

Working With LGBTIQ+ Migrants and Refugees

SETS providers across the country work with LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees, recognising the barriers they face in their resettlement journeys. The settlement sector is on a journey to become more inclusive, responsive, and client-centred in supporting this community.

This SETS Insights Special Edition Newsletter brings together specialist and expert voices to explore how settlement service providers can continue creating safer, more welcoming, and supportive spaces for people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, ensuring their rights and dignity are upheld.

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3. **Shannon White** (National Policy & Advocacy Lead), Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN).

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LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees may encounter additional challenges during migration and settlement in Australia, often stemming from discrimination within systems and communities. Despite these challenges, their goals in resettlement remain the same as anyone else's: to live freely, safely, and with dignity.



Planting Seeds of Change: Building a Thriving Future for LGBTIQ+ Forcibly Displaced People



Dr. Renee Dixson (Co-Founder), Forcibly Displaced People Network.

LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants are often portrayed as complex clients with unique and separate needs. This perception has too often been used as an excuse not to support them. The same happened to me and many in my community—as LGBTIQ+ people, we were deemed "too complex" to help, leaving us isolated. Yet, there is nothing unique about the right to be supported, to live in safety, and to rebuild your life.

Over the past decade, awareness of the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced people has grown in Australia. I am proud that the Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN) has been a key driver in transforming the settlement and refugee support landscape.

FDPN is Australia's only nationwide LGBTIQ+ refugee-led organisation. We are changemakers and capacity builders. What began as a modest project supporting queer and trans women has evolved into a leading force for systemic change. From those beginnings, we've grown to launch the LGBTIQ+ Refugee Community Sponsorship Project, publish one of the first comprehensive reports on the settlement outcomes of LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants, lead the Australian Coalition for LGBTIQ+ Asylum and Migration Justice, and prepare to host the 3rd International Queer Displacements Conference.

At FDPN, our purpose is clear: to ensure that every LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced person can find safety, receive support, and thrive. We play our role by providing peer support to the community and offering tailored capacity-building programs to settlement services. Now is the perfect time for the sector to take the next step in ensuring that all clients can succeed.

We often hear that the "unique" needs of LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants are hard to meet. But here's a challenge: what would change if we approached them as we would any other client? Ask yourself:

- What is unique about wanting to be treated with respect in a service or being referred to by the correct name?
- What is unique about wanting to live in a safe place and call it home?
- What is unique about wanting a job that allows you to reach your potential?

The settlement needs of LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants are fundamentally the same as anyone else's. Tailored approaches are necessary, but this is not new for the sector. Settlement services have already demonstrated excellence in supporting diverse groups such as young people, older people, and people with disabilities. The same creativity and innovation can apply here. The settlement sector is at its strongest when it embraces equity and inclusion as its core values.

I like to think of the settlement sector as a garden, where clients are plants and services are gardeners. Each plant requires different amounts of sunlight, water, or soil types, but the goal is always the same: a flourishing garden. The same is true for working with clients. Making adjustments to care creates the conditions for all individuals to grow and succeed.

As a sector grounded in human rights and dignity, it is our shared responsibility to ensure that LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced people can plant strong roots in their new homes. The structures are already in place in every settlement service; what remains is planting seeds of knowledge and change, and not letting the weeds of hesitation take over.

FDPN is here to guide the sector in building inclusive and responsive practices. Our capacity-building programs go beyond theory, turning inclusion into measurable outcomes within the realities of your services.

This year holds exciting opportunities— the 2025 Queer Displacements Conference, the launch of our new e-learning platform filled with resources, and more. We invite you to join us, engage with these opportunities, and work alongside us to build a sector where every LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced person not only survives but thrives.

Dr Renee Dixon, a refugee of Ukrainian Qazaq heritage, is co-founder of the Forcibly Displaced People Network. Having experienced displacement, they are at the forefront of efforts to raise awareness about the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants at the national and global levels.



Walk On Walk Strong: Supporting LGBTIQ+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia



Heather Grace Jones (FICT Project Officer / LGBTIQ Project Trainer), STARTTS. **Parissa Bozorg** (Policy Assistant), STARTTS. **Francis Jimoh** (LGBTIQ+ Project Officer), STARTTS. **Jasmina Bajraktarevic** (Community Services Coordinator), STARTTS.

***We can give each other strength.
When one rises all of us rises.
Like the Phoenix.
Walk On Walk Strong.***

LGBTIQ+ people around the world face discrimination and persecution because of who they are, who they love or how their bodies look. For many, they are forced to flee these unsafe environments in search of safety. Even for those, who have made it to Australia, LGBTIQ+ people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds continue to experience inequalities and discrimination.

The STARTTS project, Walk On Walk Strong supports LGBTIQ+ people with refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds in Australia through multiple approaches, which aim to build knowledge, understanding and insight about this cohort's experiences and provide individual and group support. Before beginning work with these communities it is important to recognise:

- The diversity of experiences within LGBTIQ+ communities
- The importance of culture, race and religion in the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people with refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds
- The multiple oppressions experienced by this cohort

Walk On Walk Strong Approaches

Our project is based on a lived experience model and is guided by a steering committee of people with lived experience at the intersection of LGBTIQ+ and refugee experiences. We currently conduct two peer-led support groups, co-creating a safer space for sharing experiences, and accessing information. Members of the communities facilitate groups and provide much-needed expertise about local conditions. The steering committee are actively involved in the project's design, implementation and evaluation. This model is invaluable in shaping the project's objectives and ensuring that the needs and perspectives of this cohort remain at the heart of the project.

Training

The STARTTS Inclusive Practice Training Program for service providers and interpreters has been operating since 2018. Each training is conducted by a team of lived experience trainers. Training focuses on building an understanding of issues faced by people from refugee backgrounds who are members of the LGBTIQ+ community: including strengths, vulnerabilities and the risks experienced in their home countries, during the journey and resettling in Australia. Walk On Walk Strong also runs sitting circles that invite people to come together to respectfully enhance understanding, empathy, and knowledge about the experiences and needs of our communities.

The project is dedicated to co-creating and co-designing resources. These resources are central to the project's work, they amplify community voices. Resources include the Walk on Walk Strong collective document. Relevant words for communities with diverse sexualities, genders, bodies, relationships, families and cultural identities, when using health services made in collaboration with Multicultural Health Services—in English, Simplified Chinese, and Arabic.

Speaking My Language

Bridging communication and access gaps for ESL LGBTIQ+ patients in collaboration with Sydney Local Health District and an advocacy workbook, which provides a step-by-step guide to conducting an advocacy campaign. The project is also working on factsheets to provide straightforward information on ways of working with these diverse populations and stories are being collected for an oral history project.

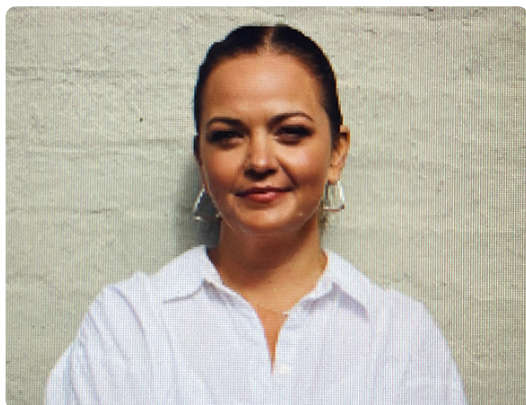
We want to tell LGBTIQ+ people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

"Those years of pain have passed, and you have been successful. You got through them. You will go through this trouble as well. It's bittersweet. You remember the traumas, you remember everything, and then you realise: I have seen the other side of them. I will see the other side of this."

We would like to thank our funders WentWest, NSW Health and Home Affairs (SETS).



Optimising Support for Young LGBTQI+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers



Shannon White (National Policy & Advocacy Lead), Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN).

As the Australian peak body for migrant and refugee youth, MYAN's report, "Counting us in: MYAN report on the settlement experiences of LGBTQI+ refugee & asylum seeker young adults," aims to inform researchers, policymakers, and LGBTQI+ and youth organisations across Australia.

Key points from the report:

Unique Challenges: Young LGBTQI+ refugees face persecution, violence, and discrimination in their countries of origin and are vulnerable during transit and in refugee camps.

Global Context: Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity leads to profound inequality and violence worldwide, driving forced displacement.

Australian Context: Understanding the protection and settlement challenges of young LGBTQI+ refugees is crucial for developing inclusive policies and support services.

Findings on Support Services:

Existing services for LGBTQI+ refugee and asylum seeker young adults often lack accessibility and inclusivity. There are several barriers to accessing support:

- Predominantly heteronormative orientation content.
- Mainstream services not advertising as safe/inclusive spaces.
- Fear of contact with ethnic community members.
- Lack of proactive outreach services.
- First point of contact often being unsupportive religious/cultural leaders.
- Limited cooperation across sectors.

These barriers highlight the need for more tailored and inclusive support services.

Sector-Wide Changes

- Restructure settlement services to be more inclusive.
- Introduce programs/services targeted at specific cohorts.
- Develop a comprehensive list of relevant services and funding sources.

Building Organisational Capacity

- Mandatory training for staff on LGBTQI+ issues.
- Recruitment of staff with relevant lived experiences.
- Implement action plans for LGBTQI+ inclusion.

Connecting with Communities

- Work with cultural communities to address stigma.
- Create a National Advisory Group with LGBTQI+ refugee and asylum seeker young adults.
- Partner with smaller, grassroots organisations.

Facilitating Accessibility

- Include visual cues/resources in service locations and websites.
- Ensure government agencies and city councils are visible in LGBTQI+ outreach.

By addressing these gaps and implementing sector-wide changes, we can build a more inclusive and supportive environment for young LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers.

New LGBTQIA+ SETS Program at Many Coloured Sky and Drummond Street



Ian Seal (Executive Director), Many Coloured Sky

Since 2018 Many Coloured Sky, the Queer Development Agency, has provided direct and ongoing support and connection to almost 500 LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers, mostly across Victoria, as well as working with LGBTQIA+ refugee-led organisations in the Asia Pacific and East Africa. We're very excited to have recently established Australia's first LGBTQIA+ specific SETS program, in partnership with Drummond Street Services and located in Melbourne.

Our work over six years has highlighted many significant challenges and barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ new arrivals in Australia, and some of these relate directly to practices and understandings in the settlement sector. Many settlement services make an assumption that newly-arrived people want to be connected to people of their own culture and background in housing, English language classes, activities etc, whereas many of our LGBTQIA+ members say that these are the very people from whom they experience the most harassment and discrimination for their gender or sexuality. Of particular concern, some of our members say that they also experience prejudice from settlement staff.

Another challenge for LGBTQIA+ people accessing settlement services is the assumption of heterosexuality. If settlement providers are uncomfortable or inexperienced in appropriate ways to ask new arrivals about their gender and sexuality, and they are not signalling through other means that the service is a safe and inclusive place for LGBTQIA+ people (e.g. posters, rainbow stickers, written information about LGBTQIA+ services and supports), then they may never know that they have LGBTQIA+ clients, and those clients are denied their right to access the services and supports they need and to be understood and respected as a whole person. They may feel that the settlement service is yet another place where they are unsafe and unwelcome.

Beyond settlement services themselves, LGBTQIA+ people on humanitarian visas can experience discrimination and violence in communities, limited safe housing options, social isolation and being ostracised from their cultural community, poor mental health, and bullying or discrimination in education and employment.

The LGBTQIA+ SETS program established by Drummond Street and Many Coloured Sky builds on the community-led work of Many Coloured Sky over many years and Drummond Street's long history of service provision to LGBTQIA+ people. In addition to casework, our program provides multiple opportunities for lived-experience leadership and peer support, including peer support officers, peer mentors, peer-led group activities and weekly group social activities, all developed under the guidance of a lived-experience advisory committee.

Recognising that much of the work that we do is unique in the settlement sector, we are committed to working collaboratively with settlement services and other service providers. We deliver comprehensive professional development led by people with lived experience, offer secondary consultation and capacity building, and develop partnerships that create new opportunities for our members while assisting other services to improve their practice. We've established an action network in Melbourne focused on housing solutions for LGBTQIA+ refugees and in 2025 we're building a national network of service providers interested in learning together and collaborating to ensure that ALL refugees can access safe and inclusive services, as is their right.

Strengthening the Settlement Sector: Advancing LGBTIQ+ Inclusion and Safety



Chai Oonnankat (Communications & Policy Officer), The Social Policy Group. **Nick Ross** (Senior Manager), The Social Policy Group.

The settlement sector has often struggled to be responsive to the needs and strengths of LGBTIQ+ refugees and vulnerable migrants.

Organisations like the Forcibly Displaced People Network (FDPN) have been advocating for years for a change in how LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced people are supported, offering support to the settlement space and adjacent services to increase their capacity to work with these communities. The Social Policy Group has been lucky to partner with FDPN to deliver trainings and webinars for the SETS Community of Practice, including 'What do successful settlement outcomes look like for LGBTIQ+ refugees?', 'Working with LBQ Women: Beyond Patriarchal Views on Womanhood', 'Working with Trans Clients', and 'Should I ask if my client is LGBTIQ+?'. We also host the FDPN's eLearning 'Building service capacity to work with LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced people', which is currently being updated to better support settlement staff. SPG also partnered with FDPN on the report Gender Responsive Settlement: Broader Learnings from LGBTIQ+ Refugees.

Fellow settlement peak body Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) has their own fantastic report, Counting us in: Settlement Experiences of LGBTIQ+ Refugee and Asylum-seeker Young Adults, which is highlighted in Shannon White's contribution in this special edition.

Promisingly, there are a number of SETS providers with burgeoning programs for LGBTIQ+, including STARTTS, MercyCare, new SETS providers Drummond Street Services and Many Coloured Sky's Queerspace, amongst other dedicated programs and settlement services that are inclusive and responsive. There is also important work being done in adjoining spaces, such as in health, employment and social enterprises, domestic and family violence response, and the wider workforce.

But there is still more work, as a settlement sector, to be done. LGBTIQ+ refugees have spoken about how they are often marginalised from cultural communities (which we know are often of prime importance in successful settlement), while also feeling isolated from the broader LGBTIQ+ community. When the sector and workforce lack capacity, training, and responsiveness, these issues can be amplified. We've observed that some parts of the sector and broader society face barriers to engaging in this capacity building. How can we progress the changes in ways that balance the realities of services and meet the needs of LGBTIQ+ clients, recognising their human rights? We recognise that there will be parts of the sector that are at different points on the journey, and different approaches needed to ensure that LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants are safe, included, and are dignified and respected in settlement.

One space we would like to highlight is the SETSCoP LGBTIQ+ Safety & Inclusion Subgroup. The subgroup was created in response to requests directly from SETS providers. Like other Community of Practice subgroups and activities, the LGBTIQ+ Subgroup is designed to be a space for SETS providers to share experiences, good practice, solutions to shared settlement issues, and collaboration in how to make staff, organisations, and the wider sector safer and more inclusive for LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants.

The next SETSCoP LGBTIQ+ Subgroup meeting is Wednesday 26 February, 2.00 PM – 3.00 PM (AEDT). If you'd like to join, please request a calendar invitation from the Secretariat.



Settlement Insights was developed based on the continual discussions during SETSCoP meetings, events, and consultations, where policymakers and practitioners share insights on the latest settlement issues and trends.

The Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Community of Practice (SETSCoP) brings together service providers delivering the SETS program to collectively harness and maximise the sector's contribution to effective settlement of refugees and migrants in Australia.

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