



CENTRE for  
GENDER in  
POLITICS



22 April 2022

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Office at Geneva, CH 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

*Submitted via email to [registry@ohchr.org](mailto:registry@ohchr.org)*

RE: Call for input to a thematic report: on the dynamics between sexual orientation, gender identity, and armed conflict.

Dear Mr. Madrigal-Borloz:

We are grateful for the opportunity in our roles, Dr. Jamie J. Hagen, Co-Director of the Centre for Gender in Politics at Queen's University Belfast and Samuel Ritholtz, Researcher at the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford (UK) and a Research Fellow at the Centre for International Security at the Hertie School (Germany), respectively to provide a methodology note to inform the Independent Expert's mandate on the dynamics between sexual orientation, gender identity, and armed conflict.

The **methodological insight** we offer for the forthcoming report responds to the call for input that will support the work of existing international legal and policy frameworks related to the incorporation of gender-sensitive approaches and frameworks to peace and security measures. Our input will focus on gender, sexual orientation and gender identity in conflict-related environments, with particular insight in the Colombian context.

As researchers we aim to contribute to the forthcoming report with our work that focuses on the relationship between different forms of past and present armed confrontations with the lived experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons, as well as Gender Diverse (GD) persons in such context. Given Hagen's research background, her input here focuses specifically on how the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda can better include LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and queer) voices in gender, peace and security initiatives. Ritholtz's contribution will focus here on how to complicate and deepen existing analyses of SOGI experiences during conflict. As we are both connected with advocacy organizations in Colombia, we know that at least one Colombia-specific report/questionnaire will be submitted to you. As such, our focus is on broad takeaways of our research that can perhaps help assist you in framing your report, as opposed to a detailed analysis of the Colombian context.

We remain available for any questions or further discussions.

Warmly,

Jamie and Samuel

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### **Research/Policy Gap 1: Queering the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda**

In 2000 the Security Council passed resolution 1325 (SCR 1325), the first UN SCR to draw attention to women and girls during conflict and the gendered experiences of war. The now ten additional related resolutions, as well as the extensive monitoring and implementation work on their behalf, are known as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) architecture. Reports using the words “women” and “gender” interchangeably neglect to consider gender as it is experienced beyond the heteronormative woman, erasing the experiences of LBT women ([Hagen 2016](#)).

A narrow definition of “women” neglects to include LGBTQ women or LGBTQ rights organizations in this struggle. In other words, the framework lacks an understanding of all the social and political implications of gendered power dynamics beyond those understood between men and women. As a result of this limited understanding of gender, LGBTQ women's experiences are overlooked and marginalized from critical work to respond to the needs of women in conflict-related environments despite the work by the international community for women's inclusion in peace processes for over two decades at the international level.

#### *Key Research Takeaways*

- **As peace and security work with a gender lens evolves, there is a need to revisit the way “gender” is defined and then operationalized from policy to practice.** The current method of gender mainstreaming neglects any queer security analysis. An LGBTQ inclusive analysis of WPS reveals there is a wide spectrum of identities that do not fit neatly into two binary categories.

- **There is a continuing challenge for WPS programmatic work to better engage with LGBTQ women and LGBTQ organizations.** Challenges that lead to this erasure include lack of data collection about individuals in the LGBTQ community, limited resources for researching marginalized populations and institutional homophobia. Another continuing challenge faced by those working on gender and peacebuilding is an inadequate understanding about how to find, work with, and support LGBTQ women in their work. (More on this in Centre Policy Brief responding to previous UN IE SOGI call for input on Gender Theory: [Minimizing protection gaps for LGBTQ people living in conflict](#)).
- **There is a need for movement building between feminist and LGBTQ organizations in order to queer peace and security policy and advocacy.** Work continues to be siloed between those working on WPS and those working on LGBTQ organizing. Important organizations have started to fund building up work at this intersection so organizations like Outright Action International and the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy have started to begin some of this much needed work. The Colombian context is an important one to watch for this work, especially with the ongoing development of the country's first National Action Plan. There is growing interest in funding this as evidenced by UK and Canadian development funding at this intersection. There is also an opportunity to recognize the important work that LGBTQ organizations are doing to lead peacebuilding and protest in Colombia, Lebanon and elsewhere. (See: [Hagen 2021](#)).

## **Research/Policy Gap 2: The differential burdens of war for SOGIESC Populations**

War affects everyone but its impact can be discriminate. LGBT people experience conflict in a unique way that, to date, many international actors as well as academics have ignored. The redress of this gap has fallen to LGBT civil society organizations who have had to mobilize to both provide support for the unique vulnerabilities of these populations as well as document their experiences ([Ritholtz 2020](#)). Much of our collective knowledge on best practices and historic documentation are the result of the brave action taken by these frontline organizations, often with limited resources and at great risk.

There is a changing-and-evolving landscape on who works on 'LGBT conflict issues' but a consistent pattern has been that many transitional justice processes attempt to produce a singular narrative of an actor and its relation to LGBT violence during conflict. As it relates to the victimization of LGBT populations, a case is often made about why these groups get victimized. But often, even within the same actor, LGBT victimization happens for a series of different reasons in different contexts that may impact the forms of this violence. As an example, during the Colombian civil war, though many paramilitary groups targeted LGBT people, they varied in how they targeted these groups. Broad narratives of conflict focused on "why" and less on "how" obviate important difference and risk oversimplification.

### *Key Research Takeaways*

- **As we seek to understand how LGBT people experience conflict, more attention should be paid to differential experiences within the same conflict.** A more nuanced understanding of different patterns of violence could improve transitional justice processes because it would allow for proper recognition of people’s experience as well as more targeted prosecution of armed groups. As one example, it has been observed that gay men and trans women experience public, visible forms of violence, while lesbians and trans men experience more private forms of violence from people within their network, making this violence difficult to account. These dynamics happen in peace and war, but without this understanding, it can be missed. One potential methodological insight is to expand beyond established categories as “repertoire” and “frequency” and instead, consider “characteristics” of violence (see e.g., [Ritholtz 2022](#)).
- **While LGBT people may be more likely to experience sexual violence than cis-and-het populations during conflict, we should be careful not to conflate sexual violence and LGBT violence.** A running theme in my research has been the assumed correlation (or conflation) of sexual violence and violence against LGBT people. Because LGBT people are so much more likely to experience sexual violence during conflict, there is an assumption that these two forms of violence occur concurrently. My research in Colombia has proven otherwise and centering that difference reveals unique dynamics happening in different parts of the country.
- **LGBT experiences of conflict can result from intentional targeting, but there are also more hidden dynamics related to social structures of exclusion that can obviate certain dynamics.** Considering LGBT experiences (and vulnerability) of conflict requires a dual consideration of the impacts that result from intentional and structural prejudice. This fine line between intentional and structural is what facilitates the obviation of LGBT people’s vulnerability during war. As evidenced by the war in Ukraine, LGBT people can have an unexpected vulnerability that is produced by a discriminating social structure ([Su & Ritholtz 2022](#)). Additionally, the intersection of one’s identities will impact their experience and certain identities might have more invisibilized forms of violence ([Reid & Ritholtz 2020](#)).

### **Additional Comments and Resources**

Hagen currently has three research projects/collaborations relevant to this call:

1. Queering WPS with case study examples in Colombia and Northern Ireland.
2. Queering WPS in the development of the Colombian National Action Plan.
3. Expanding analysis of gender-based violence to include targeting of people with diverse SOGIESC.

For these projects, the following data/analysis is available (or forthcoming):

1. Theoretical development of queering WPS with qualitative data from interviews in Colombia and Northern Ireland. (See: [Hagen 2016](#); [Hagen 2017](#); [Hagen 2019](#))
2. Co-authored mapping project for Outright Action International based on interviews with 25 participants about future work at the intersection of WPS and LGBT human rights.
3. Toolkit ‘Improving Engagement with LGBTQ Communities in WPS Programming: A Toolkit for design, monitoring and evaluation’ developed in partnership with Christian Aid-Colombia and Colombia Diversa (expected February 2023).
4. Novel argumentation about how to expand understanding of gender-based violence through a queer feminist approach to understanding this violence.

Ritholtz currently has three research projects:

1. Violence against LGBT people by paramilitaries during the Colombian Civil War
2. Queering the concept of displacement by centering the experiences of LGBT refugees
3. The experiences of LGBT Venezuelan migrants in Colombian and Brazilian Borderlands

For these projects, the following data/analysis is available:

1. Quantitative data on violence against LGBT people during the Colombian civil war, broken down by type of violence
2. Analysis/data on sexual violence and its relation to LGBT violence during the Colombian civil war
3. Survey data on the experiences of LGBT Venezuelan migrants in Colombia and Brazil (available September 2022)
4. Novel argumentation on how to build a more inclusive global refugee regime for LGBT people (akin to the argument presented in [this Reuters article](#) as well as in [Ritholtz & Buxton 2021](#))

Together, Hagen and Ritholtz are working on two projects that might be of interest to the IE SOGI and his team

- A Special Issue in the *Revista de Estudios Sociales* on Queer Peacebuilding
- An edited volume about research methods, Queer Conflict Research (expected summer 2023)