intensified human rights violations during crises such as earthquakes. Ongoing exclusion and hate speech further marginalise these groups, severely limiting their access to essential support.

Our study shows that the support provided by civil society organisations for LGBTI+s and refugees have limitations in terms of inclusiveness. Access to public support is almost impossible.

In concluding our study, we wish to highlight the following problem areas:

- **Lack of safe space:** After the disaster, LGBTI+s and refugees had serious difficulties in accessing shelter and basic needs. Refugees and LGBTI+ individuals could not access spaces that would protect them from discrimination and violence.

- **Civil society capacity:** CSOs experienced in supporting both LGBTI+ individuals and refugees faced significant challenges in delivering services during crisis situations. Addressing these issues requires training, improved access to resources, and the development of supervision software.

- **Solidarity and cooperation:** Organisations working at the local, national and international level have established more effective cooperation and coordination. In crisis situations, systematising information sharing is essential.

It is crucial for CSOs working at the national level to develop strategies that enhance local cooperation. In a context where public pressure makes the work of LGBTI+ organisations more difficult, establishing partnerships amongst local organisations significantly strengthens the access of LGBTI+ individuals and refugees to essential services. Furthermore, local organisations have the flexibility and adaptability to expand their working areas according to the needs of affected populations. Strengthening these collaborations can ensure a more inclusive and effective approach when it comes to addressing the needs of LGBTI+ individuals and refugees, particularly in crisis settings.

- **Awareness of intersectionality:** The intersectional elements of discrimination faced by LGBTI+s and refugees and the deepening discrimination caused by identities should be reflected in the policies of actors working with these groups.

As a result, in order to ensure a human rights-sensitive, inclusive and effective service provision for both LGBTI+s and refugees in the disaster zone, civil society services need to publish their institutional capacities, take part as a subject in policy development modules and take responsibility for building resilient networks.

Recommendations for LGBTI+ Organisations:

Strengthen Cooperation Agreements: Formalise partnerships with humanitarian aid organisations through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) that clearly outline roles, responsibilities, and collaboration goals. Include provisions for long-term cooperation beyond immediate crises to build institutional memory and resilience.

Organise Joint Training Programmes: Collaborate with humanitarian organisations to design and deliver capacity-building sessions focused on LGBTI+ inclusive disaster response. Ensure these trainings include practical tools and case studies specific to crisis settings (e.g., safe shelter design for LGBTI+s, intersectional discrimination scenarios).

Build a Unified Emergency Network: Establish a multi-sectoral emergency response network with clear lines of communication and responsibility. Include not only LGBTI+ and humanitarian organisations but also local government representatives and public service providers.

Develop LGBTI+ Emergency Protocols: Collaborate with humanitarian actors to create comprehensive guidelines addressing the specific needs of LGBTI+ individuals during crises. Include guidance on safe referrals, gender-sensitive shelter practices and responding to violence or discrimination.

Recommendations for Managers of Humanitarian NGOs:

Build Strategic Partnerships: Sign Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with LGBTI+ organisations to ensure the provision of inclusive services in times of crisis. These partnerships should outline joint responsibilities and strategies to address intersectional discrimination faced by LGBTI+s and refugees.

Integrate LGBTI+ Issues into Core Policies: Update organisational policies to reflect LGBTI+ inclusive humanitarian principles, ensuring that all staff members are trained in these principles and understand their importance in disaster response.

Defend Funding Allocations: Secure grants that prioritise collaboration with LGBTI+ organisations and allocate resources specifically for LGBTI+-inclusive disaster relief projects. Advocate for donor flexibility to adapt funding criteria to meet the evolving needs of affected populations during crises.

Support Knowledge Transfer Programmes: Provide technical assistance to LGBTI+ organisations on humanitarian logistics, such as resource mobilisation, supply chain management and shelter planning. Facilitate mentorship programmes between experienced humanitarian actors and LGBTI+ organisations to enhance disaster response capacity.

Recommendations for Field Staff of Humanitarian NGOs

Participate in LGBTI+ Inclusion Trainings: Engage in regular sensitivity training programmes focusing on the unique needs of LGBTI+s in emergency settings. Trainings should include practical case studies, safe referral practices and examples of intersectional discrimination scenarios observed during crises. Ensure these sessions are mandatory and integrated into broader disaster response training modules.

Establish a Referral System: Develop and maintain a structured, secure, and confidential referral system to connect LGBTI+s with specialised organisations that address their unique needs. This system should also include a clear follow-up process to ensure the success of referrals, especially in cases involving violence or discrimination.

Ensure Equality in Resource Allocation: Distribute humanitarian aid equitably, ensuring no discrimination based on SOGIESC or other intersecting factors. Include specific provisions for trans individuals, such as access to hormone therapies, gender-affirming clothing and private facilities in shared spaces. Equip staff with tools to identify and address the unique needs of LGBTI+s in the field.

Ensure Case Tracking and Reporting: Implement secure and efficient systems for documenting cases of discrimination, violence, or unmet needs. Establish a feedback loop to track outcomes for referred cases and provide training to field staff on ethical and secure data collection practices.

Implement Field-Level Coordination: Establish regular communication channels and coordination mechanisms with LGBTI+ organisations. Host joint meetings and working groups to share service updates and collaboratively address emerging needs. This coordination should extend to creating local response maps that identify LGBTI+-friendly spaces and services in disaster zones.

Recommendations for International Organisations:

Fund Joint Initiatives: Prioritise funding for projects that foster collaboration between LGBTI+ and humanitarian organisations. Ensure these projects include clear goals for inclusive service provision and intersectional support mechanisms.

Support Capacity Building Programmes: Provide funding and technical assistance for capacity-building programmes jointly designed by LGBTI+ and humanitarian organisations. Focus on practical skills, such as inclusive shelter design and intersectional discrimination awareness.

Support Research Projects: Fund academic and field research examining the cooperation between LGBTI+ and humanitarian organisations in disaster contexts. Encourage studies that explore best practices and identify gaps in support mechanisms.

Offer Emergency Relief Grants: Create flexible emergency relief grant schemes specifically designed to support partnerships between LGBTI+ and humanitarian organisations. Ensure these grants can be mobilized quickly during crises.

Support International Advocacy: Advocate for the inclusion of LGBTI+ representatives in international humanitarian forums and policy discussions. Facilitate platforms where LGBTI+ organisations can share their experiences and collaborate with other stakeholders.

Annex: Interview Questions

1. Organisational Structure and Policies

- Do you have specific policies on the rights and equality of LGBTI+ persons and refugees in your organisation? If so, can you share the details of these policies?

- Which criteria are taken into consideration when making decisions on LGBTI+ persons and refugees?

2. Training and Awareness

- Do your staff receive any training on LGBTI+ issues and refugee rights? If yes, what is the content of these trainings and how often are they provided?

- Do you have any guidelines or directives on the sensitivities your staff should be aware of when working with LGBTI+ persons and refugees?

- Which methods and materials are used in your training programmes to increase LGBTI+ awareness and refugee rights awareness?

3. Service Delivery and Support

- Does your organisation offer special services for LGBTI+ persons and refugees? If yes, what are these services?

- If there are any difficulties or discrimination faced by LGBTI+ persons and refugees when receiving assistance from your organisation, how do you deal with it?

- What kind of work do you do to adapt your services to the needs of LGBTI+ persons and refugees?

4. Collaborations and Partnerships

- Do you have collaborations with other civil society organisations working on LGBTI+ rights and refugee rights? If so, what is the scope and content of these collaborations?

- Do you have any projects or campaigns to raise public awareness on LGBTI+ and refugee issues? If so, can you share the details of these projects?

- Which partner organisations do you cooperate with at national or international level?

5. Data and Monitoring

- Does your organisation use any data collection methods to identify and monitor the needs of LGBTI+ persons and refugees? If so, what are these methods?

- Do you collect feedback on the services LGBTI+ persons and refugees receive from your organisation? If so, how is this feedback evaluated and what steps are taken?

6. Improvement and Development

- Do you have any plans or strategies to improve your services to LGBTI+ persons and refugees? If so, can you share the details of these plans?

- What kind of steps do you plan to take in the future to provide more awareness and education in this area?

- Are you planning new initiatives to address the needs of LGBTI+ persons and refugees in your future projects?

7. Challenges and Obstacles

- What are the biggest challenges you face in providing services for LGBTI+ persons and refugees?

- What strategies have you developed or are you planning to develop to address these challenges?

- How do you assess the challenges faced by organisations supporting the LGBTI+ community and the rights of refugees?

8. Lessons learnt and improvements

- What are the important lessons you have learnt from your past experiences?

- What conclusions have you drawn from your past experiences to improve your services and policies?

- What do you plan to do in the future to provide better service?

9. International Collaborations and Supports

- Which collaborations do you have at the international level in terms of support for LGBTI+ persons and refugees?

- How do you evaluate the impact of these collaborations on your organisation and services?

- What kind of projects are you planning in the future within the scope of international support and co-operation?

10. LGBTI+ Support in the Context of Earthquake

- Do you offer special support for LGBTI+ persons and refugees in the context of earthquakes? If yes, what is the scope of these supports?

- What kind of preparations do you make to meet the needs of LGBTI+ persons and refugees in crisis situations such as earthquakes?

- What are the challenges faced by LGBTI+ persons and refugees in post-earthquake processes and what kind of strategies have you developed to deal with these challenges?