

ARC International and its first 10 years

**Assessing ARC's contributions
to SOGII activism and
UN achievements since 2003**

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A report commissioned by ARC International

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“ARC is in a very unique position in which they have developed resources and capacity to engage with activists across the globe and knowledge on SOGI issues. Their work at the UN presents issues in a very unbiased way, what’s happening in all regions, in conjunction with activists on the ground. They are very useful in creating spaces for activists to raise their voices at the UN and provide them with most updated information.”

*An activist from Africa interviewed
by the research team*

Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

2013 marked ten years since ARC International was founded. Initially conceived as a small project-driven organization, ARC has developed a significant role in fostering civil society collaborations, strengthening NGO access to international mechanisms, and advancing a strategic international agenda on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) rights. Moreover, the organization has engaged with a variety of stakeholders, such as the United Nations (UN), States, civil society and the international community, increasing their attention to sexual orientation (SO), gender identity (GI) and intersex issues.¹

This report looks at ARC's contributions to UN developments on SOGI and intersex issues since 2003, mapping the roles played by the organization, achievements, current challenges and opportunities for future work. It relies on the results of an external research project carried out in two phases: through an online survey that collected 98 responses followed by more in-depth interviews with 29 individuals, including representatives of civil society organizations, individual activists, staff of UN agencies and country missions, and academics.

ARC's contributions to SOGI and intersex activism internationally

All of ARC's 5 core activities were ranked highly by at least half of the people filling out the online survey. These are information-sharing and updates on UN developments; enhancing capacity of NGOs and activists to engage in UN processes; identifying opportunities for UN advocacy; strengthening collaborations and coalition-building; and facilitating space for strategic dialogue. Interviewees acknowledged ARC's meaningful guidance on the UN and its efforts in helping activists meet with delegates, missions and country representatives. They also revealed the positive impacts of ARC's initiatives on their local work and on their capacity to engage with UN mechanisms. Several interviewees emphasized that ARC has played

a key role identifying concrete opportunities for SOGI advocacy at the UN and has increasingly facilitated the involvement of more activists in SOGI initiatives and produced stronger cross-regional coalitions.

The usefulness of ARC's resources and activities

The majority of the online survey respondents considered the SOGI list and ARC's Guides and Toolkits were amongst its most useful resources. The Human Rights Council (HRC) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) summaries came next, followed by Regional Dialogues and the Yogyakarta Principles. Interviewees emphasized the usefulness of the SOGI list in coordinating the work on SOGI issues internationally, as well as getting feedback from activists on the ground, despite the heavy flow of emails. The HRC and UPR guides were seen as not only useful for SOGI and intersex activists engaging with such mechanisms, but also for other human rights activists and even States. The UPR summaries have particularly helped local activists to engage with the UN and interact more effectively with their own governments. The Regional Dialogues were seen as very important for enhancing the capacity of local activists, as well as for creating opportunities for networking and collaborations among local and international civil society organizations. ARC's regular teleconferences were described as very influential for allowing strategic discussions among groups outside Geneva, even though challenges were raised in terms of language and representation.

ARC's practical contributions to SOGI and intersex developments at the UN

According to the interviewees, ARC has created visibility for SOGI issues at the UN in an unprecedented way, making it more accessible for other civil society organizations and UN delegates to engage in advocacy on these issues. They also emphasized that ARC's work has encouraged States to address SOGI issues more consistently in UN mechanisms, such as the HRC, and support joint statements and resolutions. As a result, ARC was able to successfully influence the actual language of

¹ The report uses the acronym SOGI to collectively refer to sexual orientation and gender identity, which is the terminology used in the Yogyakarta Principles and by most UN mechanisms. The umbrella phrase "SOGI and intersex" is used when intersex issues are also being discussed.

UN documents and its work contributed to the approval of the 2011 SOGI resolution at the HRC,² for instance, and to giving greater visibility to such issues in the UPR.

Challenges and future directions

When asked how ARC could better advance SOGII issues at the UN in the future, particularly in response to current challenges, the six most common themes emerging were that ARC should diversify the UN mechanisms with which it engages, increase its efforts to enhance NGO capacity, increase regional representation and diversity in its activities, as well as the number of identities and issues it works with, improve its advocacy resources and enhance its own organizational capacity and role.

Interviewees were also asked to identify the most important ways for ARC to support SOGI and intersex activism in the next two years. The three most common suggestions were: supporting opportunities for strategic discussion on UN advocacy, helping to increase the capacity of SOGI groups to build coalitions with other NGOs working with UN mechanisms and supporting trans and intersex organizations to do UN advocacy.

It is hoped that documenting ARC's role, including potential areas for improving its work, will enable ARC to continue to be an extremely effective organization within an expanding and increasingly inclusive SOGI and intersex movement.

² It may be noted that the online survey and interviews were conducted prior to the adoption by the Human Rights Council at its 27th session in September 2014 of a follow-up resolution on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity. Led by Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay, this resolution was adopted by an absolute majority of 25-14, with 7 abstentions, and marks a significant step forward in UN attention to these issues.

1. Introduction

On its 10th anniversary, ARC International commissioned an external research project to assess developments at the UN so far, including progress achieved by SOGI and intersex activists, remaining challenges, and possible opportunities for the future. The project also evaluated ARC's past and potential contributions to those developments, including areas where its work could be strengthened.

Two separate reports were produced. This report presents the results of the part of the research project which assesses the impacts of ARC's work and the results achieved since 2003. A companion report, titled "How far has SOGII advocacy come at the UN and where is it heading?" assesses broader developments at the UN over this period.³

1.1 Background history

ARC was founded in 2003 to facilitate strategic planning around lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues internationally, strengthen global networks, and enhance access to United Nations mechanisms.⁴ It was federally incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in Canada, but since 2005 it has had full-time staff presence both in Canada and Switzerland. The organization's three main objectives are:

1. developing and assisting in the implementation of an international strategic vision regarding LGBT human rights
2. fostering international linkages and communications between stakeholder organizations and
3. advancing equality and justice for LGBT persons and their families at the international level.

In its materials, ARC describes its commitment to an intersectional approach, which recognizes that "LGBTI people experience the world differently depending on their sex, race, age, class, disability, culture, religion,

language and other factors". This means ARC's activities aim to ensure gender representation, linguistic and other accessibility, linkages with other social justice movements and the active participation of representatives from the Global South.

ARC self-describes its organizational history as having three main phases:

- The early years (2003–2005) when, following an international needs assessment, ARC was created as a small project-driven organization, designed to fill gaps in the international LGBT advocacy landscape and connect NGOs with the work of the UN. By coincidence, 2003 was also the year when Brazil presented its initial resolution on sexual orientation⁵ and human rights, leading to ARC's first International Dialogue co-hosted in Rio de Janeiro. A SOGI listserv was set up shortly afterwards, initially designed to facilitate strategic communications amongst the 30 or so attendees.
- Following the relocation of one of its Co-Directors to Geneva in December 2005, ARC's work expanded considerably in the period 2006–2010, due primarily to the fact that it was the only NGO working on SOGI issues with a full-time presence in Geneva. ARC's establishment of a Geneva presence also coincided with the year the Human Rights Council was created, providing a unique opportunity to engage in discussions about the mandate and structure of the Council, as well as the design of the UPR from its inception.
- In recent years (2011–2014), ARC has expanded its staff complement to better meet capacity challenges resulting from increased demands on the organization from a broad range of civil society organizations, States, UN agencies and other stakeholders. At the same time, partly as a result of ARC's capacity development and outreach initiatives, there has

³ Written by Dodo Karsay, Research team: Jack Byrne, Dodo Karsay, Lucas Paoli Itaborahy, September 2014.

⁴ Although not explicitly mentioned in ARC's founding documents, ARC has supported participation of intersex activists in UN processes, and engaged more specifically with these issues in recent years.

⁵ The resolution did not at that time cover "gender identity" as a ground, though ARC and other NGOs advocated for its inclusion.

been an increasing growth and diversification of civil society participation in the work of the UN and increasing establishment of dedicated SOGI or related positions in Geneva.⁶ Following a divided vote by its NGO Committee, ECOSOC granted ARC UN consultative status in July 2014.

Therefore, this evaluation report comes at an important time, enabling community consultation and institutional reflection on ARC's strengths, contributions, challenges and potential future directions.

1.2 Research methods

This research relied heavily on the knowledge and experience of LGBTI activists, particularly those who have collaborated with ARC in the past and those who have been involved in SOGI initiatives at the UN. The researchers collected data through an online survey and individual interviews. The online survey gave an indicative sense of the relative importance people attached to different parts of ARC's role, while the interviews provided more in-depth analysis and personal testimonies.

Online Survey

The research team developed a survey of 31 questions, including 10 questions related to ARC. The survey was made available on ARC's website in 3 languages (English, Spanish and French) and calls were made to members of the SOGI list and other related mailing groups inviting activists to answer the questions anonymously. Respondents were also given the option of emailing their completed survey to the project team, knowing it would not be shared with ARC. They were asked to:

1. rank the three types of activities which they think have been ARC's most useful contributions to SOGI activism at the UN
2. mark the activities where they have engaged directly with ARC since 2003
3. specify how useful ARC resources or activities have been for their SOGI work
4. assess ARC's effectiveness in supporting activists in their region to work on SOGI issues at the UN

5. explain how ARC could more effectively support activists and NGOs to work on SOGI issues at the UN and
6. identify the 3 most important ways ARC could support SOGI activism in the next 2 years.

Individual interviews

The individual interviews were an essential part of this research and provided the researchers with rich and comprehensive qualitative data. Two different interview guides were created by the research team: one for individuals who had already answered the online survey, so that the interview could be tailored to their specific areas of expertise or concern, and another for those who had not answered the online survey. Most of the interviews were performed over Skype, with a few people being interviewed by phone or face-to-face. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish.

The project team developed a list of selection criteria for interviewees, based on the research questions. In all cases interviewees needed to have some knowledge of ARC resources or activities, and of how UN mechanisms were being used to address SOGI issues. ARC was invited to provide names of 50 possible interviewees who have collaborated with them in the past. In addition, a general invitation was sent to the SOGI lists, and respondents to the online questionnaire were also asked to identify their willingness to be interviewed.

The research team selected interviewees covering a diverse range of regions, identities and experience. Some people were specifically chosen because of their knowledge of early UN advocacy around SOGI issues, to counteract any tendency to focus primarily on more recent events and discussions. The final list of interviewees has not been supplied to ARC and all names and other identifying material has been removed from interview quotes used in the report. A great number of interviews were rescheduled, due to the huge time pressures on many SOGI activists and advocates, and a few were canceled. In the end, a total of 29 interviews were conducted over a six-week period, from 28 March to 9 May, when the researchers initiated the data analysis.

⁶ For instance the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), Organization for Refuge, Asylum & Migration (ORAM).

The individual interviews enabled the research team to engage directly with LGBTI and human rights activists, representatives from State missions, UN officials and other key stakeholders. Interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes. Where people had completed the survey, the interview questions focused on those responses ranked most highly by the interviewee, or where they had specific expertise and/or had raised concerns. Therefore, the best indication of the relative weight given to an issue is the online survey responses. The interview material provides more analysis of why these issues were important. In this sense, when the report mentions the number of people who talked about a certain issue in the interviews this is simply an indication of some common themes.⁷

In general terms, interviewees were asked to talk about:

1. ARC's impact on their SOGI activism
2. ARC's effectiveness in supporting activists in their region to work on SOGI issues at the UN
3. The usefulness of specific ARC activities or resources
4. ARC's main role/s in contributing to SOGI initiatives/achievements at the UN
5. The most important ways ARC could help progress SOGI issues at the UN in the next 2 years
6. What ARC could do better as an organization.

A number of people stressed the value of this research project as it gave them an opportunity to reflect on progress made on SOGI issues internationally. They welcomed ARC's openness to receiving feedback and critique.

The project team is immensely grateful for the time respondents gave to completing the online survey, particularly given the high number of questions. We also very much appreciated the large number of people who volunteered to be interviewed and their patience in waiting to have an interview confirmed. While it was always going to be a balancing act choosing interviewees with in-depth knowledge about the range of UN milestones and experience working with ARC, and ensuring as broad a demographic and geographic range as possible within just

29 interviews, the process played a vital role in increasing the diversity of interviewees.

1.3 Structure

Following this Introduction, Section 2 provides a demographic profile of the research participants. Section 3 discusses ARC's contributions to SOGI and intersex activism at the UN by analyzing the survey respondents' rankings of and interviewees' views on the impacts of ARC's self-defined core areas of focus. These are information-sharing and updates on UN developments; enhancing capacity of NGOs and activists to engage in UN processes; identifying opportunities for UN advocacy; strengthening collaborations and coalition-building; and facilitating space for strategic dialogue.

Section 4 examines the usefulness of ARC's resources and activities, including those which have facilitated strategic dialogue, such as the SOGI list, the regional dialogues and teleconferences. Section 5 focuses on ARC's practical contributions to SOGI and intersex developments at the UN, drawing on the more detailed information available from the interviews.

Section 6 reflects on the opportunities for ARC to increase the outcomes and achievements of its work, and in the face of current challenges. It presents the survey respondents' and interviewees' views on the most important ways for ARC to support SOGI and intersex activism in the next 2 years. The three most common suggestions were: supporting opportunities for strategic discussion on UN advocacy, helping to increase the capacity of SOGI groups to build coalitions with other NGOs working with UN mechanisms and supporting trans and intersex organizations to do UN advocacy.

The report finishes with some concluding remarks shedding light on overall agreements as well as differing views which emerged from the interviews on ARC's role and its contributions to the SOGI debate at the United Nations.

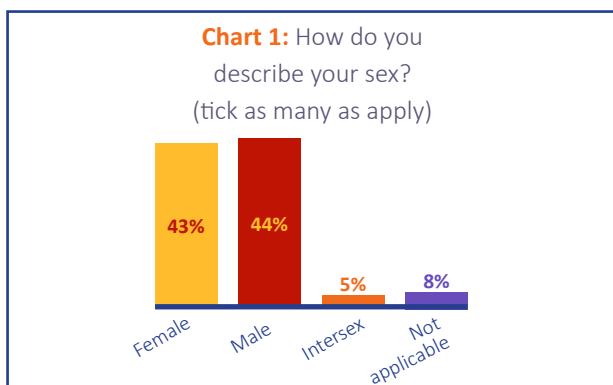
⁷ In other words, the number of interviewees mentioning an issue is likely to understate the level of concern about that point. This is because, in an hour-long interview, there was insufficient time to ask people to elaborate on all the online survey questions.

2. Research participants

2.1 Survey respondents

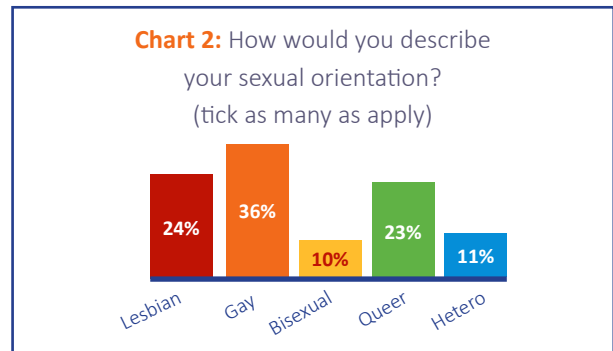
A total of 98 people answered the online survey- 5 in French, 12 in Spanish and 81 in English. The survey contained demographic questions related to the respondents' identities, fields and regions where they work, and years of experience with SOGI activism generally and at the UN. All the questions, apart from those related to years of experience on SOGI and/or UN activism, allowed people to tick multiple options. This means that percentages usually total more than 100 per cent for those questions. This is most notable in the responses to gender identity question.

A very similar proportion of females (43%) and males (44%) completed the survey, with 5 (5%) coming from people who defined their sex as intersex.⁸



People were most likely to describe their sexual orientation as gay (36%), with very similar proportions using the terms lesbian (24%) or queer (23%). Females who answered this survey were twice as likely to identify as queer, compared to male respondents. The groups most likely to identify as queer were those who also identified as intersex, trans or gender-variant/gender-queer.

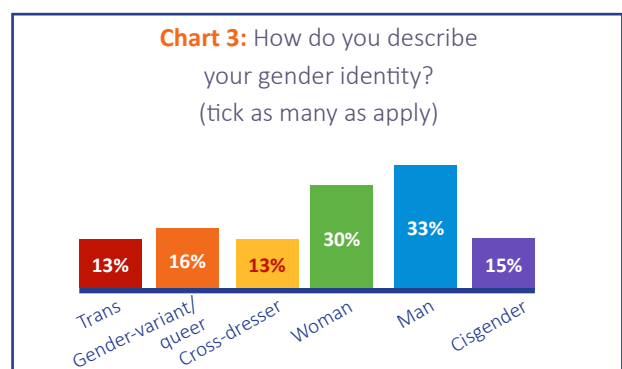
A third of people (33%) described their gender identity as man, and 30% as woman. A total of twenty-seven people



(28%) described themselves as trans, gender-variant/gender queer or as a cross-dresser.⁹

The term cisgender¹⁰ was offered as an additional gender identity term. A small proportion of people (15%) selected that term, eight females and seven males. This may reflect limited knowledge of the word as well as relatively few people identifying with the term. Most people who did not identify as transgender or gender-variant/gender-queer simply stated their gender identity as woman or man.

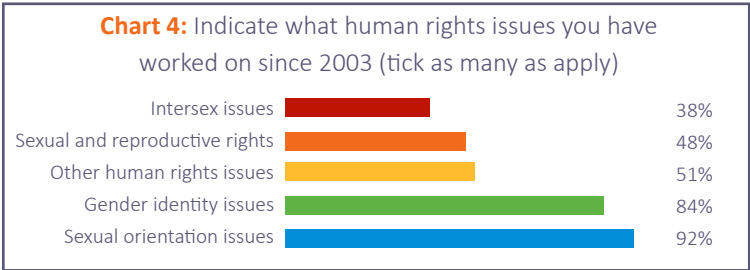
Moreover, the survey asked people to identify if they worked on sexual orientation (SO), gender identity (GI), intersex (I), sexual and reproductive rights (SRR) and/or other human rights issues. The vast majority (92%) said they had worked on SO issues. A very high proportion (84%) said their work involved GI issues, and just under half had worked on SRRs. The proportion working on intersex issues was less than half that of people working



⁸ One person who answered the English language survey stated "I do not approve the Anglophone sex/gender division" and did not consider it appropriate in a global survey.

⁹ This percentage is lower than the combined percentages of people who picked one of these three categories, because there was a high incidence of multiple responses in the gender identity question. For example, four people identified as gender-variant women, four as trans men and two as trans and gender-variant / gender-queer.

¹⁰ Having a gender identity that matches one's sex assigned at birth.



on SO issues or on GI issues. One in two people worked on other human rights issues also.

Respondents were asked to indicate what regions they worked in and if their work also had a global focus. Half indicated they worked globally and many worked in multiple regions. Just under half (47%) worked in Europe (particularly in Eastern Europe/Balkans), followed by 43% in Africa (primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa), 31% in Asia and 29% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

While most of the respondents have done SOGI related activism / advocacy for 10 or more years (53%), only 19% had a UN focus to their SOGI work for that length of time. Forty per cent had less than five years' experience doing SOGI related advocacy that included a UN focus.

2.2 Interviewees

As the methodology section indicated, the selection criteria for the 29 interviewees focused on a diversity of experience across issues and regions and a range of identity and organizational perspectives.

Compared to those who answered the online survey, an even higher proportion of interviewees (62% or 18 people) worked globally. This is not surprising given many interviewees were nominated because of the UN focus of their work. The region more highly represented in the

interviews than in the online survey was Latin America and the Caribbean. In part this reflected the decision to interview people involved in ARC's dialogues in Buenos Aires and St Lucia, as well as other experienced activists or advocates working in this region. The proportion of interviewees working in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East were very similar to survey respondents working in these regions. Compared to the online survey, a smaller proportion of interviewees were working in Europe (particularly Western Europe) or in North America.

Like those who answered the online survey, interviewees' SOGI activism/advocacy typically predated their SOGI work that included a UN focus. On average, interviewees had worked on SOGI-related activism/advocacy for slightly longer than had survey respondents. However the biggest difference was in the proportion of interviewees who had 10 or more years' experience doing SOGI-related advocacy that included a UN focus. Almost a third (31%) of interviewees had this level of UN experience compared to less than 1/5 (19%) of people who filled out the online survey. This presumably reflects the deliberate decision to interview people who had been involved in UN-based advocacy when ARC was first established.

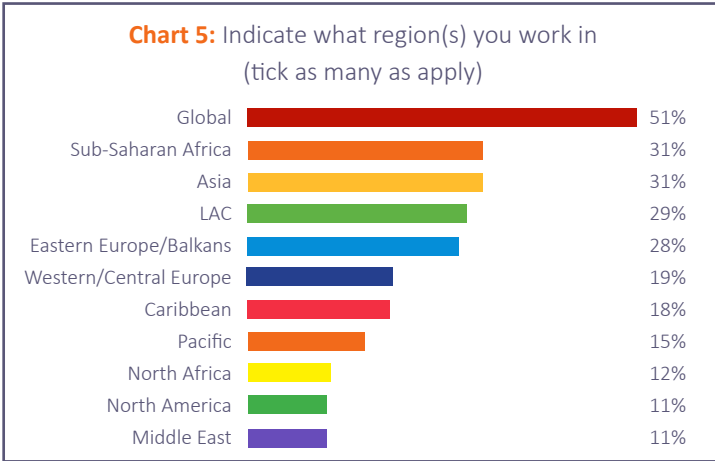
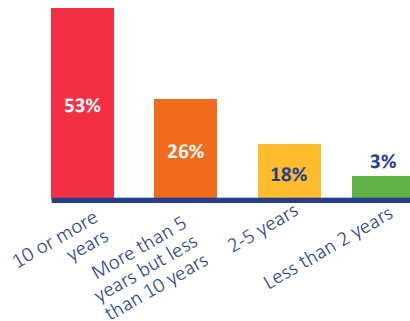


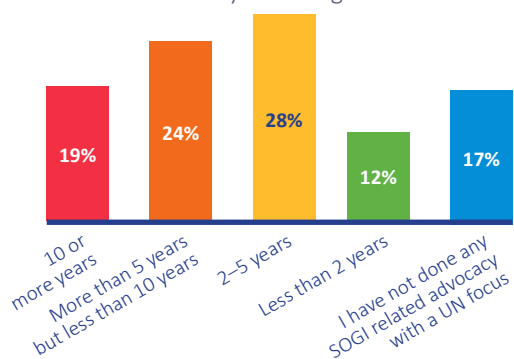
Chart 6: How long have you been doing SOGI related activism/advocacy?



Almost all of the 29 interviewees had worked on sexual orientation (26) and on gender identity (25) issues. Two thirds (19) had also worked on other human rights issues, covering a wide-ranging list of 25 specific issues. Interviewees were less likely than the survey respondents to have worked on sexual and reproductive rights or on intersex issues.

Three intersex people were interviewed (representing 10% of interviewees compared to 5% of those who answered the survey). Seven of the interviews (24%) were with trans or gender-variant people, slightly less than the 28% of survey respondents who defined their gender identity this way. The proportion of interviewees who identified as lesbian or gay also closely mirrored the survey responses. Compared to the online survey, there was a slightly higher proportion of heterosexual interviewees. This may be because some interviewees were selected from mainstream human rights organizations and diplomatic missions.

Chart 7: How long have you been doing SOGI-related advocacy including a focus at the UN?



3. ARC's contributions to SOGI activism

This section of the report aims to discuss ARC's contributions to SOGI activism. In the survey, respondents ranked the three types of activities they considered had been ARC's most useful contributions to SOGI activism at the UN. The types of activities were drawn from ARC's self-defined main areas of focus, listed as follows:

- information-sharing & updates on UN developments
- enhancing capacity of NGOs and activists to engage in UN processes
- identifying opportunities for UN advocacy
- strengthening collaborations and coalition-building and
- facilitating space for strategic dialogue.

3.1 Survey results

The survey respondents were asked to chose which types of activities were ARC's first, second and third most useful contribution to SOGI activism at the UN. Chart 8 below shows the relative ranking given to each of ARC's key types of work.

As the left hand side of Chart 8 shows, respondents' first choice was most commonly to pick 'information-sharing & updates on UN developments' (26%) as ARC's most useful contribution to SOGI activism at the UN. It was closely followed by 'facilitating space for strategic dialogue' (24%) and 'enhancing capacity of NGOs and activists to engage

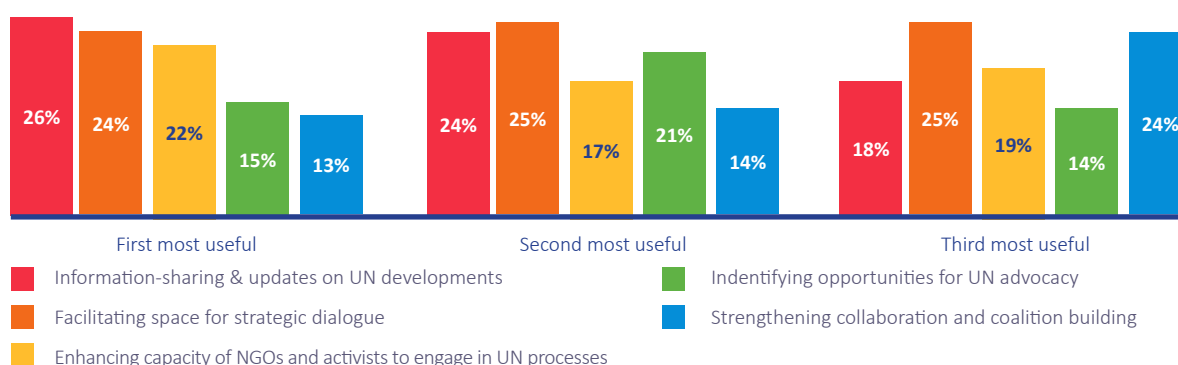
Chart 9: What THREE types of activites do you think have been ARC's most useful contributions to SOGI activism at the UN?



in UN processes' (22%). When respondents' first, second and third choices were all combined, these three activities remained the most highly ranked though in a slightly different order. Facilitating space for strategic dialogue moved to the most popular choice overall.

The high level of support for all 5 core ARC activities is seen when looking at the proportion of people who ranked each activity in their top 3 (in terms of usefulness). As chart 9 shows, all of the five ARC activities received a top 3 ranking by at least half of the people filling out the online survey.

Chart 8: What THREE types of activities do you think have been ARC's most useful contributions to SOGI activism at the UN?



3.2 Interview analysis

The interviews were a chance to discuss how those contributions impacted on interviewees' activism at the local, regional or international levels. Typically interviewees were asked to talk about one or two points (either those they ranked highest or lowest or where they had extensive experience).

This section looks at four of ARC's five activities. The fifth – facilitating space for strategic dialogue – is included in depth in section 4 of the report. This is due to the different nuances of this type of activity and the different resources employed by ARC to facilitating space for strategic dialogue.

a. Information-sharing and updates on UN developments

Some interviewees stressed the educational value of ARC's work, as it provided meaningful guidance on how the UN system works. Such collaborations had increased activists' skills to engage with the UN:

"This cannot be emphasized enough that whenever an LGBT human rights defender comes to Geneva, there was always somebody from ARC willing to sit down with them, talk them through how UN processes work. That's invaluable!"

"The UN can be complicated, intimidating and as it's a State-driven environment, it's not easy for NGOs to engage effectively. ARC has shown activists very practical ways of engagement: do this and that – but also given them a sense of how it all works."

The quotes above also draw attention to a recurring point raised by some interviewees: that ARC's guidance and information-sharing reduced the real difficulties and complexities of engaging with the UN. Some particularly expressed appreciation for ARC's openness to share information and knowledge about the UN. In the words of a mainstream human rights activist:

"There are some NGOs that are very protective of the knowledge they have and they don't share it, they don't share the stage – and ARC does and I've seen them do it repeatedly. I think it's really excellent."

b. Enhancing the capacity of NGOs and activists to engage in UN processes

When reflecting on ARC's role in supporting activists to engage in UN processes, several interviewees highlighted

the importance of bringing activists to the HRC and UPR sessions, since most national and regional organizations do not have permanent representation in Geneva. They emphasized that not only has ARC supported their participation in UN meetings, allowing "their voices to be heard", but also connected them with other organizations to secure funding when they were not able to do so. An activist from the Caribbean said:

"In a scale of 1 to 10, I would give them 11, because they have been extraordinary in supporting LAC activists, particularly from the Caribbean, to participate in the UPR, in connecting them with other international organizations, accessing travel grants, ensuring that activists have access to more UN mechanisms and to other options to engage with the UN."

Interviewees acknowledged ARC's efforts in helping them meet with UN delegates, missions and country representatives and accompanying them on such occasions. They also revealed the impacts of such initiatives on their local work. They considered ARC's support had given legitimacy to their domestic demands on SOGI issues, enabled them to work more closely with their governments or simply inspired them to do more UN advocacy. The testimonies below from activists from the Latin American and Asian regions illustrate such impacts:

"ARC and another international organization accompanied me to meet my country's ambassador in New York to understand the process in which my government makes decisions, and it gave credibility to my own organization's demands, because they realized I have been supported by two of the biggest international organizations working with SOGI issues."

"ARC has enabled me to build closer ties [to] my country's representatives and opened doors for my work back home. Only after my participation in the Oslo conference I was able to have more access to my country's ambassador and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

An activist from Latin America specifically argued that ARC has enhanced the capacity of local activists from the region to get involved with international advocacy and to have greater access to the UN:

"In the beginning, there was a lack of connection between local and international activism, mainly for Latin American activists. There was a distance between

those who have funding to do UN advocacy and those who didn't. ARC has improved that connection, bringing a more horizontal approach to its activities and allowing LAC activists to engage with the UN debate on SOGI issues."

According to our interviews, not only has ARC enhanced activists' capacity to engage with UN mechanisms, but also SOGI activism locally. As a consequence, ARC has helped develop the capacity of other organizations in LAC, Asia, Africa and the Pacific, particularly small groups:

"ARC has also helped me understand the connection between local and international struggles, to have a more universal and sensible opinion on SOGI issues at the UN and that has contributed a lot to improve my local activism."

"If there weren't organizations like ARC International supporting small groups, many groups would struggle. Groups really need capacity building on how to advocate and use these international mechanisms to support the issues on the grassroots level."

An activist from an international trans organization also commended ARC for both inspiring and supporting the development of their own organization:

"Especially when we started, ARC has been very very helpful in developing us as an organization and in helping us identify things we should work on. (...) To some extent we modeled ourselves after ARC as we felt it was very successful – very small and very targeted."

c. Identifying opportunities for UN advocacy

Several interviewees emphasized that ARC has played a key role identifying concrete opportunities for SOGI advocacy at the UN. By empowering activists and "providing expert advice on UN mechanisms", ARC enabled them to "advance SOGI through the UN agenda" and have supported "more and more activists to get involved in SOGI initiatives". In the quotes below, 2 interviewees give different examples of this role:

"During the first UPR cycle, ARC contacted and actively engaged local activists. I was extremely impressed. I felt strength and interest in LGBT activists engaging with this mechanism"

"I have seen ARC do that by bringing activists to a Human Rights Council session and organizing them to work through the session in an enabling

and empowering way; briefing them on issues and mechanisms, helping them lobby."

This accomplishment was not only acknowledged by activists but also by some UN officials. One pointed out that by identifying opportunities for global civil society to engage with UN mechanisms, ARC has, at the same time, made the UN more accessible to those activists. This official drew attention to ARC's role as a bridge between civil society and the UN:

"They play a very interesting bridge role. They don't try to represent global civil society, although they could. But they help global civil society understand UN processes and help UN mechanisms understand global civil society. And they have helped to facilitate and provide a bridge for activists all over the world, including in the Global South, to come to the UN and pitch their arguments in a way that it has impact."

The same thing was observed by an activist from an international human rights organization who further noted that:

"They play a valuable role in bridging the UN system and international organizations and then bridge the global stage with the local stage."

Activists from both international and regional organizations corroborated this impression of ARC's role, arguing that ARC's knowledge of the UN and local communities helped them identify opportunities for the latter to engage strategically with the former:

"ARC is a sophisticated advocacy player, with a very sound understanding of how the UN works, the opportunities for progress [and] how the UN can be used on the ground. They not only engage in Geneva-based advocacy, but ARC has a clear understating on how local realities and communities can play a strong role at the UN."

"ARC International is a very strategic organization with regards to UN processes, knowing the system, the procedure of engagement and opportunities which exist – and strategically where to engage and where not to push the issues. They provide useful talking points and guidance for activists."

Several interviewees explained that ARC's updates on the UPR and the HRC have created opportunities for civil society to engage with the UN. In addition, some

stressed that ARC has helped organizations to reserve slots for activists to speak at HRC sessions, organized side events and brought in LGBTI activists from across the world to provide testimonies. Such side events have had a significant impact in keeping SOGI and intersex issues on the UN agenda, as noted by this UN official:

“They helped organize events in Geneva in the margins of the Human Rights Council that have helped to keep the issue alive and make it visible at a time when it might otherwise have dropped off the radar screen.”

Other examples mentioned included setting up meetings with Special Rapporteurs and opportunities for activists to talk with senior diplomats about the issues LGBTI people face in their own countries.

d. Strengthening collaborations and coalition-building

Interviewees spoke about the impacts of ARC’s work on collaborations and coalition-building within and across the regions. Many interviewees mentioned that ARC has helped create spaces for bringing activists together and connecting organizations in the Global South which are interested in international advocacy. The first quote below was from an activist reflecting on their experience at one of ARC’s regional dialogues.

“It was very important and essential to my organization to connect and collaborate with other organizations that do international advocacy, not only at the HRC but more recently at the CSW (...). It was all about networking, collaboration, sharing experience, connecting people and building their capacity.”

“I also think ARC has played quite a clear role in the quite deliberate building of a broader range of advocacy from activist involvement from the Global South and I think that needs to be commended.”

An activist from Africa argued that ARC’s efforts to include a wide diversity of groups in its initiatives and create space for them to engage with one another have helped produce stronger coalitions across the regions:

“From all the things, what I have really appreciated from ARC’s work is how they always try to get quite a number of diverse groups around the table to talk about a specific issue. I think such processes have helped to build a stronger coalition across borders and regions and a better understanding of what it is that we are doing at the UN.”

Other interviewees emphasized ARC’s inclusive and consultative approach and how collaborations have been “very horizontal and productive”, ensuring “representation and engagement from different regions” and encouraging local organizations to take ownership of this work:

“ARC has never pushed their own agenda/mandate on local groups; they have always been very open to negotiate and construct things together.”

“ARC’s been very effective in its efforts of including people in the initiatives, being [very] democratic and transparent, informing everybody of what’s happening in Geneva ... That’s very admirable!”

4. Usefulness of ARC's resources and activities

In the previous section, it was mentioned that one of ARC's most useful contributions to SOGI activism was through facilitating space for strategic dialogue. This section identifies the relative usefulness of ARC's activities and resources, including those which have facilitated strategic dialogues, such as the SOGI list, regional dialogues and teleconferences.

It discusses the extent to which survey respondents and interviewees considered the following activities or resources were useful for their SOGI or intersex work:

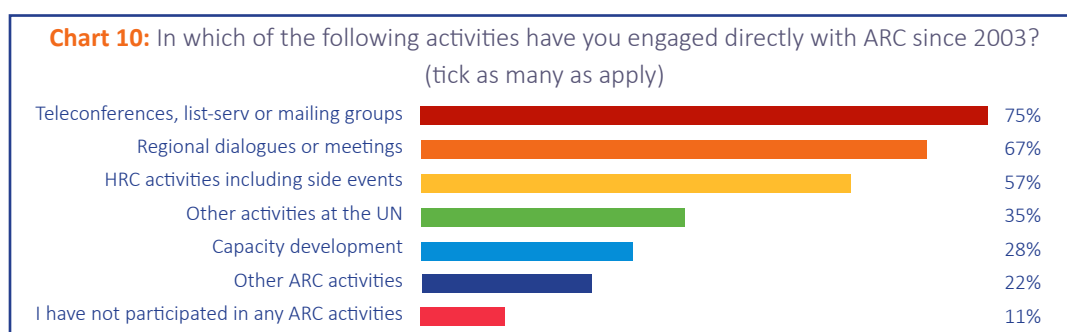
- Regional dialogues/meetings/convenings
- Capacity development workshops and mentoring
- Yogyakarta Principles and Activist Guide (resources, workshops and websites)
- ARC's guides and toolkits (e.g. to the UPR, Human Rights Council, Special Procedures)
- ARC's Human Rights Council and UPR summaries and updates
- SOGI listserv (and other mailing groups)
- ARC website
- Social media: Facebook, YouTube, and Vimeo (including "The Time Has Come" video documentary).

4.1 Survey results

The survey asked people to identify which ARC activities they have been involved in or resources they had used since 2003. The vast majority had used ARC resources or participated in ARC events. Out of the 98 people who answered the survey, only 11% stated that they had not participated in any of ARC's activities.¹¹

As chart 10 shows, three quarters of respondents had been involved in ARC teleconferences, listserv or mailing groups. It is not surprising that this was the most common engagement with ARC given the survey was predominantly promoted through the SOGI listserv. Arguably it might have been expected that an even higher proportion of respondents were on the SOGI list. Two thirds had engaged directly with ARC at regional dialogues or meetings. More than half (57%) had worked with ARC around Human Rights Council activities, including side events. The strong UN focus is reflected in the fact that 'other activities at the UN' was the fourth most common response (36%) and ranked higher than participation at capacity development workshops (28%).

Survey respondents were then asked to rank each activity based on the extent to which it had been useful for their SOGI work. The possible responses were 'very useful', 'useful', 'not so useful' or 'not useful at all'. As shown in the chart below, the resources which were most often



¹¹ Only responses from those who had used an ARC activity were used to measure whether, and to what extent, it was considered useful.

considered to be “very useful” were the SOGI listserv and other mailing groups (69%) and the HRC and UPR summaries and updates (60%), followed by Regional Dialogues and meetings (58%).

Combining the “useful” and “very useful” responses illustrates the high level of positive feedback on all listed ARC activities and resources. Almost all (97%) of people considered the SOGI list and ARC’s Guides and Toolkits were useful or very useful. The HRC and UPR summaries and updates came next with 93%, followed by Regional dialogues and the Yogyakarta Principles and Activist Guide (89% each). ARC’s social media were its only resources that less than 80% of people ranked as useful.

4.2 Interview analysis

Interviewees were specifically asked how useful some of those resources and activities have been for their own work, including for their SOGI advocacy at the UN. As previously noted, time constraints meant interviewees were primarily asked to focus on what had been most useful for their work. The most common resources or activities discussed in the interviews were the SOGI list, HRC and UPR guides and reports, Regional Dialogues and teleconferences.¹²

Some of the reasons people used to explain why they considered ARC’s resources were useful, included that ARC was “a platform for communication among LGBTI groups, either through the SOGI list, conference calls, or dialogues”; “a reliable source for SOGI advocacy at the UN”; and provided “a vehicle for other groups to express themselves and communicate with each other”. A summary of interviewees’ assessment of each specific ARC resource or activity is presented below.

a. SOGI list

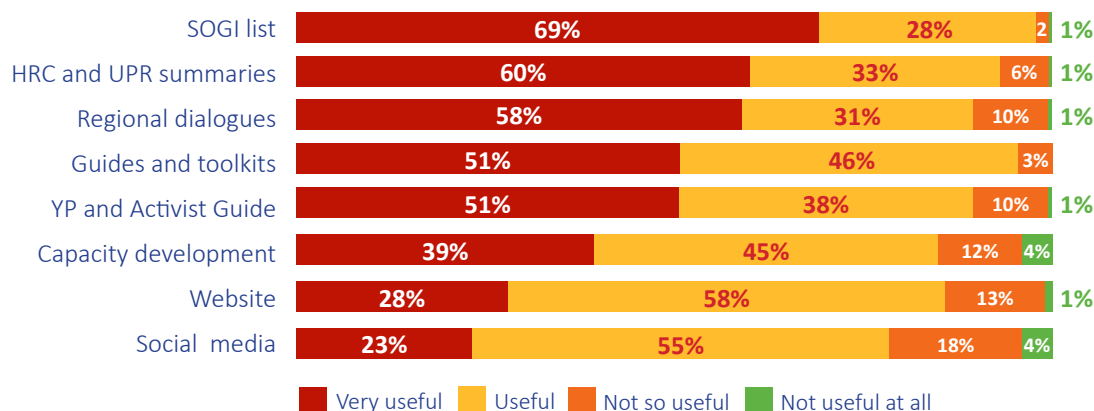
The SOGI list was described as an “online platform” for SOGI activism and a “resource center” which enables activists across the globe to exchange information, ideas, news and even advocacy strategies on a frequent basis. Twelve interviewees emphasized the usefulness of the SOGI list in coordinating or strategizing around international work on SOGI issues, as well as receiving feedback or inputs from activists on the ground. The quotes below give some examples of the usefulness of the list:

“It’s like a kind of international forum to discuss and to analyze information and also to organize strategies. For example, any time it is necessary to produce a collective response, the SOGI list is usually the place where most of the discussions take place around that.”

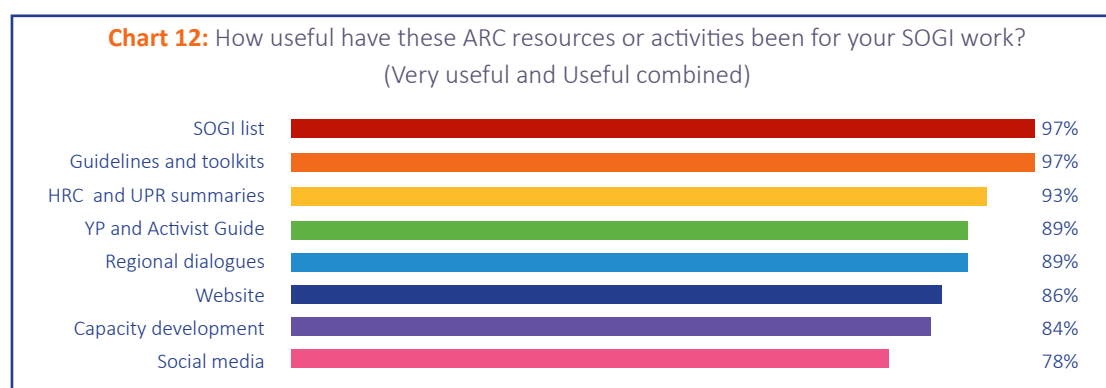
“We have used these discussions on the list to... issue a press release/make a statement at the Council, or to develop our own actions because we can send an email to the list and get very quick feedback from activists on the ground. They can share ‘this is what we expect from international groups’. So you actually have that support on what you’re doing from activists.”

Nevertheless, some interviewees expressed concern that it is hard nowadays to follow the conversations on the list due to the heavy flow of emails and the disputes which occasionally arise from some discussions. The list has increased from about 30 participants when it was created to over 1,000 now. Some people who participated on the list when it was small and strategic may miss the level of frank analysis that could occur in such space. Others still typically find it very useful. This includes seasoned activists

Chart 11: How useful have these ARC resources or activities been for your SOGI work?



¹² Although 51% of the survey respondents considered the YP activist’s guide as “very useful” and 89% as either “very useful” or “useful”, it did not come up substantially in the interviewees’ comments about ARC’s role. Nevertheless, the YPs were examined in the first part of the interviews, and are documented in this project’s separate report, focusing on SOGI developments at the UN.



who are interested in international work but not regularly in Geneva. Overall, the list continues to be an important “way to connect the online and offline activism”.

b. HRC and UPR guides and reports

The advocacy guides and the summary reports that ARC regularly produces for the UPR and the HRC were the resources interviewees mentioned the most. Overall they received very positive assessments from sixteen interviewees. ARC was described as “the SOGI voice in Geneva” and was highly commended for its efforts in sharing information and updates on UN developments on SOGI issues. Their guides and reports were seen as not only useful for activists from outside Geneva, but also as helping other human rights activists, experts and even States learn how to engage with SOGI issues at the UN:

“Information sharing is very useful [...]. You can quickly understand what the main issues are. You will also be informed about where SOGI is discussed as part of a broader agenda, not as a sole focus. For example, how SOGI is important in the traditional values discussions. This all is very useful because not everyone can go to the UN.”

“This has been useful in terms of determining my own engagement around the Human Rights Council, just to know what I should be particularly looking out for and how it may impact my work in particular.”

Moreover, some activists pointed out that ARC’s guides had positive impacts in their regions, such as LAC, Africa and Asia-Pacific. They had inspired activists to get involved with the UN, and even prompted one organization to develop its own advocacy guide:

“The UPR guide is one of the things I share the most with my colleagues for them to understand why we

should engage with the UN. It helps people to get involved especially in my region, where people do not value the UN work very much. They don’t believe the UN can achieve concrete results.”

Activists from Africa and from the Caribbean described how difficult it is to engage local activists from their regions in UN discussions because they struggle to see the effectiveness of UN mechanisms on the ground or “are not familiar with the UN language and structure”. However they considered that ARC’s guides and updates, particularly for the UPR, have shown practical ways to engage with such mechanisms and interact with their own governments.

Two interviewees mentioned that ARC’s analysis of how States have voted on SOGI issues at the UN was a very useful lobbying resource for some activists. As an activist from an international SOGI organization said:

“When ARC does the list of who voted when and where, I use that often when I’m writing a report or making a presentation and trying to shame some of the States: ‘Look at your voting record here’. So I refer to that and find that very useful.”

c. Regional dialogues

The regional dialogues and other international meetings organized by ARC also received very positive reviews from thirteen interviewees. They pointed out how informative those dialogues were and their importance for building and enhancing the capacity of local activists to engage with SOGI issues at the UN. The quotes below show how useful these dialogues were in different regions:

“The Regional meeting held in Kenya was the most useful because it introduced Kenyan activists and

other African activists to UN matters and how to engage with the UN and work with UN mechanisms.”

“I’ve seen the number of people from Asia Pacific who have been involved in the dialogues and the groups that have certainly learnt about participating in the UN systems through ARC.”

“In the 2012 international dialogue in Saint Lucia, ARC brought 90 global activists. It was the first time that such a meeting was held in a country with a sodomy law. It did not only help build our capacity but also increased our self-esteem and confidence to work more globally and try to cause impact from abroad (from the international to the local level).”

Furthermore, interviewees also spoke at length about how the regional dialogues have created space and opportunities for networking and dialogue among local and international civil society organizations and strengthened collaborations within and among the regions:

“And through the dialogue ARC held and invited me [in Saint Lucia], I felt a sense of belonging and learning from other similar NGOs and civil society organizations. How to actually work to do your own activism in your own local area. And how you can use your associates and your networking with other international civil society organizations to put your issues through.”

“They make sure they invite activists from other places to share experiences and that’s really great because then you have experiences from another region that may be similar or different. If you are an activist from Russia, how often do you get to meet activists from South Africa, Zimbabwe or Nigeria? It’s a useful space to share experiences and get to know each other.”

Finally, interviewees highlighted that those regional dialogues have been organized in consultation and collaboration with local groups. They explained that ARC has provided specific technical expertise without dominating how a local group organizes and runs the dialogue.

“The regional meetings are very well orchestrated and it’s a result of collective work and cooperation with other organizations.”

“The great thing about the regional dialogues is that they have provided great financial and technical

support to activists in the regions. They allow local groups to take ownership of the process and to organize the dialogues the way it is best for them.”

d. Teleconferences

Although the usefulness of the periodic teleconferences facilitated by ARC was not assessed separately in the online survey (see chart 10 above), they were a recurring theme in a number of interviews.

The teleconferences were described by five interviewees as very useful and influential because they facilitated the interaction among groups outside Geneva “on an ongoing and accessible basis” and brought together people from all parts of the world. Others explained that they allowed strategic discussions in ways that could never be possible face-to-face. For instance, teleconferences have made it possible for activists to organize in-person meetings, as highlighted by an activist from Africa who said that the Istanbul meeting,¹³ for example, “could never be possible if it wasn’t for the conference calls.”

Two interviewees underscored ARC’s role as ‘facilitator’ or ‘convener’ of the calls and not as leader of the process:

“It’s always made clear that ARC is not the sole convener, everyone else is free to do that if they want input. But the fact that no other group has taken initiative to do that, it makes it even more important that ARC continues to do it.”

However, some challenges were raised in terms of language and representation. Activists from Latin America and Russia considered that non-English speaking people have not been able to fully participate in the calls. An activist from Western Europe also raised a concern about the accessibility of the calls to non-Western activists, making it clear though that this is not necessarily ARC’s fault:

“The group that participates is often made up of those that have the resources to participate. There has always been an over-representation of people from the West who have worked on these issues. This imbalance is present for both who is going to the UN and who is participating in a teleconference. There have been sincere attempts to broaden the group, but the challenge is: whose responsibility is it to ensure that more voices are being heard during a call? This is not necessarily ARC’s responsibility – they are there as a convener.”

¹³ The Istanbul meeting was held in February 2014 in order to formulate and discuss civil society strategies around a follow-up SOGI resolution at the UN. The meeting was organized heavily through weekly conference calls and a shared collaborative process among NGOs working on SOGI and intersex issues at the UN, including ARC International.

5. ARC's impacts on SOGI achievements at the United Nations

The previous sections of this report analyzed the impact of ARC's work and resources on SOGI and intersex activism, either locally, regionally or internationally, and how it influenced advocacy at the UN. This section draws on the more detailed information available from interviews to focus on ARC's practical contributions to SOGI debates at the UN.

Interviewees identified that ARC has played a key role in "bringing SOGI issues into the general framework of the United Nations", particularly in Geneva, "with skill, dedication and a considerable degree of accomplishment".

They described four main impacts from ARC's work. These were that ARC has created visibility for SOGI issues, supported the work of other international organizations, encouraged States to support SOGI issues and influenced the actual language of UN documents. These are discussed in turn below.

a. Creating visibility for SOGI issues in Geneva

The first impact of ARC's role that was mentioned frequently by interviewees was that its presence in Geneva gave great visibility to SOGI issues at the UN. This achievement then paved the way for other civil society organizations and UN missions to address SOGI issues. Many interviewees argued that there was no other organization focusing solely on SOGI advocacy at the UN when ARC started, back in 2003. ARC's work changed the scenery completely, as the comments below describe:

"When I started, there was no ARC in Geneva, so no one was actually pushing for these issues at all, in any way. And now you have an extremely effective organization bringing out other organizations to lobby States consistently and the level of direct engagement between missions in Geneva and civil society has changed remarkably."

"ARC's presence in Geneva has been fundamental, without them none of these developments would have happened because they have been the only SOGI organization in Geneva. They have functioned as an informal secretariat for SOGI friendly states and advocates."

"Being in Geneva is very important, being visible and also working behind the scenes. Everyone in Geneva knows what LGBTI rights [are] mostly because of ARC."

b. Supporting the work of international human rights organizations in their SOGI advocacy at the UN

As previously mentioned, staff from international organizations who have collaborated with ARC at some point were also interviewed for this research. This included both SOGI and broader human rights organizations, some of which were also based in Geneva. They explained how collaborating with ARC has been fruitful in terms of supporting their UN work and providing them with valuable information on SOGI issues. This made it possible for other international organizations to engage in SOGI advocacy at the UN as well.

"For many years, ARC has been the only LGBT organization focused at the UN in Geneva and they have an invaluable communication/advocacy power for our community. They made the world more accessible for other organizations to work at the UN as well."

"They're constantly keeping us informed about what's happening at the UN, who's saying what, where, and what trends are emerging, particularly when resolutions are coming up, and making sure that convenings are held."

c. Encouraging States to support SOGI issues at the UN

Eight interviewees described how ARC's work extended to informing States about opportunities to raise and

advance SOGI issues through various UN decision-making processes. A representative from one of the UN missions mentioned how useful ARC's briefings before Human Rights Council sessions had been:

"Early on, States didn't know how to raise SOGI issues. The briefings that ARC organized were very useful. Before Council sessions ARC would get us together and explain all the different opportunities for raising SOGI issues in Special Rapporteurs' work, statements, the UPR, etc. The briefings were really good for us to understand where the opportunities were."

This interviewee described ARC as "a real game changer" and enabled States to address SOGI issues more consistently after the HRC was established in 2006 compared to under the former Commission on Human Rights. He particularly acknowledged ARC's endeavors to provide States with expert analysis about the new Council and emerging SOGI terminologies:

"When the Council came through, [ARC] particularly thoroughly got to grips with the Council process and became an expert in the Council itself as well as the thematic area of SOGI, so [they] became an authority. From the outset [ARC] found all the opportunities to raise these issues, got States together and made it so easy for us by saying 'here is the opportunity in this dialogue on this country, here is a tailored recommendation'."

Both UN officials and LGBTI activists who were interviewed confirmed the above statements and highlighted the impact of ARC's strategic work in getting States to support SOGI initiatives at the UN, including joint statements and resolutions. As a result, since 2003, increasingly more States have spoken out and drawn the UN's attention to human rights violations based on SOGI. The responses below illustrate such views, as expressed by a UN official and a SOGI activist respectively:

"I think they played an important role to get countries to support the informal Joint Statements that preceded the adoption of the first resolution. They have played an important role as a go-between between countries that are supportive and civil society and they have also helped to kind of bring the voices of civil society to the Human Rights Council in Geneva."

"Their presence at the UN and the work they do together with States, both by gathering like-minded ones and trying to persuade the opposed ones, is actually fundamental for SOGI developments."

d. Influencing the language of UN documents

According to the testimonies of several interviewees, ARC's strategic work in lobbying States to support SOGI issues has really paid off. Specifically, twelve mentioned that the organization successfully influenced the language of UN documents and contributed immensely to SOGI achievements at the UN, including the South African resolution at the HRC in 2011:¹⁴

"We have got a lot of language in the documents that people take for granted and ARC has helped so much providing States with knowledge to introduce SOGI language in resolutions, statements and other UN documents."

"The South African resolution would never have happened without the work of ARC. ARC has been incredibly important in joining friendly States and coordinating the work of SOGI allies."

Some interviewees also acknowledged ARC's role in the greater visibility of SOGI issues in the UPR recommendations. This was particularly emphasized by a representative from one of the UN missions:

"If you look at the recommendations made throughout the UPR, a lot of that is down to ARC's work and them getting States to raise particular recommendations. In the beginning this was hugely controversial: in one of the first reports delegations were asking wording to be put in the report that it didn't reflect the working group as a whole – because sexual orientation was in it. And now it is accepted. We have moved a huge way to improving the regularity of SOGI issues coming up at the UPR. ARC has been a huge success story in this."

These developments at the UN are analyzed in more depth in the separate report written as part of this research project.

¹⁴ As previously noted, the interviews took place prior to the adoption by the Human Rights Council of the follow-up SOGI resolution in September 2014.

6. Looking forward: opportunities and challenges

While the previous sections took a look back at ARC's impacts and contributions to date, this section looks forward and discusses opportunities for ARC to increase the usefulness and effectiveness of its work and meet current challenges. First, it presents the results of a survey question which asked people to choose the 3 most important ways that ARC could support SOGI activism in the next 2 years. The interviews provide further details particularly around the role ARC could play in responding to challenges faced by LGBTI activists doing this work.

6.1 Survey results

The online survey asked respondents to select, from 16 options, the 3 most important ways that ARC could support SOGI activism in the next 2 years. This question was completed by 91 people. The table below lists the number of people who chose each option as their first, second or third priority. It then gives the combined number and percentage of people who chose each option as one of their top 3 priorities.

The 3 areas of work people most commonly identified as their first priority, also received the highest level of support overall and were among the top 3 overall priorities. These were:

- supporting opportunities for strategic discussion on UN advocacy (34%)
- helping increase the capacity of SOGI groups to build coalitions with other NGOs working with UN mechanisms (30%) and
- supporting trans and intersex organizations in doing advocacy at the UN (30%).

Other areas which ranked relatively high as first, second and third priorities remained among the overall top priorities. These were "maintain or develop the SOGI list and/or additional lists" (27%) and "provide more support on other ways of working with the Human Rights Council" (26%).

However, other areas of work that were less prominent issues as respondents' first priority, nonetheless ranked highly overall. The first example is regional dialogues. These were only listed 8th as people's first priority, but were the highest second priority and were in the top 6 overall priorities (25%). This suggests that while people recognise regional dialogues are not ARC's top priority, they are highly valued.

Similarly, "integrate SOGI campaigns with campaigns to tackle other forms of injustice (racism, sexism, etc.)" and "hold more capacity development workshops on using UN systems" ranked very low as respondents' first priorities, but were very popular second or third priorities, with 24% and 22% respectively.

Furthermore, survey respondents had the chance to provide suggestions on how ARC could be more effective in their own regions. Overall, they identified the need for the following actions:

- More capacity building in Africa was required, alongside further engagement with activists from Eastern Europe and Central Asia in order to develop the advocacy skills of activists there.
- It was also suggested that ARC should be more active in Latin America by enhancing the capacity of NGOs there to engage with UN mechanisms, enabling more Spanish-speaking activists to participate in international strategic meetings and supporting regional coalitions in Central America and the Caribbean.
- Finally, it was stressed that ARC should increase its engagement with activists in North America, including with those who have had to leave their home countries because of SOGI-related violence.

6.2 Interview analysis

In the interviews, people were invited to describe how ARC could better advance SOGI issues at the UN in the future, particularly in response to current challenges.

Which are the 3 most important ways ARC could support SOGI activism in the next 2 years?	First priority	Second priority	Third priority	Total No	Total %
Support opportunities for strategic discussion on UN advocacy	14	9	8	31	34%
Help increase the capacity of SOGI groups to build coalitions with other NGOs working with UN mechanisms	15	9	3	27	30%
Support trans and intersex organizations in doing advocacy at the UN	10	8	9	27	30%
Maintain or develop the SOGI list and/or additional lists	10	6	9	25	27%
Provide more support on other ways of working with the Human Rights Council	9	7	8	24	26%
Hold Regional Dialogues more often	4	10	9	23	25%
Integrate SOGI campaigns with campaigns to tackle other forms of injustice (racism, sexism, etc.)	3	10	9	22	24%
Provide more support to activists on engaging with the UPR	9	8	3	20	22%
Hold more capacity development workshops on using UN systems	2	7	11	20	22%
Help increase the capacity of mainstream human rights organizations to integrate SOGI issues in their work	6	3	8	17	19%
Help increase the number of SOGI groups doing advocacy at the UN and support ECOSOC accreditation	7	2	6	14	15%
Provide more support on engaging in other UN spaces (e.g. Commission on the Status of Women, the General Assembly etc)	3	5	4	12	13%
Provide more support on working with Treaty Bodies	1	3	2	6	7%
Provide more support on working with Special Procedures	1	3	1	5	5%
A review and update of the Yogyakarta Principles	0	1	3	4	4%
Provide space where activists and governments can have frank dialogue outside their country	1	0	0	1	1%

The six most common themes emerging from the interviewees' responses were that ARC should:

- diversify the UN mechanisms with which it engages
- increase its efforts to enhance NGO capacity
- increase regional representation and diversity in its activities, as well as the number of identities and issues they work with
- improve its advocacy resources and
- enhance its own organizational capacity and role.

Each of these themes is explored below.

a. Diversification of UN mechanisms

The majority of interviewees commended ARC's work at the HRC and their efforts "to marshal support for a new resolution". However 10 people pointed out that ARC

should expand its focus to other UN mechanisms, beyond the HRC and the UPR, and provide more guidance for activists to engage with them.

Interviewees suggested that ARC should enhance their capacity to engage with a broader range of treaty bodies and help activists elaborate shadow reports. One interviewee particularly explained that:

"The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, for example, has a dreadful record of doing no more than talking around the issues. But that's partly because maybe they've not been focused for advocacy."

Interviewees also mentioned the benefits of ARC strengthening its engagement with a wide range of Special Rapporteurs "to make sure that they're paying attention to the SOGI dimensions of their respective mandates",

including intersex issues. However, concerns were raised that ARC does not currently have the capacity or resources to do this additional work with treaty bodies or Special Rapporteurs. Another argument for ARC sticking to what it does well was to avoid duplicating the work of other organizations. Therefore it is not surprising that there was no consensus about whether ARC should expand its work to a broader range of UN mechanisms, or maintain a narrower focus on the HRC and UPR.

In relation to ARC's UPR work, interviewees stressed the value of bringing activists to Geneva for UPR sessions and also training them to write civil society reports. They also suggested working closely with States on how to make a greater variety of SOGI recommendations, particularly on gender identity issues. The quote below highlights how important it is for ARC to keep engaging with the UPR process:

"There a lot of countries where there is scope to change laws. Particularly with countries that are moving to the right direction but not as quickly as you'd like, UPR is very useful. Bringing out people and getting specific recommendations from civil society in these countries is extremely valuable, so UPR capacity is a big deal."

Only a few interviewees briefly mentioned that ARC should also focus more on the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women. The separate report on UN engagement will look more carefully at activists' engagement with a range of UN mechanisms.

b. More trainings to enhance NGO capacity

Eight interviewees suggested that ARC should organize more training sessions with NGOs in order to enhance their capacity to work with UN mechanisms and help "build truly global activists with expertise at the UN". Three particularly requested training on how to lobby the different country missions and embassies to support SOGI recommendations and initiatives at the UN.

An intersex activist suggested that ARC could build activists' capacity on international organizing, rather than simply on UN mechanisms. This would enable activists to better explain the relevance of their international work to other activists in their country or region. According to this interviewee, it is not enough to participate in international conferences or ARC dialogues – activists must "follow up and do something with the knowledge" they have obtained.

Two interviewees from mainstream human rights organization and one from an international LGBT organization suggested ARC should train mainstream human rights groups on ways to give more attention to SOGI issues and integrate them into their regular work.

"It's very important that mainstream human rights groups are pushing for the inclusion of LGBT issues in their routine work. ARC could pay attention to this more and run workshops to educate them about the key issues and how to raise them; and generally to raise their awareness about how important it is for SOGI issues to be integrated in broader HR frameworks, so it is not just coming from LGBT organizations – there is a risk of ghettoizing LGBT issues".

c. Increase trans and intersex participation

Seven interviewees requested that ARC support more trans and intersex activists to do UN advocacy and educate organizations and States on a variety of trans and intersex issues which have not received sufficient attention at the UN. An activist from an international human rights organization said:

"There should be a lot more trans and intersex people who are doing advocacy at the UN, who can talk from experience what it's like and who can be visible. Right now you see trans people very rarely. There is also this tokenistic approach of just having one trans person there and it shouldn't be like that. What is needed is recruiting and training more people so they know how to use UN mechanisms, inviting more trans/intersex speakers. And we need to do some learning too."

Similarly many interviewees, not only those who are trans or intersex activists, said there is a need for meaningful participation of trans and intersex people at the UN. This included participation at UN sessions, NGO trainings and international meetings, as well as opportunities for follow-up with activists in their own regions.

A trans activist specifically suggested that ARC should start "encouraging international LGBT and mainstream HR organizations and funders to create trans and intersex positions." Additionally, an intersex activist drew attention to the leadership role ARC could play by incorporating the concept of bodily diversity in its work, since "ARC is producing most of the materials that background the understanding that most people doing SOGI activism have about the UN". This activist considered ARC was well

placed to update material available to LGBTI activists in a way that reflects evolving terminology being used by intersex activists and by some Special Procedures. This work was deemed to be particularly important because the Yogyakarta Principles paid limited attention to intersex issues.

“Intersex issues need more language ... we need our allies, including ARC, to get more sophisticated in the ways in which we talk about or understand intersex issues. [Currently] it’s so connected with gender identity that there’s no way of talking about bodies. (...) I think that ARC could play a great role recognizing that there are some areas of intersex activism that are not connected with SOGI. So instead of forcing intersex into SOGI, acknowledging that there are points of contact, but at the same time we are not exactly the same movement.”

The issue of intersectionality with other movements appeared in the responses of five other interviewees who further raised the need for a more intersectional approach in LGBTI activism. This includes working with feminist and other movements on other SOGI-related issues, such as sexual health, reproductive rights and geopolitics, “in order to increase support and avoid backlash”.

d. Ensure regional diversity and representation

Over half of interviewees said that ARC should focus on increasing regional representation and diversity in its activities. This was considered necessary to enable more activists from non-Western NGOs, the Global South, Central and Eastern Europe to engage in SOGI advocacy at the UN.

Two interviewees suggested one way to do this would be through supporting ECOSOC accreditation of more LGBTI groups across the globe to enable their representation at the UN.

Five interviewees mentioned that another practical way to tackle the issue would be to “create spaces for more systematic dialogues in the local and regional levels” so that ARC can better understand and address regional differences and challenges. There were several requests for ARC to increase participation and representation of activists from Latin America, Africa, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the Pacific, particularly those who are non-English speaking. This would make the UN more accessible to those regions and countries that require

more attention from UN mechanisms. In the words of one mission representative:

“I’m a big believer in people understanding the UN system better so it’s not just used by Western NGOs on issues that frankly they don’t need to use the UN for because they have domestic mechanisms that will do what they need. The UN needs to be accessible to countries that don’t have these mechanisms.”

e. Improve their UN advocacy resources

Section 4 of this report summarized findings from the survey results and interviews about the usefulness of ARC’s resources and materials. This section shares interviewees’ suggestions on how ARC could improve its resources and enhance the tools available for LGBTI activists worldwide to engage with the UN.

Five interviewees suggested that ARC should help convene more in-person meetings and discussions to strategize on SOGI advocacy at the UN. They spoke about the value of such meetings in helping build “a global advocacy agenda” and fostering cross-regional collaborations. In the words of an activist from an international LGBTI organization:

“If we don’t fix the gaps in global strategizing now, there is a big risk of the global movement falling apart. The efforts going on right now to try to make decision making processes around the UN more collaborative and representative of voices are an important one and there is momentum for that now.”

The Istanbul meeting was mentioned by two interviewees as a good example in this respect and follow-up meetings were considered extremely necessary.

Other suggestions for ARC to improve its resources included:

- “build closer ties with the media, the press, in order to give more visibility to the things they do, their local and international actions, meetings etc.”
- write or edit a journal, blog or a regular publication containing articles and texts analyzing and predicting threats and opportunities for SOGI issues at the UN, as well as ways to move forward
- make their resources more accessible to people new to these issues, particularly if they are working regionally, including through new media strategies or technologies, and

- develop a “SOGI-platform” focused on UN advocacy, different from the SOGI list, to allow exchange of views, practices and strategies among activists working exclusively at the UN.

An advocate from a broader human rights organization suggested that the SOGI-list should be split in two. One could be a strategic list focused on international advocacy, preferably run by ARC, and the other a general list for information on SOGI human rights issues.

“This could only happen if ARC sets up a separate list ... of people who are actually interested in and engaged on international advocacy and strategy, so it’s an activists’ list rather than an information list. There is a desperate need for a strategic list and this one can no longer be it.”

f. Enhance the organizational structure and their role

Interviewees made a number of suggestions about possible changes to ARC’s organizational structure that would help it to face the current challenges faced by LGBTI activists working at the UN. The most frequent comment was related to the size of the organization. Seven interviewees considered ARC would benefit largely from expanding and diversifying its staff.

“I don’t think they have any trans people on their staff. If they want to really engage with the issues, they themselves have to internally transform to fit and match that mandate that they want to achieve.”

Four people suggested the hiring of a trans person or an expert on gender identity and intersex issues and two people recommended having a more racially diverse staff. Additionally, two people said that hiring people from other regions would enable ARC to engage more with local and regional activists. These suggestions are not mutually exclusive, and having a greater diversity of identities, skills and experiences could help ARC meet the competing pressures outlined in this section.

On the other hand, a number of other interviewees highlighted some benefits of being small and having a tighter focus, as opposed to expanding. These benefits were recognized by two international human rights advocates:

“[ARC] is a brilliant example of having a small number of the right people, in the right places at the right time, who are strategic and have a high level of trust amongst themselves, can really achieve an enormous lot.”

“I think they are doing an extraordinary amount for such a small organization and I would encourage them to stay lean, don’t grow too big. (...)I don’t think they need to have staff from every LGBTI group for instance, to have a mandate. I think they have that mandate and status, but they just need to think about the politics they practice.”

Another common issue raised by interviewees was ARC’s role in relation to other LGBTI organizations. There was clear agreement that ARC plays a leading role in SOGI advocacy at the UN. However, it was noted by seven people that ARC should not be afraid to take stronger positions when there are divergences and disputes among organizations regarding UN strategies, since they are “also an organization and they have their own point of view and their political positions”. One of them specifically noted that in order to avoid being criticized for that, ARC could “try to make people understand that they are no better than local NGOs just because they work at the UN”, but that they have a solid expertise and experience in this field. It was also mentioned that ARC should not worry about always reaching a consensus, since “there will always be people arguing against and not feeling represented”.

Two activists from international human rights organizations shared their views in this respect:

“I think that ARC should be less afraid of popularity and play a more leadership role; they need to maintain their own position, even if not everybody will agree with that. Taking a strong position is necessary and to follow through with their leadership role.”

“It’s very hard to channel the voice of the LGBT movement internationally because there’s not one single voice. Because ARC is in Geneva, they tend to have a stronger voice but they are not a membership organization or an umbrella. They don’t [need to] represent the voice of the LGBT organizations worldwide.”

While some advocated for ARC to take a stronger leadership position, others emphasized the need for ARC to play a greater consultative role. Three respondents argued that decision-making processes around strategies for UN advocacy require meaningful negotiations and thus ARC should continue consulting with organizations across the globe.

7. Concluding remarks

This report assessed ARC International's contributions to SOGI and intersex activism at the United Nations, as well as to achievements in that field, since it was founded in 2003. It relied on the experience of activists, experts, UN officials, country representatives and other stakeholders in order to examine the impact of ARC's work. These survey respondents and interviewees suggested ways ARC could support SOGI and intersex activism, particularly in the face of current challenges.

There was common agreement among the people who participated in this research that ARC has successfully made the UN more accessible to LGBTI activists from around the world and to other human rights defenders working on SOGI or intersex issues. Through its activities and resources, ARC has provided the tools and the means for activists to engage with UN mechanisms, especially the Human Rights Council, and has fostered strategic dialogue and collaborations within and among the regions. It was also agreed that ARC has played an important role in increasing States' support for SOGI and intersex issues and bringing such issues into the UN human rights framework.

In sum, participants recognized that ARC has achieved significant results playing intermediary roles between the UN system and civil society; between international and local activists; and between activists and States. This research project has shown how ARC has mobilized a wide variety of stakeholders in many parts of the world and has become a leading organization in SOGI advocacy at the UN.

However there are inherent tensions for any international LGBTI organization in balancing its leadership role and creating opportunities for other organizations to engage in UN processes around SOGI and intersex issues. This is perhaps more pronounced for organizations such as ARC that have a base in Geneva and are skilled in the workings of the UN. While for some people involved in this project, the way forward is for ARC to expand its leadership role and take stronger positions, others believe ARC should focus on increasing its facilitator/convener role and enhancing democratic and consultative decision-making processes.

Other tensions were observed in the way respondents perceive ARC's organizational structure and areas of work. While it is important for some people that ARC considers working with a greater variety of UN mechanisms, beyond the HRC, and expands its resources and activities, others felt that ARC should stick to what it does well and avoid duplicating the work of other organizations. While some valued the advantages of ARC staying small and focused and having a nimble structure, others felt it should increase its size and diversity to better address outstanding SOGI and intersex human rights challenges. This range of views suggests the value of ARC clearly identifying the current scope of its work.

The LGBTI movement has accomplished a great deal at the UN since 2003. There is obviously a long way to go to fully integrate SOGI and intersex issues in the UN work. Activists must work faster and smarter to counteract opposing movements and convince States to end violence and discrimination and address other human rights issues faced by LGBTI people. It is undeniable, however, that ARC has played a highly valuable role in SOGI developments at the UN so far and has proven how a small Geneva-based organization can achieve so much worldwide.

