

Five easy things humanitarian aid actors should do to ensure LGBTI refugees of war are not left behind

The ongoing war in Ukraine has resulted in the need for immediate action to address the needs both of a significant population of Ukrainians fleeing the armed conflict, as well as for those who are staying in Ukraine. LGBTI people are often amongst vulnerable groups in crisis situations and specific attention is needed to ensure that they are safe, have safe refuge and that some fundamental basic needs are being met – ensuring they are not left behind.

While emergency situations make everyone vulnerable and deprived, existing discrimination and violence against LGBTI people can put them at heightened risks to be left in the blind-spot of international protection and humanitarian relief programmes. LGBTI organisations in Ukraine and in ‘landing’ countries are providing support and are available to support the work of refugee and humanitarian crisis organisations.

ILGA-Europe together with LGBTI organisations in Ukraine, and in countries hosting war refugees now, are assessing the needs of LGBTI people as closely as possible on a day-to-day basis. An easy way to ensure humanitarian aid will not fail the most vulnerable is to connect to organisations representing vulnerable communities, and connect and refer people wherever possible and whenever needed.

Here are five very easy steps we ask all humanitarian actors working in Ukraine or in countries now receiving refugees from the war in Ukraine to consider, to ensure LGBTI people are not falling through the cracks and will receive the humanitarian aid they need:

1. In many countries, local and national LGBTI organisations are stepping up and providing support services for LGBTI refugees and the families. When becoming aware of refugees being LGBTI, please share the information with them that these organisations have helplines, specific drop-in centres and are offering direct support.
2. LGBTI people and their families, including children, will need to know that the services you are providing are safe for them, or that they can disclose being LGBTI and discuss their particular needs. Consider ways to indicate that you are open to safely hearing their concerns. This could be through the display of a rainbow flag, naming LGBTI people among those you are supporting in leaflets, and making referral pathways to local LGBTI organisations visible.
3. More specifically, much like many people under medical care, trans and intersex people, or those on HIV medications, need ongoing access to these medications. LGBTI organisations know ways how to organise so that people have access to such medications, and contacts can be provided in each country on where to go for support. Please let people know about this possibility and provide them with the necessary contacts.

4. If LGBTI organisations are approaching you and ask to put out information about contacts and support for LGBTI refugees, allow them to put up this information in your locations and distribution points. If you are aware of national or local LGBTI organisations, reach out to them to seek their support and/or include local LGBTI groups in broad coordinating committee work.
5. There are efforts to ensure medication is also going into Ukraine, wherever possible, support such convoys and ensure that they include medications for trans and intersex people and those on HIV regimes.

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