



**Joint submission to the report on Understanding the impacts of funding cuts on  
civil society and NGOs working in and on Afghanistan**

*of*

**the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan**

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## Introduction

Since coming into power in 2021, the Taliban has issued over 100 regulations curtailing the rights of women, and gender and sexual minorities in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> There have been multiple cases of people being charged, publicly flogged and imprisoned for actual or perceived gender or sexual nonconformity under Taliban rule. Persecution of LGBTIQ+ individuals has also increased in the form of death threats, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence and killings, and forced conformity to societal and family norms and pressures. The International Criminal Court's historic recognition of gender persecution against LGBTIQ+ people in Afghanistan was possible through efforts by individuals and civil society organisations to document and report on human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity under Taliban rule.<sup>2</sup>

The funding cut has been detrimental to the ongoing documentation, advocacy, and humanitarian assistance efforts aimed towards LGBTIQ+ individuals in Afghanistan and those who have resettled abroad. We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, highlighting the far-reaching impacts of the funding cuts for the LGBTIQ+ organizations working in and on the country. We are committed to supporting efforts to ensure full compliance with States' obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of all LGBTIQ+ persons.

### 1. Impact on organisational sustainability and areas of work

#### **Organisational sustainability**

A global report on the immediate impacts of the U.S. funding cuts on LGBTIQ+ groups shows that they have restricted work on humanitarian assistance to LGBTIQ+ persons in conflict and crisis settings, emergency shelters, and assistance for displaced

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<sup>1</sup> USIP, *Tracking the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women: An interactive graphic illustrating how the Taliban are attempting to erase Afghan women from public life*, <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-Mistreatment-women>

<sup>2</sup> Some of these reports include: Outright International, *A Mountain on My Shoulders 18 Months of Taliban Persecution of LGBTIQ Afghans*, February 2023, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/Afghanistan%20Report\\_OurrightInternational\\_8.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/Afghanistan%20Report_OurrightInternational_8.pdf); Outright International and Human Rights Watch, *'Even If You Go to the Skies, We'll Find You': LGBT People in Afghanistan After the Taliban Takeover*, January 2022, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Afghanistan\\_HRW\\_Updated2023.pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Afghanistan_HRW_Updated2023.pdf).



LGBTIQ+ persons, and inclusive peace and security around the world.<sup>3</sup> Organisations working directly with LGBTIQ+ Afghans, in Afghanistan and abroad, also register a profound contraction in their humanitarian capacity as donor funding shrinks.

Organisations are no longer able to maintain case-management frameworks that prioritise individuals based on severity and vulnerability. Instead, they must resort to cost-effectiveness decisions that often deprioritise urgent protection cases in favour of more diffuse distributions. This shift degrades the holistic, person-centred approach that is foundational to human-rights-based assistance, and produces secondary harm, namely emotional distress, loss of trust in humanitarian actors, and worsening psychosocial conditions. Many organisations have had to change strategies just to stay active; some of them shifted to volunteer-based models out of necessity. While these efforts are admirable, they are not sustainable. In turn, staff and volunteers, whose commitment is deeply grounded in principled support for LGBTIQ+ rights, report increasing tension between professional ethics and operational reality. This conflict diminishes staff morale, increases turnover, and poses long-term risks to organisational retention and institutional memory.<sup>4</sup>

### **Protection and relocation programmes**

Protection programmes, including support for relocation to safer third countries, have become nearly impossible to maintain. LGBTIQ+ organisations lack enough funds to cover the cost of passports, visa fees, or travel expenses, leaving at-risk individuals stranded. The situation for those who have secured humanitarian visas but remain in transit countries has also deteriorated. Safehouses in these countries, once able to provide humanitarian assistance, are now unable to sustain such services. The resulting lack of basic assistance leaves LGBTIQ+ Afghans stranded in unsafe conditions, vulnerable to destitution and serious harm to their mental health while awaiting onward relocation.

### **Cash assistance and community support programmes**

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<sup>3</sup> Outright International, *Defunding Freedom – Impacts of U.S. Foreign Aid Cuts on LGBTIQ People Worldwide*, February 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/defunding-freedom-impacts-us-foreign-aid-cuts-lgbtqi-people>.

<sup>4</sup> International Rescue Committee, *U.S. aid cuts are impacting millions of Afghans*, April 2025, <https://www.rescue.org/article/us-aid-cuts-are-impacting-millions-afghans>



Since the funding cuts in January 2025, one of the few cash assistance programmes by the Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ organisation (ALO), supporting LGBTIQ+ people in Afghanistan, had to shut down. This left many LGBTIQ+ individuals without the means to cover even the most basic needs like food, shelter, and safe accommodation. There is a disproportionately negative impact on lesbian, bisexual, queer, and intersex women and girls, and trans men, who have been directly banned from working or studying under Taliban policies. With no income and nowhere to turn, their vulnerability has only grown. The number of individuals reaching out in distress has increased in recent months, and ALO has observed a disconcerting rise in suicidal ideation and other mental health issues among their beneficiaries. There are no functioning mental health programmes in place and very limited psychosocial support available for these individuals. In parallel, vital community-based education and awareness programmes on gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and SOGIESC issues have also been completely shut down.

## **Documentation of human rights violations**

The efforts to document human rights violations against LGBTIQ+ people have also been scaled back due to a lack of resources, which makes it harder to raise awareness, advocate for protection, or advocate for accountability at the international level. The evidence from LGBTIQ+ activists and organizations working in and on Afghanistan has also been vital in the ongoing investigations into crimes against humanity in the country by the International Criminal Court. U.S. funding cuts that disproportionately target gender, LGBTIQ+, and human rights work limit these organisations' capacity to shed light on gender persecution and other grave human rights violations against LGBTIQ+ people in Afghanistan, which is critical to ensure accountability for international crimes.

## **2. Impact on marginalised communities**

The negative impact of the funding cuts on LGBTIQ+ communities in Afghanistan disproportionately affects individuals with intersecting marginalised identities like lesbian, bisexual, queer, and intersex women and girls, trans women, and trans men. These individuals, who have already been disenfranchised from education and employment opportunities by Taliban policies, are losing access to means of subsistence or basic safety after the cancellation of cash assistance programmes. The deterioration of mental health of these marginalised groups is further exacerbated due



to reduced mental health support programmes and there has been a marked increase in distress calls and reports of suicidal ideation to ALO.

### **Individuals in transit and/or exile**

Funding reductions have severely disrupted pathways to safety for LGBTIQ+ Afghans. Previously, dedicated funding allowed organisations to facilitate humanitarian visa pathways, covering essential costs such as safe passage, flight tickets, travel documentation, and security measures. With these resources diminished, many high-risk individuals are now denied support, leaving them no option but to undertake dangerous, irregular journeys. This has increased exposure to trafficking, extortion, and violence, as safe and legal alternatives are no longer accessible. LGBTIQ+ individuals who have secured humanitarian visas but remain in transit are left further vulnerable as they await relocation, as safehouses in transit countries have shut down, unable to sustain basic services.

At the same time, mass deportations from Pakistan and Iran have exacerbated risks for LGBTIQ+ Afghan asylum seekers who lack humanitarian visas. Many face insurmountable overstay penalties, expired visas, and no access to safe shelter or medical aid.<sup>5</sup> Without the financial and legal support previously available, they are at heightened risk of arrest, detention, and refoulement, deepening their vulnerability and eroding already limited protection mechanisms.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Strategies in response to reduced funding and support**

In response to reduced funding, LGBTIQ+ organisations have prioritised only the most urgent cases, often leaving individuals with chronic but less immediate life-threatening needs without assistance. LGBTIQ+ organisations have also shifted to mainly unpaid voluntary work, shutting down various programmes to remain active. While these strategies allow some continuity of service, they remain stop-gap measures rather than sustainable solutions, raising serious ethical and operational concerns and leaving activists more vulnerable to harm.

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<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, *Global Trends*, June 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends>

<sup>6</sup> Outright International, *Defunding Freedom – Impacts of U.S. Foreign Aid Cuts on LGBTIQ People Worldwide*, February 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/defunding-freedom-impacts-us-foreign-aid-cuts-lgbtqi-people>.



#### 4. Long-term Implications

Without sustained funding, LGBTIQ+ Afghans risk becoming invisible in international human rights spaces, and their ability to respond to urgent needs is disappearing. For LGBTIQ+ organisations in exile, like ALO, funding cuts have long-term consequences and threaten their ability to exist and work. As one of the few Afghan-led LGBTIQ+ organisations that documents rights violations and advocates for the rights of LGBTIQ+ Afghans, they have been forced to scale back or shut down essential programmes, including cash assistance programmes and advocacy work, impacting the most marginalised people who are left without support or representation.

Funding cuts have far-reaching consequences undermining the capacity of LGBTIQ+, human rights, democracy, and other civil society movements to counter anti-rights and anti-democratic forces around the world from Taliban rulers to populist leaders in backsliding democracies. As Outright International's report, *Defunding Freedom – Impacts of U.S. Foreign Aid Cuts on LGBTIQ People Worldwide*, asserts, these cuts, as part of the broader withdrawal of support for civil society, create “spaces for both authoritarian regimes and fragile democracies to erode checks and balances, restrict civic space, and curtail fundamental rights.”<sup>7</sup> As the situation in the U.S. demonstrates, the rise of anti-rights and anti-democratic forces in donor countries threatens to exclude marginalised communities from development and humanitarian aid or pull out aid altogether.

#### Recommendations

##### Recommendations to donors and multilateral organisations

1. Provide long-term and flexible funding to Afghan LGBTIQ+ organisations and other organisations working on inclusive human rights, humanitarian and development assistance in the country.
2. Support documentation and advocacy efforts by investing in the capacity of exile-based organisations to monitor, report, and raise awareness about human rights violations inside Afghanistan committed by the Taliban against LGBTIQ+ people.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



3. Invest in the capacity of exile-based Afghan LGBTIQ+ organisations and other LGBTIQ+ organisations to pursue accountability for gender persecution and other human rights violations against LGBTIQ+ people in Afghanistan through various pathways, including the ICC, universal jurisdiction, UN bodies, and other multilateral human rights, security, and economic mechanisms.
4. Work with Afghan LGBTIQ+ organisations and other LGBTIQ+ organisations to raise awareness on acts of gender persecution against LGBTIQ+ people in Afghanistan in order to build on the momentum sparked by the ICC arrest warrant.
5. Support and expand inclusive humanitarian and protection programmes, including relocation programmes, mental health services, emergency assistance, safe houses, etc.
6. Conduct risk assessments, with the involvement of civil society groups led by and working with Afghan LGBTIQ+ people, to ensure that short-term and long-term responses to the funding crisis do not create an adverse impact on vulnerable groups, including LGBTIQ+ people.