

# Dreaming of change: trans activists unite in Geneva

[article](#), [non-discrimination](#), [trans activists](#), [un](#)

**In June 2025, over 15 activists gathered in Geneva for Trans Advocacy Week, held alongside the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council. Trans and gender diverse activists came from Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Central Asia.**

They had a dream: to achieve change. TGEU and our partners have been making this dream a reality for nine years through Trans Advocacy Week, pushing for change together with human rights defenders and allies in Geneva.

Since 2017, United Nations Trans Advocacy Week (UN TAW) has been co-organised by six international NGOs:

- [Asia Pacific Transgender Network \(APTN\)](#)
- [East Africa Trans Health and Advocacy Network \(EATHAN\)](#)
- [Global Action for Trans Equality \(GATE\)](#)
- [ILGA World](#)
- [RFSL, Swedish Federation for LGBTQ Rights](#)
- [TGEU: Trans Europe & Central Asia](#)

UN TAW empowers trans activists to engage in global human rights spaces and advocate for equality and inclusion.

TGEU supports trans human rights defenders from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, where rapid and radical legislative changes are restricting the universal rights of trans people. This year, we brought delegates who presented the situation of trans rights and shared stakeholder recommendations for Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

## Protecting democracy in the face of anti-gender backlash and funding cuts

This year's theme focused on the urgent need to protect democratic spaces amid the rise of anti-gender movements, especially in the face of alarming cuts in global funding for human rights work.

## Key Moments from UN Trans Advocacy Week 2025

The organisers conducted three training sessions, both online and in person, for activists on UN advocacy tools (treaty bodies, special procedures, UPR), preparing participants for impactful public speaking and engaging with UN officials, writing statements, diplomatic communication, and practising interventions.

During the week, trans human rights defenders participated in interactive dialogues with special rapporteurs, prepared statements, and networked. With every international policymaker they met, trans activists shared stories from their communities – each time with unwavering emotion and strength. It was both powerful and unifying.

The activists attended dedicated meetings with partners from the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, UNAIDS, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and the Office of the

High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).



*Trans activists with the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Alexandra Xanthaki, after a productive meeting*

A major highlight was a jointly organised side event in the Palais des Nations titled: **Defunding Equality: The Global Impact of Aid Cuts on Trans Rights and the Path Forward**. The event focused on strategic solutions and opportunities to defend trans rights in the face of anti-gender movements, worsening legislation, and decreasing funding for civil society.



*TGEU's Senior EECA Programme Officer speaks at the side event on the impact of anti-trans and anti-gender narratives and potential solutions.*

Trans activist delegates from UN TAW prepared and delivered six joint statements during interactive dialogues with the UN Independent Expert on SOGI and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly.

*TGEU delegate Adi Petrov delivered a statement on anti-trans laws and their impact on his and other community members' mental health.*

This year, organisers continued integrating social and art-based elements into the programme. A **closed screening of the Malaysian documentary 'Queer as Punk'** was held at a local theatre, followed by a panel where trans activists discussed the role of art in resistance.

Trans activists also carried out advocacy among Permanent Missions to support the renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on SOGI.

## **Why UN Trans Advocacy Week Matters**



The UN Trans Advocacy Week bridges the gap between grassroots trans activists, especially from underrepresented regions, and global decision-makers. It brings the voices of people from marginalised communities into the room where global agendas are shaped.

UN TAW equips activists with the tools to navigate UN advocacy mechanisms, spotlight the lived realities of trans people, build strategic partnerships with diplomats and UN experts, and channel recommendations back to their countries to improve laws, policies, and practices.

This initiative not only raises awareness about the rights of trans and gender diverse people but also strengthens the capacity of participants to advocate effectively in their home countries.



*UN TAW representatives and OHCHR staff pose together after a productive meeting.*

## **Why UN Trans Advocacy Week is important for TGEU**

Activists need international mechanisms to protect their rights because they cannot always achieve justice in their countries using national mechanisms.

**The lived experiences of trans communities are mirrored in data. TGEU's 2025 edition of the [Trans Rights Index & Map](#) reveals a stark reversal in trans rights: for the first time in its 13-year history, setbacks now**

**outweigh progress across Europe and Central Asia.** Over the past year, we've witnessed anti-trans constitutional amendments in Hungary and Georgia, the removal of gender identity protections in Republika Srpska, criminalisation of LGBT expression in Turkey, and further erosion of rights in the UK following a damaging Supreme Court ruling.

These trends go beyond cultural backlash. They represent a coordinated, global attack on human rights, fuelled by anti-trans and anti-gender movements aligned with right-wing populist and authoritarian interests — from Kremlin-backed disinformation to Trump-era ideologies. The impact is compounded by shrinking foreign aid, including cuts from historically supportive states like Sweden, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

Trans communities are increasingly vulnerable: losing access to legal recognition, healthcare, funding, and safety, while facing online hate campaigns, forced displacement, and criminalisation. Trans-led organisations are under pressure or forced to close, especially in countries like Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, where civil society is under siege.

**These attacks signal more than a rollback of trans rights.** Trans people are the canary in the coal mine. What's being dismantled is the broader international human rights system: the very principles of bodily autonomy, freedom of expression, and equality before the law. **That is why we need trans activists in the UN who are not only defending their communities, they are also safeguarding the fundamental values of human rights, democracy, and equality for all.**

## Trans Advocacy Week's Real Impact

Trans Advocacy Week enabled participants from across the globe to:

- Gain practical skills in advocacy and the use of UN mechanisms,
- Share the lived realities of trans people in their countries, including personal stories, data, and emotions,
- Deliver clear, actionable recommendations to both international stakeholders and their home countries via Permanent Missions — especially important for those preparing for the Universal Periodic Review process,
- Use cultural tools, such as film, to challenge stereotypes,
- Take part in advocacy for the renewal of the Independent Expert on SOGI mandate,
- Connect with fellow trans human rights defenders to exchange experiences, support one another, and build solidarity,
- Increase awareness among UN international policymakers about the global challenges facing trans people and enhance focus on finding solutions.

**By drawing attention to ongoing and emerging threats, such as political rollbacks and funding cuts, the UN Trans Advocacy Week unites local and global activists to defend trans communities around the world.**

TGEU is proud to share that the 2025 UN Trans Advocacy Week in Geneva reaffirmed the power of collective, cross-sectoral advocacy for trans rights at the highest level.

By equipping underrepresented activists with strategic tools, access to decision-makers, and a vibrant advocacy ecosystem, including cultural diplomacy, this week contributed to advancing a more inclusive, resilient, and rights-based global agenda for trans and gender diverse people.

## Your support makes change possible

We work across Europe and Central Asia to advance trans rights, build strong communities, and drive change through research, advocacy, and community-building.



Your donation helps us continue this vital work — defending trans lives, amplifying trans voices, and advocating for justice every day.

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