



## **AsylumConnect Media Kit**

### **Media Contacts**

Katie Sgarro, Co-Founder & President

Phone: 646-602-5600 ext. 5658

Email: [press@asylumconnect.org](mailto:press@asylumconnect.org)

Website: [www.asylumconnect.org](http://www.asylumconnect.org)

### **About AsylumConnect**

AsylumConnect is a tech nonprofit providing the first ever digital resource platform for LGBTQ asylum. From leaving their dangerous home country to resettling in their new home, easily identifying and connecting with legitimate and LGBTQ-affirming lawyers and other direct service providers is often a matter of life-or-death for LGBTQ asylum seekers. Launched in 2016, the “AsylumConnect Catalog” is **the first and only resource website and mobile app designed for LGBTQ asylum**. LGBTQ asylum seekers and related marginalized LGBTQ populations (such as undocumented LGBTQ immigrants and homeless or isolated LGBTQ youth) use AsylumConnect as a free digital one-stop-shop referral site to meet their needs in all aspects of their lives, including where it is safe to go for: housing, legal, food, medical, mental health, community support, translation, education and employment, and more. Lawyers and other direct service providers also use AsylumConnect to gather verified resource referrals for their LGBTQ clients. AsylumConnect’s free website and mobile app can currently connect users with verified safe LGBTQ-and immigrant-friendly services in 25 states in the United States, Canada (as of April 2019), and Mexico (in response to recent U.S. asylum policy).

Since 2016, AsylumConnect’s free app has **connected over 11,000 unique users** to verified LGBTQ-and immigrant-friendly services in the U.S., and the number continues to grow.

### **Why AsylumConnect Is Needed**

There are 70 countries, mostly in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, where homosexual activity between consenting adults is illegal, according to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association’s (ILGA) 2019 [State-Sponsored Homophobia report](#). There are also currently six countries in which homosexuality is punishable by death. These include Iran, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen and parts of Somalia and northern Nigeria. The death penalty is also applied by non-state actors, including the Islamic state, in Syria and Iraq.

According to Amnesty International, even in countries where homosexuality has been decriminalized, LGBTQ people can still face violence, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and torture. An estimated **400 million LGBTQ people** continue to face the risk of criminal imprisonment due to their LGBTQ identity.



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*"I know that I either leave this place or die. Any information [on the LGBTQ asylum process] will be very valuable to me as I am all by myself here. I have no friends knowing about me nor any family member. **My only source is the internet.**"*

—Trans asylum seeker from the Middle East to AsylumConnect

*"I am planning to move to the U.S. to live like a normal human being without fear of persecution. **Show me the way.**"*

— Gay asylum seeker from the Middle East to AsylumConnect

As a result, every year, millions of people are forced to flee their home countries due to persecution based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

- The U.S. is facing an unprecedented backlog of asylum cases. The U.S. immigration court system currently has a backlog of over 900,000 cases. An [estimated 5 percent](#) of U.S. asylum claims are based on persecution of sexual orientation or gender identity, which suggests there are over 45,000 currently pending LGBTQ cases in the U.S.
- Additionally, [thousands](#) of LGBTQ people are seeking asylum in Canada, and the country's acceptance rate of asylum seekers is the [highest in 27 years](#).

The challenge for many LGBTQ asylum seekers is that this discrimination continues even in these "safe" havens. Health care facilities, shelters, legal opportunities, and the wider social services sector can be unsafe and biased. Prejudice from fellow non-LGBTQ asylum seekers, immigration judges and translators is rampant. As a result, LGBTQ asylum seekers often struggle to access legitimate local services and support, and face increased risk of detention, homelessness, and homophobic or transphobic behavior when accessing social services. Many are forced to give up on their asylum claim and face deportation to their dangerous home country.

AsylumConnect's free resource website and mobile app fills this information gap.

## **How AsylumConnect Started**

AsylumConnect co-founders Sy and Katie Sgarro met as college students at the University of Pennsylvania. As Sy shared his personal experiences seeking LGBTQ asylum in the U.S. and explained the persecution that LGBTQ people continue to face on a global scale, Katie realized that she had failed to speak out about her own LGBTQ identity in a country where she at least had that choice. Finding strength in each other, the two co-founded tech nonprofit AsylumConnect to build a comprehensive digital lifeline for persecuted LGBTQ people.

AsylumConnect is founded on the belief that there should never be a time when someone does not know where it is safe to go for help due to their LGBTQ identity or immigration status.



## Impact Data & Testimonials

Since launching the catalog pilot in 2016, AsylumConnect has connected **more than 11,000 unique users** to verified safe LGBTQ-and immigrant-friendly services in the U.S.

AsylumConnect is trusted by and listed as a recommended LGBTQ resettlement resource by numerous respected organizations and websites, including: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Trevor Project, Rainbow Railroad, Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) United Nations Office, The Asylumist, and Seattle.gov's Office of Immigrants & Refugee Affairs.

### Sample User Data (United States Resource Catalog):

#### 2019

- Average Monthly Active Users: 900+
- Unique Lifetime Users: 11,000+
- The U.S. catalog currently includes 338 verified unique LGBTQ- and immigrant-friendly organizations and 1,192 verified unique services distributed across 25 states

#### 2018

- Geographic Growth: By the end of 2018, the U.S. catalog grew to include 182 verified organizations and 788 verified services in 16 states
- Total Annual Users: 6,632 (**over 5x increase** from 2017) / Average Monthly Users: 595

### Sample User Testimonials:

“Thank you so much. I was trying to gather information such as yours, but **this is the most comprehensive I have ever read.**” — LGBTQ asylum seeker

“It’s wonderful to see AsylumConnect continue to thrive. I will be **needing it now more than ever.** A huge thanks to [AsylumConnect] for all the work and advocacy you are doing for us; especially a time like this.” — LGBTQ asylum seeker

“If AsylumConnect had existed when I was applying for asylum it would have made my life much easier. AsylumConnect’s **work truly saves lives.** I was homeless for about three years because I could not find services for undocumented lesbians, work, or anyone who could explain to me how the immigration process work[ed] and what my options were.” — LGBTQ asylee

“My office is glad to learn that AsylumConnect exists. **So many asylum-seekers don’t know where to turn & worry that ‘help’ will discriminate.**” — Asylum attorney focusing on LGBT/SOGI claims

“I’m so excited about AsylumConnect’s work. **It’s exactly what’s needed.** We have people getting on trains to reach us when we can’t help more people or people who need help in other



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parts of the country, we can use the AsylumConnect catalog to tell them where it is safe to go." — Nonprofit user

"The AsylumConnect catalog is **easy to use, and has a lot of helpful information** for asylum seekers in one place." — Nonprofit user

"I am so grateful for AsylumConnect. **This has given us hope.** Thanks for the information."  
— Family member of a LGBTQ asylum seeker being held in immigration detention

## Spokesperson Bios

### Katie Sgarro, AsylumConnect Co-Founder & President

Katie Sgarro is based in New York and is a social entrepreneur and LGBTQ advocate. During her senior year in college, she publicly "came out" in order to co-found AsylumConnect. Her experience denying her own LGBTQ identity drives her to ensure that other LGBTQ people live freely. Sgarro has led AsylumConnect for 5 years in establishing the first ever digital resource platform for LGBTQ asylum.



For her work on AsylumConnect, Sgarro was selected as the winner of MCC15's Millennium Peace Prize at the United Nations and the 2015 Business Today Impact Challenge. In 2017, she was named to the Clinton Foundation's Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U) Alumni Honor Roll of social innovators and as a Mogul Influencer. Sgarro was also named a *Washington Post's* WP BrandStudio Influencer in 2018. In 2019, Sgarro became a Roddenberry Fellow and joined Urban Justice Center's Social Justice Accelerator. In 2019, Sgarro was also selected as one of 24 emerging nonprofit leaders for American Express Leadership Academy's Converge Academy in Brooklyn, NY.

She has been a featured speaker on LGBTQ rights and public good technology, and her work has appeared in national outlets including *Teen Vogue*, *Forbes.com*, *The HuffPost*, *NowThis*, *The Advocate*, and *The Hill*. She received a B.A. cum laude in Health & Societies from the University of Pennsylvania and a M.S. in Management from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

More about Sgarro can be found at her website [www.katiesgarro.com](http://www.katiesgarro.com) and she can be followed on Twitter [@katiesgarro](https://twitter.com/katiesgarro).



### **Hans How, AsylumConnect Vice President**

As a current LGBTQ asylum seeker, Hans How knows first-hand how difficult it is to find safe help in a new country. He is a frequent speaker on LGBTQ rights, and his work with AsylumConnect has been featured in *The Daily Beast*, *The Bay Area Reporter*, and others.



How's previous experience includes raising corporate sponsorships for San Francisco Pride, and contributing to diversity and inclusion initiatives through his involvement with Out Leadership, a global LGBT+ business network, and StartOut, a nonprofit dedicated to fostering LGBTQ entrepreneurs.

How graduated from Wesleyan University with full scholarships from the Freeman Foundation, the American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce, and the U.S. Department of State. How is based in San Francisco, California and can be followed on Twitter at [@HansHow00](https://twitter.com/HansHow00).

### **Other Spokespersons**

AsylumConnect has a robust Advisory Council, which includes LGBTQ asylum seekers, asylees and refugees from Mexico, Russia, Egypt, Syria, Nigeria, Malaysia and Azerbaijan. There are times upon request where members of the Advisory Council will be available to speak to press.

More about the current members of AsylumConnect's Advisory Council is available: [www.asylumconnect.org/who-we-are](http://www.asylumconnect.org/who-we-are)

### **AsylumConnect Supporters**

In addition to a range of individual supporters across the nation, AsylumConnect has been fortunate to receive financial and in-kind support from the Roddenberry Foundation, U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants (USCRI), Clinton Foundation, Urban Justice Center Social Justice Accelerator, Brooklyn Community Foundation Immigrant Rights Fund, Calamus Foundation, Broadway CARES/Equity Fights AIDS, Clif Bar Family Foundation, J.M. Kaplan Fund, Miller Center's GSBI Social Entrepreneurship at the Margins Accelerator, and others.



## Recent Press

### September 2019 Teen Vogue

LGBTQ Asylum Seekers Face Layered Marginalization, So These Four Organizations Are Here to Help

[www.teenvogue.com/story/lgbtq-asylum-seekers-marginalization-four-organizations-help-resource-guide](http://www.teenvogue.com/story/lgbtq-asylum-seekers-marginalization-four-organizations-help-resource-guide)

### August 2019 Forbes.com

Katie Sgarro's AsylumConnect Helps LGBTQ Asylum Seekers Access Safe Services

[www.forbes.com/sites/mollysprayregen/2019/08/14/katie-sgarros-asylumconnect-helps-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-access-safe-services/#2791869bff84](http://www.forbes.com/sites/mollysprayregen/2019/08/14/katie-sgarros-asylumconnect-helps-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-access-safe-services/#2791869bff84)

### June 2019 Clinton Foundation's "Why Am I Telling You This?" Podcast

Stonewall 50: Pride, Progress, and the Future Fight for LGBTQ+ Rights (Podcast)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/stonewall-50-pride-progress-future-fight-for-lgbtq/id1462232601?i=1000442930121>

### June 2019 NowThis

AsylumConnect Helps LGBTQ+ Asylum Seekers Find Resources in the U.S. (Video)

<https://nowthisnews.com/videos/news/asylumconnect-helps-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-find-resources-in-the-us>

### May 2019 Philadelphia Gay News

Resource for LGBTQ Asylum Seeker Launches in Canada and Mexico

[www.epgn.com/news/national/14613-resource-for-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-launches-in-canada-and-mexico](http://www.epgn.com/news/national/14613-resource-for-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-launches-in-canada-and-mexico)

### May 2019 The Bay Area Reporter

LGBTs Visit US-Mexico Border, Meet Asylum Seekers

[www.ebar.com/news/news/275665/lgbts\\_visit\\_us-mexico\\_border\\_meet\\_asylum\\_seekers](http://www.ebar.com/news/news/275665/lgbts_visit_us-mexico_border_meet_asylum_seekers)

### March 2019 Urban Justice Center Social Justice Accelerator Announcement

<https://accelerator.urbanjustice.org/project-announcements>

### January 2019 The Advocate

LGBTQ Asylum Seekers Cannot Wait Safely in Mexico (Op-ed)

[www.advocate.com/commentary/2019/1/04/lgbtq-asylum-seekers-cannot-wait-safely-mexico](http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2019/1/04/lgbtq-asylum-seekers-cannot-wait-safely-mexico)



### **January 2019 Roddenberry Foundation Fellows List**

<https://roddenberryfoundation.org/our-work/roddenberry-fellowship/fellowship-in-action/2019-fellows/>

### **November 2018 The Advocate**

We Must Fight Trump's Asylum Attacks With Everything We Have (Op-ed)

[www.advocate.com/commentary/2018/11/12/we-must-fight-trumps-asylum-attacks-everything-we-have](http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2018/11/12/we-must-fight-trumps-asylum-attacks-everything-we-have)

### **Fall 2018 Unfunded List – Philanthropy News**

<https://unfundedlist.com/the-unfunded-list-2018>

### **August 2018 The Daily Beast**

The Malaysian Gay Man Fighting for His Life, and Many Other LGBT Asylum Seekers

[www.thedailybeast.com/the-malaysian-gay-man-fighting-for-his-life-and-many-other-lgbt-asylum-seekers](http://www.thedailybeast.com/the-malaysian-gay-man-fighting-for-his-life-and-many-other-lgbt-asylum-seekers)

### **July 2018 The Advocate**

Trump Policies Will Send LGBT Asylum Seekers to Their Deaths (Op-ed)

[www.advocate.com/commentary/2018/7/09/trump-policies-will-send-lgbt-asylum-seekers-their-deaths](http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2018/7/09/trump-policies-will-send-lgbt-asylum-seekers-their-deaths)

### **December 2017 The Clinton Foundation**

The Honor Roll: A young leader provides a lifeline for LGBTQ asylum seekers in the U.S.

<https://stories.clintonfoundation.org/the-honor-roll-a-young-leader-provides-a-lifeline-for-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-in-the-u-s-59b1de680539>

## **AsylumConnect's Social Media**

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