

# Protecting “the invisible”

## Understanding organisational response to violence against sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian contexts

### Introduction

In the context of humanitarian crises, the unique threats posed to LGBT refugees have often gone unconsidered. I examined how a feminist organisation, the Women’s Refugee Commission, can situate the sexual and gender minorities within its mission to rectify gender inequalities. What are the points of tension when sexual and gender minorities are included in a discourse of intersectional feminism? How do we study communities that in many parts of the world remain hidden from mainstream humanitarian practitioners? This study asks how women’s organisations respond when the parameters of gendered inequality in humanitarian response are broadened and asks how we can meaningfully research groups about whom, in many communities little is known.

### Methodology

- Conducted two semi structured interviews with employees of the Women’s Refugee Commission during which I asked open-ended questions about the institution’s policies on sexual and gender minorities
- Analysed four publicly available policy documents from the Women’s Refugee Commission. I examined the way in which discourses around sexual and gender minorities were framed as well as investigating how humanitarian methods in these projects were adapted to suit the needs of these groups.

### Findings

Fundamentally, organisations like the WRC have to work with the fact that not enough is known about the experiences of sexual and gender minorities in displacement settings. There is a strong desire to “meaningfully serve” these communities but traditional humanitarian research methods are not ideally suited to identifying the needs of those who are hidden below the surface. A scarcity of resources the resources which are needed to reach out to sexual and gender minorities and lack of permanent organisation presence in any particular region mean that a large amount of emphasis is put on partnerships with local organisations. In many ways, the needs of sexual and gender minorities present very different problems to the needs of women and girls, who usually occupy a more visible position in the community. Within the organizational context, expanding gender-based violence provisions presents difficulties that cannot merely be resolved by an ethos of “inclusion”.

### Reflections

At its inception, my primary interest was how sexual and gender minorities could be situated within a feminist organisational context in the humanitarian sector. I set out to answer to what extent the Women’s Refugee Commission had broadened its ideas of GBV to include the violence that sexual and gender minorities faced. However, as I progressed with my research, I realised that in many ways humanitarian organisations are as shaped by the limitations of the contexts in which they work as they are by their own principles. What I had framed as a question about institutional ideology shifted into a question about how organisations could pragmatically work with sexual and gender minorities. Although the conceptual basis of the organisation was never irrelevant, I realised that space had to be given to the large variety of contexts in which the organisation worked, all of which presented unique difficulties in how information could be gathered and whether projects could be implemented.



“More Than One Million Pains”:  
Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the  
Central Mediterranean Route to Italy



Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict  
and Displacement: Findings from a Qualitative  
Study in Bangladesh, Italy, and Kenya