



ASYLUMCONNECT

<https://asylumconnect.org>

AsylumConnect Media Kit

Media Contacts

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About AsylumConnect

AsylumConnect is a nonprofit organization providing **the world's first and only 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 LGBTQ+ status.

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 world's 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 immigrants and homeless youth) use AsylumConnect's free technology to find verified safe LGBTQ+ affirming and immigrant friendly legal, medical, mental health, and social services in seconds, 24/7. Lawyers also use the free resource platform to efficiently gather trusted verified medical, mental health and social service referrals for LGBTQ+ clients.

AsylumConnect is currently available in 30 U.S. states and Canada. In October 2020, in response to the Trump administration's Migrant Protection Protocols (or "Remain in Mexico") policy, the organization also released a custom version of its free technology in Mexico. With this expansion, AsylumConnect's resource website and app can connect LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants and other queer people in need with verified affirming services in Mexico including free lawyers, community centers, support groups, doctors, and housing. Additionally, AsylumConnect's product offers translated resource pages for those who are still in transit to a safer destination country. Since 2016, AsylumConnect's free technology has connected thousands to verified LGBTQ+ affirming and immigrant friendly services. At scale, AsylumConnect's technology will ensure *every* LGBTQ+ person knows where it is safe to go for help regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, race/ethnicity or income level.

Why AsylumConnect Is Needed

In over 80 countries it remains illegal or fundamentally unsafe to be LGBTQ+. Same-sex activity between consenting adults is subject to criminalization in approximately 70 countries. Of these



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70 countries, 31 carry a sentence of ten years or more in prison, and 12 countries still impose the death penalty. Twelve countries target gender identity through “cross-dressing” or “impersonation” laws. According to Amnesty International, even in countries where homosexuality has been decriminalized, LGBTQ+ people can still face violence, arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and torture.

*“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. Many turn to asylum and refugee protections as a lifeline.

- 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](#).
- Since its implementation in December 2018, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) policy has forced [over 67,000](#) asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while the U.S. immigration courts decide on their asylum cases.

The challenge for many persecuted LGBTQ+ people is that discrimination continues even in “safe” havens. Health care facilities, shelters, legal opportunities, and the wider social services sector in North America can be unsafe and biased. Prejudice from 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 Jamie Sgarro met as college students at the University of Pennsylvania. Sy shared his personal experience struggling to find safe resources during his own



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U.S. asylum process. Despite access to technology, upon arrival in the United States Sy struggled as a gay immigrant to know where it was safe to go for help to meet his basic needs, from finding legitimate pro bono legal representation to LGBTQ+ affirming health care, mental health support, housing, and educational opportunities. Coming from a conservative background, the feeling of not being able to live authentically deeply resonated with Jamie. Together, during their senior year at Penn, Sy and Jamie co-founded the tech nonprofit AsylumConnect to extend a digital lifeline to other persecuted and marginalized LGBTQ+ people.

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+ affirming and immigrant friendly services. Since 2016, AsylumConnect's tech resource platform been accessed by **over 40,000 users in 160 countries.**

Users By Country

- United States (launched in 2016): 28,000+
- Canada (launched in April 2019): 1,000+
- Mexico (preliminary static resource page added in December 2018; full resource platform launched in October 2020): 200+
- Other*: 10,000+

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

Verified Resource Coverage

So far, our trained volunteers have verified 1,000+ organizations and 3,900+ services for inclusion in AsylumConnect's free resource website and mobile app. (*Each resource is verified at least once every 6 months by our trained volunteers for maximum user safety and accuracy.)

- United States: 800+ verified organizations and 3,000+ verified services
- Canada: 170+ verified organizations and 500+ verified services

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*



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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

Jamie Sgarro, AsylumConnect Co-Founder & Executive Director



Jamie 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 6 years in establishing the world’s first tech resource platform designed for those fleeing persecution due to LGBTQ+ status.

For their work on AsylumConnect, Jamie 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 in 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*, *The Hill*, *Forbes* and *NBC OUT*.

Jamie 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 personal website www.jamiesgarro.com and they can be followed on Twitter [@jamiesgarro](https://twitter.com/jamiesgarro).



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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, Nigeria, and Malaysia. 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, 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, NYC Pride, Stonewall Community Foundation, and others.



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Sample Press

August 2020 NBC OUT

Trump proposals threaten LGBTQ asylum-seekers' hopes of refuge in U.S.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/trump-proposals-threaten-lgbtq-asylum-seekers-hopes-refuge-u-s-n1236736>

July 2020 The American Prospect

The Public Comment Battle to Save American Asylum

<https://prospect.org/justice/the-public-comment-battle-to-save-american-asylum>

July 2020 Forbes.com

Trump's New Asylum Regulations Could Have Devastating Effects For LGBTQ People. The Leaders Of AsylumConnect Explain Why.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mollysprayregen/2020/07/12/trumps-new-asylum-regulations-could-have-devastating-effects-for-lgbtq-people-the-leaders-of-asylumconnect-explain-why/#367fef0b6858>

June 2020 Between The Lines

AsylumConnect Helps LGBTQ Refugees Find Support Across U.S., Co-Hosts June 20 Virtual Pride

<https://pridesource.com/article/asylum-connect-helps-lgbtq-refugees-find-support-across-u-s-co-hosts-june-20-virtual-pride/>

June 2020 The Hill

This World Refugee Day and Pride month we need to save LGBTQ asylum (Op-ed)

<https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/503580-this-world-refugee-day-and-pride-month-we-need-to-save-lgbtq-asylum>

May 2020 Oprah Magazine

Here's How You Can Celebrate Pride Virtually

<https://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

December 2019 Forbes

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

www.forbes.com/30-under-30/2020/law-policy



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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

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

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>

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 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

March 2019 Urban Justice Center (UJC) 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

January 2019 Roddenberry Foundation Fellows List

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



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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

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

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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