



ASYLUMCONNECT

Border Shelters Training | April 7, 2022

[ASYLUMCONNECT.ORG](https://www.asylumconnect.org)

AGENDA FOR TODAY

1 Best Practices for Working with LGBTQ+ Asylum Seekers

2 AsylumConnect's Free Tech Platform

3 Q&A





Abby Davies
(she/her)

Part-Time Resource Coordinator (Spanish)

Abby is an International Development professional and a vocal advocate of immigration and asylum rights. She holds a Master of Science in International Development from the University of Edinburgh and a Bachelor of Arts in Latin American Studies and Spanish from the University of Virginia. Her Master's dissertation was focused on improving the use of small-scale tourism revenue in rural, Indigenous communities in Mexico. She has worked for various global non-profit organizations focused on asylum, immigration, trafficking, and community development, and has extensive experience working with victims of trauma, trafficking, and unaccompanied minors. She has also worked as a writer, editor, and translator for various transnational organizations.

Pitch

Intros



Paulina Leyva
(she/her)

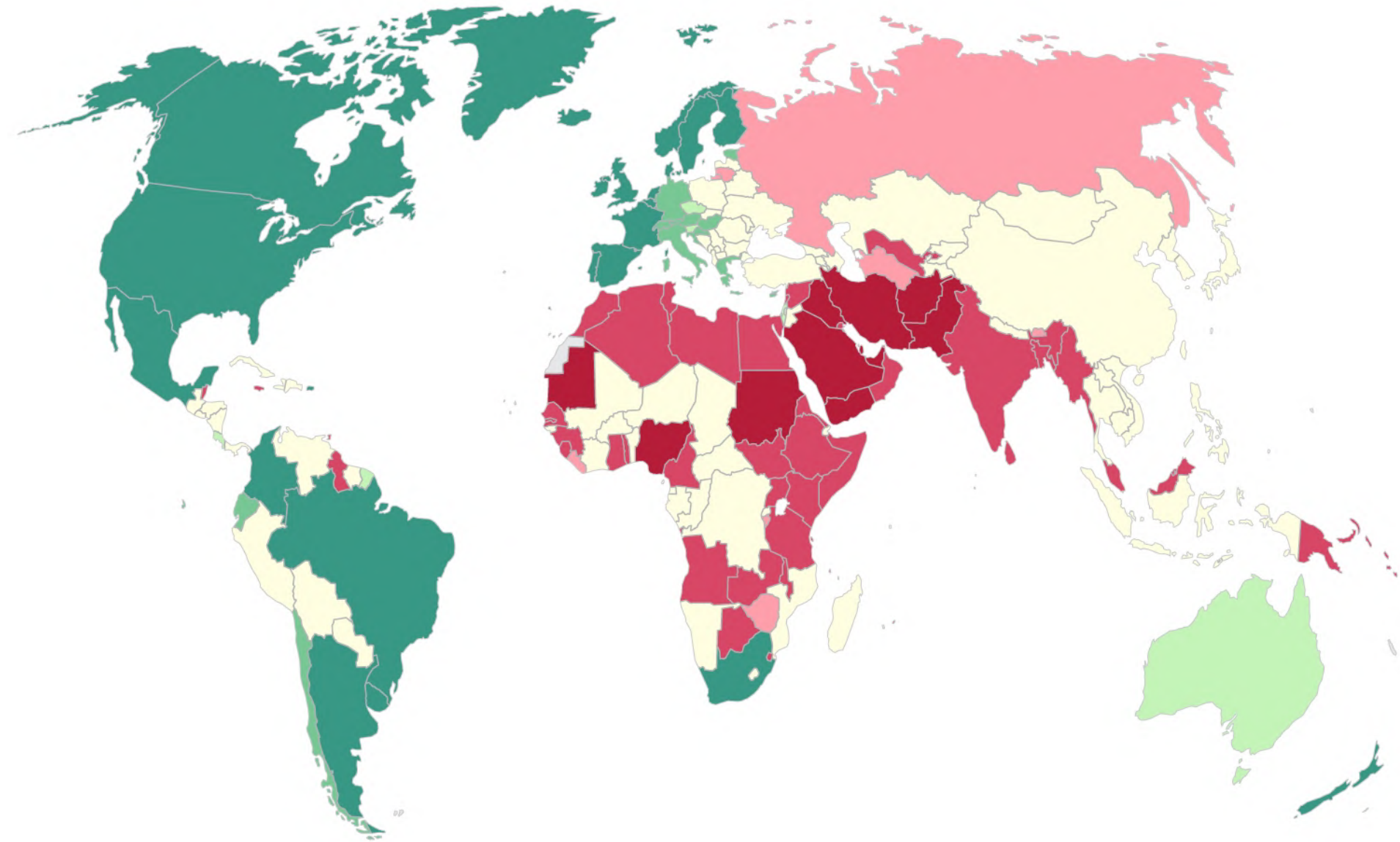
Part-Time Resource Coordinator (French)

Paulina is originally from Mexico, but has had the privilege of living in all three countries in North America. Her own experiences as an immigrant and Latinx woman inform her trauma-informed approach in her work. She has worked in the domestic and international nonprofit sector advocating for persecuted and other vulnerable populations, including forcibly displaced individuals, LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, survivors of torture and gender-based violence. Paulina received a B.A. from the City University of New York and is currently pursuing a joint law and master's degree with a focus on International Affairs at the CUNY School of Law.

Section 01

Best Practices

THE PROBLEM



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



Each year, **tens of thousands** of individuals are forced to leave everything behind to seek asylum in the US. But **the process often takes years due to a 1.6M+ case backlog** and is filled with challenges:

- 1** When an asylum seeker does not have legal representation, immigration courts in the US **deny 90% of cases**.
- 2** Many asylum seekers are re-traumatized when they are **thrown into immigration detention facilities that replicate the very persecution they give up so much to escape**.
- 3** Once an asylum application is received by the US government, an asylum seeker must wait 180 days from that date to be eligible to apply for a work permit. **It is not uncommon for asylum seekers to wait one year from US entry before they receive work authorization**.
- 4** Asylum seekers are ineligible for state or federal benefits in the US. Unable to financially support themselves, **many are subject to extreme poverty, predatory networks, and profound isolation during the immigration process**.

In addition to these common challenges, LGBTQ+ asylum seekers also face unique obstacles during resettlement:

- LGBTQ+ people in US immigration detention are **97x more likely** to be sexually assaulted than other detainees. Trans women are especially vulnerable.
- Even in "safe havens," doctors, therapists, shelters, legal support, and the wider US **social services sector can be unsafe and biased for queer and trans people.**
- As a result, LGBTQ+ asylum seekers often struggle to navigate their legitimate options during resettlement, face **increased risk of homelessness**, and face homophobic or transphobic behavior when accessing critical social services.
- Out of options, **many are forced to give up on their legal asylum claim and face deportation** to their dangerous home country.



Best Practices:

- Service providers should integrate LGBTQ+ affirming language into their online presence and program materials
- Include LGBTQ+ identities in day-to-day interactions
- LGBTQ+ trainings for staff/volunteers
- Shelter placement for the TGNC community
- Trauma-informed care
- Translation best practices

LGBTQ+ affirming language

English

It is important to stay up-to-date with affirming language, e.g., *sexual orientation* vs. sexual preference; *gender-affirming surgery* vs. gender reassignment surgery; *preferred pronouns* vs. pronouns. [Find a list of current up-to-date terms here](#). See GLAAD's [recommendations for language when reporting on transgender victims of crime](#).

Spanish

What is appropriate is different in different languages; it is important to realize the preferred terminology of clients based on their country of origin. For example, many official documents use *LGBTTTI+* in Spanish vs. LGBTQ+. [Find a list of current up-to-date Spanish terms here](#).

Russian

There has been an increase in LGBTQ+ Russians seeking asylum in the US. Contact the [Russian LGBT Network](#) for any questions on appropriate Russian terminology.

Integrating LGBTQ+ practices into day-to-day interactions

- **Pronouns**

- Always use someone's pronouns (*if they choose to share; some TGNC or questioning people may not be comfortable sharing*)
- Acknowledge differences in people's cultures and languages (*e.g., someone's pronoun in Spanish may not translate to the pronoun they prefer in English; a pronoun may exist in another language that is not commonly used in English*)

- **Intake forms and other documentation**

- Offer (optional) opportunities for clients to include their sexual orientation and gender identity on intake forms
- Include options beyond the binary Male/Female on intake forms (include a custom write-in option)
- Recognize that people may not include their gender identity and/or sexual orientation on intake forms due to safety/privacy or cultural concerns

- **Overflow housing**

- Be aware that LGBTQ+ people are more vulnerable than non-LGBTQ+ peers when facing homelessness (e.g., 40% of homeless youth in the US identify as gay or transgender); prioritize when possible

- **Do not make assumptions**

- Do not make assumptions about someone's identity based on how they present (clothes, haircut, name, etc.)
- Do not assume other immigrants/asylum seekers, (including someone's family) is a safe haven/resource

- **Confidentiality**

Do not share someone's identity unless given explicit permission, including on forms

Provide trauma-informed care for LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution

- Recognize clients are under severe stressors & may be feeling desperation
- Have patience with someone "coming out" about their LGBTQ+ identity
- Some clients will not feel comfortable sharing their LGBTQ+ identity due to safety/privacy concerns
- Some LGBTQ+ people will flee their home country for reasons unrelated to their LGBTQ+ identity; their identity still makes them more vulnerable
- Some LGBTQ+ people will not disclose their identity as a reason for fleeing; stories may appear inconsistent
- Recognize trauma experienced by other communities, of which LGBTQ+ people may also be members, such as trafficking survivors, people living with HIV, survivors of sexual assault, substance abuse, etc.
- Be aware of the intersectionalities within the LGBTQ+ community, and acknowledge added discrimination experienced by clients due to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and/or disability

Shelter placement for TGNC asylum seekers/immigrants

Lack of trans-friendly housing on the border

- Trans people are over 4x more likely than cis people to be victims of violent crimes, including rape, sexual assault, and aggravated assault. They also experience higher rates of poverty.
- It is crucial for trans people to be assigned identity-appropriate housing for their own safety. Trans women are especially at risk of violence.
- Harassment by CBP agents and other law enforcement; less likely to report crimes.
- While many trans asylum seekers/immigrants come from countries that are unsafe for trans people, the US is not a beacon of hope everywhere. There are currently 200+ anti-trans bills in state legislatures across the US. Do not assume, or encourage those newly arrived to the US, to assume that every place is safe and affirming.

Community sponsorship (long-term solution)

- Santa Fe Dreamers Project sponsorship (for detained TGNC immigrants)
- Matching TGNC/LGBTQ+ sponsors with TGNC asylum seekers/immigrants

Section 02

Our Free Platform

Welcome to the United States AsylumConnect Catalog!

Find services verified to be safe for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and other LGBTQ+ people in need.

FIND SERVICES NEAR YOU

FIND AN ORGANIZATION BY NAME

El Paso, TX, USA

Service type 2 ^

Uncheck All

Education and Employment >

Food

Housing >

Hygiene and Clothing >

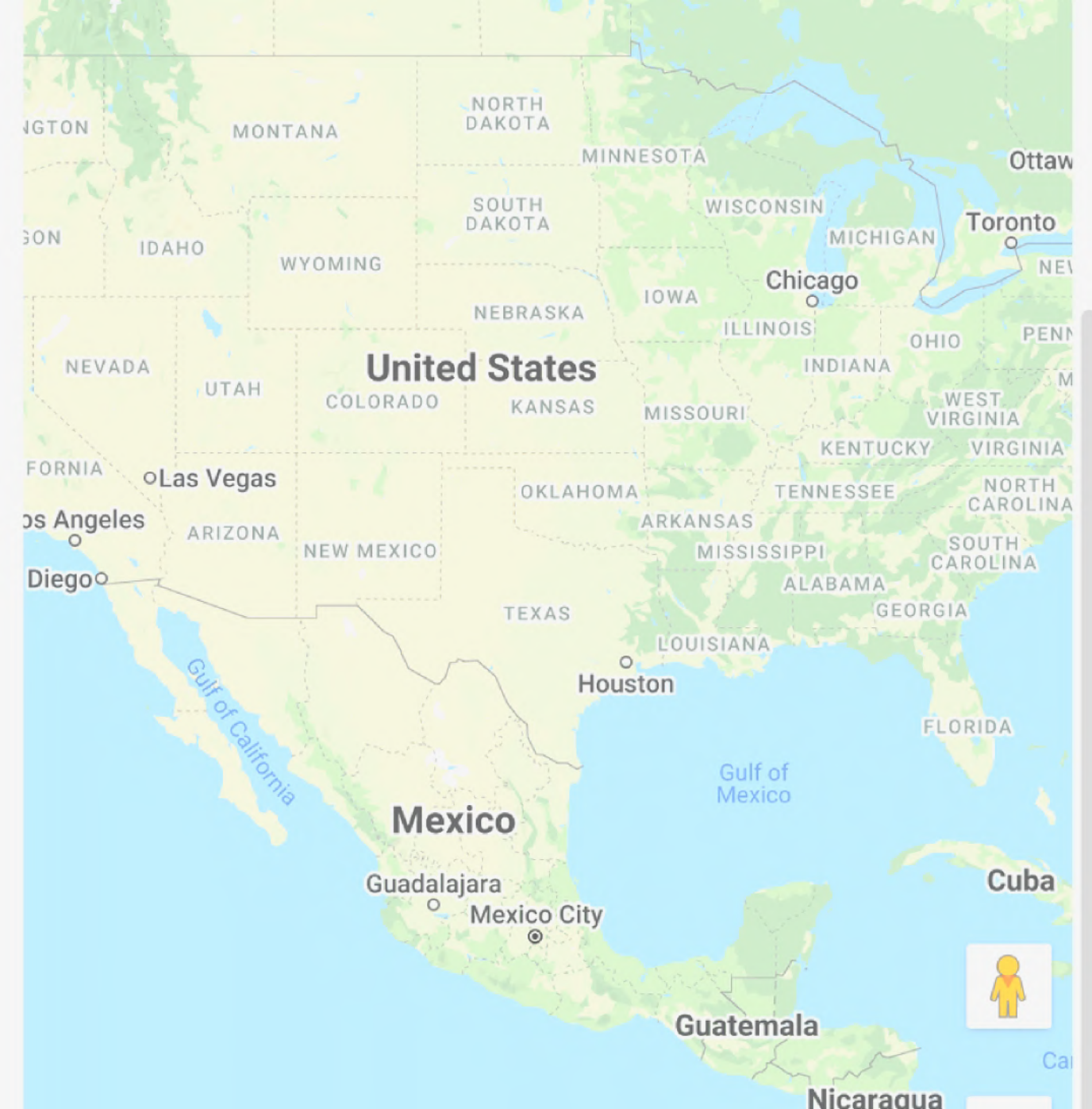
Legal >

Drop-in centers for LGBTQ youth

Emergency housing

Housing information and referrals

Short-term housing



WHAT WE DO

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



OUR FOUNDING STORY

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 US 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.

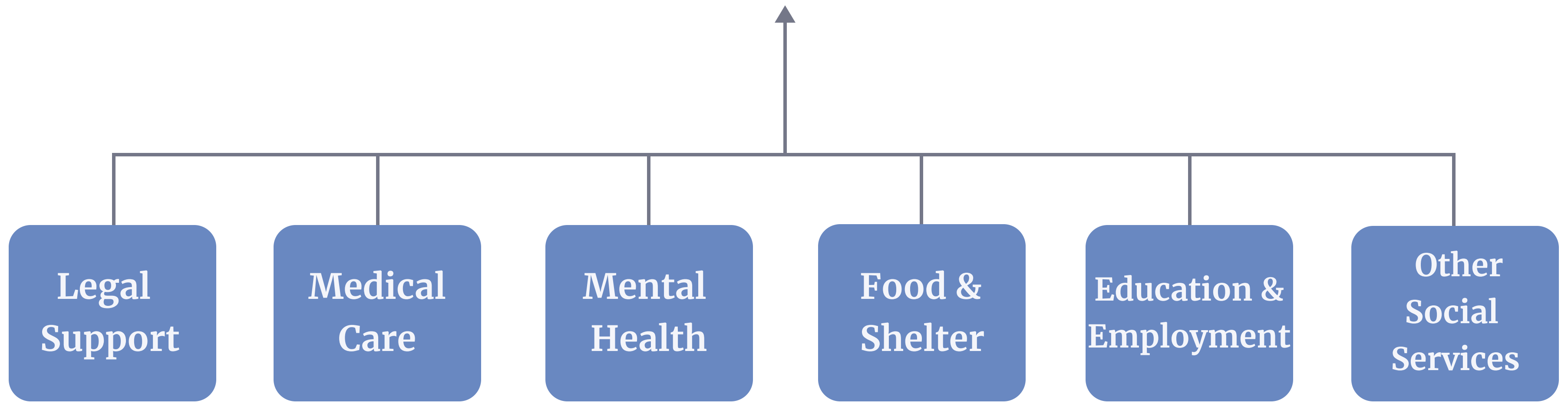
Together, during their senior year at Penn, Sy and Jamie co-founded the tech nonprofit AsylumConnect to extend the first ever digital lifeline to other persecuted and marginalized LGBTQ+ people.

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

Before AsylumConnect, there was **no holistic support system** for LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution

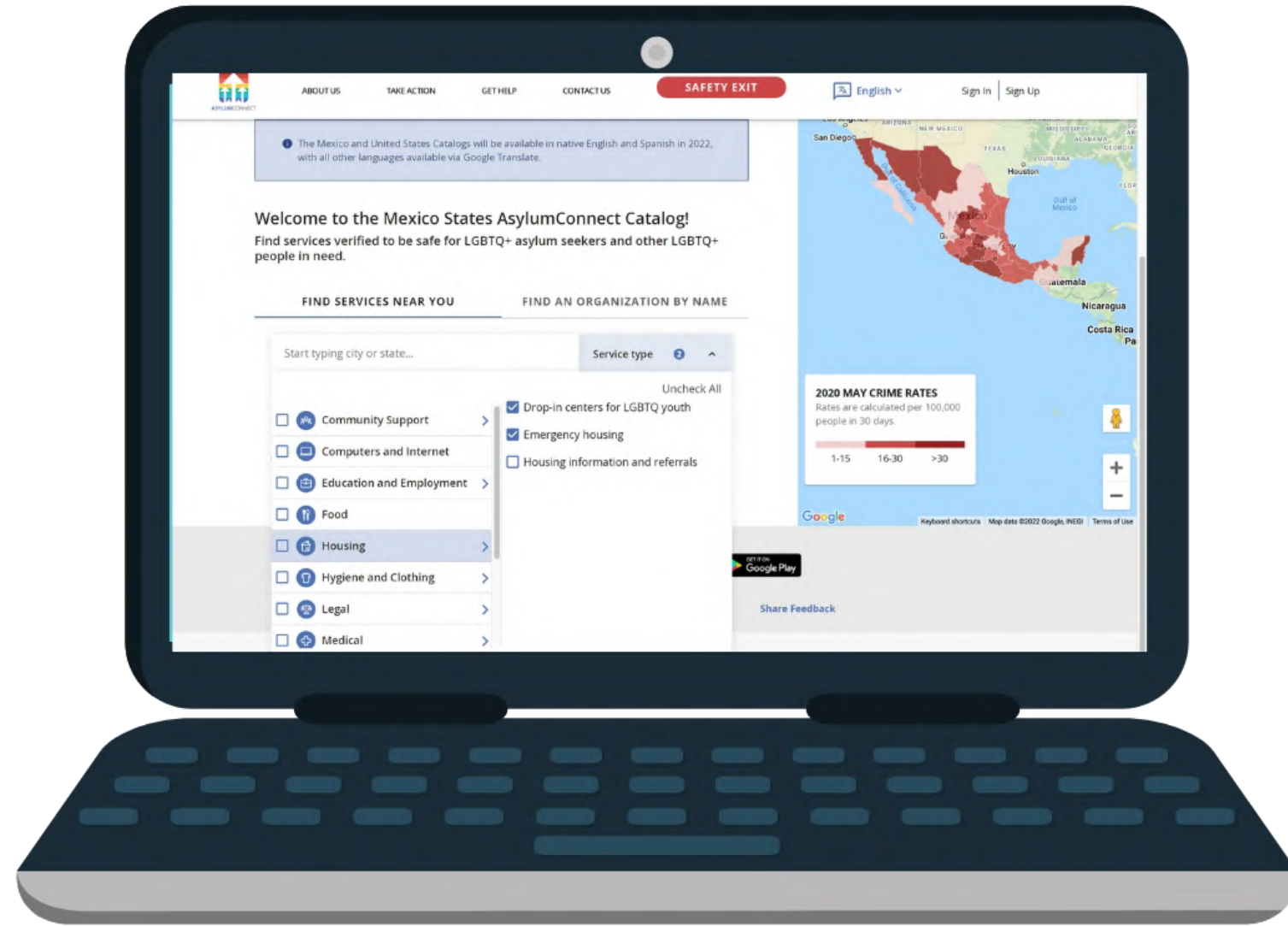


We have created the **first and only scalable tech platform** designed to fill this critical information gap

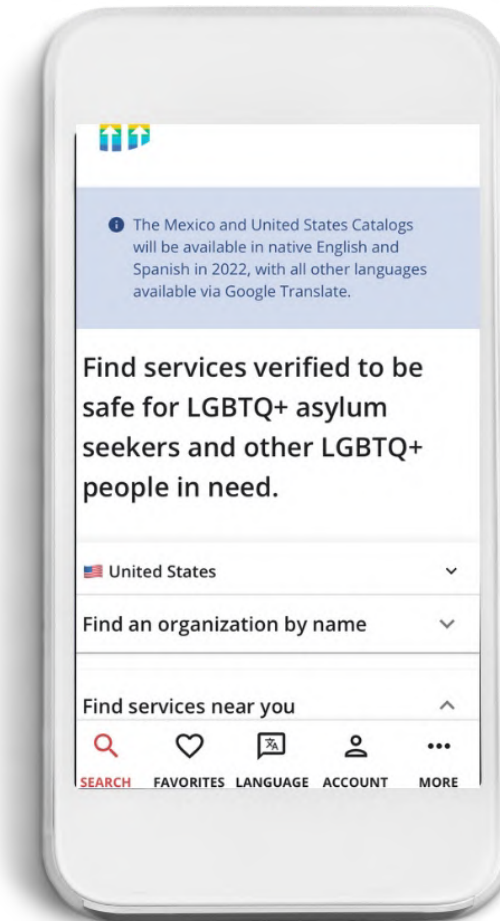


PLATFORM

Use our **FREE resource website and mobile app** to connect with safe legal, medical, mental health and social service providers **verified to be welcoming to LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and other LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution**



Desktop



Mobile

**Our platform is currently 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 platform is currently available all 50 US states and the District of Columbia, Mexico and Canada.*

OUR PROCESS

Every direct service provider listed on AsylumConnect undergoes a **unique and rigorous vetting process** designed to ensure they are welcoming to **LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and other LGBTQ+ people fleeing persecution**

Volunteer Training

All volunteers complete a comprehensive virtual training program on:

- LGBTQ+ rights
- Immigration law/policy
- Unique obstacles faced by LGBTQ+ asylum seekers
- AC's unique tech-centric service model

Service Identification

New direct service providers for potential inclusion in AC's app are identified via:

- Internal research
- Media monitoring
- Partner recommendations
- Crowdsourced via app's public "suggest new resource" form

Service Verification

Prior to listing on AC, trained volunteers independently verify that each direct service provider is:

- Active and legitimate
- LGBTQ+ affirming
- Accessible to asylum seekers and the undocumented community

Service Publication

Once a provider has been vetted, trained volunteers then publish the new listing on AC, allowing for critical feedback loops:

- Public ratings & written reviews from registered users
- Providers invited to "claim" their profile & manage their own listing

Service Re-Verification

Every direct service provider listed on AC is re-verified at least once every 6 months by our trained volunteers:

- Ensure data quality
- Maintain and develop provider relationships
- Protect the safety of our users

OUR USERS



Direct Need

Target Users: those fleeing persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identify, including:

- LGBTQ+ asylum seekers & refugees
- Undocumented LGBTQ+ immigrants
- Homeless or isolated LGBTQ+ youth



Client Referrals

Target Users: service providers working with LGBTQ+ clients or friends/family members of LGBTQ+ people in need, including:

- Immigration attorneys
- Pro bono attorneys & law students
- Case managers & other direct service providers

USER STORY

MEET "SARA"

- An undocumented trans woman living in the Bronx who fled her home country of Nigeria due to multiple death threats because of her gender identity
- She wants to remain in the US to avoid future life-threatening persecution in Nigeria
- She is referred to AsylumConnect by a friend

Sara fled Nigeria after death threats due to her trans identity. She is undocumented and has never heard of asylum.

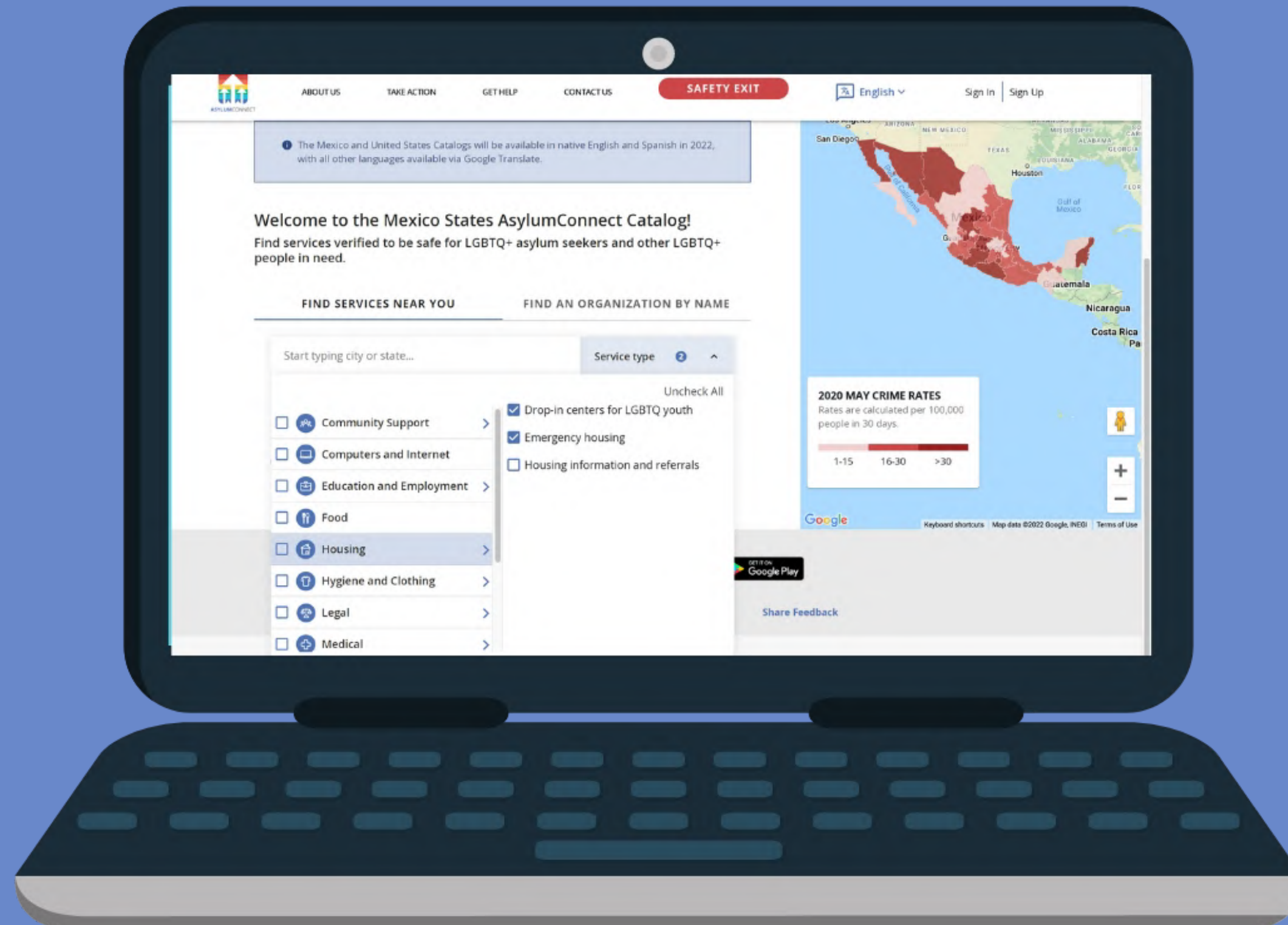


WHEN SEARCHING FOR SAFE SERVICES, SARA FACES MULTIPLE BARRIERS DUE TO HER IDENTITY AS A TRANS WOMAN, UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT, NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER & PERSON OF COLOR

- Sara turns to AsylumConnect to quickly find a pro bono attorney with expertise in serving members of the LGBTQ+ community fleeing persecution to discuss her legal options
- She also uses the app to easily find a free support group for trans women of color and a pro bono trans-affirming doctor and therapist
- As an undocumented person, Sara appreciates the app's ability to filter out service providers that require specific documentation

She trusts AsylumConnect due to its unique emphasis on confidentiality and user safety, and LGBTQ-affirming care.

Live Platform Demo



How has AsylumConnect's free technology helped you or your LGBTQ+ clients?

How has
AsylumConnect's
free technology
helped you or your
LGBTQ+ clients?

Video from July 2021



OUR VISION

With AsylumConnect at scale, *every* LGBTQ+ person will know where it is safe to go for help regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, immigration status and/or income level.



ASYLUMCONNECT
LEARN MORE

**FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL
MEDIA FOR UPDATES**

@asylumconnect

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Homesite:

asylumconnect.org

"Get Help For My Client" page:
asylumconnect.org/how-to-find-resources-for-clients

**SHARE OUR FREE WEBSITE
& MOBILE APP**

Computer / Web Browser on Phone:
catalog.asylumconnect.org

Download our Mobile App:
asylumconnect.org/mobile-app



Thank you!

QUESTIONS?