



# INSIGHTS REPORT

**2025**

For the period January to December 2025

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# IDAHOBIT 2026 Statement

**Theme: At the Heart of Democracy.**  
**CAISO's Wholeness & Justice Insights**  
**Executive Summary**

In commemoration of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) on 17 May, CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice is pleased to share the findings of its Insights from Wholeness and Justice Report based on the fifth year of providing clinical, legal, and wholeness development services to Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTQI+ communities. CAISO's annual Insights Report provides data on service provision and community interventions, discusses key findings, analyses problems presented by clients, and offers policy recommendations based on client and community engagement.

CAISO's Wholeness & Justice Programme offers free, clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions to members of the LGBTQI+ community who experience a violation. Interventions seek to enable healing and resilience, with a focus on trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming and intersex people. In 2025, the Programme completed intakes with 35 people, enlisted 28 new clients, and continued services with 27 clients from 2024. This brings the total number of intakes to the Programme, since its December 2020 launch, to 208 LGBTQI+ people.

Key insights from the Report are informed by the cumulative experiences of clients, knowledge garnered through engagement with the wider LGBTQI+ community in Trinidad & Tobago, and related interventions by the Wholeness & Justice Programme. Of significance to this year's Insights Report was the Court of Appeal's decision in March, to overturn the landmark 2018 High Court ruling in *Jones v Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago*, decriminalising consensual, same-sex intimacy. To LGBTQI+ citizens, the latest ruling echoed the longtime position of the State, NOT to recognise, include, or protect their human rights.

The report offers data and analysis each of these key insights based on the year's intake (with 34 people) and wider engagement with community members: 1) The breakdown and unreliability of national social services constrained the Programme's ability to effectively support clients. 2) Global and geopolitical dynamics undermine LGBTQI+ people's sense of safety and constrain our prospects for legal recognition and protection in Trinidad and Tobago. 3) Weak social support networks and limited meaningful interpersonal connections hinder LGBTQI+ individuals' engagement with systems for redress in Trinidad and Tobago. 4) Social displacement and housing instability undermine safety, limit access to stable, affirming living conditions for LGBTQI+ individuals, and increase their susceptibility to exploitation. 5) Identity affirming name changes strengthen LGBTQI+ individuals' confidence and capacity to navigate administrative and social systems. These insights highlight the persistent precarity experienced by LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, as a consequence of the Government's inaction to recognise, include, and protect their rights. They also reaffirm findings shared over the past five years of service provision.

In 2025, the significant issues (presenting problems) for which clients accessed the Programme were family violence, mental health support, name changes, employment and housing issues, assault/harassment, social services support, and intimate partner violence. Some clients accessed the Programme for multiple overlapping issues. This was often compounded by intersecting issues such as financial instability, food insecurity, disability, migrant status, sex work, and living with HIV. The discussion section explores these issues, as presented by enlisted clients and LGBTQI+ individuals who approached the Programme for support and guidance but did not continue with the process. The discussion and analysis of presenting problems also reflect the Programme team's wider engagement with community.

Reflecting on the fifth year of service provision, this report reveals the multiple ways that the Programme is responsive to LGBTQI+ community needs and remains committed to providing data and analysis. This provides evidence-based advocacy to address structure and state-sanctioned discrimination. The report proposes several policy recommendations that provide effective ways for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to meet its obligations to ensure rights and protection for LGBTQI+ people, prevent the perpetuation of discrimination, and provide mechanisms for redress. These policy recommendations align with the [2025 LGBTQI+ Policy Agenda](#).

CAISO continues to reiterate the long-standing calls to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for legislative and policy changes, most urgently and especially to the Equal Opportunity Act (EOA), to address the exclusion of sexual orientation and to add LGBTQI+ status under the protections. This is one significant, meaningful change that the Government can initiate to begin addressing the silences and gaps in legislation and procedures. This demand (in addition to the policy recommendations made in this report and the 2025 Policy Agenda) aligns with this year's IDAHOBIT theme, The Heart of Democracy, because truly democratic societies must be built on equity, justice, and inclusion for all citizens, including those who identify as LGBTQI+, and whose rights are under threat, worldwide.

For the meaningful and reparative inclusion and protection of LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, attention must be paid to different aspects of their lives that impact community members' ability to live fully and equally. This includes physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing, as well as livelihood opportunities. This is precisely why CAISO has embarked on the expansion of Wholeness & Justice through Growing Spaces, which seeks to empower LGBTQI+ community members through holistic, supportive, and sustainable resources that address immediate needs and foster long-term resilience, wellbeing, and self-advocacy. However, the State is responsible for ensuring the rights of all citizens. Hence, CAISO continues to advocate for policy and legislative changes that will ensure LGBTQI+ people can enjoy their rights and freedoms. As we do our part to work for social, economic, and cultural rights for a more just and inclusive society and world for all, CAISO invites the public to follow our work and support efforts to create change.

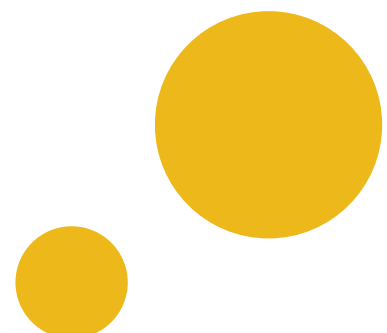
# About the Programme

CAISO established the Wholeness & Justice Programme in 2020 to expand access to wholeness, justice, and social services for diverse LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad & Tobago. The Programme is committed to responding to violations experienced by LGBTQI+ community members with an emphasis on trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming, and intersex people; and to delivering clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions that enable healing and resilience.

A violation is an action or inaction that infringes on a person's human rights. A violation can occur intentionally (for example, abuse or violence from a person/authority) or by omission (for example, a failure to protect from harm). Violations may include:

- Abuse from authorities and/or persons
- Infringement on safety and security of the person
- State failure to protect from abuse, exploitation, and/or discrimination
- Infringement on equality before the law and due process.

Community members who have experienced a violation are supported through a combination of legal, psychosocial, social work, peer navigation and referral services, and engagement with allies. The Wholeness and Justice team assesses each case and provides tailored service as capacity and resources permit, making referrals to appropriate providers as needed.



The main services offered to members of the LGBTQI+ community are:

1. **Legal support** for clients who have experienced a violation, act of discrimination, or abuse. The programme may enlist the support of partners based on available resources and capacity.

2. **Clinical and Casework support** for clients who require mental health support or need assistance with managing day-to-day challenges, while accessing other services.

3. **Wholeness Development** complements other service areas by providing additional guidance, support, and resources to clients, and connecting them to other relevant service providers, agencies, and bodies.

Additionally, Wholeness & Justice engages in community-level outreach, national and regional policy advocacy, strategic litigation, and capacity building for service providers.



### Wholeness & Justice Philosophy of Care

The Wholeness and Justice philosophy and framework is decolonial, feminist, queer-, trans-, and class-conscious. Our approach to care prioritises those most marginalised because of sex and gender (diverse genders and sexualities, people living with HIV, sex workers, among others).

Our philosophy of care operates within a **healing justice framework**, which recognises that marginalisation does not only create legal or structural issues, but also causes deep emotional, psychological, and social harms. These issues and harms shape the material conditions in people's lives and can destabilise their sense of place and wellbeing in the world. We affirm that addressing these harms is essential to achieving justice.

Therefore, client and community-based interventions are grounded in the understanding that activating meaningful legal and political forms of justice requires supporting psycho-social wellbeing and meeting basic needs. Basic needs include access to mental health support, other health services, safe housing, food security, and other forms of community care.

## A Closer Look at 2025

### An Overview

<b>35</b> Intake for 2025	<b>28</b> New clients enlisted
<b>27</b> Existing clients from 2024	<b>20</b> Closed cases
<b>148</b> Clients served since December 2020	<b>208</b> Intakes since December 2020

Wholeness & Justice provides services to **LGBTQI+** people who experience **violations** in Trinidad and Tobago.



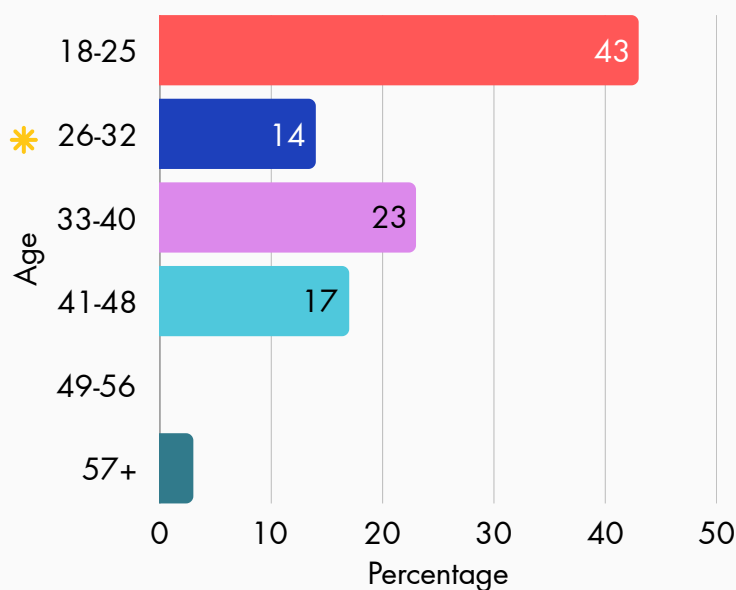
**LGBTQI+** is a shortened form of the words Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex. It is used to refer to both sexual orientation and gender identity.



The Programme has an expansive view of violations. We understand a **violation** to be any action or inaction that arbitrarily infringes on a person's human rights.

Like other social groups in Trinidad & Tobago, LGBTQI+ people should have the right to be protected by the law, equality before the law, and the freedom to express one's sexual and gender identity, without fear of violence or persecution.

### Age distribution among new clients in 2025



Due to legal limitations, the Programme can only provide direct services to adults. Children remain at risk of violence from family members, peers, adults, and the State based on their real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The State has an obligation to act in the best interest of the child by enacting laws and response mechanisms which protect children from this type of violence and the resulting fallouts.

Like 2024, almost 50% of new intakes were between the ages of 18 and 25. A similar proportion of people identified with expansive gender identities and sexual orientation.



**Gender** refers to the systems and ideas through which societies and cultures define, enact and enforce differences in expectations, roles and opportunities for people. The binary gender system affects how people understand gender and perceived biological sex, but these are not the same. There are variations in biological sex (intersex), and there are many forms of gender identity and expression.

**Sexual Orientation** refers to a person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards other people. Everyone has a sexual orientation, which is part of their identity. Sexual orientation is different from gender identity.

**Gender Identity** refers to a person's internal, deeply-felt sense of being a woman or man or neither. Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation.

**Gender identity distribution among new clients in 2024**

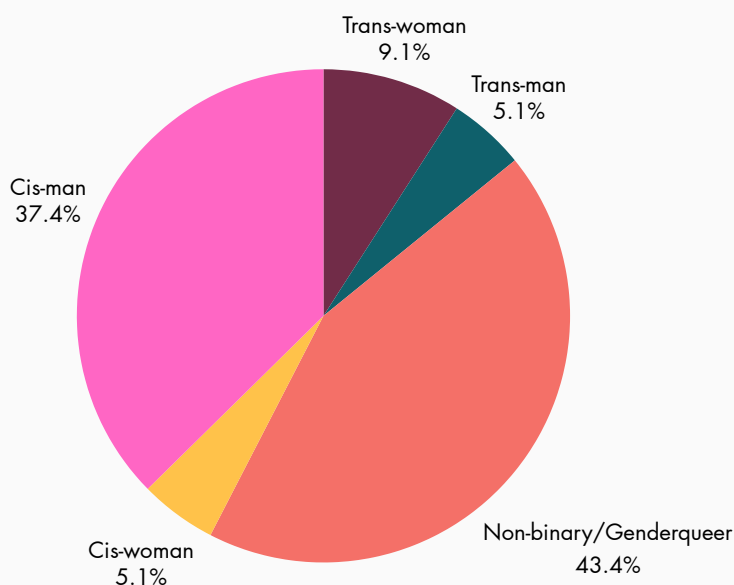


fig.2

**Sexual Orientation distribution among new clients in 2024**

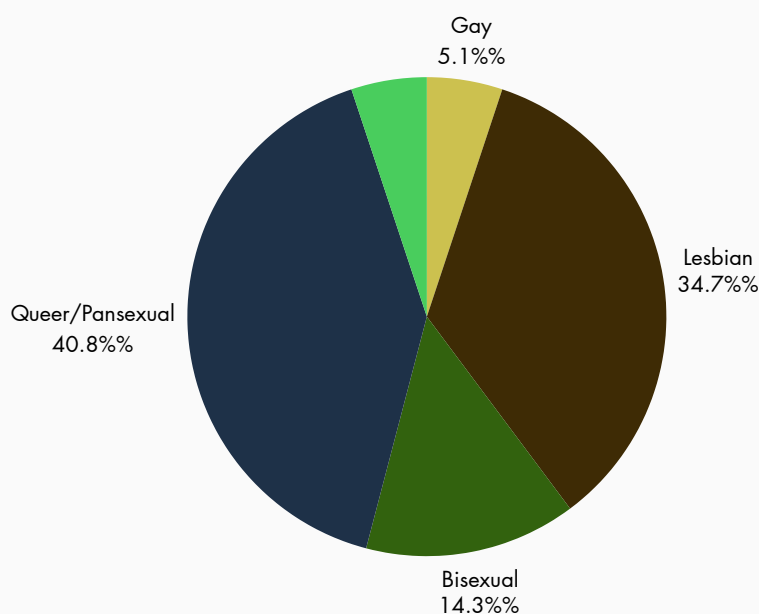


fig.3



**Cisgender** refers to a person whose gender identity matches the sex/gender they have been assigned at birth.

**Non-Binary/Genderqueer** describes a person's gender identity that exists outside of binary definitions of gender being man or woman. This means a person does not identify as one gender or another, but rather beyond, neither, or both. This category of gender is often described as fluid, though the way a person identifies their gender is also personal.

**Expansive gender identities and sexual orientations** refer to ways of understanding gender and sexuality beyond traditional or binary categories. These affirm the complexity and diversity of the human experience and support people in identifying themselves in ways that most authentically reflect who they are.

# Service Overview

## Distribution of services received by new clients in 2025

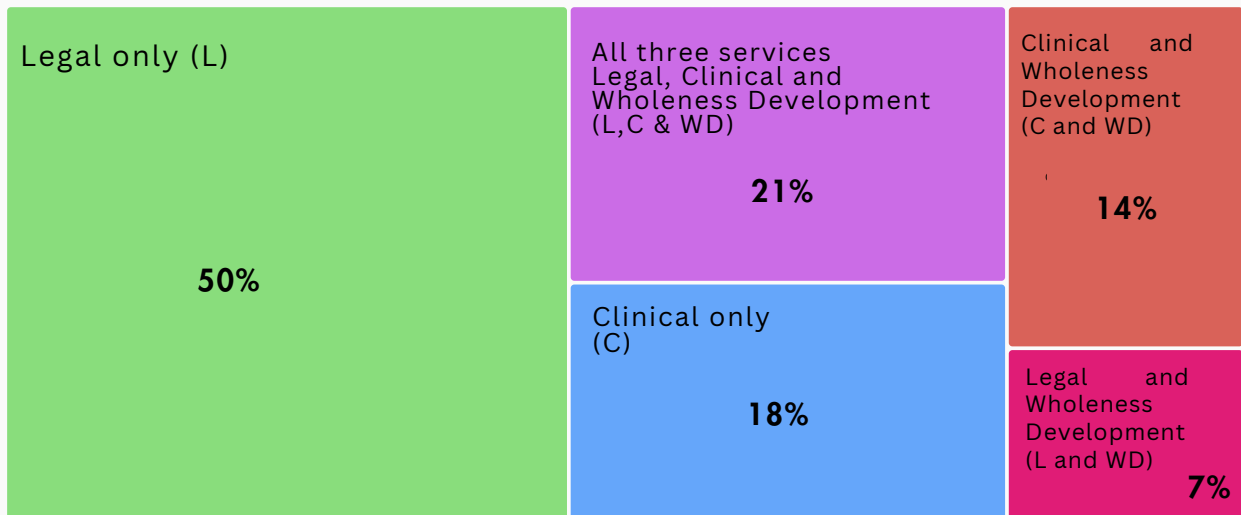


fig. 4

## Legal Services

Legal services begin with a preliminary legal consultation, which may result in legal representation by the Community Lawyer or support with an existing legal matter. Legal support includes providing the clients with guidance and advice about the related legal issues and processes. In instances where, through legal consultation, it is determined that another institution may be more suitable to address the matter, the Community Lawyer assists the client to navigate that institution and supports them throughout the process. During this period, the Community Lawyer extended consultation services, in varying degrees, to LGBTQI+ community members with legal questions unrelated to the experience of a violation.

INSIGHTS FROM LEGAL SERVICES 2025	
Clients	Services Provided
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% accessed legal services only</li> <li>• 85% accessed a combination of services that included legal services</li> <li>• 37% accessed legal services for documentation support</li> </ul>	Legal consultation and advice
	Legal process and institution navigation, including support for filing police reports, accessing trade union services, retrieving court documentation, assisting LGBTQI+ migrants with support systems and pathways
	Documentation support for accessing social services, estate planning, and transferral of property rights
	Deed Poll Application

## Key Interventions

Along with interventions that are specific to each client and the legal issues presented by each intake; the Wholeness and Justice Legal team frequently engages broader-based interventions geared towards advocating for the LGBTQI+ community and alleviating conditions that make community members susceptible to violations. In 2025, these included:

- **Documentation Support:** Through legal consultation, it was evident that several community members needed support with different types of legal documentation. Most notably, young gender expansive people sought to have their identities affirmed via a name change. For this, the Programme provided assistance with Deed Poll applications, which upon completion, allowed clients to have their chosen names affirmed on their national identity documents. Similarly, some clients sought support with affirming their familial relationships via estate planning and the transferral of property rights.

Many working-class and marginalised individuals face barriers to accessing competent legal services, often not considering them a priority due to more pressing concerns. This lack of access increases their susceptibility to exploitation. In 2025, members of the LGBTQI+ community approached the programme for assistance with reviewing and explaining various legal documents and verifying their legality to prevent unfair treatment. These included tenancy agreements, contracts for services, job agreements, among others. The Programme continues to extend this service to LGBTQI+ community members as a pre-emptive measure, given the absence of specific protections such as under the Equal Opportunity Act, that would otherwise make redress mechanisms accessible to people who have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in similar contexts.

- **Strategic Litigation:** The Programme remains committed to pursuing strategic litigation on behalf of clients and the wider LGBTQI+ community in Trinidad and Tobago. Key areas of interest continue to be around police abuse of power, employment-related issues, family and intimate partner violence, and queries around the Equal Opportunity Act (EOA). Proceedings related to police abuse of power and employment matters, reported on previously, are ongoing.
- **Ready, Set, Know: Navigating Legal Processes for LGBTQI+ People in Trinidad and Tobago:** This guide is the second instalment in the Programme’s “Ready, Set, Know!” series which seeks to support LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago in navigating national services for support and/or redress. It affirms the rights of LGBTQI+ people to redress and other legal services and provides guidance on how to navigate these meaningfully, with awareness of specific community experiences and needs. The guide was launched at a Community Share Space, which was facilitated by the Programme’s legal team at which best practices for navigating legal processes were shared.



## Clinical & Social Services

The Clinical team spearheads all clinical interventions including psychosocial support, complex trauma therapy, support with social, economic, and personal issues, and social services navigation. Interventions focus on providing LGBTQI+ people who experience violations, mental and emotional support while they receive legal services and navigate relevant institutions and legal processes. The Clinical team aims to equip clients with skills to cope with their experiences of violation and trauma and to manage stress and day-to-day challenges. Ultimately, all clinical interventions focus on enabling healing and resilience in addition to encouraging self-advocacy and self-empowerment. The details below focus on the 2025 intake of clients and assessments.

INSIGHTS FROM CLINICAL SERVICES 2025	
Clients	Services Provided
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18% accessed clinical services only</li> <li>• 60% accessed a combination of services that included clinical services</li> <li>• 29% presented with a need for mental health support including suicide risk</li> </ul>	Clinical interventions and support for clients with legal cases (in particular, matters related to discrimination and harassment, family violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, unfair employment dismissals, and other associated traumas)
	Supplementary support to clients navigating public mental healthcare
	Casework support for clients seeking to navigate social services
	Clinical therapy, empathetic listening
	Referrals for psychiatric care

## Key Interventions

As with legal services, the Wholeness and Justice Clinical team designs and offers services that extend beyond individual clients. These seek to address pervading community needs and gaps that exist for LGBTQI+ people seeking access to support services. In 2025, they included:

- **Navigation Support** – This is an intervention provided by Wholeness and Justice’s Clinical team, led by the Community Caseworker, to support community members (most often those with compounding vulnerabilities) and supplement what is offered by the Programme. Specifically, the Programme offered support for clients to apply for social service grants (for food, housing, medication, supplemental income), public mental healthcare (for longer term clinical care, pharmacotherapy, or psychiatric intervention), and HIV care and treatment.
- **Capacity building and public education webinars** – Facilitated by the Clinical team and informed by insights from client engagement, these webinars have a dual intent: strengthening the skills and capacity of clinical service providers catering to LGBTQI+ people and building awareness among LGBTQI+ people. The ultimate aim is to expand the landscape of available care for LGBTQI+ people, nationally and regionally.

In 2025, Wholeness and Justice hosted one (1) clinical webinar – namely: **Fault Lines of Care: LGBTQI+ Marginalisation in Crisis:**

Noting significant client unease in response to a number of variables, including increased geopolitical volatility, the overturning of the 2018 decriminalisation judgment, and extreme weather events, the Wholeness and Justice Clinical Team decided to convene a webinar on discussion how to manage care for LGBTQI+ community members amidst various crisis points.

Open to community members, mental health practitioners, social service workers, and disaster relief personnel, the webinar explored how community members experience exclusion and trauma during times of crisis and ways to support them.

## Wholeness Development Services

Wholeness development services are a key component of the Wholeness & Justice Programme, implemented through the coordinated efforts of the Wholeness & Justice team, Community Outreach Officer, and other staff members. These services seek to respond to client needs that intersect with and/or exacerbate their experience of violations, such as housing, food support, access to safe transportation and health care, among others. The Programme has found that such needs increase a client's risk of exposure to violence and limit their responsiveness to legal and clinical interventions. Wholeness development services are a key component of the support the Programme provides and underpin the philosophy of Wholeness and Justice.

INSIGHTS FROM WHOLENESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES 2024	
Clients	Services Provided
21% accessed a combination of services that included wholeness development services	Monthly food support to clients and other community members with intersecting vulnerabilities (i.e. priority groups who experience multiple challenges: people of trans experience, people living with HIV, migrants, and/or people engaged in sex work).
	Clothing and food support raised through community donations.

## Key Interventions

Key Wholeness Development interventions are targeted at providing the LGBTQI+ community with resources, information, experiences, and opportunities that enrich their lives, and address areas that make them more vulnerable to violence and other forms of marginalisation. In 2025, interventions included continued strategic advocacy, community outreach activities, food support, resource guides, and public education materials.

**Strategic and Evidence-Based Advocacy:** The Wholeness & Justice Programme provides insights and data that inform the organisation's evidence-based advocacy. These strategic advocacy efforts are directed towards the State, service providers, and other stakeholders to include and protect the rights of LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as to improve community members' experiences with different services. Also, team members frequently present data from our work, along with insights into our philosophy and programming, at various regional and international forums and conferences. These engagements in 2025 included the Okra Collaborative Convening led by Black Feminist Futures in Cartagena, Colombia and the European Union's NGO Human Rights Forum in Brussels, Belgium, among others. Continued strategic advocacy efforts include: the Add all Three Campaign, LGBTQI+ Workplace Policy and Sensitivity training workshops, engaging with Regional Human Rights Mechanisms, and launching the 2025 LGBTQI+ Policy Agenda.

1. **Add All Three: Amend the EOA Campaign** - a call to add protections based on LGBTQI+ status, age, and health conditions, to the 26-year-old law. Since 2011, CAISO has focused attention on the Equal Opportunity Act and campaigned for legislative amendments to add three protections (Age, HIV, Sexual Orientation) to the EOA. The campaign was revamped in 2018 to name Age, Health, LGBTI status – as the three needed additions to reflect a wider range of inclusions. Supported through partnerships with civil society organisations and the Equal Opportunity Commission, the campaign featured a series of public education campaigns to increase awareness of the Act and the call for amendments.

2. **LGBTQI+ Workplace Policy and Sensitivity Training** – This training workshop series, which began in 2022, offers different-sized public and private sector businesses and organisations varying packages to support their endeavours to create an enabling and inclusive work environment. This type of environment considers the needs of LGBTQI+ people and seeks to implement measures these needs. Components of the workshop include gender and sexuality sensitivity training, as well as a discussion of barriers to inclusion in the workplace. It is guided by a toolkit, created by CAISO, offering practical guidance for successful implementation.
3. **Regional Human Rights Mechanisms** – Data and community insights gained through the Programme continues to support advocacy efforts on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago’s LGBTQI+ community in regional spaces and forums. CAISO, through its membership in the Organisation of American States (OAS) LGBTTTI Coalition continues to seek avenues to negotiate with regional human rights mechanisms via the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, for the advancement of the rights of LGBTQI+ community in Trinidad and Tobago. Alliance building with other human rights CSOs and professionals in the English-Speaking Caribbean countries remains a central part of our mission. We continue to strategise regionally and collaboratively for an inclusive and enabling region via forums like CARIFLAG’s (Caribbean Forum for the Liberation and Acceptance of all Genders and Sexualities) monthly Regional Gyaff, initiated in 2024.
4. **2025 LGBTQI+ Policy Agenda** -- CAISO has co-led policy agenda-setting with community partners and organisations since 2010, and through Alliance for Justice and Diversity since 2015. The 2020 Policy Agenda with 13 Action Points guided our policy and legislative advocacy from 2020 to 2024. During that time, CAISO produced research and data to support policy recommendations through Insights from our Wholeness & Justice Programme and engagement with community members. Through annual Insights Reports, research from resource guides, and the Beyond Decriminalisation Position Paper, CAISO developed several policy recommendations, which guided the work of updating and developing the 2025 Policy Agenda. CAISO engaged with community partners and organisations through convenings and through a Community Share Space with the wider LGBTQI+ community to gather thoughts, concerns, and issues for identifying priority areas – and specifically reflecting on needs around rights, advocacy, and empowerment.

**Community outreach activities** included spaces and moments for solidarity, community-building, and reflection. These included:

- 1. Community Share Space events** facilitated by Wholeness & Justice team members. The first one was held on 20 February 2025 and focused on **“Navigating Legal Processes for LGBTQI+ People”** where we launched a resource guide for community members. The legal team shared an overview of this resource guide. The second one focused on the policy agenda work and was led by the Wholeness & Justice policy team on 29 May 2025 discussing **“The Way Forward – Policy Agenda 2025.”** This was a community meeting to discuss, review, and affirm the 2025 LGBTQI+ Policy Agenda.
- 2. IDAHOBIT Solidarity Campaign:** CAISO invited civil society and regional partners to support a solidarity campaign for IDAHOBIT – responding to the Appeal Court’s decision to overturn the 2018 decriminalisation judgement and supporting the organisation’s call on Parliament to act and end LGBTQI+ discrimination. Seven (7) civil society organisations and regional groups responded and submitted solidarity statements to CAISO that were shared across social media.
- 3. Trans Day of Visibility (TDOV) and Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR): Regional Community Gatherings:** The Programme continued marking auspicious days for the trans community with regional events for community gathering, sharing, and mobilisation. TDOV 2025 (in March) focused on **“Community, Collaboration, Healing”** featuring three speakers (trans leaders from Guyana, Jamaica, and Dominican Republic) - to create a space for people of trans experience and trans-led organisations to discuss strategies to confront invisibility, misinformation, and erasure. TDOR 2025 (in November) focused on **“Archiving as Resistance”** – in partnership with TT Transgender Coalition and Guyana Trans United – to share information about queer archiving and how we preserve our history through collecting oral stories, community-based research, and activism.

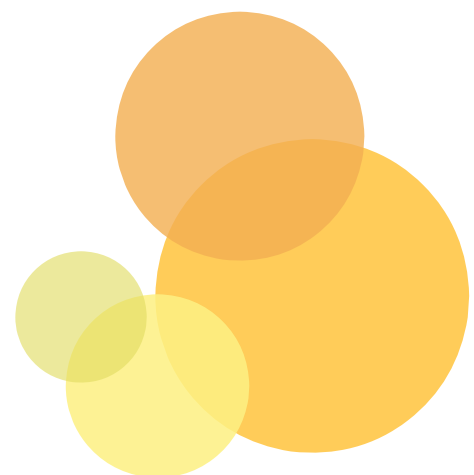
### Curated community messaging

The Programme developed messages on issues of concern to community members via traditional media and social media platforms - in coordination with the organisation's media team. Contributions included the "Wholeness Wednesdays" campaign as well as several media interviews and media releases. Among topics covered were the Appeal Court's overturning of the 2018 High Court judgement and a call for the Government of Trinidad & Tobago to change discriminatory laws.

### Resource guides and public education material

The Programme's commitment to knowledge production for public education and community mobilisation resulted in the launch of the aforementioned ***Ready Set Know: Navigating Legal Processes for LGBTQI+ People in Trinidad & Tobago***, and the legal education video, **Etiquette for Remote Court Matters and Hearings**.

Further, the ***Inclusive Futures*** project was launched early in 2025 and included a social media campaign, a video series, and the companion factsheet that provides information about the anti-rights and anti-gender movement and how they affect the Caribbean region. The Factsheet also provides insights into barriers and discrimination faced by LGBTQI+ communities, affirmation of trans identities, and shares the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).



## Client and Community Support

In 2025, the Programme provided emergency financial support to clients in the amount of TT\$105,475.00 to ease circumstances that exacerbate their ongoing violation experience. The support covered food, housing, legal, medical, and transportation expenses. In response to rising food costs, the Programme increased the amount of support per client assisted.

CAISO also offered food support and other resources to non-clients who are vulnerable members of the LGBTQI+ community. In 2025, CAISO worked with community partner Trinidad & Tobago Transgender Coalition to distribute food support to community members through the Pride Food Drive and the Holiday Food Drive. As in previous years, priority groups in 2025 included trans people, migrants, people engaged in sex work, and people living with HIV.

The table below provides a breakdown of support provided.

2025 Client Emergency Support   Community Food Support & Fundraising			
Activity	Target Group	Total	Resources
Food Support	Monthly support to 8-10 clients and community members	Distributed 108 food cards, food grants (bank transfers) and hampers, valued at TTD \$85,600	CAISO's Wholeness and Justice Emergency Support
LGBTQI+ Community Food Bank	23+ no-income and low-income clients and community members supported through community food drive and donations	Valued at TTD \$8,850	Donations from Individual Donors

## Key Insights

Key insights are informed by the cumulative experiences of clients, knowledge garnered through engagements with the wider LGBTQI+ community in Trinidad & Tobago, and related interventions by the Wholeness & Justice Programme. These insights highlight the persistent precarity experienced by LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago as a result of State inaction to recognise, include, and protect their rights. They reaffirm findings shared over the past five years of service provision.



**The breakdown and unreliability of national social services constrain the Programme's ability to effectively support clients.**

The Programme's role in Trinidad and Tobago has evolved from operating as a resource for the LGBTQI+ community to being a de facto primary point of care for community members, many of whom present with complex and intersecting needs. This includes housing instability, unmet healthcare needs, and psychosocial distress, which extend beyond the Programme's mandate and capacity. This shift is as a result of a combination of structural discrimination against LGBTQI+ people, as noted in previous reports, and the broader unreliability and inconsistency of these national social service systems.

Repeated client interactions with national social services, as reported to the Community Caseworker and Programme Officer, characterise them as demotivating, difficult, and too often disappointing. Clients frequently report feeling excluded from these services, even when they have a clear and legitimate need. Among barriers inhibiting access to services are rigid eligibility criteria (such as the requirement for a permanent address), overly bureaucratic processes, and restrictive thresholds for assistance. For example, clients in urgent need of food assistance are often deemed ineligible due to narrowly defined qualification criteria, such as formal employment status, despite having irregular and insufficient income, relative to their basic needs.

Gaps in public mental healthcare further illustrate these systemic challenges. Clients have approached the Programme after being unable to access consistent support within the public system. Others reported that service providers lack sufficient understanding of LGBTQI+ identities and experiences, resulting in inadequate or inappropriate care. This is considered a violation by the Programme. Effective mental health support often requires the combination of psychological care in the form of talk therapy and psychiatric care in the form of medication. In many instances, clients indicate that the support they are offered is limited to medication, without accompanying psychosocial support as practitioners are ill-equipped to address issues faced by LGBTQI+ people. These experiences reveal the extent to which the public health care system fails LGBTQI+ clients and is unable to address their complex challenges.

These systemic failures were particularly apparent in a 2025 case involving a client in acute suicidal crisis. The Programme had to intervene directly after unsuccessful attempts to contact the national suicide hotline, which was unresponsive. Efforts to secure timely emergency medical assistance were also unsuccessful, necessitating immediate crisis triage by the Programme staff. Scenarios like this put sustained pressure on the Programme's resource capacity, while underscoring systemic gaps in the State's provision of inclusive, accessible, and responsive social protections.

This case highlights the extent to which LGBTQI+ persons are underserved and, in many cases, unable to rely on public systems to meet basic needs. In the absence of broader structural intervention, the Programme will continue to absorb demands beyond its capacity and mandate, limiting its ability to provide effective and sustainable support.

So, there is a critical need for targeted State investment and reform to strengthen the accessibility, inclusivity, and responsiveness of social services. This should include the removal of discriminatory barriers, expansion of psychosocial support, and improvement of accountability mechanisms to ensure reliable service delivery.



## **Global and geopolitical dynamics undermine LGBTQI+ people's sense of safety and constrain prospects of legal recognition and protection in Trinidad and Tobago**

The cumulative experiences of LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago are not solely affected by domestic laws and/or local attitudes. Contemporary global, geopolitical shifts, and Trinidad and Tobago's positioning within them, particularly given the rise of anti-rights and conservatism, have compromised the community's sense of safety and confidence in the trajectory of legal recognition and protection, locally.

Previous Insights Reports have noted that the sustained flow of anti-rights ideology from the Global North has increasingly shaped local discourse and practice. One effect of this has been the normalisation of stigma against LGBTQI+ people and increased instances of hostility and violence towards them. Notable shifts in global power and governance in 2025 have intensified polarisation on issues of gender and sexuality. Materially, these shifts have influenced donor priorities and geopolitical commitments, resulting in declining availability and sustainability of financial support for human rights work globally. The reduction in funding has limited the service provision and advocacy capacity of organisations working on intersectional issues and ultimately weakened protective and responsive community structures that are critical in the contemporary moment of legal and social vulnerability. Community members have shared with the clinical team that geopolitical uncertainties in the Caribbean region have compounded feelings of insecurity.

This volatile global moment has coincided with local developments that have further undermined the LGBTQI+ community's feelings of safety, especially those who are migrants or seeking to migrate. The closure of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Trinidad and Tobago at the end of August 2025, has been perceived by those most affected as abandonment at a time of heightened risk. For Wholeness & Justice, UNHCR's withdrawal widened the gap in community support for migrant clients experiencing heightened vulnerability.

Added to this, the recriminalisation of consensual same-sex intimacy as a result of the Appeal Court's decision to overturn the 2018 Judgement (Jones vs. T&T) marked a significant legal regression that heightened anxieties within the community about the likelihood of legal recognition and protection. These concerns were further exacerbated by political uncertainty locally, and the perceived alignment between the incoming government and global anti-rights ideologies.

All together, these developments served to reinforce sentiment within the community that both domestic and international safeguards for LGBTQI+ rights are weakening. In short, insecurity among community members deepened in 2025, while prospects for sustained legal recognition and protection remain increasingly constrained. This illustrates the need for increased coordination and commitment among stakeholders, including local and regional organisations and international actors, to rebuild protective frameworks to mitigate the impact of funding volatility and insecurities associated with global shifts.



**Weak social support networks and limited meaningful interpersonal connections hinder LGBTQI+ individuals' engagement with systems for redress in Trinidad and Tobago**

The ability of LGBTQI+ individuals to seek redress and engage with formal systems of protection in Trinidad and Tobago is significantly shaped by the strength or absence of social support networks. Family and close interpersonal relationships often serve as the first point of protection or harm for community members. As the Programme has consistently noted, the family and interpersonal relationships of many LGBTQI+ people are often characterised by a lack of acceptance, rejection, and/or violence. These experiences fundamentally undermine their sense of safety, belonging, and stability.

Family violence and the lack of acceptance remain consistent sources of vulnerability for community members. As has been previously identified, individuals who disclose as being or are perceived to be LGBTQI+ often face economic, emotional, or physical abuse within their households.

The result of this abuse is displacement, with several clients reporting they have had to leave their homes without adequate resources and support. This has resulted in housing instability, food insecurity, often exacerbated by unemployment. In these instances, immediate survival needs take precedence over pursuing legal or institutional redress, even in cases where clients may have strong legal claims.

We have found that the lack of strong interpersonal relationships such as friends, partners, or general community networks, contributes to a client's feeling of isolation and reinforces feelings of unsafety. The Wholeness & Justice team has also noted that clients who lack trusted individuals to provide emotional validation and practical guidance are less likely to report incidents and navigate complex legal and administrative systems for redress or support. Unfortunately, feelings of isolation are often intensified by the client's internalised stigma, leading to self-censorship, diminished self-worth, and reluctance to assert their rights.

These circumstances may result in the client disengaging from systems of redress and also from the Programme. Several community members have, over the years, engaged the Programme for support and assistance, initiated complaints or described their experiences, but took no further action due to lack of social support, especially considering the emotional and material costs to them.

The Programme recognises that the absence of stable social networks makes it more difficult for clients to withstand the demands of legal processes, particularly in an environment where institutional responses are characteristically slow, unreliable and insensitive to the specific experiences of LGBTQI+ people. Therefore, in addition to other identified structural barriers to justice for LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, weak social support networks and limited meaningful interpersonal connections also act as significant barriers to justice for community members. As a result, violations often go unreported or unresolved, which reinforces cycles of marginalisation and insecurity.

To address this, there is the need for targeted investment by the Government in trauma-informed, community-based support systems, including safe housing and psychosocial services. This ought to be combined with efforts to strengthen family engagements and public education initiatives to reduce stigma and discrimination. These will be central to enabling community members to engage with systems of redress and improve the effectiveness of protection and response frameworks.



**Social displacement and housing instability undermine safety, limit access to stable, affirming living conditions for LGBTQI+ individuals, and increase susceptibility to exploitation**

Access to safe, stable, and affirming housing remains a critical challenge for LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, with social displacement being both cause and consequence of broader vulnerability. Experiences of rejection, family violence, and a lack of acceptance within households frequently force individuals out of their homes, resulting in housing instability, and in some cases, homelessness. The absence of secure living arrangements not only undermines the immediate safety of these community members, but also disrupts their access to employment, health care, and social support, which compound their experiences of marginalisation.

In 2025, these challenges were exacerbated by broader economic pressures, including labour retrenchments that have disproportionately affected vulnerable members of the community. Several community members reported job losses during the year, which further destabilised their housing situation and ability to sustain themselves. Without consistent income, many community members are forced into precarious living arrangements, including temporary stays with acquaintances, unsafe shared housing, or transactional arrangements that expose them to additional risks.

The Programme noted how housing instability significantly increased community members' susceptibility to exploitation. Individuals facing urgent needs (particularly with food and shelter) often have limited bargaining power and were more likely to accept unsafe or exploitative working conditions. Some community members reported exploitative labour practices, particularly within private security service companies, where informal or insecure employment arrangements left them vulnerable to underpayment and coercive conditions. Fears of job loss, retaliation, or further displacement prevent workers from reporting such forms of exploitation or seeking redress.

These issues are further compounded by the lack of access to safe and stable living environments. Even when housing is available, it is often not safe or inclusive. Clients report being exposed to harassment, discrimination, or violence from family members, landlords, or neighbours. This contributes to a persistent sense of unsafety and instability that limits their ability to establish routines, maintain employment, or engage with systems for employment.

As such, social displacement and housing instability create (and perpetuate) a cycle of vulnerability in which at-risk LGBTQI+ people are increasingly pushed into precarious conditions. The intersection of economic insecurity, unsafe housing, and exploitative labour practices does not just undermine personal safety but also restricts the potential of pathways for redress. Support for safe and inclusive housing options for the community is crucial. Likewise, strengthening labour protections and expanding access to job support, sustained legal assistance, and reliable social services will significantly address the vulnerability experienced by community members.



**Identity affirming name changes strengthen LGBTQI+ individuals' confidence and capacity to navigate administrative and social systems**


In the absence of legal gender recognition in Trinidad and Tobago, name changes have emerged as a critical pathway for gender-diverse clients to affirm their identities. Essentially, this process allows them to align aspects of their legal identity with their lived realities. Requests for this service have remained consistent over the years, which reflects both a sustained need and the practical value of this intervention.

For many clients, obtaining a legal name that reflects their gender identity contributes significantly to their sense of self and personal dignity. Beyond its symbolic importance, a name change has tangible effects on how individuals are able to navigate everyday administrative and social systems. The Programme understands how presenting identification that aligns with community members' identity can reduce the likelihood of misgendering or questioning in interactions with employers, service providers, and/or state institutions. In turn, this can potentially lower their exposure to stigma and discrimination in everyday processes such as applying for jobs, accessing health care, or engaging social services.

Clients who have completed deed poll applications often report increased confidence in engaging with formal systems. The ability to present consistent identification across different settings reduces anxiety and may enable smoother interactions, particularly in environments where perceived inconsistencies between a person's physical appearance and their legal documentation can lead to suspicion, denial of services or even violence. In this way, name changes are a practical tool, within clients' control, that supports greater autonomy and participation in public life.

Benefits aside, name changes via deed poll application also serve to highlight the limitations of the existing legal framework. Without broader legal gender recognition, community members may still face the aforementioned challenges when gender markers remain unchanged on their official documents. This creates ongoing inconsistencies that can continue to expose them to risk, particularly in more formal or "high-risk" settings.

Nonetheless, the sustained uptake and interest in deed poll services underscore their importance as an accessible and immediate form of support. Within a context where comprehensive legal recognition remains a distant dream, name changes play a key role in affirming community members' sense of self and in strengthening their confidence in navigating administrative and social systems. This should be complemented with public education and training for institutions and service providers to ensure understanding and respect for individuals with chosen names. Further, legal reform toward full gender recognition remains crucial in addressing ongoing gaps and ensuring community members can fully align their legal documents with their identities.

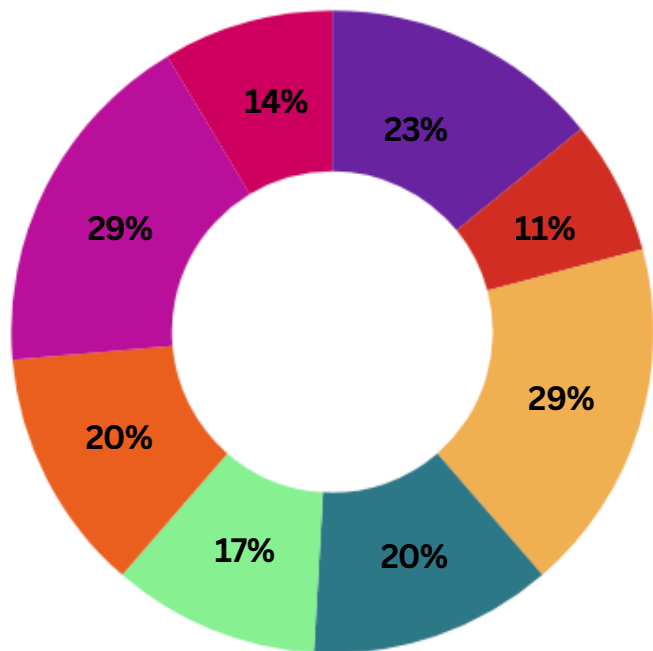


# Discussion of Presenting Problems

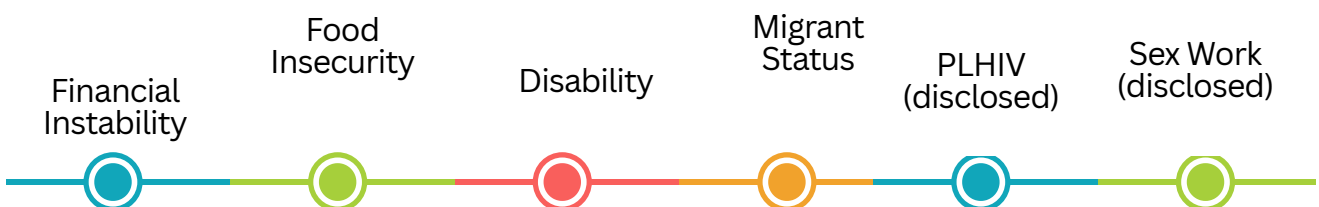
In 2025, the significant issues for which clients accessed the Programme were family violence, mental health support, name changes, employment and housing issues, assault/harassment, social services support, and intimate partner violence. Some clients accessed the Programme for multiple overlapping issues. This was often compounded by intersecting issues such as financial instability, food insecurity, disability, migrant status, HIV, and sex work. The following discussion explores these issues, as presented by clients and LGBTQI+ individuals who approached the Programme for guidance but did not continue with the process. This discussion also reflects the Programme team’s wider engagement with community.

## Issues Wholeness & Justice clients presented with in 2025

- Name Change (23%)
- Intimate Partner Violence (11%)
- Family Violence (29%)
- Employment Issues (20%)
- Assault (sexual/physical/financial), harrassment (17%)
- Housing Issues (20%)
- Mental Health Support (includes suicidality) (29%)
- Service navigation (including legal navigation of negligent police) (14%)



## Intersecting Issues presented to Wholeness and Justice in 2025



Despite increasing local and global forms of violence including the repeal of decriminalisation judgements and rights, LGBTQI+ communities find avenues to live in ways that affirm their identities and existence. **Twenty-three percent (23%) of WJ clients accessed services for name changes as a way of asserting that they are who they know themselves to be.** Name changes create standing for individuals to be referred to in ways that better approximate their gender in many formal and public processes including: accessing healthcare and government services and identifying themselves at their place of employment. Name changes are also important for personal self-identification as clients have reported reduced feelings of gender dysphoria from this process.

**While gender affirming processes may bring significant benefits, these efforts do not come without great cost.** Clients have stopped pursuing a name change in the middle of the legal process because of family pressure, the difficulty and cost of bringing all documents into alignment, and discrimination and harassment at their place of employment. Dependence on interconnected social networks to fulfil these needs often becomes priority; however, the impact of these decisions on the mental health of our clients are notable. Additionally, clients who are migrants face several barriers when attempting to access services. The deed poll service has to be initiated in their home countries and many of the documents that need to be updated must be accessed there. The additional costs mean that for many migrants, particularly, working class migrants, gender affirmation through name change services is extremely prohibitive. **Intersecting issues such as migrant status, financial instability, and food insecurity are major mediating factors for several presenting issues including the name change process.**

In 2025, the Programme noted violence, discrimination, and harassment as presenting issues existing in employment, housing, mental health provision, and navigating social services. These issues are often overlapping and as such a single client may access the Programme for several issues at once. **In 2025, twenty percent (20%) of clients accessed the programme to address employment issues.** Employment issues included unfair dismissals, harassment for actual or perceived LGBTQI+ status, reprisals for seeking redress due to harassment or violence, and barriers at the interview stage that resulted in reduced job opportunities.

These issues are deepened when there are other forms of discrimination at hand including discrimination against migrants, people with disabilities, and people living with HIV. These findings continue to inform the work of the organisation in advocating to amend the Equal Opportunity Act – with the ‘Add All Three’ - Amend the EOA campaign: **age, health status, and LGBTQI+ status should be included in the protection and redress mechanism.**

Additionally, these **legal interventions need to be supported by changes in attitudes and behaviours to become effective.** The process for redress even when legally mandated can be very lengthy. During this time, LGBTQI+ people without financial stability or food security are often left in precarious positions. Additionally, clients are still impacted by the psychological impacts of violence even when legal justice is being implemented. Clients have been hesitant to look for new employment for fear of similar forms of violence being meted against them. It is clear that changes are necessary in both legal frameworks and the social norms that impact our understanding and treatment of the LGBTQI+ community. These changes would have significant, positive impacts on both employment and housing issues.

**Twenty percent (20%) of clients also access the programme to address housing issues.** Discrimination from landlords and other tenants, financial insecurity, and lack of legal protections against discrimination make the process of finding and keeping safe housing difficult for LGBTQI+ community members. Further, many clients experience violence and harassment from neighbours and other members of their geographic community. Clients report that such harassment reflects negatively on them as landlords blame the tenant and not the perpetrators for the disturbance. The impacts of housing issues can result in homelessness, isolation, fear of leaving the house, fear of commuting to work, and an exacerbation of mental health issues. Leaving housing that is violent is also difficult for LGBTQI+ people who have intersecting issues. Clients with disabilities who experience harassment may opt to stay in accessible housing and withstand the consequences, because of the uncertainty of finding suitable, alternative accommodation or because it may require them to live far away from assistive networks. Similarly, clients facing financial instability and food insecurity may sacrifice housing safety for affordable rent or a location near their place of work. The use of justice-seeking mechanisms to address violence is weakened by need and lack of choices.

Many clients also identify that their housing issues began as a result of desperation to find a place to live after histories of family violence. Family violence continues to be a major issue faced by LGBTQI+ people across all years of service provision. **In 2025, almost a third (29%) of all clients experienced family violence** which includes harassment, disownment, and physical and verbal abuse (including threats and attempted murder), among other forms of aggression. Several clients shared that the family violence began as soon as their gender identity or sexual orientation become known or exposed. **Some clients identified family violence as occurring at a young age, before becoming aware of their own gender identities.** Significantly, many clients endured physical and verbal abuse because of intersecting issues related to financial vulnerabilities.

**Reporting family violence is a difficult process, and clients state several reasons for hesitation including the need for shelter, and the complexity of family interconnectedness.** Some clients were hesitant to report abuse because taking action against abusive family member(s) would have negative ramifications for other members of the household whom they cared for, viewed as vulnerable or who depended on the abusive family member for financial and/or food security. The social benefits of a supportive family network may be easily undermined by unsupportive family members with more power. LGBTQI+ people's ability to get the assistance and protection they need is further complicated by difficulties navigating police services and the rigidity of the legal system's interpretation of justice.

**When unfair dismissals, harassment, assault and isolation are present in the home, the family, and/or the workplace, LGBTQI+ people's ability to earn wages, keep stable housing, or access a social safety net all become compromised.** The impacts of exploitative, discriminatory systems are significant. Negotiating identity and seeking justice are complicated by pressures to fulfill basic needs and maintain psychological well-being. **Twenty-nine percent (29%) of clients accessed mental health support as part of our service provisions.** The issues present range from a lack of acceptance and isolation to depression and anxiety due to violence in several spaces in their lives.

Young adults access mental health support noted trauma from family violence (including threats of murder) that began at a very young age, and contributed to feelings of unworthiness and suicidality. **While the Programme only works with community members who are 18 and older, difficulty in accessing redress and protection before this age is worth noting, because childhood traumas persist into adulthood.**

Many migrants access our mental health support for trauma that first led to their migration, as well as for issues that emerge after arrival. Several clients migrated to Trinidad in hope of freedom from violence, only to find the opposite, and little hope for justice. Regional migrants note that pathways to work, study, or live in Trinidad and Tobago are few, even with the free movement of people under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). Some migrants have been stuck in Trinidad for years with refugee status, but without permission to work. **There are no meaningful protections for migrants or refugees in Trinidad and Tobago.**

**LGBTQI+ people who sit at the intersection of multiple forms of vulnerabilities are left open to exploitation.** Exploitation exists in multiple forms and intersects significantly with *issues of financial instability, food insecurity, migrant status, disability, HIV status and sex work*. **We know that clients often sacrifice safety and endure violence to meet basic needs.** Lack of protections for LGBTQI+ migrants increases fear around deportation to countries where they have experienced extreme violence and influences them to make uncharacteristic choices including further isolation and harm. LGBTQI+ clients engaged in sex work have shared the discrimination they face because of the nature of their work as well as their sexual orientation and gender identity. They note difficulties making reports to police and beliefs by abusers that LGBTQI+ sex workers have limited avenues for redress. This has made them vulnerable to physical and sexual violence including coercion to engage in unsafe sex. These are just some of the ways that LGBTQI+ who face multiple issues are marginalized. The solutions we pursue for these issues need to be comprehensive to address these complexities.

In reviewing the multiple presenting problems faced by vulnerable LGBTQI+ community members, it is evident that legal protections, queer-informed mental healthcare, improved access to grants, and support for basic needs are essential. **Individuals who are made additionally vulnerable require holistic care and expanded choices that will address their interconnected needs. It is important for us to create a society where people can make safe and, informed decisions about their basic needs, health and mental well-being that allow them not only to survive but to thrive.**

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

These insights highlight the consequences of discrimination towards LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago, using Wholeness & Justice client experiences and community knowledge. It reiterates the need for State action to address discrimination and improve the living conditions of LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Despite operating within a context of legal and social exclusion, CAISO's Wholeness & Justice Programme continues to advocate for the inclusion and protection of LGBTQI+ people in all their diversity, and to innovate and expand service provision. This has happened most precisely through the Growing Spaces project as an expansion of services and visioning for the future. Moreover, the Programme provides insights and analysis to support advocacy and policy recommendations.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

The following recommendations to the **Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago** - and related stakeholders - offer direction on where intervention is necessary for the inclusion and protection of the rights of LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago.

These recommendations have been informed by CAISO's work in general, and the Wholeness & Justice Programme, specifically. They centre the need for structural transformation through legal and social protections and guarantees.

There are three priority areas and related action points that are aligned with the 2025 Policy Agenda:

#### **1. Inclusive and Expanded Social Services:**

- Create safe and affordable housing for LGBTQI+ people, especially youth, and those who experience family violence at home, and gender-based violence in State care;
- Improve social welfare policies that limit or prevent access to services, such as the "fixed address" requirement, which discriminates against people in need of social services who do not have stable or permanent housing or are in same-sex relationships;
- Increase and improve access to healthcare services for LGBTQI+ people through gender-sensitive and inclusive policies that explicitly offer protection and ethical protocols for confidentiality and care. This includes access to mental healthcare services, HIV prevention (PrEP) medication, and affirming and quality care for sex and gender diverse persons.

## 2. **Legislative and Policy Change:**

- Amend Section 4 of the Constitution – which ensures citizens’ access to their fundamental rights and freedoms without discrimination- to enact protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Amend the Equal Opportunity Act to protect diverse social groups against discrimination, including on the basis of LGBTQI+ identity, health status, and age, as recommended by CAISO’s Add All Three Campaign, in different public and private spaces;
- Engage in legislative review regarding non-discrimination and enact laws that specifically prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC);
- Provide concrete and responsive mechanisms for complaint and redress, especially with regards to when public servants and duty bearers infringe rights.

## 3. **Education and Training:**

- Expand and implement new training programmes focused on gender-based violence awareness and prevention, rights and discrimination awareness, health and wellbeing, and social relations and anti-bullying, among other areas to increase empowerment, equity, and justice;
- Support capacity-building and gender, sexuality, and LGBTQI+ sensitivity training for public servants and duty bearers (including police officers, social workers, teachers, and healthcare workers) who are key stakeholders in providing social services. Training should be continuous and facilitated by experts;
- Provide continuous training of judicial officers – especially as it relates to the 2020 Amendments to the Domestic Violence Act – and implement the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago’s “Gender Equality Protocol for Judicial Officers” in a way that recognises and includes LGBTQI+ people, particularly people of trans experience and gender diverse identities.

***Insights from Wholeness and Justice 2025***

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