



ASYLUMCONNECT

<https://asylumconnect.org>

## **AsylumConnect Media Kit**

### **Media Contacts**

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### **About AsylumConnect**

AsylumConnect is a nonprofit providing **the world's first tech resource platform designed for those fleeing persecution due to sexual orientation or gender identity**. The organization's mission is to use technology to facilitate the safe navigation of people fleeing persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

From leaving their dangerous home country to resettlement, it is often a matter of life-or-death for persecuted LGBTQ+ people to be able to easily identify and connect with legitimate and LGBTQ+ affirming lawyers and other direct service providers. Launched in 2016 in the U.S., the "AsylumConnect Catalog" is the first resource website and mobile app designed for the tens of thousands of people fleeing persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identity each year. LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and other LGBTQ+ people in need (including undocumented LGBTQ+ immigrants and homeless LGBTQ+ youth) use AsylumConnect's free technology to find verified LGBTQ+ affirming and immigrant friendly legal, medical, mental health, and social services, 24/7. Lawyers also use the free tech resource platform to easily gather trusted verified medical, mental health and social service referrals for LGBTQ+ clients.

AsylumConnect is currently available in 25 U.S. states and Canada. The product also offers translated resource pages for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in Mexico and those who are still in transit to a safer destination country. Since 2016, AsylumConnect's free technology has connected thousands to verified LGBTQ+ friendly and immigrant friendly services. At scale, AsylumConnect will ensure *every* LGBTQ+ person knows where it is safe to go for help - regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status or income level.

### **Why AsylumConnect Is Needed**

There are still 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.

*"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, tens of thousands 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 1 million 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 50,000 currently pending LGBTQ cases in America.
- 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 they had failed to speak out about their own LGBTQ+ identity in a country where they at least had that choice. Finding strength in each other, the two co-founded tech nonprofit AsylumConnect to extend a comprehensive digital lifeline to other LGBTQ+ people in need.



AsylumConnect is founded on the belief that *every* LGBTQ+ person deserves the safety and freedom to live authentically.

## Impact Data & Testimonials

AsylumConnect's free technology has connected thousands to verified LGBTQ+ friendly and immigrant friendly services. Since 2016, AsylumConnect's free digital platform been accessed by **over 30,000 unique users in 160 countries.**

### Users By Country

- United States (launched in 2016): 24,000+
- Canada (launched in April 2019): 700+
- Mexico (initial resource page added in December 2018): 140+
- Other\*: 7,000+

\*Other countries include: India, Trinidad & Tobago, Nigeria, Turkey, Russia, Jamaica, Uganda

### Users By Device

- Desktop: 65%
- Mobile: 34%
- Tablet: 1%

### 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, LGBT 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 parts of the country, we can use AsylumConnect Catalog to tell them where it is safe to go.” — Nonprofit user



## Spokesperson Bios

### **Katie Sgarro, AsylumConnect Co-Founder & Executive Director**

Katie Sgarro is based in New York and is a social entrepreneur and LGBTQ+ advocate. During their senior year in college, they publicly “came out” about their sexual orientation to co-found



AsylumConnect. Their experience denying their own LGBTQ+ identity drives them to ensure that other LGBTQ+ people live freely. They have led AsylumConnect for 5 years in establishing the world’s first tech resource platform designed for those fleeing anti-LGBTQ+ persecution.

For their work on AsylumConnect, Katie was selected as the winner of MCC15’s Millennium Peace Prize at the UN (2015), named to the Clinton Foundation’s CGI U Alumni Honor Roll of social innovators (2017), and a *Washington Post*’s WP BrandStudio Influencer (2018). In 2019, they became a Roddenberry Fellow, joined Urban Justice Center’s Social Justice Accelerator, and was selected as 1 of 24 emerging social purpose leaders for American Express’ Converge Academy in Brooklyn, NY. They are also a member of the Forbes 30 Under 30 Class of 2020 (Law & Policy).

They have been a featured speaker on LGBTQ+ rights and public good technology, and their work has appeared in national outlets including *Teen Vogue*, *NowThis*, *The HuffPost*, *The Advocate*, and *The Hill*. Katie is also co-founder and board member of ed-tech nonprofit UPchieve. They received a B.A. cum laude with distinction 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 their website [www.katiesgarro.com](http://www.katiesgarro.com) and they can be followed on Twitter [@katiesgarro](https://twitter.com/katiesgarro).



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### **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+ 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:

<https://asylumconnect.org/about-us>

### **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, Clinton Foundation, Urban Justice Center (UJC) 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 (SEM) Accelerator, and others.



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## **Recent Press**

### **May 2020 Oprah Magazine**

Here's How You Can Celebrate Pride Virtually

[www.oprahmag.com/life/a32700263/virtual-pride-events-2020/](http://www.oprahmag.com/life/a32700263/virtual-pride-events-2020/)

### **April 2020 Fast Company**

World Changing Ideas Awards 2020: Apps Finalists and Honorable Mentions.

[www.fastcompany.com/90492187/world-changing-ideas-awards-2020-apps-finalists-and-honorable-mentions](http://www.fastcompany.com/90492187/world-changing-ideas-awards-2020-apps-finalists-and-honorable-mentions)

### **February 2020 The Washington Post's WP BrandStudio**

Q&A: Katie Sgarro, AsylumConnect

[www.linkedin.com/pulse/qa-katie-sgarro-asylumconnect-emily-chertow](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/qa-katie-sgarro-asylumconnect-emily-chertow)

### **December 2019 Forbes**

Forbes 30 Under 30, Class of 2020 (Law & Policy List)

[www.forbes.com/30-under-30/2020/law-policy](http://www.forbes.com/30-under-30/2020/law-policy)

### **November 2019 GO Magazine**

This New App For LGBTQ Asylum Seekers Is A Game-Changer

<http://gomag.com/article/this-new-app-for-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-is-a-game-changer>

### **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/#5db85d25ff84](http://www.forbes.com/sites/mollysprayregen/2019/08/14/katie-sgarros-asylumconnect-helps-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-access-safe-services/#5db85d25ff84)

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

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

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



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**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>

**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://roddeberrystation.org/our-work/roddeberrystation-fellowship/fellowship-in-action/2019-fellows>

**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>

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