



# THE LGBTI ELDERS ADVANCING PROJECT

## INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Full Report Prepared by

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**sage** | Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ+ Elders  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Evaluation Plus would like to thank the members of the Elders Advisory Committees and the local and regional partners for contributing their time and perspectives to this report. We are grateful to them for placing the evaluation of this project in our trust.



SAGE commissioned an independent evaluation of the LGBTI Elders Advancing Initiative (LEAP) by Evaluation (E+). This Executive Summary report provides an overview of E+'s Interim Evaluation Report, based on learnings gleaned during the first eighteen months of the project (December 2021 - March 2023). A second report will be published in late 2024 as an update on progress and lessons learned.



## BACKGROUND

Around the world, LGBTI older adults (LOAs) experience rampant human rights violations based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity and the stigma of ageism. While the specifics of LGBTI aging vary from country to country and region to region, older members of the LGBTI community commonly face widespread discrimination in care, services, and housing, and are at acute risk for severe social isolation and economic insecurity.

Created in partnership with SAGE, OutRight International, Mitini Nepal, EnGendeRights (the Philippines), CIPAC (Costa Rica) and Aspidh (El Salvador) the LGBTI Elders Advancing Initiative (LEAP) is a cross-regional initiative designed to strengthen the human rights protections of LOAs and build a more robust and well-connected global LGBTI aging movement.

As one of the first cross-regional, multi-year initiatives centering LGBTI+ aging advocacy, the insights gained from LEAP will inform not only the remainder of the initiative but also elucidate the challenges and opportunities inherent in building the capacities of LGBTI aging advocates and LOAs across diverse contexts.

### Three main objectives inform the initiative:

1. Build awareness of LGBTI older adults and their needs through country-based data collection, documentation and dissemination of information to targeted audiences.
2. Improve the ability of LGBTI organizations to work in support of LGBTI older adults and position LGBTI older adults as self-advocates.
3. Support discrimination protections and health equity for LGBTI older adults through national policy reform agendas.

**ASPIDH:** A trans-led civil society organization based in El Salvador that provides both LGBTI advocacy and direct service.

**EnGendeRights:** A sexual and reproductive health advocacy organization based in the Philippines.

**Mitini Nepal:** A woman-led and lesbian-founded civil society organization based in Nepal.

**OutRight International:** A United States based organization focused on international LGBTI advocacy (Asia technical assistance partner).

**SAGE:** A United States based organization with expertise in LGBTI aging.

**CIPAC:** A Costa Rica based organization focused on LGBTI health and human rights (Latin America technical assistance partner).

# KEY LEARNINGS

## 1. A Flexible and Asset-Based Approach

The LGBTI Elders Advancing Initiative (LEAP) positions SAGE, Outright International, and CIPAC as technical assistance and thought partners to local organizations Aspidh, Mitini Nepal and EnGendeRights. Though LEAP partners recognize that there are “common elder issues shared among LGBTI persons such as housing vulnerabilities, citizenship, discrimination and others”, they also acknowledge the ways in which social and political differences inform work in each of their respective countries. While a full analysis of the socio-political realities in El Salvador, Costa Rica, the Philippines, and Nepal is beyond the scope of this interim report, an acknowledgment of how disparate levels of political instability and legal protections influence partners’ engagement strategies, technical capacities, and respective approaches to advocacy and priority-setting is imperative.

*“Despite progressive laws and policies, Nepal’s society is still deeply conservative, and there is widespread social stigma and discrimination against LGBTI people, especially towards elders. LOAs often face discrimination and exclusion from their families, communities, and healthcare providers, which can negatively impact their physical and mental health.” - Mitini Nepal*

*Costa Rica may seem like a relatively progressive place for LGBTI people having passed legislation like marriage equality. However, the focus on economic issues following COVID has resulted in a lack of prioritization for things in our sector like health and education. This directly affects LGBTI people and a lack of prioritization prevents us from continuing to expand protections for LGBTI persons and make the progress necessary to ensure LGBTI persons are protected in all sectors of society, free from discrimination.” - CIPAC*



Costa Rica Elders Advisory Committee

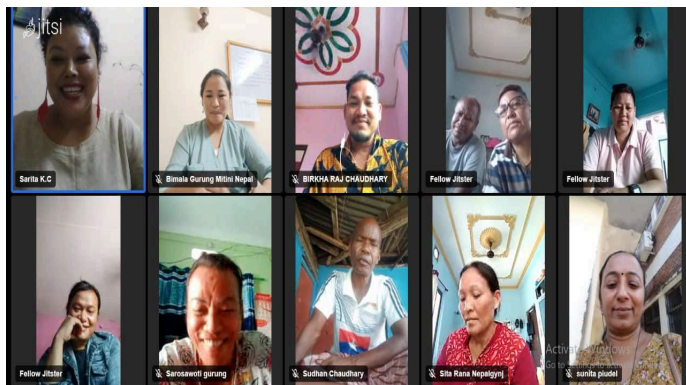
As such, partners on the ground are encouraged to lead conversations around strategic and programmatic decision-making based on these realities. Technical assistance partners meet regularly with country partners to discuss how their ever-evolving contexts impact their work and how to adjust their workplans, if needed. For example, partners have adapted the content and structure of their trainings and workshops, developed strategic ways of collecting, packaging and disseminating data collected through the initiative, and formulated culturally appropriate messaging and outreach strategies. Many of the successes in LEAP can be attributed to the customized and flexible approach that is informed by the unique environments in which partners operate.

*“Socio-cultural tolerance in the Philippines is high, but this visibility has not translated into legislation or legal protections. Religious extremist groups continue to block legislation, but we have opportunities with allies in the legislature. There is widespread discrimination against LGBTIQ people, yet at the national level, the SOGIE Anti-Discrimination Law has not been passed into law despite the lapse of over 24 years since the first anti-discrimination bill was first filed in 1999. This delayed passage of the law clearly shows a society that has failed to stand up for the rights of LGBTIQ people.” - EnGendeRights*

*“In El Salvador there are still no inclusive policies for older LGBTI individuals. Although in some institutions, such as the Office for the Defense of Human Rights, there is an older adult working group, LOAs do not have specific shelters or safety nets for these populations. This makes it even more difficult for them to live and they end up as caretakers for other older adults. There is also rampant homophobia and transphobia culturally and this has been exacerbated and perpetuated by tremendous amounts of police and gang violence against our communities.” - Aspidh*

## 2. LGBTI Older Adults as Self Advocates

LOAs are best positioned to advocate on behalf of their own interests as leaders with lived experience. One way LOAs have taken an active role in LEAP is through participating in Elders Advisory Committees. The Elders Advisory Committee model is comprised of 5-8 LOAs in each country. These groups meet, at minimum, once a month to reflect upon and inform the implementation of project activities. For Elders Advisory Committee members, the group has become a source of socialization, support, and self-identification. Notably, partner organizations are integrating this advisory model into their organizational structures for other initiatives outside of LEAP.



Mitini Nepal Elders Advisory Committee

*I am overjoyed. Through my participation in meetings, trainings, and this event organized by Mitini Nepal, I have experienced a remarkable transformation. It has empowered me to cultivate the confidence needed to share the stories of older women within the sexual and gender minorities community. This platform has been a catalyst for my personal growth, and I am immensely grateful for the opportunities it has provided.*  
- LOA participant from Nepal

To support LOAs' participation as self-advocates, partner organizations also deliver capacity-building opportunities for LOAs through trainings, workshops and one-on-one mentorship. Areas of focus range from trainings on how to tell one's life story to how to participate in participatory research to how to understand the resources and benefits available to them, and even how to engage with technologies. As a result, LOAs gained knowledge and skills necessary to advocate for their rights and effectively communicate their needs to policymakers and the wider public. Training also helped LOAs develop confidence, build networks, and access resources that support their advocacy efforts. As a result, LOAs have become more visible and influential, leading to greater inclusion and recognition of their rights. **Indeed, LOA participants- across all four countries- shared that this initiative encouraged them to consider themselves not as beneficiaries of "assistance" but as powerful agents of change.**

*The formation of the Older LGBTI People's Activist Circle (OLPAC)\* is one of the positive outcomes of the LGBTI Elders Advancing Project. OLPAC members are already activists on other issues, including senior citizen issues, but they have never worked at the intersection of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics and ageing. They are shaping up to become a long-lived advocacy group, eager to fight for LGBTI older people's rights. Capacity training is preparing them to mobilize solidarity and empathy for older LGBTI people who have been dealing with discrimination for most of their lives and continue to be vulnerable."*

- Grace Poore, Outright International



Aspindh Elders Advisory Committee

\*In the Philippines, partners use the term Older Persons Advisory Committee, or OLPAC, to refer to the ongoing work of a core group of LGBTI older adults that meet regularly to inform LEAP and participate in trainings and programming. In Nepal, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, partners use the term Elder Advisory Committee, or EAC.

### 3. Relationship Building and Kinship

In the absence of institutional support and nuclear familial structures, LGBTI persons have long relied on “families of choice”. This remains true for LOAs, though aging populations face increased barriers to social connection (including issues ranging from physical immobility to technology illiteracy). The LGBTI Elders Advancing Initiative offered LOAs a unique opportunity to build social networks, despite these limitations, both intergenerationally with younger LGBTI advocates and, perhaps most importantly, with one another.

*Our LGBTQ+ elders have shared that being part of this initiative has encouraged them to build more social support networks and start speaking openly about their shared experiences of aging. Not only are our older adults growing in their ability to advocate for their own needs, but they are also building friendship, solidarity, and trust among their peers. For a population that faces extreme isolation and loneliness, this kinship has been lifesaving. - CIPAC*



Celebratory Gathering in the Philippines

For many of the LOAs involved in the initiative, connecting with peers and sharing their experiences presented a unique, and rare, opportunity. Particularly for geographically dispersed LOAs and LOAs living with a disability, participating in this initiative presented myriad opportunities for connection - both through in person and virtual engagements. Across all four partner countries, LOAs (particularly those living in rural areas) reported isolation, not just from services, but from each other. Some of the technological solutions introduced through LEAP, like providing cell phones, internet, and training on the use of communication platforms both facilitated the participation of LOAs in LEAP activities and allowed LOAs to communicate with one. Social media groups created by partner organizations on platforms like WhatsApp have also become critical vehicles for communication, helping to create community among geographically dispersed LOAs. Partners report that LOAs are meeting informally outside of LEAP-facilitated activities to share their stories and celebrate their successes.

*LEAP has created a home and a sense of purpose for LOAs. Beyond the intent of the project, elders are organizing to help each other, and they see the project as a way to help people understand their role in the community. The project enables them to feel they matter and are visible. - Mitini Nepal*

*Without legal protections and competent services, LGBTI people (both young and old) have relied on one another to sustain community. These intergenerational relationships are a tool for both survival and celebration. - Hannah Yore, SAGE*

Some LOAs have shared that participating in LEAP was the first time they publicly identified as a member of the “LGBTI” community and were able to connect with others of shared identity and life experiences. LOAs in El Salvador, for example, shared **“We see discrimination and violence all around us, but being part of a group (like this) has let us make stronger alliances and live with less fear.”** El Salvadorian LOAs also stress the importance of building strategic relationships with advocates and LOAs outside of El Salvador through this initiative, helping them develop solidarity cross-regionally and beyond their domestic contexts.

For a population that reports high levels of abandonment in older adulthood, the implications of enhanced social networks on LOA’s physical and mental wellbeing are far-reaching and will extend beyond the life cycle of this project. Through participating in LEAP, LOAs are building relationships with both their peers and intergenerationally, across a spectrum of LGBTI persons in their country and beyond borders.

## 4. The Importance of Documentation

A major component of LEAP was qualitative and quantitative data collection from LGBTI older adults across the Philippines, Nepal, Costa Rica and El Salvador. Partners were successful in collecting data on LOAs through landscape surveys with a total of 380 respondents across all four countries. There is presently very little information available on LGBTI aging, further exacerbating the chronic invisibility of LOA's life experiences. As such, the depth and breadth of information collected through LEAP is a huge step forward in being able to tell the stories of and advocate for LOAs.



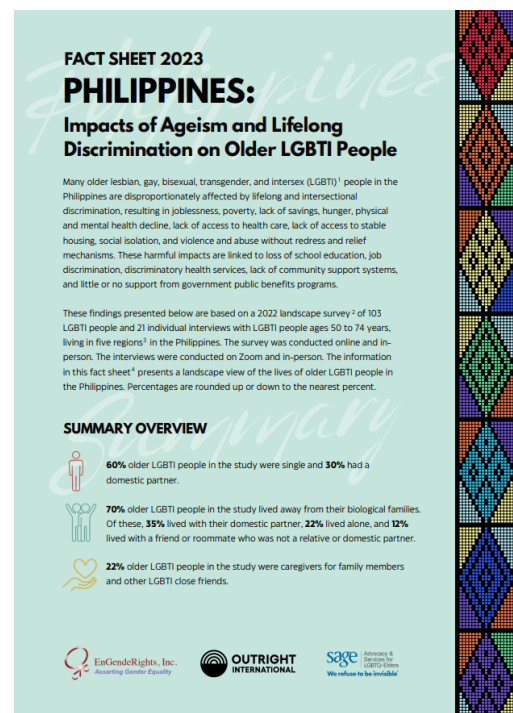
CIPAC Infographic for Webinar: Love after 50 in the LGBT+ Population

It is the hope of LEAP partners that this baseline data will help make visible the needs and challenges of LOAs and can be leveraged in the second half of the initiative to build awareness and bolster advocacy. Not only does this data elucidate the realities of LOAs in each partner country, but, too, it provides a quantifiable basis for comparing the similarities and differences among LOA experiences in different countries and cross-regionally. SAGE and Outright have also worked with partners to leverage this data vis-a-vis international advocacy opportunities, ranging from presentations at the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association for Latin America and the Caribbean conference to advocacy at the United Nations Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing.

Furthermore, the process of data collection in and of itself provided great insight into other areas of implementation, particularly around the importance of access to technology, psychosocial support, and the importance of capacitating older adults in data collection and advocacy roles



Mitini Nepal's Landscape Survey

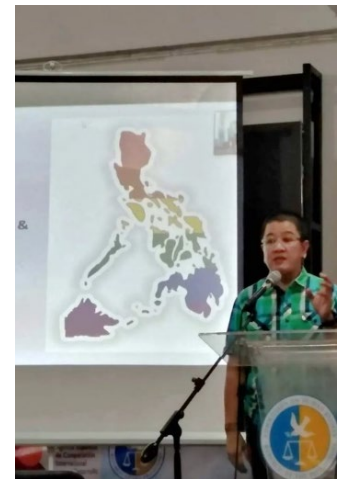


EnGenderRights' Landscape Survey

## LOOKING AHEAD

Through the highly collaborative LEAP model, Aspidh, Mitini Nepal and EnGendeRights are continuing to grow their expertise as leaders in the field of LGBTI aging vis-à-vis the technical assistance provided by SAGE and regional hub partners Outright International and CIPAC. At the same time, SAGE, Outright International and CIPAC are further deepening their understanding of how partners' unique social and political contexts inform the experiences of LGBTI aging. As the work moves forward, there are several elements of the LEAP model that show promise for scaling international, regional, and local efforts to advance the rights of LOAs.

Partner organizations continue to develop their own capacities as leaders in the field of LGBTI aging through the development of new models of engagement. Creating space for LOAs through advisory committees, for example, is another promising practice that can be incorporated into partners' organizational infrastructures to develop new or enhance existing efforts. Partners have shared that participating in LEAP has helped them recognize that bringing a life-stage perspective to many of their areas of programming and advocacy would enrich the portfolios of their respective organizations (e.g., HIV, Health Equity, Discrimination, Violence). As such, LEAP emphasized the importance of increasing an understanding of "ageism" not just as a siloed issue but one that needs to inform all the work of the organization. Adopting a life course orientation into an organization's existing portfolio also influences the types of solutions that can be generated into policy and services, and activation of new networks and relationships. Further, the cross-regional orientation of the work demonstrates learning across country contexts and provides credibility and visibility to our grassroots partners.



OutRight International in the Philippines at the Age with Rights Forum



Mitini Nepal partner speaking at Pride Event

We at SAGE honor the legacy of LGBTI older adults who, despite facing generations of grave injustice at the hands of both their own governments and wider society, have made and continue to make meaningful contributions to our communities as the pioneers in movements for justice and through demonstrating resilience and care for one another, outside of institutionalized structures that have so often excluded them.  
- Hannah Yore, SAGE Director of International Programs

Partners will also continue to position LOAs as self-advocates vis-à-vis national, regional and international forums. These public-facing opportunities will complement the ongoing work of partners to deliver capacity-building workshops and trainings for LGBTI older adults and civil society organizations alike. Attention will be paid to scaling up the development and delivery of adaptable training materials and technical assistance resources to sensitize and capacitate even more civil society organizations, direct service providers and LOAs in each partner country and to other countries.

Too, partners will work to leverage the qualitative and quantitative data collected for advocacy purposes. On this point, partners will pay particular attention to building alliances with other movements who share similar priorities. As such, broader outreach strategies will be developed to align across sectors on policy where the needs of LOAs intersect with the aging population more broadly (e.g., various versions of social security, guaranteed income and health equity), or where needs of LOAs intersect with other SOGIE rights like marriage equality.