

stonewall

LGBTQI+ ATROCITY RISKS IN AFGHANISTAN

Joint briefing



Protection
Approaches

“My family is in danger because of my sexuality. Everyone knew of my sexuality when previous government was in power. At that time, I face lots of harassment, but now it is much worse [...] I already have people after me, and always have to hide. I’m hiding in [location] changing locations every time. My wife and children get threats about me.”

Protection Approaches and Stonewall are concerned about the imminent and medium-term risk across Afghanistan of widespread and systematic persecution of and violence against LGBTQI+ people, those who are believed to belong to the community, and their families. LGBTQI+ people are not the only community facing atrocity risks, but the absence of LGBTQI+ expertise and focused policy in high level responses to the human catastrophe in Afghanistan is stark.

We are calling on high-level policy and humanitarian actors to focus their attention to the specific risks we have identified in order to avoid further and devastating risks to LGBTQI+ Afghans.

That is why we have come together to share the information and insights we gain from our daily interactions with LGBTQI+ Afghans and to inform our call for targeted policy interventions to protect LGBTQI+ communities in Afghanistan. We know that when communities do not have a voice, they get forgotten. And when communities get forgotten by those of us who have the power to act, we miss vital opportunities to prevent atrocity.

We are calling on the United Nations, its member states and humanitarian agencies to:

- 1. Take a coordinated approach to gathering intelligence on threats facing LGBTQI+ people in Afghanistan,** paying particular attention to risks at the family, neighbourhood and community level, that can support multilateral and humanitarian efforts of protection and prevention.
- 2. Produce a plan for LGBTQI+ inclusive atrocity prevention and preparedness in Afghanistan for every part of the cycle of this crisis, including likely scenarios.** Such a plan must be dual track, simultaneously prioritising evacuation while investing resource and strategic thinking *now* to prepare for – and seek to mitigate – predictable violence. It is essential to consult and collaborate with LGBTQ+ civil society throughout to ensure that expert community insight informs the work.

Track one must prioritise coordinated multilateral and humanitarian support for the safe passage of LGBTQI+ Afghans who are able and willing to flee, with LGBTQI+ people and their families named as a priority group for resettlement by every country of resettlement in keeping with the durable solutions States have agreed for refugees.

Track two must support a coordinated multilateral and humanitarian approach to preventing further identity-based violence, including mass atrocity crimes, with a focus on the particular risks facing different vulnerable groups, including LGBTQI+ people.

The plan must include:

- Coordinated training for country teams and staff in humanitarian agencies on the specific dynamics of LGBTQI+ atrocity risks.
- Support for the development of an agreed set of atrocity prevention indicators developed by Protection Approaches with Stonewall.
- A coordinated strategy of preparedness and prevention capable of responding to escalating threat thresholds and holding the Taliban to account through all means necessary, including through the collection of intelligence, evidence, and supporting International Criminal Court's investigation on the Situation in Afghanistan.

Evidence and testimony

Stonewall, working with partners, has had direct and sustained contact with LGBTQI+ people in Afghanistan, in neighbouring countries and in third countries. We continue to receive reports from LGBTQI+ Afghans hiding in very insecure environments because they are at risk of violence and killings from their family, community and the Taliban.

“My father was threatened several times by the Taliban, they beat my father because of my trans and lesbian status. They informed that if they give refuge to these people, the Taliban will kill them. Nowhere is safe for us.”

Since the Taliban takeover there have been reports of LGBTQI+ Afghans being victims of torture, extrajudicial executions and violence from across all actors in society, including notably from family and community members. There is evidence of bribery, threats and hoax offers of assistance to LGBTQI+ people seeking to leave Afghanistan to draw them out of hiding, followed by violence.

Almost all those who have managed to flee to another country express grave fear over the treatment of their families who remain behind. Many continue to face threats from those at home who are aware that they have left the country. Taliban and community statements across the media claimed that LGBTQI+ people should not have been allowed to leave the country; when the news went viral of those granted protection outside of Afghanistan, some outlets reported that they should have been killed.

We have seen evidence of hate speech, physician threats, and intimidation both on social media and in SMS or WhatsApp messages. These communications from inside Afghanistan frequently contain violent imaged, expletives, incitement to violence and threats or imagery of rape, violence or murder. This raises real concerns for LGBTQI+ people who have made it out and are receiving these threats in countries of asylum and for their families still in Afghanistan. We are concerned by the risks of violence and honour killings facing LGBTQI+ people but also families with an LGBTQI+ person.

A major concern for the security of LGBTQI+ Afghans and their families is that the Taliban inherited the digital records of the country. While many have taken steps to destroy their digital footprints within their control, there is a legacy of records including those relating to health, use of social media and activism that will continue to create risk for LGBTQI+ Afghans of being exposed.

“Taliban have threatened my family telling me to come back home. But I am still hiding. The Taliban come to my family house every day and give them threats as they want information of where I am.”

“I am really terrified and as a gay I feel they will kill me or stone me to death any moment. If they found out that I am gay they will kill me and my family members.”

From the information we and partners are collecting from those in hiding we are identifying emerging and multiple patterns of risk. Terrified and unable to seek the help of any local communities, they face additional vulnerabilities in the unfolding crisis because they often cannot access even basic food, shelter and medical care. LGBTQI+ Afghans have no visible networks of support in Afghanistan. They face risks every day, not just from the Taliban – who have openly stated that the sanction for being LGBTQI+ is the death penalty – but also from their families and communities.

What LGBTQI+ Afghans are experiencing today continues a long history of LGBTQI+ people being disproportionately targeted and subject to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic sexual violence, forced marriages, honour killings, conversion practices and execution. Simply being LGBTQI+ will, under the rule of the Taliban, mean extra-judicial executions and the death penalty. We know that such violence often foreshadows or accompanies widespread identity-based violence and mass atrocities against LGBTQI+ communities but also other groups.

The immediate and medium-term risks of mass atrocity crimes against the country’s LGBTQI+ people are extremely high. These are part of the Taliban’s targeting of marginalised communities at risk of atrocity, including, but are not limited to, women and girls; human rights defenders; (former) government workers; refugees; Sikhs, Hindus; Shi’as; Hazara; journalists; and disabled people. These patterns of violence, instability and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan will continue to deepen without high-level, creative and committed response from the UN and its members states.

About

Protection Approaches

Protection Approaches works to change how the world views identity-based violence – and by so doing, change the way we respond to and prevent it. We seek a world where everyone accepts and respects each other, regardless of identity. We have run a core Atrocity Prevention programme since 2014.

Stonewall

Founded in London in 1989, Stonewall now works in each nation of the UK and has established partnerships across the globe. We help create transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people through our [campaigns](#), [research](#) and change and [empowerment](#) programmes. We continue to fight for a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere can live our lives to the full.

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