

United Nations Development Programme, Bangkok Regional Hub

Being LGBTI In Asia and the Pacific: Strengthening LGBTI Inclusion in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Final Report

Project information	
Project title	Being LGBTI in Asia and the Pacific: Strengthening LGBTI Inclusion in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Corporate Outcome(s) and Output(s)	Primary: RPD Outcome 2: Accelerate structural transformations for sustainable development Output 2.3: Institutions, networks and non-state actors strengthened to promote inclusion, access to justice, and protect human rights (SP 2.2.2 and 2.2.3) Secondary: RPD Outcome 1: Advance poverty eradication in all its forms and dimensions Output 1.5: National institutions, laws and policies strengthened for equitable and effective delivery of HIV and health services (SP 1.2.1)
Region	Asia-Pacific
Project Duration	January 2020- June 2022
Funding sources	Swedish International Development Coordination Agency (Sida)
Implementation modality	Direct implementation (UNDP)

Executive Summary

This completion report summarizes the progress made towards achieving the objectives of the Sida-funded project titled “Being LGBTI in Asia and the Pacific: Strengthening LGBTI Inclusion in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” implemented by UNDP from 2020 to 2022. It provides an overview of the impact of the project activities and the lessons learned. UNDP will share the certified financial statement in July 2023.

Over the project implementation period, the Being LGBTI in Asia and the Pacific programme (BLIAP) has addressed inequality, violence, and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) and promoted universal access to health and social services. The initiative provided a platform to engage and leverage the mandates of partners, such as governments, civil society, national human rights institutions, the private sector, academic institutions, donors, foundations and United Nations (UN) agencies, to advance the inclusion of LGBTI people. As of 2022, it has engaged with **1,388 partners**, including **241 government departments**, **667 civil society groups**, **27 human rights bodies** and **182 private sector organizations** from over **59** countries to advance the inclusion of people of diverse SOGIESC. The programme has contributed to developing and implementing protective legislation, court judgments and policies addressing violence and discrimination in health, education, and employment settings. The programme has also generated important research and data to provide evidence on the social cost of marginalization and to strengthen the meaningful inclusion of LGBTI people and gender empowerment through development efforts.

Due to sensitivities, policymakers and governments in the Asia-Pacific region can often be reluctant to engage on issues regarding LGBTI persons. Through long-term engagement, BLIAP has built trust with government partners, increasing the number of government departments engaging on LGBTI issues and the depth of their involvement. Government representatives have become active participants in the project, providing inputs to strategic planning and guidance through the Technical Advisory Group. Government actors have also recognized the value of the project as a source of guidance on good practices, proactively requesting inputs and technical assistance to inform the development and implementation of protective laws, policies and programmes.

BLIAP's structure as a regional platform has effectively addressed sensitive issues and gained visibility for new issues for follow-up work at the country level. The programme has leveraged a regional approach to extend its implementation beyond its focus countries, where there is country-level funding, engaging advocates and allies in places where local implementation is constrained due to financial limitations or safety concerns. The regional approach effectively promotes South-South and triangular learning and provides opportunities to generate effective models in one country that can be shared with others. This approach has been identified as a central factor of success – promoting a strong role for regional organizations and networks that, in turn, builds capacity of local organizations. The review of the programme noted that such a model promoted efficiency, maximizing relatively scarce resources while providing a means of working in contexts where explicit work on SOGIESC remains tentative. At the same time, the Programme was able to provide more in-depth support in some of the focus countries. The project takes advantage of this approach in work led by UNDP's country offices and in engaging regional and national partners, e.g., by building the capacity of regional civil society networks that connect horizontally across countries and vertically to local communities. BLIAP also leverages synergies with UNDP's work on addressing HIV, especially experience, partnerships and opportunities for building enabling legal and policy environments.

The project has utilized the perceived neutrality of the UN as a partner, the regional structure, and research initiatives to create safe spaces for dialogue that engage high-level policymakers and government champions, helping to link them to activists and advocates. Moreover, in countries where LGBTI issues are particularly sensitive, BLIAP has found entry points through mainstreaming the issues in the overall framework of SDGs and the call to "leave no one behind" and integrating LGBTI-specific concerns in dialogues on broader themes such as inclusive access to health care and education or anti-discrimination protections.

The goal of the project is to promote LGBTI inclusion in Asia Pacific across five development dimensions: political and civic participation, access to justice and personal safety, economic well-being, health and education.

The end-of-project outcome is: **LGBTI social and economic inclusion in Asia Pacific advanced through promulgation and implementation of protective laws, policies and programmes which mitigate discrimination and violence, ensure access to LGBTI appropriate services.**

Three lower level or interim outcomes will contribute towards achieving the overall end of project outcome:

1. Improved capacity and commitment of governments and NHRIs to develop, implement and monitor LGBTI inclusive and protective laws, policies and programmes and to ensure equitable access to services that meet the needs of LGBTI people.
2. Improved capacity and increased participation of LGBTI community groups in dialogue and advocacy with stakeholders – including governments, civil society, NHRIs, the private sector and youth development partners – on the development, implementation and monitoring of LGBTI inclusive and protective laws, policies and practices as well as the promotion of equitable access to opportunities and services that meet the needs of LGBTI people.
3. Improved capacity and commitment of the business sector, other private sector actors, and social protection initiatives to develop, implement and monitor LGBTI inclusive policies and programmes supporting access to employment, livelihoods, innovative social entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation.

The following section provides a brief background about the intervention, while other sections of the report detail the accumulated results during the project implementation period.

Background

Phase 1 of the Being LGBTI in Asia (BLIA) programme, initiated in 2012, focused on developing an evidence base of the lived experiences of LGBTI people through research and the engagement of civil society groups throughout the region. This engagement was facilitated by convening eight national LGBTI dialogues, publishing [national reports](#) and producing 12 videos highlighting community stories from the region.

Informed by this process, Being LGBTI in Asia and the Pacific (BLIAP) Phase 2 (2014-2018), through a combination of regional and country-specific programming, strengthened the capacity of civil society groups, government departments and human rights bodies to effectively address priority issues on SOGIESC, built broad coalitions with key stakeholders, including the private sector, media and academic institutions, and strengthened the evidence base on SOGIESC and intersex issues. As recommended in the 2018 Programme Review, the five-year strategy was developed in consultation with key partners at national and regional levels, including civil society and government representatives.

In response, UNDP developed this intervention, building on the recommendations of the [Being LGBTI in Asia Regional Dialogue](#) in 2015, the achievements of BLIA Phase 2 and reflecting the key areas of inclusion identified through a global consultative process with civil society and stakeholders on the [LGBTI inclusion index](#) in 2016. While most of the work was built on areas undertaken in BLIA Phases 1 and 2, the design also included new areas of work and new or extended partnerships. The programme specifically aimed to address the needs of some of the most marginalized and underrepresented groups within the LGBTI spectrum, have a greater focus on youth issues, support the development of a new generation of young LGBTI advocates and expand the geographic scope of the programme to the Pacific.

During this multi-year programme, stakeholders worked to strengthen the meaningful inclusion of LGBTI people and gender empowerment through cross-cutting development efforts. The programme carried out extensive analytical, policy, legal and rights-based work at the intersectionality of issues relating to gender, economic empowerment and SOGIESC. Implementors worked across the region on both national and regional initiatives to advance the rights and inclusion of LGBTI communities. Ultimately, the intended end-of-project outcome was for **widespread increased LGBTI social and economic inclusion across Asia and the Pacific**.

Over the programme term, UNDP focused Swedish support on three work streams that cut across several development dimensions and intended outcomes and directly build on the results achieved to date:

- Legal and policy reform for LGBTI inclusion;
- Strengthening the capacity of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to address human rights violations of LGBTI persons; and
- Supporting LGBTI Community Leadership and Advocacy.

Key Achievements Summary and Lessons Learned

Activities

Legal and Policy Reform for LGBTI Inclusion

BLIAP has played an important role in influencing policy and laws. Often through requests from national governments, UNDP has supported developing and implementing legislation protecting LGBTI people and people living with HIV and key populations in **eight countries**. BLIAP has been able to provide critical data-driven research, evidence and expertise towards proposed legal reforms. As of 2022, the programme has cumulatively contributed to developing **24 supportive laws and policies** (in various legislative stages) on improving the gender-responsiveness of legal systems and in the areas of legal gender recognition, anti-discrimination and civil partnerships.

The programme has found this success by utilizing a partnership approach involving building long-term partnerships with key government and civil society stakeholders, other UN organizations, and medical and legal experts. Empowering and building the capacity of civil society to engage with government partners has been crucial to progress in this field. The political support of UNDP and other donor partners enabled local LGBTI groups to gain the political will and support necessary to change these laws and policies.

UNDP has also provided direct capacity building support to government departments and policymakers; and by bringing its strategic advantage and approach into partnerships with civil society and other organizations with similar or

overlapping objectives (strategic innovation). An assessment of the programme found that “legal and policy changes were made possible because the project created a downstream voice mechanism and platforms to amplify and collectivize the voice of the BLIAP communities.”¹ The impact of BLIAP on improving inclusive laws and policies in the region led to some of the most tangible outcomes of the programme.

Although direct attribution is difficult to assign to any single actor in complex reform processes, **key highlights during the programme term 2020- 2022** include:

In **India**, UNDP, together with the Humsafar Trust, developed a framework document on social welfare measures for transgender people as provided by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. UNDP held a regional consultation with countries in Asia and the Pacific, including Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam and other countries. The process included south-south exchanges of good practices in social welfare measures in different countries and how they could be adapted to the Indian context. The findings were included in the framework document, launched in April 2021 with the support of key government stakeholders, including the National AIDS Control Organization, National Human Rights Commission, and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, partners and community representatives.

In **Pakistan**, UNDP, together with UNAIDS, provincial governments and ministries in Punjab and Sindh, and other key stakeholders, drafted federal and provincial strategic frameworks on ending stigma and discrimination against transgender persons in HIV/AIDS prevention and response in social protection settings in Pakistan. Also, in Pakistan, UNDP and key stakeholders developed provincial strategies on transphobic stigma and discrimination, including the exacerbation of this social exclusion and isolation from COVID-19.

In **Thailand**, UNDP is convening dialogues with Parliament sub-committees and civil society on four pieces of legislation concerning discrimination, civil partnership, legal gender recognition and sex work, as well as supporting the implementation of the Gender Equality Act. UNDP also supported civil society organizations to develop a draft legal gender recognition law, supported wide-ranging consultations on the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules 2020 and development of a framework document on the welfare measures of the transgender community. UNDP has been working closely with the Government to strengthen SOGIESC-responsiveness in the Thai justice system. UNDP’s handbook, “Advancing the Human Rights and Inclusion of LGBTI People,” has also been used to inform discussions with parliamentarians and to formulate possible actions to increase access and inclusion of vulnerable groups, [including LGBTI persons, in the work of the Thai Parliament](#).

In **Viet Nam**, UNDP has worked with the Coalition for Transgender rights (C4TRANS) to identify three major advocacy points in the previous draft that don’t meet international standards of transgender healthcare and legal gender recognition: (1) requiring transgender people to undergo medical intervention in order to change their legal gender; (2) requiring transgender people to be more than 18 years of age in order to access medical intervention and (3) requiring transgender people to be single in order to change their legal gender. Throughout the year, C4TRANS worked closely to introduce the Ministry of Health (MOH), which is responsible for drafting the law and good international practices regarding non-medical interventions. C4TRANS also consolidated the opinions of transgender and gender-diverse community members and engaged with medical experts. MOH was gradually introduced to the concept of self-determination and started to adopt this into the draft. These efforts resulted in a significant improvement: the requirement for medical intervention was removed in the latest draft.²

In **China**, a significant policy breakthrough in legal gender recognition for transgender people was achieved. Specifically, the required surgery age for those who wish to change their gender marker has been lowered from 20 to 18, and the surgical procedures have also been adjusted and improved by the National Health Commission after consultations with experts and community groups that UNDP has engaged with for the past few years. Professor Liu Minghui, author of

¹ UNDP Asia Pacific Mid-Term Review (2020).

² <https://baochinhphu.vn/de-nghi-xay-dung-du-an-luat-chuyen-doi-gioi-tinh-102220112105245816.htm>

UNDP's report on Legal Gender Recognition in China, and Professor Wu Lijuan, author of the UNDP National Survey on Social Attitudes towards LGBTI People in China, both from the Experts Consultation Group, are among the experts that the National Health Commission consulted, as well as representatives from the community group, Beijing LGBT Center, a key programme partner and beneficiary of UNDP, who were also active participants in the room. These experts and community partners informed the change in policy and were crucial to getting the changes off the ground.

Over the programme term, BLIAP delivered important results in changing the legal framework across the region, with a lasting impact on the legislative agenda in many target countries towards improved legal protections for the LGBTI community.

Strengthening Capacity of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to Address Human Rights Violations of LGBTI Persons

Collaboration with Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions

Being LGBTI in Asia and the Pacific builds the capacity of stakeholders to understand issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and to advance LGBTI inclusion in development efforts. The programme has engaged NHRIs through its partner, the [Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions \(APF\)](#), in policy dialogues, contributing to greater awareness and knowledge of LGBTI inclusion issues, increased political will and action, and progress towards more protective legal and policy environments. This has been achieved through providing innovative technical support to regional and national partners and promoting South-South engagement.

UNDP and APF have collaborated since 2015 to promote human rights related to SOGIESC. In 2021, the UNDP-APF partnership aimed to enhance NHRI's capacity to protect and promote human rights for LGBTI communities, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The partnership sought to continue strengthening the capacity of NHRIs to promote and protect human rights related to SOGIESC and to develop accessible online resources and capacity development activities to achieve this outcome. The project aimed to foster NHRI exchange experiences and to understand and respond to the vulnerabilities of LGBTI communities exacerbated by COVID-19 related issues.

Interventions carried out in 2021 and 2022 included the development of an online e-course on SOGIESC issues for NHRIs, building a community of practice for NHRI staff, and creating a resource for NHRIs showcasing case studies of good practice in response to the impact of COVID-19 on LGBTI communities. The online course, held in late 2021, aimed to strengthen the capacity of NHRI staff to promote and protect human rights related to SOGIESC. The course included eight online modules and four live sessions, including a session focused on the impacts of COVID-19. The APF conducted the online course for four weeks, from 8 November to 3 December 2022, with 21 participants from the NHRIs of 12 countries, including Australia, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor Leste. The course participants reported increased knowledge and understanding of SOGIESC. Additionally, 13 NHRIs agreed to establish and join an APF Community of Practice on SOGIESC to further work on inclusive environments and apply the knowledge gained. The gender breakdown of participants was 10 cis women, 10 cis men, and one who preferred not to disclose their gender.

Through the partnership, APF also developed an [NHRI Guide on responding to COVID-19 impacts on LGBTI people](#), which became a key tool for NHRIs (APF's members) to advocate and respond to the needs of LGBTI persons in the region. This

"The APF-UNDP partnership have been a long standing one, and although smaller in scope (the 2021 project), this project leaves the APF and its membership in a strengthened position to continue this work. We greatly appreciate the collaboration and support of UNDP and individual colleagues over the years"

Aishath Fasoha, Manager of Gender and Pacific Programmes, Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions

report was designed to support NHRIs in promoting and protecting the rights of LGBTI people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The guide increased NHRIs' knowledge and understanding of these issues and supported members in undertaking practical steps to protect the rights of LGBTI communities. The guide draws on discussions held during the APF online course.

These three interventions strengthened the capacity of NHRIs to promote and protect human rights in relation to SOGIESC whilst also serving as an opportunity for NHRIs to exchange experiences, understand and respond to the vulnerabilities of LGBTI communities. The project also enabled APF to identify and establish relationships with new contact points in NHRIs and re-establish links with those working on LGBTI issues. It has also provided an opportunity to understand the nature of the impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTI communities in the APF member countries and new entry points to support members. Moreover, APF stated that the project strengthened their "ability to support NHRIs, especially in the context of the pandemic, and to identify LGBTI groups as vulnerable communities in crisis situations."³

Supporting LGBTI Community Leadership and Advocacy

From 2020-2022, BLIAP had direct and contributory roles in strengthening LGBTI civil society and fostering the sustainable capacity to advocate and address LGBTI issues. The programme aimed to enhance their effectiveness, advocacy skills, and ability to contribute to policy dialogues, as well as create space to support a broader diversity of voices in development agendas. Through this programme, BLIAP built a regional platform for action and collaboration, which improved stakeholders' understanding of issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, and advanced LGBTI inclusion in development efforts. The programme engaged a total of **418** LGBTI civil society organizations (CSOs) and **249** other CSOs.

BLIAP recognizes the importance of civil society networks in reaching local levels and ensuring a diversity of voices and marginalized groups' participation. They acknowledge LGBTI intersectionality, including factors such as educational attainment, ethnicity, income level, religion, age, class, and ability, which can impact individuals' experiences within the LGBTI community. To be inclusive, the programme activities were designed to ensure the active participation of those in the margins.

By building capacity and providing technical support, BLIAP enabled these organizations to function more effectively and advocate for their causes, contributing to policy dialogues and creating space for diverse voices to be heard. Through the regional platform for action and collaboration, stakeholders better understood intersectional issues impacting LGBTI persons and advanced LGBTI inclusion in development efforts. The programme's impact was significant in fostering sustainable capacity building and advancing LGBTI inclusion in the region.

These kind of sustained partnerships with CSOs, both financially and through technical support, has helped them to effectively advocate for their causes, but also to attract additional funding. For example, the Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTNet) was able to successfully attract grants from prestigious organizations such as the Robert Carr Foundation, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS and Tuberculosis, and the Global Equality Fund. BLIAP has successfully created space to support broadening the diversity of voices in spaces where development agendas are set, and issues are prioritized. Overall, BLIAP's impact has been transformative for civil society in the region, helping to advance their causes and attract the resources needed to make a difference.

The programme successfully expanded its intersectional approach to focus more explicitly on adequate representation by young LGBTI persons and ensuring transgender issues receive adequate attention. This impact of the focus on young LGBTI leaders can be seen through the Inter-Agency Task Team on Young Key Populations. The grants received by Youth LEAD and Youth Voices Count resulted in over 100 young LGBTI persons and vulnerable key populations being reached, trained and sensitized in the region. The young leaders engaged with the programme have even collaborated and partnered after the grants were completed, having connected through the "UNDP Small Grants network".

3 <https://www.asiapacificforum.net/news/new-guide-for-nhris-on-protecting-lgbti-rights-during-covid/>

Small Grants Programme 2020 and 2021

With shrinking civil society space, limited funding availability for LGBTI CSOs in the region and the harsh impact of the pandemic, there has been increased demand from community partners for funding. In response to this, UNDP, with support from SIDA, launched two rounds of **Small Grants funding** in 2020 and 2021. This initiative furthered ongoing close collaboration with civil society and supported CSOs to continue crucial advocacy activities at the grassroots level, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also enabled UNDP to reach communities at the grassroots level who were at the very beginning of their advocacy journeys. This included TWEET foundation, Ya_ALL, San Julian Pride and Pride Cook Islands, who expressed that the grants were pivotal to their progress and visibility as organizations. The catalytic funding also provided an opportunity to reach organizations in more rural areas and those operating in their national languages SWING Foundation (Thailand) and San Julian Pride (Philippines).

In 2020, UNDP launched the first round of small grants (up to USD 25,000) to strengthen civil society action towards LGBTI inclusion in the Asia-Pacific. Four grantees were selected from among the 73 applicants, representing communities from 20 countries in the region and regional and multi-country proposals.

Highlights from the 2020 Small Grants

Thematic priorities for the **2020 small grants** programme:

- **Enhancing LGBTI Youth leadership in the Asia-Pacific:** Youth LEAD(Regional)
- **Transgender leadership and advocacy in the Asia-Pacific:** Service Workers in Group (SWING) foundation (Thailand)
- **Supporting human rights for LGBTI people in the Asia-Pacific:** Equal Asia Foundation (Equal AF) (Regional), ICS Center (Viet Nam)

Youth LEAD successfully utilized the grant to make a tangible impact in fostering youth leadership in Mongolia, Myanmar, and India through their partners: Youth LEAD Mongolia, MYS, and Ya_All programmes. By adapting their Organizational Development and Change (ODC) manual to country contexts, Youth LEAD was able to build the capacity of these grassroots organizations and promote their growth. The grant also enabled country-led assessments in collaboration with each civil



society group, which led to the identification of gaps in organizational components that needed improvement. The subsequent training courses and capacity-building exercises, including financial and management training, networking and partnership training, and mobilization of funds, filled these gaps and supported stronger and more resilient youth LGBTI-led organizations. The virtual Regional Cross-Learning Meeting in December 2020 provided a platform for organizations to share their experiences and lessons learned, facilitating cross-sharing of findings between network

partners. This approach to capacity building led to the development of more effective youth-led organizations that could engage national decision-makers on health and human rights, mobilize their constituents, and foster strategic partnerships.

Some key examples of how the grant fostered youth leadership and enabled LGBTI youth leaders to engage in national decision-making levels related to health and human rights include:

- **India (Ya_All):** The grant received by Ya_All has had a significant impact on the inclusion and representation of LGBTI youth leaders in decision-making platforms related to health, human rights, and socio-economic issues. As a result of the grant, several youth LGBTI leaders were appointed to prestigious positions, including one as a Youth Panel Advisor for the Global Mental Health Databank Project by The Wellcome Trust UK, and another as a board member of the Young People in Action Team for YuWaah: Generation Unlimited by UNICEF. The coordinator was also selected as an emerging youth fellow for TCI Asia Fellowship 2020-2022. These appointments demonstrate the recognition of Ya_All's work and the value of their contributions to important global initiatives. Additionally, Ya_All's efforts were recognized by the UN youth envoy as one of the 10 inspiring leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the most significant impact of Ya_All's work has been in their local community, where they were able to leverage their status as a sub-grantee of the UNDP small grants programme to effectively engage with government partners. This resulted in the creation of two dedicated quarantine centers for transgender people in Manipur, following the model created by Ya_All of an inclusive space for transgender people. Overall, the grant has had a transformative impact on Ya_All's ability to advocate for LGBTI youth issues and create tangible change in their community.
- **Myanmar (Myanmar Youth Stars):** The grant provided by UNDP enabled three youth key population (YKP) leaders in the organization to take on a leadership role by implementing the ODC manual. This not only allowed them to gain valuable leadership experience, but also had a positive impact on multiple organizational levels. The programme increased awareness among staff and volunteers, helping to create a more informed and effective team. As a result of this increased awareness, the organization recognized the importance of regularly assessing and strengthening their youth leadership capacity. This has led to the development of new programmes and initiatives focused on building the skills and capacity of YKP leaders, ensuring that they are better equipped to drive change and create a more inclusive society. The impact of the grant has therefore been significant, not only in terms of providing valuable leadership experience, but also in increasing awareness and driving meaningful change within the organization.

The completion of the project with UNDP marked a significant milestone for Youth LEAD, as it enabled the organization to integrate the ODC manual into their core business and provide ongoing support to national youth groups. This was made possible through the development of long-term strategic plans during the grant period, which helped to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the programme beyond its initial implementation. The integration of the ODC manual into Youth LEAD's core business has had a significant impact, as it has enabled the organization to better support young key populations (YKPs) and drive meaningful change within their communities. This impact has been further amplified through Youth LEAD's ongoing collaboration with the BLIAP programme and their focal points through the Interagency Task Team on Young Key Populations (IATT on YKPs). Together, these initiatives have helped to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for YKPs, empowering them to take on leadership roles and drive change in their communities. Overall, the impact of the grant has been significant, enabling Youth LEAD to strengthen their capacity and provide more effective support to young people in their efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

UNDP launched the second call for proposals to issue small grants (up to USD 30,000) in 2021, to strengthen civil society action toward LGBTI inclusion in the Asia-Pacific. Four grantees were selected from the 60 applicants, representing diverse communities at the national level and regional and multi-country proposals.

Highlights from the 2021-2022 Small Grants

Thematic priorities for the **2021 small grants** programme:

- **Supporting Youth Leadership in the Asia-Pacific:** Youth Voices Count (YVC), Regional
- **Transgender leadership and advocacy in the Asia-Pacific:** Transgender Welfare Equity and Empowerment Trust (TWEET), India
- **Strengthen digital capacities of LGBTI CSOs in the Asia-Pacific:** Pride Cook Islands Inc, Cook Islands
- **Action on LGBTI inclusion in climate change adaptation and/or COVID-19 recovery:** San Julian Pride Advocacy Group Inc (SJP), Philippines

"UNDP BLIAP grant ended up making a huge impact when more than 60 transmen leaders from across India came together to have a policy dialogue with key government stakeholders in the capital of the country, a platform that was never previously available for the community. Transmen in India have been highly invisible and have been structurally kept out of policy dialogues that determine our future in the country. With the Trans Act 2019 currently underway implementation in India, the grant gave us an opportunity not only to come together for first of its kind transmen summit but also helped us in building the capacity of 4 regional transmen groups that will continue to establish themselves, build communities and do advocacy at a regional level."

Shaman Gupta, Co-Chair, TWEET Foundation

transgender network at the national level. With this grant, transmen-led civil society groups were able to increase their capacity and create a new transgender network at the national level. "Project Samarthan" directly contributed to the registration of two transmen grassroots organizations, providing them with the expertise needed to become fully-fledged and sustainable entities. Tweet foundation's capacity building training also helped these groups become more transparent and accountable in their work. Furthermore, the project inspired like-minded activists and groups to advocate for their rights and issues in their regions with more confidence, and to approach larger community-based organizations for support. TWEET Foundation leveraged the lessons learned from the project to develop the Trans Yuva (Youth) Leadership Fellowship in collaboration with the Lakshya Trust, which currently supports three trans women and two transmen in implementing various activities for their respective communities. Through this project, the empowerment and upliftment of the often marginalized and invisible trans male community in India were championed.

"This Grant from UNDP BLIAP has created major impact on the Trans men movement India. Due to the Project Samarthan the voices of Trans men leaders from India were heard by Key Stakeholders in Government System in India which was first of its kind. I am really grateful I was a part of this project and implemented it on the ground. The three Rs Regular, Responsive and Reform is required to build a sustainable system to keep the momentum on track."

This Grant gave us the opportunity to start a platform which will help the upcoming generations of Trans men leader to come out and work for the community. As a Trans man myself while working with all the leaders and the voices I was hearing in the All-Trans men/Masculine Persons Summit 2022, I see a future here which is inclusive and safe for Trans men voices."

I look forward for future collaborations for the betterment of Trans men community in India."

Satvik Sharma, Co-Chair, TWEET Foundation

In India, the programme supported the national-level civil society group, TWEET Foundation and their project, "Project Samarthan", to empower the transmen community to participate in advocacy dialogues and to build regional community support systems. The activities supported in 2021 and 2022 include capacity building workshops on legal awareness, leadership training and community mobilization. TWEET foundation has also been providing ongoing virtual training on digital skills and developing social media materials.

UNDP's work in India has traditionally focused on the transgender women and Hijra communities, The trans male community have often found themselves an invisible minority within the minority, and these small grants were an opportunity to bolster the capacity of transmen-led civil society group and create a new

The support received from UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and UNDP India enabled Tweet Foundation to organize the first National-level Transmen Meet-up in New Delhi on 12-13 March 2022, which marked a significant milestone for the transmen community in India. The summit aimed to empower transmen to engage in advocacy dialogues, build regional community support systems, and create a platform for transmen leaders to connect with the larger community and bring visibility to transmen issues. The event was planned on principles of inclusion and equity and drew over 60 transmen from across India who either worked for the community or expressed an interest in working for the community in the future.



Participants represented a diverse range of regions, religions, castes, and linguistic backgrounds to ensure that the needs of the community were fully supported.⁴

The meet-up provided a platform for high-level panel discussions with government stakeholders, allowing the transmale community to advocate for their rights and build regional support systems. Informal events such as talent competitions, music, and dance also allowed the community to bond and network with each other. The participation was high, and a wide range of issues were discussed, including access to identity cards for trans persons, health and mental health services, and empowerment policies for the transgender community. The dialogue also had a tangible impact, as a representative of the Ministry of Transport present at the event agreed to immediate policy changes related to the importation of medical binders for Transmen. Overall, the dialogue served as an effective platform for the transmen community to connect, advocate, and effect change.

The small grants programme supported San Julian Pride (SJP), a national civil society group, in their LGBTQI-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) project in the Municipality of San Julian, Eastern Samar, Philippines. The project aimed to enhance SJP's capacity to influence local DRRM policies and practices in the municipality towards applying an intersectional lens for DRRM and addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQI community in San Julian. The grant was the first of its kind, as it was initiated by a local CSO, setting a new precedent for participatory governance in the context of climate change and DRRM. SJP also used the grant to foster strong relationships with the local government and address mental health issues that other civil society groups had not yet tackled. SJP officers, directors, committee heads, and Barangay coordinators were trained on the salient points of Republic Act 10121 (National DRRM Act) and on applying SOGIESC/intersectional lens to DRRM, Republic Act 11036 (National Mental Health Law), psychological first aid, suicide and self-harm prevention, and mental health in the context of pandemics and disasters. As a result, the local government has agreed to engage SJP in local DRRM and CCA efforts by providing post-disaster mental health first aid, once SJP members are trained as mental health first aiders.



The programme enabled SJP to engage Local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Councils (LDRRMC) in a training on SOGIESC in DRR, which was the first time that the Local DRRM Council was face-to-face with vulnerable sectors and created an opportunity for partnership. Local DRRM Council members expressed increased understanding on the impact of disasters on mental health and enhanced capacity in dealing with issues surrounding DRRM as a result of the training. The training also facilitated an exchange between representatives of the LGBTI community and the council, ensuring that the community had a better understanding of what measures the local government was implementing and

how they could be involved.

In addition, SJP provided intensive training to selected LGBTI advocates and leaders on DRRM, legal environments, and mental health provisions to better prepare the community for future disasters. The 32 LGBTI participants, including one cisman, three ciswomen, 12 transgender women, and 19 other gender identities, are expected to continue sensitizing their communities using the knowledge and skills acquired in these trainings to ensure that they are better equipped should another disaster arise.

⁴ Photo courtesy of TWEET Foundation

Youth Leadership/ Young LGBTI Persons

The BLIAP programme, UNDP's Youth team and UNDP India successfully launched the first-of-its-kind initiative in India: Innovations Marketplace for Gender Equality (IMGE) amidst the COVID pandemic. The initiative focused on finding solutions to Gender Based Violence (GBV) and increasing livelihood opportunities for young LGBTI persons. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, the programme was able to provide an interactive platform for LGBTI youth to develop and launch innovative solutions for issues encountered by their communities. The programme was operational until July 2021, and it enabled a cohort of young LGBTI persons to develop social enterprises focused on a variety of areas, such as providing enabling education and employment for transgender and gender non-conforming children, co-working safe spaces for LGBTI youth, and leveraging technology to provide mental health services to LGBTI persons. Overall, this initiative aimed to foster social entrepreneurship and promote gender equality by empowering LGBTI youth to take an active role in addressing issues faced by their communities.



The success of the programme speaks volumes to the actual demand for these kinds of platforms — over 100 LGBTI youth innovators applied, of which 21 LGBTI entrepreneurs, social innovators and youth leaders (five transgender women, 10 ciswomen, and six cismen), were selected to join the three-month intensive mentorship and incubation programme, while a further 10 were selected for the Regional Youth Co: Lab Springboard Programme. The curriculum and mentorship sessions focused on developing skills such as financial management, design thinking, building a business model, professional networking skills, and other business skills crucial to turning their ideas into viable, sustainable social enterprises. The cohort comprised mainly of nascent and early-stage entrepreneurs,

most of whom had never been exposed to any entrepreneurial or business training. The varied online sessions, set against the backdrop of COVID-19, enabled the young entrepreneurs to learn online at their own pace whilst also ensuring that they were developing worthwhile skills and building their capacity as advocates. This was especially useful for those who were faced with unemployment or out of school as a result of the pandemic, a reality faced by many LGBTI Youth across the region. ² This would be their first opportunity to receive formal orientation and eventually pitch their diverse, innovative solutions to a panel of judges. More information on this initiative can be found [here](#).

BLIAP remains committed to supporting young LGBTI entrepreneurs through its programmes and plans to launch a scaled-up, regional LGBTI innovation challenge in partnership with UNDP's Youth Team in Q3 2023. Marginalized youth are proven expert problem solvers, given their position in society and daily challenges. However, from working with marginalized youth groups, it has been observed that they often need tailored or targeted support depending on their situation. Therefore, bigger, scaled-up interventions like the Regional LGBTI Inclusion Challenge need to be developed to ensure greater inclusion in youth training programmes on innovation and entrepreneurship, or startup development, and to bring marginalized groups together with other groups to share experiences and skills. This will help strengthen the impact and assist marginalized groups in developing skills in areas with less experience, such as business modelling and startup development.



In 2021, UNDP and UNESCO collaborated to conduct a mapping and desk review of online resources for and perceptions among young LGBTI persons and young key populations (YKPs) in Asia and the Pacific about digital security, digital literacy, privacy protection, and other aspects of their digital citizenship. The research, conducted by a team from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), aimed to understand the needs of LGBTI young people and YKPs in the AIDS response in the Asia-Pacific region regarding secure digital spaces and improved experiences of digital

citizenship. The findings of this study have informed the development of an online course on digital safety and security by UNDP and UNESCO, in collaboration with youth-led LGBTI and YKP networks in the Asia Pacific (Youth LEAD and Y-Peer). The course aims to bridge the gap between available online digital citizenship resources and capacity-building opportunities for these groups. Part 1 of the course was launched in Q4 2022, and Part 2 is scheduled for launch in Q2 2023.

Young LGBTI persons and YKPs are often exposed to a hostile societal and legal environment, and young LGBTI persons are particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment, including online. There is an emerging demand among young LGBTI persons and YKPs in the Asia-Pacific region for digital competencies to safely navigate online spaces, protect their personal data, and create positive and empowering online spaces and experiences for themselves and their peers. Based on the findings and recommendations of the mapping, UNDP and UNESCO, in partnership with Youth LEAD and Y-Peer, have developed online training materials to address the concerns and needs of young LGBTI and YKPs. Five YKP organizations used the online training materials to produce digital prevention and advocacy programmes that fit the context of the HIV situation in their respective countries. The short digital HIV programmes targeting stigma and discrimination, policy and advocacy and CSE can be found [here](#).

COVID- 19 and the Lasting Impact on the LGBTI Community

[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has not been equal for everyone, hitting marginalized communities disproportionately hard.](#) It has exacerbated existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities for LGBTI people and generated complex challenges for the communities. The livelihoods of many LGBTI people in the region were already precarious before the pandemic, and especially those working in the informal sector and/or not having adequate social protection coverage have been highly impacted. Access to services for information, prevention and care of COVID-19, and other crucial services, including primary care, SRHR, gender-affirming care, HIV prevention and treatment, and mental health care, has become increasingly difficult. Some of the same measures necessary to contain the spread of the virus, such as social distancing and lockdowns, have led to a documented increase in the incidence of gender-based and family violence for women and LGBTI people. LGBTI people, especially young LGBTI people, are often highly vulnerable to mental and physical violence when forced to stay home with families who may reject them. Access to community support is severely limited due to the pandemic.

In an open letter on ["COVID-19 to the LGBT community"](#) UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz stated that "those who already faced discrimination in accessing the health sector will only see existing barriers worsen" and "isolation may impose greater challenges upon those who carry out sex work and other types of informal work, as well as refugees, asylum seekers and other persons on the move." The BLIAP team was able to pivot rapidly during the pandemic to respond to the needs of civil society groups, communities and UNDP Country Offices and enabled continued delivery across the programme. The team also quickly adjusted to "going online" and utilized this as an opportunity to engage in exchanges and knowledge sharing between countries and stakeholders. which

would have been far more difficult, if not impossible, if they were held in person given locations and political sensitivities. This has allowed for interesting discussions and opportunities for further engagements.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

- Through the implementation of the small grants programme, the BLIAP team learned that short-term funding and uncertain financial support for LGBTI work can limit the possibility of coherent long-term strategic engagement and multi-year planning, ultimately curtailing the efforts of UNDP and its partners. Despite many impressive results produced by grant recipients within a short time frame, many struggled with timelines due to Covid-19 restrictions and border closures, especially in the Pacific region. The effects of short-term planning and budget allocations trickle down to project partners and funding recipients, highlighting the need for multi-year engagements to drive change at the policy and societal values level and build the capacity of stakeholders in a more effective and efficient manner. The BLIAP team will incorporate it into future programming efforts to achieve greater impact and sustainability.
- UNDP has learned invaluable lessons from its HIV, human rights and the Law programme. It has been realized that building trust, identifying strategic entry points, and taking a step-by-step approach are critical to creating sustainable partnerships and driving change. A thorough programme review has indicated that the ability of key staff to network with individuals and organizations, build global and regional relationships, and seize opportunities thoughtfully has been instrumental in the programme's success. The BLIAP team acknowledges that these factors need to be considered in all future interventions and engagements, particularly when working with marginalized communities, to ensure that partnerships are built on trust and that sustainable change is achieved.
- Stakeholders at the regional and national levels have emphasized the crucial need for technical assistance and strategic advocacy support in future initiatives. UNDP recognizes the importance of providing assistance to help stakeholders develop national and regional advocacy strategies, enhance financial management practices, improve business English skills, and build capacity in grant writing and other areas of need. By prioritizing these areas, UNDP aims to support stakeholders in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to create sustainable change and drive progress towards greater inclusion and equality for LGBTI individuals and communities.
- The programme recognized the importance of generating data to inform its advocacy work by conducting consultations with local LGBTI groups, stakeholders, and research. In the first phase of the programme, the focus was on collecting information on the lived realities of LGBTI people and the challenges they face. This data was then used to increase the visibility of LGBTI people, humanize “LGBTI rights,” and sensitize state officials. Subsequently, the programme conducted targeted research on priority areas identified jointly by community members to provide evidence-based advocacy tools for legal and policy developments, inform policymaking, and support capacity building. This approach resulted in the production of a significant volume of publications, videos, and other types of data, which have informed legal and policy reforms in Asia and the Pacific and beyond. A review of the programme emphasized that providing data to governments, donors, and even religious institutions supports the understanding that LGBTI rights are human rights that deserve protection.
- Through its work on laws and policies, the small grants programme, and its partnership with APF on NHRIS, the programme achieved a significant expansion of its geographic scope to the Pacific. Despite challenging operating environments and limited partner capacity on the ground, the programme successfully engaged with the Pacific community through partnerships with grassroots and regional organizations. Moving forward, it is crucial for the programme to continue its targeted efforts in reaching the communities in the Pacific to ensure that their needs and concerns are addressed effectively.
- With the current emerging landscape of national and regional LGBTI civil society advocacy organizations, the programme played an important role in the initial organizing efforts of these organizations. One impact of note was BLIAP's support for organizing one of the first regional efforts for the intersex community. Leaders from the intersex community were able to organize and convene one of the first regional advocacy events to support the specific needs of intersex people. This example was indicative of the BLIAP initiative being poised to support new synergies and fledgling advocacy organizations that emerged in the Asia Pacific region over the years. UNDP must continue to flexibly support new emerging LGBTI civil society organizations, especially around underserved communities.

- COVID-19 demonstrated a key need for organizations, such as UNDP, to be more adaptive, agile and responsive to the needs of communities in the face of multi-dimensional crises. UNDP responded by reviewing policies and practices and working with affected communities to better ensure critical needs were being met.

Looking forward- UNDP's continued engagement on LGBTI related issues

UNDP intends to leverage its distinctive position as a convener on social inclusion and human rights to advance and expand on the foundation established by the BLIAP programme. The UNDP BRH will persist in its commitment to promoting LGBTI-related issues, in addition to its efforts toward HIV prevention, human rights, and key populations. In light of current global challenges, it is crucial to safeguard the progress achieved thus far, and to uphold the measures necessary to prevent any regression. UNDP is unwavering in its pledge to support countries and communities throughout the region in realizing a future where inclusion, non-discrimination, and equality are actualized for all.

Programme Indicators 2022

Indicator 1: Number of protective legal instruments drafted, proposed, adopted, and/or implemented to promote or strengthen social inclusion of LGBTI people at the regional, national or subnational levels	Indicator 2: Number of government officials, parliamentarians, and members of judiciary engaged in dialogue on LGBTI inclusion through the programme	Indicator 3: Number of government departments engaged in multi-sectoral dialogue on LGBTI inclusion	Indicator 4: Number of NHRIs supported to integrate SOGIESC issues into their programming and/or implementing LGBTI-specific projects
Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 22 Target: 24 Result 2020-2021: 24 Result 2021-2022: 24	Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 0* Target: 80 Result 2020-2021: 33 Result 2021-2022: 165 *The programme has previously reported on no. of organizations/ departments rather than no individuals. The programme will begin to systematically measure number of government officials, parliamentarians, and members of judiciary engaged. New indicator since 2020; cumulation 2020-2021	Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 232 Target: 240 Result 2020-2021: 239 Result 2021-2022: 241	Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 5 Target: 7 Result 2020-2021: 7 Result 2021-2022: 12

Indicator 5: Number of civil society participants engaged in dialogue on LGBTI inclusion through the programme	Indicator 6: Number of LGBTI community groups supported to engage in dialogue and advocacy with governments, wider civil society, NHRIs, the business sector and other private sector actors on the development, implementation and monitoring of LGBTI inclusive and protective laws, policies and practices	Indicator 7: Number of multi-stakeholder dialogues held facilitating discussions between CSOs, government agencies, NHRIs, the business sector and other private sector actors
Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 0* Target: 50 Result 2020-2021: 571 Result 2021-2022: 893	Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 397 Target: 405* Result 2020-2021: 409 Result 2021-2022: 418	Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 232 Target: 240 Result 2020-2021: 239 Result 2021-2022: 241

*Programme has previously report on number of targeted beneficiaries/ human rights defenders (which includes other stakeholders and is not limited to civil society) and number of civil society organizations. The programme will begin to systematically measure number of civil society participants engaged in dialogue (in person and online).	*Note: most groups will not be new so incremental target proposed to be small	
--	--	--

Indicator 8: Number of instances where support to LGBTI advocates engage with human rights monitoring mechanisms results in inclusion of LGBTI and/or SOGIESC issues (recommendations made etc.)	Indicator 9: Number of youth entrepreneurship events organized in which SOGIE topics were integrated
Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 8 Target: 9 Result 2020-2021: 8 Result 2021-2022: 8* * 7 UPRs, 1 CRC submission. No related funding in 2020-2022	Cumulative over programme term Baseline: 2 (2019) Target: 4 Result 2020-2021: 6 Result 2021-2022: 8