



CONCEPT NOTE: SIDE-EVENT HRC48

THE ONLY WAY IS UP: A CALL FOR A GLOBAL RESPONSE TO THE EXCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DIVERSE SOGIESC INCLUSION IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

In 2020, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the resolution 45/29, entitled “promoting, protecting and fulfilling women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations”. The resolution recognizes that humanitarian situations have the potential to exacerbate preexisting or to create new patterns and structures of discrimination, including multiple and intersection forms of discrimination, and inequalities resulting in a disproportionately negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls.

Amongst those women and girls are lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer women and girls, whose diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity create specific and often critical needs in humanitarian settings.

In 2021 Edge Effect completed a ground-breaking [report](#) with UN Women on gaps in humanitarian responses that leave the rights, needs and strengths of people with diverse SOGI unrecognised and unaddressed. This side-event will highlight the need for a new global commitment to address these gaps, starting with women and girls with diverse SOGI.

Background

Discrimination, violence and exclusion is experienced by people with diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics (aka LGBTIQ+ people) before, during and after disasters and conflict. Discrimination in everyday life undermines efforts by people with diverse SOGIESC to develop resilience, survive crises and recover effectively. Sometimes crises increase marginalisation, including when people with diverse SOGI are falsely blamed for ‘causing’ disasters or spreading viruses in a pandemic.

This discrimination, violence and exclusion is maintained by deeply rooted norms at the heart of societal laws, institutions and practices, shaping the lives of people with diverse SOGIESC well before they ever interact with the humanitarian system, or with disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives. However **The Only Way Is Up** also shows that the humanitarian and DRR systems often fail to acknowledge or address the discrimination, violence and exclusion experienced by people with diverse SOGIESC. At the very least this leaves people with diverse SOGIESC to find their own solutions; at worst, it reinforces violations of human rights.

Women and girls with diverse SOGIESC are amongst those who fare the worst. They are often hidden within populations, and so do not appear in needs assessments. They may experience marginalisation based on conventional gender norms and their SOGIESC. They may face sexual violence when seeking assistance or engaging with authorities, and have little or no access to justice or recourse. Violence experienced in everyday life may lead transgender women to avoid evacuation shelters or aid distributions. The humanitarian



crisis in Afghanistan has also made clear how people with diverse SOGIESC can be in grave danger in crises.

In 2011 the United Nations Human Rights Council recognized that discrimination and violence on the basis of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) violates human rights. While the 2011 resolution did not address sex characteristics, thirty-four countries supported a 2020 statement at the Human Rights Council, recognizing that people with “diverse sex characteristics face discrimination in all areas of life”, calling on the Council and national governments to address these violations and their root causes. What does this mean for the humanitarian and DRR sectors? When the principle of humanity states that “Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found” does that include suffering endured by people with diverse SOGIESC? When the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) urges an “all-of-society” approach, are people with diverse SOGIESC part of that society? When the world promises that “no-one will be left behind” (United Nations 2015) in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), does that mean everyone including people with diverse SOGIESC?

The Issue

The answers should, of course, be yes. However research conducted for ***The Only Way Is Up*** reinforces that the reality is often very different. In reviewing diverse SOGIESC inclusion in Cox’s Bazar, Mindanao, and Vanuatu the report strengthens the evidence base that people with diverse SOGIESC have specific and urgent needs in crises. However the assessments, plans and activities in those settings were found to rarely recognise the existence of people with diverse SOGIESC, far less provide a substantive engagement with their needs, strengths and rights. The report goes beyond pointing out this gap, exploring:

- The absence of SOGIESC inclusion within key humanitarian and DRR frameworks.
- Ways in which humanitarian and DRR policy and practice combine with societal discrimination to hold the problem of diverse SOGIESC exclusion in place.
- The absence of meaningful engagement with community based diverse SOGIESC CSOs and communities.

Solutions

The change required will be both bottom-up and to-down, and needs to occur within global frameworks, response settings, thematic areas and individual organisations within the humanitarian and DRR systems. It will also need to address the interplay between experiences in crises and the pre-emergency marginalisation that people with diverse SOGIESC experience in everyday life.

Amongst the 22 recommendations in *The Only Way Is up*, one requires action by principals within the humanitarian system based in Geneva and New York, supported by human rights institutions and States that fund the humanitarian system.

“Many people [in the humanitarian system] are not aware of a normative, legal or institutional framework for promoting [diverse SOGIESC inclusion]. I’m not aware of action plans or resolutions coming from the UN”



- UN gender and humanitarian action specialist in the Philippines

Recognising the human rights of women and girls, people with disabilities, and people of different ages, the humanitarian system has established global processes to focus attention on those issues. These processes have led to formal charters and initiatives across the humanitarian system. ***A similar process is needed for diversity of SOGIESC, to demonstrate commitment, to create standards and to generate the will for change.***

Side-Event Objectives

- Share findings from The Only Way Is Up on diverse SOGIESC inclusion – and exclusion - in humanitarian response and disaster risk reduction.
- Advocate for humanitarian actors to adapt their rights-based approaches to include protection of SOGIESC.
- Make the case for, and seek support for, a focused process of developing standards and commitments at global level for diverse SOGIESC inclusion in the humanitarian system.