



United Nations
Office of the Secretary-General's
Envoy on Youth



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
SPECIAL PROCEDURES
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Queer Youth Dialogues

A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE RIGHTS OF LGBTIQ YOUTH





Introduction

All over the world, young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) persons¹, are among the most vulnerable and marginalized, experiencing violence and discrimination that negatively impacts all aspects of LGBTIQ persons' lives. This is especially true for those who are young.

Due to societies' heteronormative and cisnormative expectations, LGBTIQ youth experience abuse at home and elsewhere; offensive stereotyping and widespread discrimination, including in educational and health care settings; and lack adequate legal protection to address denial of basic human rights.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic LGBTIQ youth have become more vulnerable to police abuse, arbitrary arrest and detention in the context of measures taken by Government officials to manage the pandemic (i.e. movement restrictions and curfews²), and many have been forced to quarantine in unsafe environments, enduring exposure to unsupportive family members, exacerbating rates of domestic violence and physical and emotional abuse. Still, LGBTIQ young persons around the world are continuously showing their resilience, and leading change for the better in their [local communities, at national and global levels](#).

In addition, LGBTIQ youth are largely excluded from participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives and concerted advocacy efforts are challenged by a loosely organized youth civil society, suffering from a lack of resources and capacity.

Responding to this ongoing challenge, the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth ([OSGEY](#)), the United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity ([IE SOGI](#)), [ILGA World](#), and the [Global Queer Youth Network](#) have joined forces to elevate and support youth voices, aiming at opening new spaces for emerging voices and ideas to be heard.



¹ There are people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics who identify using other terms. These terms vary across different cultures and can include hijra, meti, lala, skesana, motsosalle, mithli, kuchu, kawein, travesti, muxé, fa'afafine, fakaleiti, hamjensgara, and Two-Spirit.

² <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ImpactCOVID19LGBTpersons.pdf>



Queer Youth Dialogues

The Queer Youth Dialogues (referred to as ‘the Dialogues’ in the following) were launched on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) 2021, as a year-long campaign to build a stronger global youth movement for the human rights of LGBTIQ persons, with more resources, support and power.

The Dialogues consisted of advocacy events, capacity building sessions, and connection opportunities, which invited decision makers and LGBTIQ young persons from around the world to engage, build capacity, network, and share their experiences. The 12-month series of activities brought together the United Nations, Member States, civil society and youth LGBTIQ activists from all over the world, [in a fully virtual programme of activity](#) allowing participants to learn, share, meet, strategize, and celebrate.



The Dialogues were implemented across two primary modes of engagement. One focused on high-level advocacy, increasing young persons’ capacity to engage within decision makers and providing a global platform to amplify LGBTIQ youth voices; and another focused on capacity-building activities for young activists, providing a space for action and creativity. The organizing partners, believe in the collective power of young persons to lead and transform communities, but recognize that this often comes with great personal risk. The Dialogues were therefore co-created through an intergenerational and participatory process, based on the principles of inclusion, accessibility, and safety.

Our Principles:

Inclusion

Queer Youth fully participated in the development, implementation, and review of the Dialogues. The Dialogues encouraged the personal development of those who participated, facilitating and empowering individuals to take part in high-level public advocacy. Global geographical representation was a priority for the Dialogues which aimed at amplifying the voices of historically under-represented and disempowered groups.

● Accessibility

All activities, opportunities, and engagements related to the Dialogues had as a priority to be open to all who wished to participate. The Dialogues strived to adapt to the priorities and specific requests from young participants', including, but not limited to, accessibility considerations for disability, language, technical ability and access, neurodivergence, or long term/chronic health conditions.

● Safety

The protection of everyone engaging in the Dialogues was a core priority of its design and implementation, including considerations of physical, mental, and digital safety. Further, the program of the Dialogues [included training and resources](#), which aimed to improve the security knowledge and skills of participants.

Highlights

The Queer Youth Dialogues have provided opportunities to [connect](#), [perform](#), [speak](#), [write](#), [learn](#), and [push forward](#) for progress and equality for young persons in all their diversity. More than 1,000 young LGBTIQ persons have engaged with the Dialogues as speakers, participants, artists and collaborators. A network of 150 activists from organizations across all regions have been established as a direct outcome of the initiative. Furthermore, the Dialogues have enjoyed support from external partners including United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN HABITAT), UN Globe, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the UN LGBTI Core Group., Microsoft, freeQ, The Global Equality Caucus, and the Partnership for Global LGBTI Equality (PGLÉ).



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Integrating intersectionality and politics to climate solutions is crucial for change to be truly powerful, transformative, and emancipatory.

— Felix Giroux
Director of Youth4Nature

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SheDecides

Inclusion of LGBTIQ+ youth is important in conversation about rights. There should be nothing done for us without us. We are more than just our stories, and we are also deserving of adequate access to SRHR services so that we know how to better navigate our own sexual health.

— Saidy Brown
SheDecides Member

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“Our talents are often suppressed and undervalued due to stereotypes and discrimination. I believe that only in an equal, inclusive and diverse environment can everyone truly accept who they are and realize their potential.”

— Qiuyan Chen
Global Advisory Committee member,
Equal Asia Foundation

Queer Youth Dialogues

A Call to Action

The Queer Youth Dialogues have brought the issues of LGBTIQ young persons to the forefront of high-level conversations. We have listened carefully and calls to action have been collected below in four thematic areas meant to inform the priorities and decision making of civil society, the United Nations, Member States and the private sector.

PRIORITY AREA 1

Recognize the need for intersectional policies and legislations to support LGBTIQ youth in the realization of their universal human rights

Intersecting forms of discrimination hinder and often obstruct the fulfilment of young persons' human rights. Whilst anti-LGBTIQ campaigns spread across issue-lines, it is essential that LGBTIQ persons stand together in solidarity across political and social movements and within private companies and the public sector. The LGBTIQ community has a history of resilience in fighting for their rights and the deep intersection of LGBTIQ issues within many social justice movements should be recognized and nurtured to create increased solidarity and collaboration.

The [UN Youth Strategy](#) promotes young persons' human rights as a priority, especially focusing on those experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination and abuse. It acknowledges that in order to realize the Sustainable Development Agenda and truly leave no one behind, an intersectional approach between movements is needed, building solidarity and complementary strategies together. It is fundamental to [recall](#) the Agenda 2030 and the commitment of leaving no one behind, which should be understood as including LGBTIQ youth and therefore a commitment of States to address issues that are key to this population, such as: violence and discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), the need for adequate housing, access to appropriate and affirmative healthcare, routes to secure and decent employment, and sustained initiatives which ensure marginalized young LGBTIQ persons' access to higher education.

“The Queer Youth Dialogues have showed me how much wisdom - which is usually attributed to older persons - can reside in youth. Now, when someone says the youth is the future, I answer: the youth is the present. The youth is here now. I'm hoping and hopeful, because I know it's the youth that have capacity to lead.”

- Victor Madrigal

United Nations Independent Expert
on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity



To make sure no one is left behind:

- Member States should review and adopt comprehensive legislations and policies on eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ persons, including abolishing laws that criminalize consensual same-sex relationships, and other laws, in violation of international human rights standards, used to punish individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.
- Member states should prohibit medically unnecessary surgery and procedures on the sex characteristics of intersex children and youth. These actions are intended to protect the physical integrity and respect the bodily autonomy of intersex individuals.
- The private sector should implement the United Nations' Human Rights Council's [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), and the [UN Standards of Conduct for Business](#), to lift barriers and tackle discrimination against lesbian, gay, bi, trans and intersex persons in the workplace.
- All stakeholders should support and invest in disaggregated data collection in order to enhance knowledge about the specific needs and challenges faced by young LGBTIQ persons, and to, in accordance with the [OHCHR's Guidance Note to Data Collection and Disaggregation](#), proactively consider the participation in general data collections of underrepresented groups, such as LGBTIQ persons. The collection methods of this data must consider not only aspects of sexual orientation and gender identity, but also other factors, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, religion or belief, health status, age, class, caste and migration or economic status - all of which must be accessible on the basis of self-identification.



PRIORITY AREA 2

Commit to meaningful LGBTIQ youth participation in decision making



There is a need to increase LGBTIQ youth representation in decision making at all levels in both the private and public sectors. When given the knowledge, support and opportunity to participate, decision making processes become more inclusive and equitable. Young persons are effective drivers of positive change and should be engaged as partners, not simply beneficiaries. It is imperative to recognize that the visibility of LGBTIQ persons in positions of power is a tool of empowerment for those seeking role models and informs a positive vision of a future where they are prosperous, respected, and empowered.

One of the priorities of the [UN Youth Strategy](#) is to protect and promote the rights of young persons and support their civic and political engagement. Leaving no one behind means finding ways for the meaningful inclusion of young LGBTIQ advocates in public affairs, including in political and civic processes, platforms and institutions at all levels and around the globe. For many, engagement in such processes is exposure to risk of violence and stigmatization. With participation often limited and tokenistic, including within the LGBTIQ movement more broadly. The need for increased support and meaningful inclusion of young LGBTIQ persons deserves more attention and must be highlighted as a priority in realizing the global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

"There has to be a conscience effort to remove the structural barriers to participation if young people are to meaningfully take part in conversations impacting their lives."

- Jayathma Wickramanayake

United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth



To make sure no one is left behind:

- All stakeholders should promote the meaningful engagement and participation of young LGBTIQ persons in the workplace, by adopting inclusive strategies to facilitate their access to leadership positions and decision-making process, and by fostering the creation of networks of LGBTIQ employees in the workplace.
- All stakeholders should create and promote a safe, affirmative and enabling environment for LGBTIQ young activists in all their diversity, ensuring a rights-based approach to youth development and participation, especially to the most marginalized groups, such as LGBTIQ youth with disability, migrants and forcibly displaced persons.
- The private sector should follow the United Nations' Human Rights Council's [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), and take its commitment to human rights beyond the workplace, using corporate engagement to strive for changes in the public sphere in order to promote and protect the rights of LGBTI persons.
- The UN and Member States should engage more actively with LGBTIQ youth, in an effort to accelerate progress towards the realization of their rights, implementing strategies to provide dedicated support and opportunities for their participation and engagement in the broader UN system and beyond.
- The UN and Member States should ensure that LGBTIQ youth are safe and supported to be involved in politics and decision-making, including by recognizing their challenges to meaningfully participate due to travel and visa restrictions, access to technology and internet connection, and funding resources.



PRIORITY AREA 3

Increase and sustain support for LGBTIQ youth

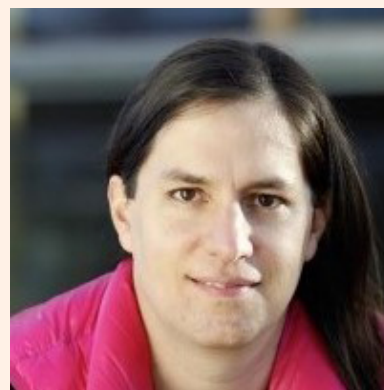
LGBTIQ youth organizations, movements and activists are organizing to create a more equal and free world, where they are safe and can live with dignity. However, they are often [excluded from or struggle to access existing funding and resources](#), including those from international donors.

The IE SOGI has [noted](#) that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, “civil society organizations have reported decreased access to policymakers and advocacy opportunities across the board and denounced a closed loop in which LGBT persons were unable to have basic needs met. It was reported that concerns believed to be ‘LGBT issues’ were not considered a priority at the moment.”

The [UN Youth Strategy](#) outlines the effort being taken to strengthen the foundations of the UN to deliver with and for young persons, including identifying ways to ensure dedicated funding for youth participation in all relevant UN entities at all levels, and creating an online umbrella platform to attract and direct investment in youth-related programming towards strengthening existing UN funds that support youth and key UN youth initiatives.

"Youth have always been innovators in our movement - while the reality of persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics has changed tremendously over the last decades."

- Julia Ehrt
Executive Director at ILGA World



To support LGBTIQ youth-led action:

- All stakeholders should provide resource mobilization training to young LGBTIQ persons as indirect support to their initiatives and campaigns.
- All stakeholders should dedicate flexible financial funding in support of youth-led LGBTIQ organizations and collectives.
- All stakeholders should take actions to support the strengthening of the LGBTIQ youth movement on local, national, regional and international levels by continuously providing platforms for LGBTIQ activists to highlight their experiences, the challenges they face and influence decision-makers.



PRIORITY AREA 4

Enhance protection through ensuring safe spaces



Recognizing that the experience of the digital divide is not uniform¹ for all LGBTIQ young persons, intervention and action in this area must be tailored to individual contexts. From the cost of monthly data payments to consideration of captioning social media content/live sessions, the core elements of facilitating access to digital spaces are unequally felt by those impacted by intersectional inequalities and injustices. Beyond the matter of access to digital spaces, online platforms are not always safe places to be an LGBTIQ young person: from harassment² to exposure to increased reports of violence.

The [Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space](#) highlighted that the challenges emerging from online restrictions, privacy issues and surveillance are becoming more significant in defining and limiting the dimensions of youth's space for self-organization and activism, with a significant challenge being the weakness and inefficiency of existing mechanisms to report online harassment and abuse, especially the difficulty in providing sufficient evidence to initiate official complaints against cyber bullies. In this document, LGBTIQ youth also reported the lack of civic space structures to protect them against threats and harassment, highlighting that their rights are many times seen as “luxury”, and their concerns are not perceived as valid or worthy of discussion, which often has a negative impact on young persons’ mental health and sense of self-worth, hampering their motivation to continue their path on activism.

Given the increase of online activities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, initiatives such as the Dialogues have reached individuals who may have never been given an opportunity to participate in similar initiatives physically. As some organizations return to in-person activities it should be a priority to protect and meet the needs of those who face different barriers to access civic spaces, particularly young persons at the margins of accessing travel documents (trans and gender nonconforming persons in particular) and those who are unable to travel freely (individuals who are displaced and asylum seeking, refugees, and those fleeing persecution).

¹ <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/news/how-do-lgbtq-people-experience-the-digital-divides/>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-56100079>

“As a nonbinary trans person I think there are real benefits to online participation. Physical presence often demands travel and use of facilities that are violent and that police gender identity.”

- Young participant from a
Queer Youth Dialogues' session



To promote safe spaces and strengthen the protection of young LGBTIQ persons:

- All stakeholders should ensure that, as in-person events eventually return in many parts of the globe, marginalized LGBTIQ young persons are supported in their travel to in-person gatherings and their specific needs taken into consideration.
- All stakeholders should recognize the impacts of the digital divide for LGBTIQ youth and accessibility solutions should be informed by the individuals' context. Digital and hybrid options must continue to be developed, implemented, and meaningfully accessible to those at the margins of access.
- All stakeholders should commit to implement measures against digitally mediated violence. With particular focus on implementing transparent moderation and regulation procedures of online spaces, particularly social media platforms, and sources identified as tools for anti LGBTIQ radicalisation.
- All stakeholders should ensure the existence of a welcoming and safe environment for young LGBTIQ persons to engage in civic spaces where they can seek solidarity and voice their concerns safely.
- Member States should include LGBTIQ youth in the development and establishment of relevant protection measures and mechanisms relevant to this particular group.

“[...] at the heart of the 2030 Agenda is the notion of inclusivity. It is the framework to eradicate poverty, to address discrimination and exclusion, to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities with the promise to leave no one behind. This means all people from all walks of life including young people with various fluid and intersectional identities”

— Young participant from a Queer Youth Dialogue

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