

TOWARDS AN INTERSECTIONAL WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA:

Strategies, Challenges and Solidarity with LGBTQIA+ People
in a Time of Backlash.

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INTRODUCTION

As anti-gender and anti-feminist movements gain strength and spaces for civil society advocating for gender equality and human rights shrink, LGBTQIA+ people face increasing discrimination and violent attacks. This is especially severe and exacerbated in conflict-affected settings, where pre-existing discriminatory norms and violence based on homo-, trans- and bi-phobia are further exacerbated and weaponised. While the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda acknowledges the gendered dimensions of conflict and the role of women in peacebuilding, it remains embedded within gender-binary, cis- and heteronormative frameworks, neglecting explicit references to people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC) including their specific experiences in both conflict and non-conflict settings. In times of increasing backlash and a return to more repressive concepts within global politics, this poses a risk to the LGBTQIA+ community. This learning paper draws from the webinar “LGBTQIA+ rights and inclusion in the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda” held on May 27, 2025, and hosted by Oxfam Denmark, Women’s Council Denmark, DanChurchAid, Danish Family Planning Association on behalf of the Danish WPS CSO Network. The webinar amplified the voices of LGBTQIA+ activists, practitioners, academics and civil society organisations from Denmark, Egypt, Lebanon and South Africa, as well as international perspectives via Outright International. It outlines the urgency of queering the WPS agenda – recognising and centring diverse identities to build inclusive, rights-based peace.

KEY ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

While UN Security Council Resolution 1325 acknowledged the gendered dimensions of conflict and the critical role of women in peacebuilding, the WPS framework remains grounded in binary, hetero- and cisnormative assumptions. Although intersectionality is increasingly invoked in global policy discourse, the absence of explicit references to SOGIESC contributes to invisibility, underfunding and neglect.¹ Moreover, the dominant definitions of intersectionality remain western-centric, excluding frameworks and insights from the global majority.²

LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE AS PRIMARY TARGETS OF ANTI-GENDER BACKLASH

Even though there are considerable regional differences between the perceptions and advances with respect to gender equality, we currently observe that hard-won gains in gender equality are facing a significant and organised backlash at a global level. Such backlash is often driven by authoritarian and ultra-conservative forces which are using homo-, bi- and transphobia as political tools, portraying LGBTQIA+ inclusion and feminist ideals as threats to 'traditional values'.³ In so doing, they turn SOGIESC

people into scapegoats, fuel social divisions and legitimise violence by challenging the rights of these people to belong as equals in the social contract. The attacks on gender equality, LGBTQIA+ identities and SRHR originate in the same ideological matrix, targeting people and groups that are seen to destabilise traditional gender norms. In addition to real-world threats and attacks, even virtual spaces have become less secure, eroding previous safe spaces for exchange and self-expression.⁴ Structural barriers to full participation in civic and political life – together with restrictive legal frameworks, discriminatory gender norms and cultural practices – intensify the vulnerabilities that LGBTQIA+ people face, particularly in the context of conflict and humanitarian emergencies.⁵ During conflict and in times of heightened sexual and gender-based violence, LGBTQIA+ people have been particularly targeted through 'sex or gender-corrective' violence, and persecution based on social stigma.⁶ These specific forms of targeting should inform a more inclusive definition of 'conflict' in the WPS agenda – taking into account political conflicts at local levels where SOGIESC diverse people are used as scapegoats and face organised attacks.

In the face of this politically coordinated yet not centralised attack against gender

¹ *Outright International (2023). LGBTQ lives in conflict and crisis: A queer agenda for peace, security, and accountability. New York: Outright International*

² *Argument made by Fatma Ibrahim, The Sex Talk Arabic, during webinar*

³ *Shaw, A. (2023). The global assault on LGBTQ rights undermines democracy. London: Chatham House*

⁴ *CSO representative during the webinar hosted by the Danish WPS Civil Society Network, May 27 2025*

⁵ *Outright International (2023). LGBTQ lives in conflict and crisis: A queer agenda for peace, security, and accountability. New York: Outright International*

⁶ *Outright International (2023). LGBTQ lives in conflict and crisis: A queer agenda for peace, security, and accountability. New York: Outright International*

equality and the fundamental rights framework, the WPS agenda stands at a pivotal juncture. However, as long as the provisions within the global normative framework of the WPS agenda exclude the LGBTQIA+ community through binary language and heteronormative assumptions, it remains not only incomplete but also replicates heteronormative and

exclusionary practices in how international and national machineries work on peace and security. The continuous exclusion of LGBTQIA+ rights prevents the WPS agenda from reaching its full potential and, at worst, risks reinforcing harmful understandings of gender that undermine the spirit of the agenda.



NORMATIVE INVISIBILITY IN THE WPS AGENDA: EXCLUSION AND VULNERABILITY ON THE GROUND

At the national level, LGBTQIA+ concerns are rarely explicitly mentioned when it comes to peace and security policies and plans. National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS, which guide countries' implementation of the WPS agenda, rarely consult LGBTQIA+ groups or include their priorities.

Only 23 out of 100 countries with NAPs include LGBTQIA+ considerations in their NAPs, and even fewer address these issues meaningfully in implementation.⁷ Despite the current rather conservative political climate, Outright International highlights the United States and Albania as positive examples, as their 1325 National Action Plans explicitly reference sexual orientation and gender identity, with commitments ranging from protection against violence to strengthening institutional responses to hate crimes.

Regarding legal provisions on same-sex marriage, two trends can be observed. Despite a rise in the number of new

countries decriminalising same-sex marriage on one hand, the criminalisation of same sex marriages is globally on the rise on the other. In 1991, five countries criminalised same-sex marriage; by 2019, that number had risen to 37.⁸ In a number of countries, same-sex relationships are punishable by death. The lack of marriage equality reinforces the marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ people – particularly queer women and trans people – in peacebuilding and post-conflict settings, limiting their recognition as legitimate actors within the WPS agenda.

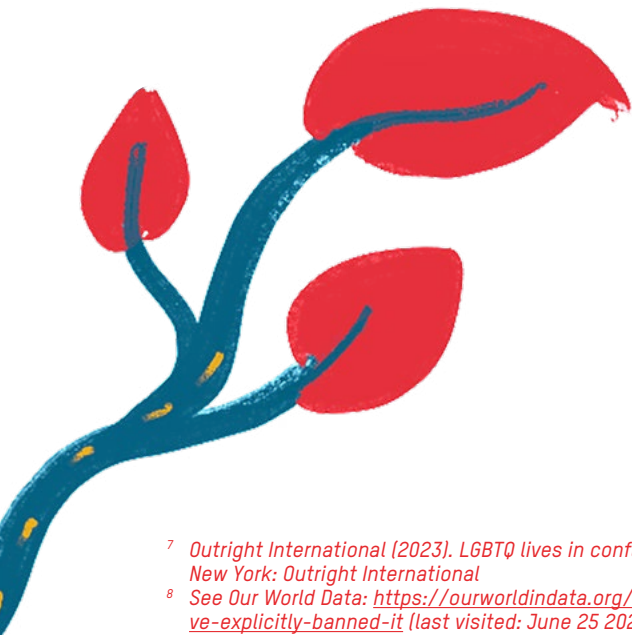
By upholding heteronormative assumptions and withholding basic family rights and legal protections, WPS frameworks risk excluding those whose lives, relationships, and security needs fall outside cis- and heteronormative definitions of womanhood and family. This exclusion is not abstract: it translates into denied access to housing, health care, inheritance and other essential protections. In conflict and post-conflict contexts, it determines whether someone has a place to live, can visit a partner in hospital or inherit property after displacement or death – rights that are central to the WPS agenda's stated goals of protection and recovery.

It is important to note that any proposed solutions to address these SOGIESC-related gaps and barriers in WPS interventions must be shaped by consultations with LGBTQIA+ people and networks in respective global majority crisis and conflict-affected contexts to ensure their context-specific relevance and ensure they do not risk causing further harm or backlash against LGBTQIA+ people, e.g. due to being perceived as western-imposed.⁹

⁷ Outright International (2023). *LGBTQ lives in conflict and crisis: A queer agenda for peace, security, and accountability*. New York: Outright International

⁸ See Our World Data: <https://ourworldindata.org/data-insights/more-countries-have-legalized-same-sex-marriage-but-others-have-explicitly-banned-it> (last visited: June 25 2025)

⁹ Argument made by Fatma Ibrahim, *The Sex Talk Arabic*, during webinar



HEIGHTENED PERSECUTION OF LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE IN TIMES OF WAR AND CRISIS

Denying the existence of the LGBTQIA+ community, portraying its members as seeking ‘special rights’ or not deserving fundamental rights, and neglecting their basic human rights, have led to increased vulnerability and lack of protection in conflict and crisis settings. LGBTQIA+ refugees and crisis-affected people often fall through the cracks of protection programmes designed for ‘women and children’ – categories that render them invisible. Stigma can also hinder access to education and health services, particularly sexual and reproductive health.¹⁰ These omissions have life-threatening consequences.

LGBTQIA+ people in conflict and post-conflict settings face persecution, blackmail, forced displacement and torture – while being excluded from peace negotiations, protection frameworks, and transitional justice mechanisms, and from basic humanitarian assistance due to stigma. They are often specifically targeted by state and non-state armed groups, who use gender-based violence against LGBTQIA+ people as a weapon of war. LGBTQIA+ people are at heightened risk of arbitrary detention, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, and extrajudicial killing.¹¹ Sexual and gender-based violence

in armed conflict is used not only as a military strategy but also as a means of enforcing heteronormativity and gender conformity. Homo- and transphobia are used as strategies for political gains¹² to the extent that LGBTQIA+ people – particularly trans and gender-nonconforming persons – are subjected to ‘corrective’ rape, forced exposure and public humiliation.¹³

Even within the relief and recovery mechanisms by international organisations and civil society, LGBTQIA+ people are not sufficiently recognised and hence do not receive adequate protection. Humanitarian structures frequently assume heteronormative family units and gender binaries. For example, trans women may be denied access to women’s safe spaces, and queer couples or LGBTQIA+ people not belonging to a household may be excluded from shelter support, NFI or food distribution because their relationships or identities are not recognised.¹⁴

These acts are not incidental; rather, they are often deliberate strategies of persecution, especially when LGBTQIA+ people are used as cultural deviants or threats to national identity. Notably, such harmful violent acts against LGBTQIA+ people are driven by the same forces of sexism, rigid patriarchal gender norms and discrimination against anyone who deviates from what is considered the socio-cultural norm, which the WPS agenda already recognises for heterosexual cis-gender

¹⁰ CSO representative during the webinar hosted by the Danish WPS Civil Society Network, May 27 2025

¹¹ Outright International (2023). *LGBTQ lives in conflict and crisis: A queer agenda for peace, security, and accountability*. New York: Outright International

¹² CSO representative during the webinar hosted by the Danish WPS Civil Society Network, May 27 2025

¹³ Cooper-Cunningham, D.; Hagen, J. J.; Akbary, A.; Ayazi, M.; Bohémier, A.; Chen, E. et al. (2023). *Queering peace and security: Recommendations to the United Nations Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. Sheffield: University of Sheffield

¹⁴ Outright International (2023). *LGBTQ lives in conflict and crisis: A queer agenda for peace, security, and accountability*. New York: Outright International.

women.¹⁵ Accordingly, a WPS agenda based on narrow definitions that only acknowledge how gender dynamics of conflict and crises impact some population groups but not others is both incomplete and misrepresentative.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND QUEER FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING

LGBTQIA+ people experience layered marginalisation due to race, class, ethnicity, age, disability and migration status. Without

an intersectional lens, peacebuilding efforts risk reproducing the very exclusions they aim to address. For example, queer women of colour or trans people with disabilities may face specific risks that need tailored responses. Gender considerations within humanitarian action and WPS coordination platforms – whether at national, regional or global levels – rarely extend to LGBTQIA+ issues, and people or civil society organisations representing them are often absent from these spaces. It is therefore critical that coordination mechanisms, policies, tools and guidance on gender in crisis and conflict integrate an

¹⁵ Cooper-Cunningham, D.; Hagen, J. J.; Akbary, A.; Ayazi, M.; Bo-hémier, A; Chen, E. et al. (2023). *Queering peace and security: Recommendations to the United Nations Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. Sheffield: University of Sheffield



intersectional lens that explicitly includes LGBTQIA+ perspectives. Building inclusive peace requires forging stronger coalitions between feminist, human rights and LGBTQIA+ movements, ensuring that these struggles are not fragmented but interconnected. Such alliances not only strengthen collective advocacy for recognition of basic human rights but also expand the legitimacy and impact of the WPS agenda in addressing the full diversity of lived experiences in conflict and post-conflict settings.

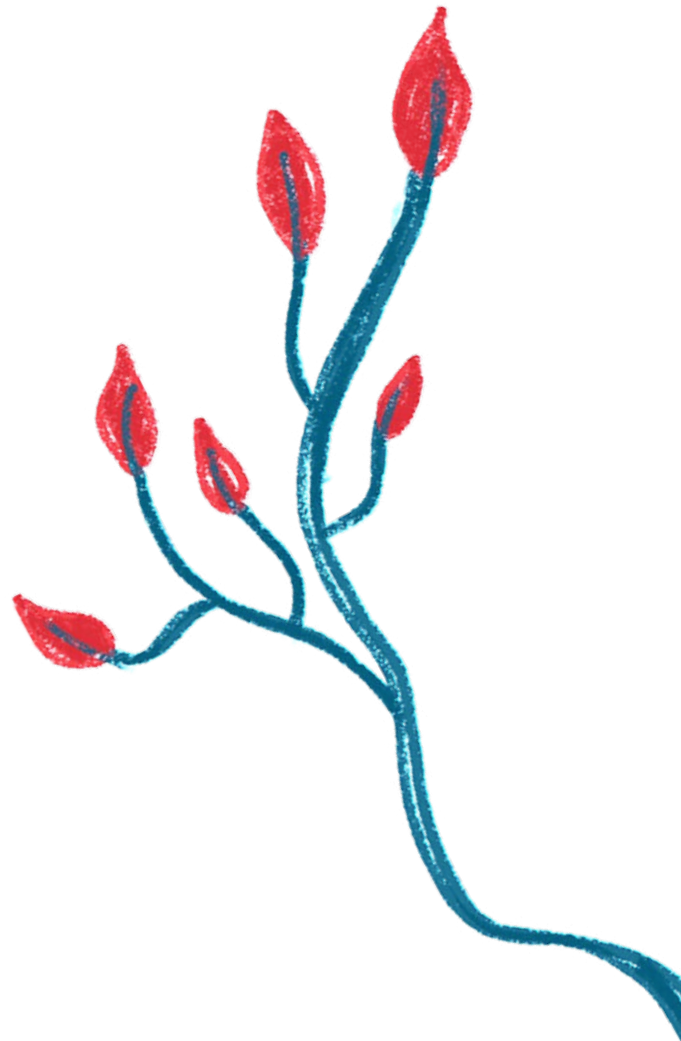
Knowledge-sharing tools¹⁶ can help institutions put these changes into practice, while solidarity and cross-institutional protection networks are equally essential. Such networks can include practical mechanisms like safehouses, secure communication channels and emergency funds, but also broader systems of referral, advocacy and resource-sharing across organisations and sectors to ensure rapid and sustained protection.

MULTILAYERED CHALLENGES REQUIRE MULTIDIMENSIONAL SOLUTIONS

LGBTQIA+ human rights defenders often operate in extremely hostile and precarious environments, facing death threats from extremist groups, harassment by state security forces and ostracism from their communities. On top of that they often lack sufficient backup from the international community, political representation or

substantive funding. Unlike some human rights defenders who may have at least legal recognition or international support, queer activists are often doubly endangered: targeted for their activism and targeted for who they are.

In addition to very limited access to mental health and trauma-informed care, LGBTQIA+ people also face barriers to general health services due to stigma. Health workers are often insufficiently equipped to respond to the specific needs of this group, and the LGBTQIA+ people affected are given little



¹⁶ See for example Jamie J. Hagen, Anupama Ranawana, Valentina Parra, Laura Beltrán, María Susana Peralta Ramón and Nathalie Mercier. *Queering the Women, Peace and Security Agenda – a practice-based toolkit*. The British Academy. 2023

space to express their specific concerns, especially in times of armed conflict.

Addressing these complex challenges, especially considering the current backlash against LGBTQIA+ rights, requires bold, coordinated action across sectors, with resources and power shifted toward those most affected. Despite potential risks and challenges, LGBTQIA+ organisations and coalitions have developed innovative, transformative practices that offer valuable lessons for inclusive peacebuilding. Many of the organisations that have shared their experiences either in publications or webinars¹⁷ have built protection networks and safe housing solutions, providing critical refuge and support for trans people and queer youth facing heightened threats of violence and displacement. Some organisations have also integrated SOGIESC considerations into HIV and broader health programming, recognising that access to affirming, stigma-free care is essential for community resilience and well-being.¹⁸

That being said, LGBTQIA+ considerations in crisis and conflict must extend beyond the health and protection area into broader humanitarian areas – food security, livelihoods, shelter and camp management – reflecting a more holistic approach to inclusion.

Beyond service delivery, LGBTQIA+ activists are increasingly engaging international legal tools, such as supporting landmark gender persecution cases at the International Criminal Court, to advance accountability for crimes targeting queer communities. They are leading participatory monitoring and advocacy to ensure that WPS NAPs meaningfully include LGBTQIA+ rights and voices. Crucially, these efforts are strengthened through building inter-movement alliances that unite feminist and queer struggles, fostering solidarity and shared strategies for transformative, inclusive, rights-based peace.

¹⁷ See for example: WPSN-C. "Queering Peace and Security: Moving from Rhetoric to Action" <https://wpsn-canada.org/2025/06/19/queering-peace-and-security-moving-from-rhetoric-to-action/#::-text=Framed%20by%20the%20understanding%20that%20both%20timely%20and%20necessary> (last visited June 27 2025)

¹⁸ CSO representatives during the webinar hosted by the Danish WPS Civil Society Network, May 27 2025

CONCLUSION

Queering the WPS agenda is not a deviation – it is a much-needed evolution to follow a coherent human rights approach enshrined in principles of gender equality. Without explicit attention to LGBTQIA+ rights, identities and realities, initiatives to foster peace and security remain partial and exclusionary. Reclaiming WPS in a time of backlash means resisting erasure, amplifying lived experience and co-creating peace grounded in dignity, diversity and justice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Acknowledge and Include LGBTQIA+ Realities in the WPS Agenda** - Ensure LGBTQIA+ people are explicitly named in WPS policy frameworks, NAPs and funding mechanisms. Inclusion must be rooted in lived realities based on consultations with LGBTQIA+ rights defenders and civil society, not abstract commitments to diversity. Ensures definitions of conflict, intersectionality and SOGIESC reflect perspectives and narratives from LGBTQIA+ people and networks in global majority contexts.
- 2. Direct Resources to Queer-Led Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Action** - Allocate core, flexible and long-term funding to civil society organisations led by and dedicated to the rights of LGBTQIA+ people, especially in conflict and crisis-affected regions. International donors should meet transparent benchmarks for inclusive funding and support mechanisms led by those most affected.
- 3. Protect Queer Human Rights Defenders** - Integrate protection protocols that include digital security, psychosocial support and legal aid into WPS programmes. International actors must recognise threats against LGBTQIA+ rights defenders as a peace and security issue.
- 4. Apply Intersectionality in Practice** - Move beyond rhetorical commitments to ensure that race, class, migration status, disability, gender and SOGIESC diversity are central to programme design, implementation and evaluation. Use intersectional tools to assess risks and address multiple layers of discrimination.
- 5. Build Solidarity Across Movements** - Strengthen alliances between LGBTQIA+ and feminist, anti-racist and Indigenous rights movements. Encourage co-creation of advocacy strategies and shared protection mechanisms that centre care, justice and resilience. Collaborative spaces for members of the LGBTIQ community and activists.
- 6. Strengthen International Legal and Monitoring Frameworks** - Promote recognition of SOGIESC-based persecution under international law and integrate such recognition in peacekeeping mandates, UN resolutions and transitional justice systems.
- 7. Foster Queer-Inclusive Training in Public Institutions** - Develop and implement training curricula for peacekeepers, military personnel, front-line health workers and humanitarian actors that centre LGBTQIA+ rights, inclusion and anti-discrimination frameworks. Educate the next generation and raise awareness about SOGIESC diversity.
- 8. Learn From and Amplify Good Practices** - Share and institutionalise lessons from countries with LGBTQIA+ inclusive NAPs, for example Albania. Facilitate learning exchanges and create platforms for LGBTQIA+ organisations to lead peer support and technical assistance.

