



## Executive Summary

This submission is made by African Rainbow Family (ARF) in response to the call for input by the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It focuses on the experiences of lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) refugee women, with particular attention to women from African contexts.

The submission draws on ARF's primary qualitative data collected through an anonymised survey of LBQ refugee and asylum-seeking women that we support, as well as on ARF's frontline casework and two published reports: [the Access to Justice Report](#) and [the Accommodation Report](#). Together, these sources provide evidence of the intersecting and cumulative forms of violence and discrimination faced by LBQ refugee women across countries of origin, during displacement, and within host-country asylum systems.

Findings indicate that LBQ women are exposed to gender-specific and sexualised violence, including family-based abuse, forced marriage, and threats of "corrective" rape, alongside criminalisation, social exclusion, and lack of state protection in their countries of origin. These harms often continue after displacement. Within host countries, including the United Kingdom, LBQ refugee women report ongoing exposure to unsafe accommodation, harassment, institutional neglect, and barriers to accessing justice and support services.

This submission identifies significant protection gaps within refugee status determination (RSD) processes. Credibility assessments frequently rely on narrow or stereotypical understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity, while assumptions linked to "safe country" designations obscure lived realities and undermine individualised assessments. Limited access to specialist, culturally competent legal advice further restricts LBQ women's ability to effectively present their claims and secure protection.

Evidence also highlights the importance of community-led, LGBTIQ+-specific interventions. Trauma-informed legal advice, safe and affirming accommodation pathways, and peer-led advocacy have been shown to reduce harm and improve engagement with protection systems.

This submission concludes with practical recommendations for States, UN mechanisms, and policymakers, including the adoption of intersectional and gender-sensitive approaches to protection, improved access to safe accommodation and specialist expert-by-lived-experience led legal support, the removal of harmful legal and policy assumptions, and sustained resourcing of grassroots organisations working directly with LBQ refugee women.

# 1. Introduction and Organisational Background

[African Rainbow Family](#) is the Leading UK based Expert-by-Lived-Experience Grassroots Charity Campaigning and Advocating for Racial Justice and Human Rights of LGBTIQ+ Refugees and People Seeking Asylum of African Heritage and the Global Majority. Our psychotherapeutic supports include counselling, health and wellbeing, financial, training, integration, and immigration advice. We provide inclusive LGBTIQ+ safe space for practical and social activities for mutual support, empowerment, and solidarity. African Rainbow Family has developed a national network of over 1500 service users who we refer to as Siblings; with centres in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, London, and Swansea respectively.

ARF provides holistic support in accommodation, mental health and wellbeing, as well as free, confidential immigration advice under our *Refugee Access to Justice* initiative following accreditation by the UK Immigration Advice Authority (IAA).

This submission draws on:

- Primary data from a targeted survey of LBQ refugee women within the African Rainbow Family's Women Group. We collated an anonymised survey of LBQ refugee and asylum-seeking women, primarily from African countries including Nigeria and Cameroon, currently residing in the United Kingdom. Respondents shared lived experiences of violence, discrimination, and interaction with asylum, housing, and protection systems;
- African Rainbow Family's [Access to Justice Report \(2024\)](#) which examines the systemic barriers faced by LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom when navigating immigration and asylum processes. Drawing on frontline casework, lived experience, and community-based evidence, the report highlights how gaps in legal representation, inconsistent decision-making, and a lack of culturally competent and trauma-informed legal support undermine fair access to protection.

- African Rainbow Family's **Accommodation Report (2023)** which examines the housing conditions and accommodation-related risks faced by LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. Based on lived experience, frontline casework, and community evidence, the report documents how unsuitable and unsafe accommodation arrangements expose LGBTIQ+ individuals, particularly lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, to harassment, violence, isolation, and mental distress.
- Ongoing casework and lived-experience evidence from African LBQ women seeking asylum in the UK.

Our contribution to this written submission focuses specifically on African LBQ refugee women, recognising the intersecting impacts of gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, and immigration status.

## **2. Methodology**

This submission is informed by a mixed-methods approach: - Survey data collected from ARF's LBQ women with lived experience of forced displacement, asylum procedures, and accommodation systems; - Qualitative casework evidence from ARF's frontline advocacy and immigration advice services; - Secondary analysis of ARF's published reports on access to justice and accommodation.

All data was anonymised. Ethical safeguards were applied, including informed consent, trauma-informed framing, and signposting to emotional support such as counselling.

## **3. Context: Criminalisation and Forced Displacement of LBQ Women in Africa**

Across Africa, LBQ women continue to face severe human rights violations driven by: - Criminalisation of same-sex relationships; - State and non-state violence; - Gender-based violence, including so-called "corrective rape"; - Family and community rejection; - Lack of State protection and impunity for perpetrators.

Recent developments, such as the criminalisation and conviction of same-sex relationships in Burkina Faso, illustrate a widening regional trend that directly fuels forced displacement. LBQ women are often compelled to flee not only State persecution, but also gendered and sexualised violence within families and communities.

## **4. Findings: Violence and Discrimination Experienced by LBQ Refugee Women**

### **4.1 Violence**

All respondents who completed the survey reported experiencing violence and/or discrimination linked to their sexual orientation and gender identity. The forms of harm described were multiple, overlapping, and persistent across different stages of their lives.

Types of violence reported included:

- Physical and emotional abuse
- Sexual violence, including threats of “corrective” rape
- Family rejection and forced isolation
- Community harassment and threats
- Discrimination in housing and employment
- Police inaction or hostility

### **4.2 Pre-flight and Transit Violence**

Survey respondents reported: - Sexual violence and threats linked to their sexual orientation;- Forced marriage and family-based violence;- Blackmail, extortion, and arbitrary detention.

LBQ women often lacked access to protection mechanisms and were unable to seek help from authorities due to fear of arrest or further abuse.

### **4.3 Violence and Discrimination in Host Countries (UK)**

For many of LBQ women supported by the African Rainbow Family through our Women's Group, violence first occurred in their countries of origin, where same-sex relationships

are criminalised or heavily stigmatised. Several women often express that violence did not end with displacement; rather, it continued in host-country contexts, including asylum accommodation and shared housing. One woman described this as living in “constant fear even after reaching safety”, explaining that visibility as an LBQ woman remained dangerous within both migrant communities and institutional settings.

African Rainbow Family’s Accommodation Report (2023) documents widespread experiences of unsafe housing, lack of privacy, and exposure to homophobic and sexist abuse, disproportionately affecting LBQ women.

#### **4.4 Impact on Daily Life**

Violence and discrimination have a profound impact on daily life for LBQ refugee women. Respondents consistently highlighted:

- Fear of being open about their identity
- Concealment as a survival strategy
- Mental health distress, including anxiety and depression
- Social isolation and lack of trust
- Housing insecurity and homelessness risk
- Difficulty accessing healthcare and support services

Daily life was often described as a process of constant risk assessment—where to live, who to trust, and when (or whether) to disclose one’s identity. For some respondents, asylum accommodation itself was experienced as unsafe due to homophobia from other residents or lack of intervention by staff.

### **5. Intersectional Risks**

LBQ refugee women experience violence and discrimination in ways that are deeply intersectional, shaped not only by sexual orientation but also by gender, race, nationality, immigration status, poverty, religion, disability, and, in some cases, gender identity. These overlapping identities compound vulnerability and intensify exposure to harm at every stage of displacement. LBQ women seeking asylum often live with precarious legal

status, limited access to resources, and fear of state authorities. This vulnerability increases exposure to exploitation, unsafe housing, and economic dependency, while simultaneously discouraging reporting of abuse due to fear of immigration consequences.

### **5.1 Race and Ethnicity**

Race and ethnicity further exacerbate discrimination. African LBQ women reported experiences of racialised stereotypes and exclusion both within mainstream asylum systems and within LGBTIQ+ spaces that are often dominated by Western norms. Racism intersects with homophobia and misogyny, resulting in compounded marginalisation and social isolation.

### **5.2 Gender and sexuality**

Gender and sexuality intersect to produce distinct forms of harm that differ from those experienced by gay men or heterosexual women. LBQ refugee women are disproportionately subjected to sexualised violence, including threats of “corrective” rape, forced marriage, and family-based abuse. These gendered harms are frequently minimised or misunderstood within refugee status determination processes, where persecution is often assessed through male-centred frameworks.

### **5.3 Socio-economic marginalisation**

Socio-economic marginalisation, including poverty and housing insecurity, heightens vulnerability. Many LBQ women face exclusion from family support networks and community resources, increasing reliance on unsafe accommodation or exploitative relationships. ARF’s Accommodation Report demonstrates how insecure housing environments expose LBQ women to further harassment and violence, particularly in mixed-gender or shared asylum accommodation.

For LBQ women who are also transgender or gender-diverse, risks are significantly amplified. Trans LBQ women reported heightened visibility, increased harassment, and greater exposure to violence, alongside systemic misrecognition within asylum, housing, and healthcare systems. These compounded risks underscore the urgent need for intersectional, gender-sensitive protection frameworks.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that violence and discrimination against LBQ refugee women cannot be understood in isolation. Effective protection requires intersectional approaches that recognise how multiple identities interact to produce distinct and heightened forms of harm, and that ensure asylum, housing, and legal systems respond accordingly.

## **6. Protection Gaps and Refugee Status Determination (RSD)**

### **6.1 Credibility and Gendered Bias**

LBQ women face particular challenges in asylum decision-making, including: - Gendered disbelief and stereotyping; - Inappropriate expectations around visibility or disclosure; - Failure to recognise intersectional persecution; - Re-traumatisation during substantive interviews.

African Rainbow Family's Access to Justice Report (2024) highlights how lack of specialist legal advice, inconsistent decision-making, and poor-quality representation undermine fair outcomes for LGBTIQ+ applicants, including LBQ women.

### **6.2 Barriers to Legal Representation**

Survey data and casework evidence show that LBQ women frequently encounter: - Inability to secure legal aid solicitors; - Fear of homo/bi/transphobia from legal professionals; - Language barriers and trauma-related disengagement; - Delays that prolong destitution and insecurity.

These barriers directly impact the ability of LBQ women to present their claims effectively.

## **7. Good Practices and Community-Led Responses**

Evidence from African Rainbow Family's work demonstrates that the following practices significantly improve protection outcomes:

- **Specialist, LGBTIQ+-led services** providing culturally competent and trauma-informed support;
- **Early legal advice** delivered in safe, affirming environments;

- **Holistic models** integrating legal support with housing, mental health, and peer support;
- Dedicated LBQ-safe accommodation pathways;
- Community empowerment and peer-led advocacy.

African Rainbow Family's *Refugee Access to Justice* Initiative exemplifies a rights-based, survivor-centred model that reduces harm and improves engagement with **the** asylum processes.

## 8. Regional Analysis: Africa-Focused Implications

African LBQ refugee women face compounded risks due to: - The intensity of criminalisation across multiple African states; - Limited regional protection mechanisms; - Gendered violence deeply embedded in social and cultural norms; - Lack of recognition of LBQ-specific persecution in country-of-origin assessments.

International protection frameworks must respond to these region-specific realities.

## 9. Recommendations

We respectfully recommend that the UN Independent Expert and the Human Rights Council:

1. Recognise LBQ refugee women as a distinct risk group facing gendered and sexuality-based persecution.
2. Call for decriminalisation of same-sex relationships and protection from gender-based violence across African States.
3. Urge States to adopt intersectional, gender-sensitive RSD procedures, including trauma-informed interviewing.
4. Promote access to safe, LBQ-inclusive accommodation for asylum-seeking women.
5. Ensure access to free, specialist expert-by-lived-experience led legal advice for LBQ asylum applicants.
6. Support and fund community-led, LGBTIQ+-led organisations providing frontline protection.

7. Strengthen accountability mechanisms for violence and discrimination in asylum reception systems.

## **10. Conclusion**

LBQ refugee women—particularly from Africa—experience continuous cycles of violence, from countries of origin through to host states. Without targeted, intersectional protection measures, these harms persist even within asylum systems designed to offer refuge.

This submission urges the Human Rights Council to centre the lived experiences and expertise of LBQ refugee women and to advance concrete, survivor-informed protections at both national and international levels.

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