



ASYLUMCONNECT

<https://asylumconnect.org>

AsylumConnect Media Kit

Media Contacts

AsylumConnect Press Team

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About AsylumConnect

We use technology to instantly match LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution with verified safe legal, medical, mental health and social service providers.

Co-founded by a trans American and gay asylum seeker at the University of Pennsylvania, AsylumConnect is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing **the world's first tech resource platform designed for LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution**. Since launching in 2016, AsylumConnect's free web and mobile resource platform has made over 140,000 matches between LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution (including asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented immigrants and homeless youth) and independently verified affirming legal, medical, mental health and social service providers.

AsylumConnect is available as a free website, mobile responsive web app (accessible via a web browser on a phone), and native iOS and Android mobile apps. The free resource platform is currently available to LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, Canada (as of April 2019), and Mexico (as of October 2020).

Why AsylumConnect Is Needed

In **80+ countries** it remains illegal or fundamentally unsafe to live openly as a LGBTQ+ person.

- Same-sex activity between consenting adults is subject to criminalization in approximately 70 countries
- Of these 70 countries, 31 carry a sentence of 10+ years in prison, and **12 countries still impose the death penalty**
- 12 countries target gender identity through 'cross-dressing' or 'impersonation' laws

*"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



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*“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 immigration case backlog. 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 70,000](#) asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while the U.S. immigration courts decide on their asylum cases.

The challenge for many LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution is that discrimination continues even in “safe” havens. Doctors, shelters, lawyers, and the wider social services sector in North America can be unsafe and biased for queer and trans people. LGBTQ+ asylum seekers especially often struggle to access legitimate local services and support, and face increased risk of detention, homelessness, and facing homophobic or transphobic behavior when accessing critical social services. Out of options, many are forced to give up on their legal claim and face deportation to their dangerous home country.

AsylumConnect is leveraging technology to fill the critical information gap separating LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution from the safe direct service providers that can help.

How AsylumConnect Started

AsylumConnect co-founders Sy and Jamie met as college students at the University of Pennsylvania. Sy shared his personal experience struggling to find safe resources during his own 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 for his asylum claim to LGBTQ+ affirming health care, mental health support, housing, and educational opportunities. As a trans man from a conservative background, the feeling of not being able to live authentically deeply resonated with Jamie.



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Together, during their senior year at Penn, Sy and Jamie co-founded the tech nonprofit AsylumConnect to extend the first ever 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

Since launching in 2016, the AsylumConnect platform has made **140,000+ matches** between LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution and independently verified affirming direct service providers. (*85% of matches to-date are from the United States.)

Highlights:

- United States: 121,000+ matches
- Canada: 4,000+ matches
- Mexico: 900+ matches

Verified Service Area Coverage:

The AsylumConnect web and mobile resource platform is currently available in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, Canada and Mexico. We also offer a translated international resource page for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees who are outside of North America or who are still in transit.

The platform currently lists **1,500+ organizations and 6,000+ services** vetted by trained volunteers* to be welcoming to LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and other LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution.¹

The most common verified service categories listed on AsylumConnect include: Mental Health, Legal, Medical, Community Support, and Education & Employment.

Additional Tech Platform Features:

- **Verification (safety)**: all direct service providers listed on AsylumConnect are vetted (and re-verified at least once every 6 months) by trained volunteers to be welcoming to LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and other LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution ([learn more about our vetting process](#))

¹*Prior to inclusion on AsylumConnect, trained volunteers verify that each direct service provider is: 1) active and legitimate, 2) LGBTQ+ friendly, and 3) accessible to asylum seekers and the undocumented community. Our trained volunteers also re-verify each provider listed on the platform at least once every 6 months for maximum user safety and quality control. ([Learn more.](#))



ASYLUMCONNECT

<https://asylumconnect.org>

- **Accessible:** AsylumConnect is available as a free [website](#) and on mobile (via a mobile-responsive web app and native [iOS and Android mobile apps](#))
- **Translation:** available in native English and over 100 additional languages on-demand via Google Translate (the AsylumConnect team is in the process of adding native Spanish translations to the platform for the US and Mexico in 2022)
- **Anonymity:** designed to protect users' confidentiality and privacy online
- **Search filters:** users can easily filter out services that require specific documentation (such as medical insurance, proof of age/income/residence, or a referral) to access
- **Public ratings and reviews:** once logged-in, users can share public ratings (one to five stars) and written reviews on all resources
- **Save and share resources:** once logged-in, users can also save and share their personalized resource list(s) via print, email or another AsylumConnect user account
- **Public resource submissions:** once logged-in, users can "suggest" new direct service providers in the US, Canada and Mexico that they think might be a fit for our platform via country-specific "Suggest New Resource" forms
- **Ownership over their own listing (service providers):** direct service providers who register for a free user account can also "claim" their organization's live profile page on AsylumConnect to help keep their organization's information up-to-date, 24/7

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 focused 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 parts of the country, we can use 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*

"A few years ago, through one of my tasks at Immigration Equality, I worked on improving our hotline and referral process, and I came across the AsylumConnect website. I started using the website as a way



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*to find resources for individuals so **I recognize the importance of the existence of this type of database and centralized information, and I can attest to its efficacy by the many individuals who benefitted from the information obtained.*** — Asylum paralegal at legal nonprofit

*"I am an international student here in the US. My family have cut me off completely because I got engaged to my now Fiancé. My VISA only allows me to work on campus. My campus is now closed due to COVID-19 and because of that my only source of income is non-existent. I have no money and no family support here to help me financially. **So I am stuck.**"* — LGBTQ+ international college student impacted by COVID-19

*"I'm a black gay asylum seeker that is about to be homeless and without any resources. **I don't have a work permit to work so with these COVID-19 crisis hard times I can't survive with no job.**"* — LGBTQ+ asylum seeker in need of safe resources during COVID-19

*"I'm in [the] process of asylum. I have court in less than two weeks. I'm afraid to get back to my country and I need to find here a job to exist. **Any advice or help will be [a] blessing.**"* — LGBTQ+ asylum seeker in New York in need of safe resources

*" I am looking for support [with the] asylum [process]. I am colombian and I have been in the States for almost two months ... however I don't know how the process is, **where can I find some help, a lawyer specialized in LGBTQ and so on...Could you give me some orientation?**"* — LGBTQ+ asylum seeker in Miami in need of safe resources



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Jamie Sgarro, AsylumConnect Co-Founder & Executive Director

Jamie Sgarro (he/him or they/them) is the co-founder and executive director of AsylumConnect. As a trans man who grew up in a conservative environment, Jamie remains personally motivated to ensure every persecuted trans and queer person has access to AsylumConnect’s vital service.

For his work on AsylumConnect, Jamie has earned national and international recognition for outstanding contribution in social impact as the recipient the Millennium Campus Network’s 2015 Millennium Peace Prize at the United Nations, member of the Clinton Foundation’s 2017 CGI U Alumni Honor Roll of social innovators, [2019 Roddenberry Fellow](#), [2020 Forbes 30 under 30 honoree](#) in Law & Policy, finalist in [Fast Company’s 2020 World Changing Ideas Awards](#), and a Gold Winner in the [2021 Passion Fund](#) by Linktree x Square.

Jamie has been a featured speaker on LGBTQ+ rights and technology for social good, and his work has appeared in national outlets including The HuffPost, Forbes, Teen Vogue, The Clinton Foundation’s “Why Am I Telling You This?” Podcast, The Advocate, The Hill, NowThis, and NBC OUT.

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



Hans How, AsylumConnect Board Member & Former Volunteer Vice President



As a LGBTQ+ asylee, 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.

As a gay Asian immigrant community leader, Hans cofounded and campaigned for the historic passage of Proposition C: Commissions For All, a ballot measure that will give all San Franciscans, regardless of immigration status, a voice, representation, and equal rights to serve on city commissions and advisory bodies. After Prop C was successfully passed by voters, Hans was appointed by the Board of Supervisors to serve as the Housing Commissioner to provide oversight of city funds to develop permanently affordable housing in the City and County of San Francisco.

Born and raised in Malaysia, Hans is a proud first-generation college graduate from Wesleyan University, where he earned full scholarships from the Freeman Foundation and the American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce.

Before joining the AsylumConnect governing board of directors, Hans previously served as the volunteer Vice President of AsylumConnect from June 2017 – May 2021.

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 countries including Mexico, Russia, Egypt, and Nigeria. 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 received financial and in-kind support from the Roddenberry Foundation, Clinton Foundation, Urban Justice Center Social Justice Accelerator, Brooklyn Community Foundation, Calamus Foundation, Broadway CARES/Equity Fights AIDS, Clif Bar Family Foundation, J.M. Kaplan Fund, Stonewall Community Foundation, Borealis Philanthropy's Collective Fund for Trans Communities, and others.



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Featured Press

June 2021 Los Angeles Blade

It's time to prioritize the plight of trans and queer refugees (Op-ed)

www.losangelesblade.com/2021/06/18/its-time-to-prioritize-the-plight-of-trans-and-queer-refugees

April 2021 Greatist

Millennial Change Makers

<https://greatist.com/live/millennial-change-makers>

March 2021 Authority Magazine

Young Change Makers: Why and How Jamie Sgarro of AsylumConnect Is Helping To Change Our World

<https://medium.com/authority-magazine/young-change-makers-why-and-how-jamie-sgarro-of-asylumconnect-is-helping-to-change-our-world-6a6206c51b79>

December 2020 The Daily Beast

Biden Wants to Fix Trump's Trans Detention Policy. Advocates Say He Needs to End It.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/biden-wants-to-fix-trumps-trans-detention-policy-advocates-say-he-needs-to-end-it>

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/>



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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

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>



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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>

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>

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>

AsylumConnect's Social Media

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