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## **From trans rights to the Olympics: 10 LGBT+ issues in 2021**

***In the next 12 months marriage equality and discrimination against LGBT+ people will be high on the agenda.***

By Hugo Greenhalgh

Thomson Reuters Foundation (01.01.2021) - <https://tmsnrt.rs/39bYrIP> - From the United States to Japan, the list of countries mulling legislation that impacts LGBT+ rights in 2021 is lengthy, encompassing issues from gay sex to so-called conversion therapy to same-sex marriage.

Conversion therapy will be a major theme in 2021 with potential national bans being considered in Britain, Israel and Mexico.

Gay sex is still illegal in 69 U.N. member states, according to LGBT+ rights group ILGA World, but advocates hope countries such as Kenya and Singapore will follow the lead of Bhutan and Gabon last year in decriminalising same-sex relations.

LGBT+ advocates also hope that U.S. president-elect Joe Biden will overturn a ban on new transgender military personnel, brought in under President Donald Trump.

Here are 10 of the main issues likely to be faced in 2021:

### **1. Marriage equality**

Rights activists expect to see same-sex civil partnerships or marriages enacted in countries such as Mexico, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Venezuela this year.

Switzerland's parliament passed a bill to approve same-sex marriage in December, but the small Federal Democratic Union party has requested the vote be put to a nationwide referendum.

Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera has also called for a similar national vote to test the mood on same-sex marriage.

### **2. European Union (EU) sanctions on Hungary and Poland**

Calls are growing for the European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, to impose further sanctions on Hungary and Poland.

In July, the EU said it would withhold funding from a town-twinning scheme to so-called LGBT-free zone towns in Poland, prompting the nationalist government to threaten a legal challenge.

In May, Hungary banned trans people from changing their gender on identity documents.

Last month, the country's constitution was amended to effectively ban adoption by same-sex couples and mandate that children be raised with "values based on our Christian culture".

### **3. Conversion therapy**

Germany outlawed conversion therapy for minors in May, joining Brazil, Ecuador, Malta in instituting forms of nationwide bans on the practice, which aims to alter a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

In the United States, LGBT+ activists are calling on the incoming Biden administration to pass a federal ban on the controversial treatment, which is currently banned for minors in 20 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

Globally, there are mounting efforts to outlaw the practice, with Britain, Israel and Mexico among those mulling bans.

### **4. Transgender rights**

Trans rights, hotly debated around the world as to whether they encroach upon those of women, will see battles in many countries in 2021.

In Britain, an appeal is expected to be heard in the recent High Court case of Keira Bell on whether puberty blockers can be given to children without a court order.

A judicial review of the waiting lists for gender identity clinics within England's national health service is also likely.

A further judicial review will also decide England and Wales's prison policies for trans inmates.

Globally, trans participation in school and higher sports is likely to come under focus in the wake of last year's ruling by World Rugby to ban trans women from international matches.

## **5. The United States**

Trans rights will also be high on the U.S. political agenda with an expected repeal of a ban on new transgender military personnel.

LGBT+ activists will also be watching keenly to see if Biden keeps his promise to introduce the Equality Act, a pro-LGBT piece of legislation, in his first 100 days in office.

The battle between religious freedoms and LGBT+ rights is also expected to make headlines.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule in the case of *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, a major religious rights dispute concerning the city of Philadelphia's refusal to place children for foster care with a Catholic agency that bars same-sex couples from serving as foster parents.

## **6. Hate crime laws**

Italy is mulling hate crime legislation that would specifically protect LGBT+ people from discrimination, with campaigners pushing Belize to follow suit.

Britain's Law Commission is set to report on a consultation into whether to place the five current protected characteristics of race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender status on an equal footing.

Scotland is expected to pass its controversial – and amended – Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill, early next year following protests from free speech campaigners.

## **7. The Caribbean**

Decriminalisation proceedings are expected to be filed - or have been filed - in the remaining jurisdictions that outlaw gay sex.

A final ruling by Britain's Privy Council, the final court of appeal for many Caribbean nations, on same-sex marriage in Bermuda, was delayed from December until the new year.

The case could also have implications for decriminalisation appeals in St Vincent and Dominica.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights will also rule on the extent to which Jamaica is in violation of the American Convention on Human Rights in terms of its buggery and gross indecency laws.

## 8. Decriminalisation of same-sex relations

Beyond the Caribbean, battles are expected to be fought over gay sex bans in Kenya, Mauritius and Singapore.

A Court of Appeal hearing on decriminalisation in Singapore is expected in January with a ruling later in the year.

The U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) will examine the criminalisation of lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka, although a final ruling might not come through until 2022.

However, the Ugandan elections in January are not expected to see any change to gay sex laws that come with possible life sentence.

## 9. LGBT+ asylum seekers

In December, five U.S. LGBT+ rights groups filed a federal lawsuit challenging changes to the country's asylum rules that they claim will effectively bar LGBT+ applicants fleeing persecution.

Britain is also planning changes to its asylum system, which will penalise people who do not make immediate claims when entering the country.

Rights campaigners say this could impact LGBT+ applicants who often do not declare their sexuality or gender identity on their initial application.

Britain's Home Office says the new rules will allow the country to more accurately steer its immigration policy and border controls, particularly in the wake of Brexit.

## 10. Japan

This year, Japan is set to host the delayed 2020 Olympic Games and the international spotlight has focused increased scrutiny on the country's relative absence of pro-LGBT+ laws.

Same-sex relations have always been legal, apart from a brief eight-year period in the 19th century.

However, LGBT+ people lack many of the same legal protections as heterosexual peers, with gay marriage outlawed and sexual orientation and gender identity not protected by national workplace or housing laws.

Calls are growing for the government to pass a pro-LGBT+ rights Equality Act in advance of the expected summer Games.

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## World AIDS Day 2020 – WHO calls for global solidarity to maintain HIV services

WHO (30.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Jt8f8z> - On 1 December WHO is calling on global leaders and citizens to rally for "global solidarity" to maintain essential HIV services during COVID 19 and beyond - and to ensure continued provision of HIV services for children, adolescents and populations most at risk for the disease. The Organization also calls on

countries to provide health workers with greater protection and support so they can continue their work safely during the pandemic.

Protecting people from HIV during the pandemic, and ensuring they can maintain treatment, is critical. Researchers are currently investigating whether people with HIV have an increased risk of poor outcomes with COVID-19. Preliminary evidence of a moderate increased vulnerability of people with HIV makes it even more urgent that people with HIV have access to antiretrovirals (ARVs) and treatments for co-morbidities – such as treatment for non communicable diseases (NCDs), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes and tuberculosis.

WHO and partners sounded the alarm earlier this year, concerned at the impact of reported disruptions in service delivery. But now, thanks to the unstinting work of health and community workers, the number of countries reporting disruptions in HIV services has declined by almost 75% since June. Only 9 of the 152 countries surveyed are still reporting disruptions (maps: [June 2020](#) - [November 2020](#)); and in June, 24 countries reported less than 3 months supply of ARVs, while now only 12 report a critically low stock.

This is mainly due to the implementation of existing guidelines, including providing multi-month dispensing (MMD) of ARVs for 3-6 months to patients who did not have access to health facilities; strong WHO-led global, regional, country, manufacturer and partner coordination to ensure adequate supply of drugs stocks, and sustained provision of facility-based essential health services and community delivery mechanisms.

But countries have also introduced a number of effective adaptations and innovations in service delivery during COVID-19. These include:

- In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, testing for COVID-19 has heavily relied on the laboratory systems built and developed by HIV and TB programs. Devices have been shared across programs as well as infrastructure, sample transport systems, and highly skilled staff.
- In Thailand, PrEP services have been delivered through key population led health services providing multi-month dispensing, telehealth, Xpress service, self-sampling, and counselling.
- In Bulgaria, a demonstration project showed strong community demand for HIV self-testing which also led to expansion of testing services to reduce inequalities between rural and urban areas.

"On World AIDS Day 2020, we pay tribute to the communities and countries who have shown resilience and innovation - often spearheaded by people themselves living with HIV," says Dr Meg Doherty, Director of WHO's Department of Global HIV, Hepatitis and STI Programmes. "This is vital, because while we focus on fighting this new pandemic, we must not drop our guard on a twin pandemic that has been with us for 40 years and which is far from over."

Progress towards global targets for diagnosis and treatment has slowed down considerably this year.

New data shows that an estimated 26.0 million people were on antiretroviral treatment as of mid-2020, up only 2.4% from an estimate of 25.4 million at the end of 2019. This increase is too slow by comparison to last year where treatment coverage increased by an estimated 4.8% between January and June of 2019. Among 24 countries with monthly data reported to UNAIDS and WHO, people currently on treatment have been supported and maintained, but testing has declined in all and newly enrolled on treatment has been halved. In the last few months; however, there positive signs of rebound in testing and treatment services.

WHO hopes that some of the innovative approaches adopted during COVID-19 can help the world catch up and accelerate progress towards our new 2025 targets and the SDG goals of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

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## **JOINT STATEMENT: Trans Day of Remembrance 2020: Fighting for our futures**

***On Trans Day of Remembrance (TDoR), 20 November, we remember and honour trans and gender-diverse people whose lives were taken away from us.***

ILGA-Europe (19.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3fsI6Cc> - Day after day, trans people around the world fight for our human rights and social justice. Year after year, we demand that trans people are protected from violence. We demand that our human rights are respected. We demand our right to live.

This year, the [Trans Murder Monitoring \(TMM\)](#) reported 350 trans and gender-diverse people murdered worldwide between 1 October 2019 and 30 September 2020.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, inequalities, systemic oppression, and violence by state and non-state actors are heightened. The realities of trans communities that are hugely marginalised and underrepresented, such as Black and people of colour, sex workers, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, Roma, people with disabilities, and those living with HIV, remain mostly unseen. Lack of access to healthcare, employment, housing, education, and justice, as well as stigmatisation and persecution, are just some of the results of the inaction of societies that do little or nothing to protect trans and gender-diverse people.

Trans activists and movements are persistently fighting to ensure that trans rights, policies, and legal measures protecting trans people are put in place. However, the lives of trans and gender-diverse people remain constantly at risk, particularly for those of us who are affected by racism, sexism, misogyny, xenophobia, ableism and anti-sex worker sentiment and discrimination. Increasing hostility from anti-trans feminist groups, exclusion from mainstream LGBT groups, and the rise of political networks mobilising anti-gender movements severely aggravate these risks.

November is a particularly painful month for trans people. Trans Day of Remembrance reminds us of how normative and oppressive systems strive to erase us, to eradicate our existence. This date reminds us that violence towards one of us is violence towards all of us. It reminds us of the urgency and importance of building more self-aware, resilient, and connected trans movements. It is not enough that we are in one another's thoughts; we have to be in one another's actions. We will not let anyone stop us from fighting for our dignity, caring for our communities, and celebrating our lives. To our trans siblings around the world, you are not alone. We are in this together.

On Trans Day of Remembrance, we call on you to join our fight. Do not only share the horrific statistics on murders of trans people worldwide. Make sure that the lives of trans people who are still alive are part of your fight. Amplify trans voices while we live. Educate others about trans rights while we live. Donate to organisations focusing on marginalised and underrepresented trans communities. Commit to concrete actions and confront the pervasive structural and systemic oppression that keeps us deprived of our basic rights. Let us end all forms of violence and discrimination against trans and gender-diverse people together.

Together, we fight for our futures. Fight with us!

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## **Caster Semenya to take fight to European Court of Human Rights**

***Caster Semenya plans to fight rules forcing intersex athletes to reduce their naturally high levels of testosterone with drugs or surgery to compete.***

Reuters (17.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Hr0QFJ> - South African double Olympic 800-metre champion Caster Semenya is to take her fight with World Athletics to the European Court of Human Rights, her lawyers confirmed on Tuesday.

Semenya is one of a number of female athletes with differences in sexual development (DSDs) competing in races ranging from 400 metres to a mile, who World Athletics insist must reduce their naturally high levels of testosterone in order to run.

This can be done either through the use of drugs or surgical interventions.

Semenya has vowed to fight the regulations, but has already lost an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, and another subsequent plea to the Swiss Federal Tribunal (SFT) asking for the CAS ruling to be set aside.

"We will be taking World Athletics to the European Court of Human Rights," Semenya's lawyer Greg Nott said in a media release on Tuesday, without placing a time-frame on their appeal.

"We remain hopeful that World Athletics will see the error it has made and reverse the prohibitive rules which restrict Ms Semenya from competing."

World Athletics have consistently said the regulations are aimed at creating a level playing field for all athletes.

"World Athletics has always maintained that its regulations are lawful and legitimate, and that they represent a fair, necessary and proportionate means of ensuring the rights of all female athletes to participate on fair and equal terms," the governing body said in a statement after the SFT case.

Athletics South Africa insist Semenya is still part of their team for the Tokyo Olympic Games next year, though over what distance remains to be seen.

She has also been competing in the 200-metre sprint, which falls outside of the World Athletics regulations.

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## **Kept out of traditional jobs, transgender people see hope in tech world**

***LGBT+ advocates and tech entrepreneurs are offering training and employment to trans workers in one of the world's fastest growing industries.***

By Oscar Lopez

Thomson Reuters Foundation (28.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3oVnOpv> - As a transgender woman living in Russia, where LGBT+ people often face abuse and state repression, Chloe Golovleva said she felt like an animal trapped in a cage.

"There was no life for me," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Two years ago, Golovleva left Russia and sought asylum in Argentina where trans people have greater legal protections, but she still felt her co-workers did not accept her.

"It's very difficult to start a new life," the 40-year-old said. "There's transphobia and homophobia, just like everywhere else in the world."

Golovleva's experience is common across the Americas, where conservative social norms often leave trans people locked out of formal work and pushed to the margins of society.

But increasingly, LGBT+ advocates and tech entrepreneurs are teaming up to offer training and employment in one of the world's fastest growing industries: information technology.

With relatively well-paid jobs, a disruptive attitude toward traditional work environments and an emphasis on innovation, advocates say the tech industry offers opportunities for trans people often left out in the cold.

"There's a lot of trans folks ... who are working in the tech space and who are also leveraging their access to resources to help other trans folks," said U.S. tech entrepreneur and academic Kortney Ziegler.

Because the industry "is focused on innovation and the next big thing, there's a lot of room for people of all identities," Ziegler said.

### ***'Representation in tech'***

In countries such as the United States, Brazil and Argentina, LGBT+ rights have become increasingly accepted in recent years, despite resistance from conservative groups.

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that workers could not be discriminated against for being LGBT+, while Brazil's highest court made homophobia and transphobia a crime last year.

Argentina established a quota system in September under which at least 1% of public sector jobs are reserved for trans workers.

Despite these strides, trans people are often left out of the workforce.

In the United States, 16% of trans people reported losing a job due to their gender identity, according to the National Center for Transgender Equality, a nonprofit, while in Brazil, some 90% of trans women work in prostitution.

But in the tech industry, often centered in liberal, LGBT+-friendly urban centers like San Francisco in the United States or Buenos Aires in Argentina, acceptance of gay and trans people tends to be higher, experts say.

"The representation in tech is genuinely higher than it is in a lot of more old-school industries," said Vivienne Ming, a U.S.-based researcher and tech entrepreneur.

According to Ming's research, nearly 7% of people in the U.S. tech industry identify as LGBT+, compared with about 4% of Americans overall, according to polling firm Gallup.

Despite the greater openness, trans people may face discrimination in the industry, especially in the recruitment process, Ming said.

As a result, many trans people in tech have taken it upon themselves to make the industry more inclusive.

Ziegler had a doctorate degree and was living near San Francisco, but as a Black trans man struggled to find work.

So in 2013, Ziegler founded Trans\*H4CK, an organization to provide training and support for trans and nonbinary people, meaning those that don't identify as male or female, in the tech industry.

"I was inspired by this space of innovation, this idea of folks of different backgrounds and skills coming together to build something that's tangible and usable and can save lives."

In its three years of operation, the organization said it helped more than 100 transgender developers to create mobile apps for other trans people to find work, health care and friends.

Ziegler admits the industry has a long way to go toward trans inclusion, and research from Trans\*H4CK suggests trans tech workers often are paid less than are their non-transgender peers.

But Ziegler said Trans\*H4CK's impact has been long lasting.

"In our existence we birthed so many different organizations focused on trans folks," he said. "So many different ideas and platforms that are still in operation to this day have come out of that."

'PROFOUND IMPACT' Initiatives like Trans\*H4CK have become more and more common. In 2014, U.S. transgender actor and entrepreneur Angelica Ross founded TransTech Social Enterprises, providing training and co-working spaces for trans people in tech.

"I wanted to create a program that was really powered by the community," Ross said on a recent Facebook live.

"I wanted to make sure that folks had access to community, to mentorship, to resources, job opportunities."

In Brazil, Noah Scheffel runs EducaTRANSforma, an organization which provides training for trans people as well as inclusion training for potential employers in the tech industry.

The organization began in 2019 with 16 students taking in-person classes, although with the coronavirus pandemic shutting down much of the country, Scheffel moved courses online and hopes to train 200 trans people by August next year.

"(My dream) is to give them an opportunity that they've never had in their lives," Scheffel said via WhatsApp message.

In Argentina, Daniel Coletti founded Trans-TI two years ago, providing coaching and jobs for trans people, helping them prepare for tasks like online software testing.

According to Coletti, jobs in tech do not necessarily require formal education, so trans people with few prospects can quickly learn the skills they need.

"A lot of times, the impact can be quite profound," he said. "It's not that we're giving them charity - we're giving them a job."

Among the trans people employed by Trans-TI is Russian refugee Golovleva, who started working at the organization in March.

It's been a steep learning curve, she said, but after two years in Argentina, she said she finally feels at home.

"I have formal work, and in this job, there's no transphobia," she said. "In that sense, I'm happy."

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## **Global HIV response found to neglect gay and bisexual men, trans women**

***Gay and bisexual men account for about one in five new HIV infections, but they were only allocated 1% of the \$57 billion spent to fight the virus between 2016 and 2018.***

By Rachel Savage

Thomson Reuters Foundation (20.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3dZa2NB> - Funding to fight HIV among gay and bisexual men and transgender women is a fraction of what it should be, researchers said on Tuesday, with advocates blaming stigma for the shortfall.

Gay and bisexual men account for about one in five new HIV infections, but they were only allocated 1% of the \$57 billion in global donor funding to treat the virus and combat its spread between 2016 and 2018, Dutch HIV charity Aidsfonds found.

And while trans people represented about 1% of new global HIV infections in 2018, programmes targeting them received just 0.06% of the total pool - most of which is channelled to the general population in 135 lower- and middle-income countries.

The fight against HIV/AIDS could be set back by a decade by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted treatment and testing services, the United Nations said earlier this year.

Advocates for people living with HIV said health programmes needed to better target high-risk groups, including sex workers and their clients and people who inject drugs.

"Because of stigma and discrimination, because of social attitudes that are derogatory... all of these things influence the way in which development partners designate resources," said Brian Macharia from the Gay & Lesbian Coalition of Kenya.

"We're seeing a proportion of funding that does not comprehensively afford care to these communities," said Macharia, who helps run programmes for LGBT+ Kenyans including HIV prevention and treatment.

About 38 million people worldwide are living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS, according to UNAIDS - the joint United Nations programme on HIV and AIDS, a million more than in 2018.

Many LGBT+ people are unwilling to access HIV services designed for the population as a whole because they often face discrimination, said Mirjam Krijnen, who runs Aidsfonds' international programmes.

"Specific targeted services and safe spaces for those groups to actually access those services are necessary," she said. "Otherwise there's a real risk... these groups are actually not accessing the care they need."

The funding gap for gay and bi men was widest in Latin America, where they accounted for 40% of new HIV infections in 2018 but received just 0.5% of total funding between 2016 and 2018.

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## **Event in Brussels on LGBTQI rights highlights elevated risk during pandemic times**

***LGBTQI activists raise alarm over an increase in hate speech and violence and propose strategies to strengthen protections by improving funding mechanisms.***

By Brianna Hertford

The European Times (08.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3nNnXL2> - LGBTQI people around the world, an already marginalized group, have been subjected to an [increase in risk and violence](#) largely due to responses towards and misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic, said panelists of a conference held by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

At this Brussels-based event, panelists from Poland, Bangladesh, and Iraq reported that political and religious leaders have been using LGBTQI people as a scapegoat for the pandemic and building on existing narratives of LGBTQI people as a threat. Additionally, measures such as quarantines to combat the pandemic increased risk, as LGBTQI people were stuck in abusive homes or kicked out of temporary housing.

The LGBTQI activists speaking also spotlighted country-specific concerns.

In Poland, a Catholic majority country, Julia Maciocha, the Director of Warsaw Pride, highlighted the discrepancy between the outspokenly anti-LGBTQI agenda of the government and the general public's sentiments, citing the finding that about 50% of Polish people support same-sex marriage.

Moreover, state-sanctioned hostility towards LGBTQI people in Poland is at odds with many of the commitments and values of the EU, which has led to controversies such as the so-called 'LGBT-free zones'. In July 2020, the European Commission [rejected applications](#) from six Polish towns to 'twin' with other EU cities because these towns had declared themselves 'LGBT free'. Consequently, they didn't receive the funding for this exchange programme. A month later, the Polish Justice Minister announced that the government would provide financial support to these towns and decried the EU's actions as ['illegal and unauthorized'](#).

Amir Ashour, the Founder and Executive Director for [IraQueer](#) stated that in Iraq, a Muslim majority country, LGBTQI people live with the constant fear of violence, torture, or even death. He also highlighted an issue essential to the discussion of risk, which is that when LGBTQI people flee to Western countries, they are often forced to 'prove' their sexual orientation or gender identity during the refugee determination process.

An activist from Bangladesh, who remained anonymous for safety reasons, explained that in Bangladesh, a Muslim majority country, homosexuality is still criminalized by a law inherited from British colonialism. After the 2016 highly publicized murder of Xulhaz Mannan, the founder of the first Bengali LGBT magazine, the movement was forced underground. Since then, social media platforms have been essential for LGBTQI activists to mobilize in a safe way.

Belgium is ranked as the [second-best](#) country regarding LGBTQI rights in Europe by ILGA Europe, but the lived experience of the LGBTQI community varies widely depending on which 'letter' one identifies with. For example, intersex children are still operated on at birth because, legally, parents need to register a child's sex with their birth certificate. Despite numerous legal protections in Belgium, many individuals still experience violence and discrimination, but do not always report to the police.

Globally, LGBTQI activists face many hostilities, including online threats and smear campaigns. Fear is a constant reality: fear of increasing political and legal persecution; fear that loved ones may be attacked either because they identify as LGBTQI or are associated with advocacy work; fear for LGBTQI people who are struggling with depression and may commit suicide; and fear of persecution and violence by the state or religious fanatics. Activism comes at an immense personal cost.

### ***Strategies for increasing rights by improving funding mechanisms***

Providing accessible avenues of funding for small NGO's and grassroots initiatives in challenging political and social environments is an essential step forward in protecting and advancing LGBTQI rights worldwide. Funding is often an issue, but the situation has become especially dire for many activists since governments and donors are not giving as much due to the pandemic. One of the many reasons funding is so essential is that activists often cannot find paid work due to their role as human rights defenders and so, without funding, these movements may become unsustainable.

Currently, application processes for funding are typically very time-consuming and complicated for activists on the ground, often requiring experts to complete them which is an added expense. These applications take precious human resources away from their actual work. It is in everyone's best interest to balance the need for transparency and accountability on the one hand, and the need for accessibility on the other.

At the end of the event, there was a call for increased intersectionality during any decision-making process about the LGBTQI community ranging from funding mechanisms to policymaking. Tailoring a programme to fit the needs of one 'letter' is insufficient, because each member of the community will have different needs. Other factors such as an individual's race, ability, age, etc must also be considered. Without taking them into account and planning accordingly, well-intentioned legislation and policies will continue to exclude already marginalized members of minority groups.

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## **Protect intersex persons' rights, 34 states tell the United Nations**

***In a historic first, 34 States from all regions of the world called on the UN Human Rights Council to urgently protect intersex persons in their bodily autonomy and right to health, 8 NGOs said today.***

By Daniele Paletta

ILGA World (01.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3nthzZ4> - Intersex people are born with diverse sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies. Up to 1.7% of the global population is born with such traits; yet, because their bodies are seen as different, intersex children and adults are often stigmatised.

"In many countries around the world," Austria told the Human Rights Council today on behalf of 34 states, "intersex people are subjected to medically unnecessary surgeries, hormonal treatments and other procedures in an attempt to change their appearance to be in line with gendered societal expectations of male and female bodies without their full and informed consent."

"Governments should investigate human rights violations and abuses against intersex people, ensure accountability, reverse discriminatory laws and provide victims with access to remedy."

"This is an historic step forward for the global intersex community", says Tony Briffa, Chair of the Intersex Committee at ILGA World and a Co-Executive Director of Intersex Human Rights Australia. "For the first time States have taken the lead, recognised the historic injustice that people with diverse sex characteristics are still facing every day, and are pushing their own governments and others to work with civil society to raise awareness."

Civil society has indeed worked for years to make sure that intersex stories could be heard. Their voices highlighted how being denied their bodily autonomy has had a ripple effect on people's health outcomes, education and employment opportunities, as well as their possibility to compete in sports - often without even being able to access remedies and justice.

Slowly, the world has begun to acknowledge these realities and lives. In 2019, the UN passed a resolution calling for an end to discrimination of women and girls in sports – including women born with variations of sex characteristics. This represented the first UN resolution on the rights of intersex persons. Earlier in 2020, then, a children's hospital in Chicago became the first in the United States to publicly apologise for the harm it caused to intersex people, and announced it would stop medically unnecessary "normalising" surgeries. More and more voices have spoken up against regulations that keep excluding top female athletes from the Global South from international sport competitions.

Civil society has also spoken today at the UN Human Rights Council: 33 organisations welcomed the recent initiative by States, and encouraged them to "take further action in protecting intersex persons' autonomy, rights to health, to physical and mental integrity, to live free from violence and harmful practices and to be free from torture and ill-treatment".

"Our bodies were born whole, and only we should have had the right to decide what happened to them", said Mauro Cabral Grinspan of GATE. "Violations against our bodies that only seek to make us fit the binary model of how women and men should look like are still the norm rather than the exception. We hope that today's words at the United Nations will push States to finally take action and restore justice towards us".

*This is a joint statement by: ILGA World – The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association; Tony Briffa and Morgan Carpenter, Intersex Human Rights Australia; GATE; OII Europe; SIPD Uganda; Intersex South Africa; Intersex Asia; and OII Chinese.*

**Read the statement delivered by the States [here](#).**

## States who joined the statement:

Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Panama, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Uruguay.

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## LGBTQI rights during pandemic times: Activists raise alarm over increase in hate speech and violence

**Poland, Iraq and Bangladesh in the spotlight during a webinar in Brussels. Strategies to strengthen protections and improve funding mechanisms discussed.**

By Brianna Hertford, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (01.10.2020) – During 2020, LGBTQI people around the world, an already marginalised group, have been subjected to an [increase in risk and violence](#) largely due to responses towards and misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Friday, 25 September, the *Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom* hosted 'Protecting and Advancing LGTBI Rights Globally' in Brussels, an event that exposed the threats facing LGBTQI people and highlighted strategies to push for much-needed protection and rights.

The event began with a virtual panel discussion with three LGBTQI activists:

**Julia Maciocha**, the Director of *Warsaw Pride* in **Poland**,  
**Amir Ashour**, the Founder and Executive Director for [IraQueer](#) based in **Iraq**,  
and an **activist** from **Bangladesh** who remained anonymous for safety reasons.

The questions centred on the state of LGBTQI rights in each of their respective contexts, activism within the local LGBTQI community, their personal experiences as activists and suggestions for how to move forward.

The second half consisted of a discussion facilitated by Rachael Moore and Aida Yancy from the [RainbowHouse](#) Belgium.

### **Country-specific threats to LGBTQI people and activists**

In **Poland**, a Catholic majority country, the outspokenly anti-LGBTQI agenda of the government is not reflective of the general public's sentiments as about 50% of Polish people support same-sex marriage, Julia Maciocha argued.

One major unresolved issue that she raised concerned legal and administrative barriers for transgender individuals seeking legal gender recognition (LGR). LGR is essential to obtain identity documents that correspond with one's identified gender, which increases one's ability to navigate public spaces with more dignity and safety. Unfortunately, the current process in Poland is handled by the court system and requires the transgender individual to [sue their parents](#), even if they are an adult. If their parents are not supportive and refuse, this lengthy and costly court procedure is at a higher risk of taking longer and ultimately failing.

State-sanctioned hostility towards LGBTQI people in Poland is at odds with many of the commitments and values of the EU, which has led to controversies such as the so-called 'LGBT-free zones' and EU funding. In July 2020, the European Commission [rejected applications](#) from six Polish towns for the opportunity to 'twin' with other EU cities because these towns had declared themselves 'LGBT free'. Consequently, these towns did not receive the funding involved in this exchange programme. A month later, the Polish Justice Minister announced that the government would provide financial support to these towns and decried the EU's [actions as 'illegal and unauthorized'](#).

In **Iraq**, a Muslim majority country, LGBTQI people live with the constant fear of violence, torture or even death through annual 'killing campaigns' that have terrorised the LGBTQI community for over a decade now, according to Amir Ashour. Recently, the hate speech and violence targeting LGBTQI people has dramatically increased, he said, because of political and religious leaders spreading misinformation related to the pandemic and framing LGBTQI people as a threat. Additionally, measures such as quarantines to combat the pandemic have increased risk, as LGBTQI people may be stuck in abusive homes or kicked out of temporary housing. Another pressing issue he highlighted was that when LGBTQI asylum seekers flee to Western countries, they are then forced to 'prove' their sexual orientation or gender identity during the refugee determination process.

In **Bangladesh**, a Muslim majority country, homosexuality is still criminalised by a law that was inherited from British colonialism. After the 2016 highly publicised murder of Xulhaz Mannan, the founder of the first Bengali LGBT magazine, the movement was forced underground. Since then, social media platforms have been essential for LGBTQI activists to mobilize. Unfortunately, anti-LGBTQI sentiments are widespread amongst the general public, and so violence against this community is typically viewed as justified. One exception is the perception of transgender people, who are seen more positively due to historical cultural norms. Transgender women in particular are generally more accepted, but this does not translate into tangible rights.

Rachael Moore and Aida Yancy explained that although **Belgium** is ranked as the [second-best country](#) regarding LGBTQI rights by ILGA Europe, the lived experience of the LGBTQI community varies widely depending on which 'letter' one identifies with. For example, intersex children are still operated on at birth because, legally, parents need to register a child's sex with their birth certificate. Additionally, bisexual people comprise of the largest portion of the LGBTQI community yet are often invisible due to prejudices from general society and LGBTQI people alike. Despite numerous legal protections in Belgium, many individuals still experience violence and discrimination, but do not always report to the police.

Globally, LGBTQI activists face many hostilities for their advocacy, including online threats and smear campaigns. Additionally, fear is a constant reality: fear of increasing political and legal persecution; fear that loved ones may be attacked either because they identify as LGBTQI or are associated with advocacy work; fear for LGBTQI people who are struggling with depression and may commit suicide; and fear of persecution and violence by the state or religious fanatics. Activism comes at an immense personal cost.

### ***Strategies for increasing rights and improving funding mechanisms***

Throughout the event, it was made clear the importance for members of the international community to learn from activists themselves if international involvement would be helpful and, if so, in what way. In Poland and Iraq, international pressure was welcomed by the panellists, while the panellist from Bangladesh requested a more indirect approach.

Julia Maciocha advocated to expand legislation in Poland to include hate speech on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as for the EU to enact sanctions against the Polish government.

Amir Ashour stated that there was a huge need to tackle religious hatred in Iraq and advocated for the separation of state and religion.

However, in Bangladesh, there have been instances where international involvement has resulted in an increase of risk for the LGBTQI community and activists. Instead, the focus should be on supporting local efforts. For example, the transgender community have been acting as liaisons with local preachers to combat the increase in anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQI rhetoric amongst religious leaders in Bangladesh.

Providing accessible avenues of funding for small NGO's and grassroots initiatives is an essential step forward in protecting and advancing LGBTQI rights. Across all national contexts, funding was a huge issue, especially since governments and other donors are not giving as much due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the many reasons that funding is so essential is that activists often cannot find paid work due to their role as human rights defenders and so, without funding, these movements may become unsustainable.

Currently, application processes for funding are typically very time consuming and complicated, often requiring experts to complete them which is an additional expense. These applications, which usually must be renewed on an annual basis, take precious human resources away from the actual work of the NGOs tackling these issues on the ground. It is in everyone's best interest to find a balance between the need for transparency and accountability, and the need for accessibility.

Finally, during any decision-making process about the LGBTQI community ranging from funding mechanisms to policy making, there was a call for increased intersectionality. Rachael Moore and Aida Yancy explained that it is not enough to tailor a programme to fit the needs of one 'letter', because each member of the community will have different needs. This will also be impacted by other aspects of an individual's identity such as race, ability, age, etc. Without taking these factors into account and planning accordingly, well-intentioned legislation and programmes will continue to exclude already marginalised members of minority groups.

*To learn more about LGBTQI rights, religions and human rights in Europe, read HRWF's 2013 report: ['LGBT People, the Religions & Human Rights in Europe'](#).*

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## **TikTok apologises for censoring LGBT+ content**

***Video-streaming app's Europe director Theo Bertram quizzed by British MPs over company policies.***

By Umberto Bacchi

Thomson Reuters Foundation (22.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2G6VcYV> - TikTok has apologised for suppressing LGBT+ content in the past, with a director telling British lawmakers on Tuesday that the company now removed LGBT+ images only when required to do so by law enforcement agencies.

The video streaming app came under fire last year over reports it censored depictions of homosexuality, such as two men kissing or holding hands, and artificially prevented posts from LGBT+ users from going viral in some countries.

"I'm really sorry, we really got that wrong," TikTok's director of public policy in Europe the Middle East and Africa, Theo Bertram, told a British parliamentary committee referring to the practice of curtailing the reach of some posts.

Bertram said viewership of some LGBT+ videos, as well as posts from disabled or plus size users, was deliberately limited in a bid to reduce bullying on the platform.

"That was a terrible idea," he told the sub-committee on online harms and disinformation, adding the policy had since been changed.

TikTok, which boasts hundreds of millions of users worldwide, is widely used by young LGBT+ people to share niche jokes, find a date, and swap advice and stories about traumatic experiences such as being forced into conversion therapy.

Speaking about the removal of LGBT+ content, Bertram said the company would do so only upon receiving a specific request from law enforcement agencies in countries, like Russia, where there were laws banning the dissemination of LGBT+ materials.

"I think the Russian law is terrible and our community does too ... But unfortunately we have to comply with legal requests in the countries that we operate," he said.

Russia adopted a so-called "gay propaganda" law in 2013, which makes illegal any event or act regarded by the authorities as an attempt to promote homosexuality to minors.

Separately on Tuesday, TikTok said it had removed over 104 million videos from its platform globally in the first half of the year for violating its terms of service.

The company owned by China's ByteDance and at the centre of a political battle between Washington and Beijing, was also criticised earlier this month for suppressing LGBT+ related hashtags in some countries.

A report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) think-tank found the Russian, Estonian, Bosnian, and Arabic version of some terms like "gay" and "I am a lesbian" were "shadowbanned" - meaning searches would yield no results.

Responding to the report, TikTok said some hashtags had been restricted to comply with local laws, while others because they were primarily used for searching pornographic content.

Some compound phrases in English and Arabic had been moderated by mistake, but the issue had been solved, it added.

Asked if the company was still restricting the prevalence of LGBT+ hashtags in some countries, and particularly in Russia, Bertram said he did not think that was the case.

"Not as far as I'm aware, you can create any content on our platform, there is no restrictions," he said, adding he was unsure as to what the company would do if requested to take down an hashtag by law enforcement agency.

"I don't know the answer to that," he said.

TikTok owner, ByteDance has been racing to avoid a crackdown on TikTok after being at loggerheads with the U.S. government.

U.S. officials have expressed concerns that personal data of as many as 100 million Americans that use the app is being passed on to China's Communist Party government.

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## **Oscars reveal new diversity requirements for best picture nominees**

***Nominees must satisfy two of four key standards addressing onscreen and offscreen representation.***

The Guardian (09.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3hocZra> - The Oscars are raising the inclusion bar for best picture nominees, starting with the 96th Academy Awards in 2024.

In a historic move, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on Tuesday laid out sweeping eligibility reforms to the best picture category intended to encourage diversity and equitable representation on screen and off, addressing gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and disability.

The film academy has established four broad representation categories: on screen; among the crew; at the studio; and in opportunities for training and advancement in other aspects of the film's development and release. To be considered for best picture, films will have to meet two of the four new standards, the Academy said.

Each standard has detailed subcategories as well. To meet the onscreen representation standard, a film must either have at least one lead character or a significant supporting character be from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group; at least 30% of secondary roles must be from two underrepresented groups; or the main storyline, theme or narrative must be focused on an underrepresented group. According to the academy, underrepresented groups include women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people or people with disabilities.

The best picture award, which is handed out to the producers of a film, is the one category every film academy member can vote for. This year, the South Korean film Parasite became the first non-English language film to win the award. All other categories will be held to their current eligibility requirements.

"The aperture must widen to reflect our diverse global population in both the creation of motion pictures and in the audiences who connect with them," said David Rubin, the Academy president, and CEO Dawn Hudson in a written statement. "We believe these inclusion standards will be a catalyst for long-lasting, essential change in our industry."

The second category addresses the creative leadership and crew composition of a film. In order to meet the standard, a film must have either at least two leadership positions or department heads be from underrepresented groups and at least one be from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group; at least six other crew members be from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups; or at least 30% of crew members be from underrepresented groups.

The third category deals with paid internship and apprenticeship opportunities as well as training opportunities for below-the-line workers, and the fourth category addresses representation in marketing, publicity and distribution teams.

Films will submit confidential inclusion standards forms, but they will not be required for best picture hopefuls for the 94th and 95th Academy Awards.

The inclusion standards were developed by a taskforce led by academy governors DeVon Franklin and Jim Gianopulos and in consultation with the Producers Guild of America. They took into account diversity standards used by the British Film Institute and the British Academy of Film and Television Awards.

These changes will not affect the 93rd Academy Awards, although the academy has had to make alterations because of Covid-19's effects on the movie business, including pushing the ceremony back two months to 25 April 2021 and allowing films that debuted on streaming services to be eligible for best picture.

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## **Vulnerability amplified: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBTIQ people**

OutRight Action International (06.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Wobthj> - In this pioneering report, "[Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ people](#)", OutRight Action International documents the effects of the pandemic on LGBTIQ people.

While the COVID-19 pandemic leaves no country and no individual unaffected, drawing on almost 60 rapid research interviews conducted with LGBTIQ people in 38 countries from all regions of the world, the report overwhelmingly shows that the challenges faced by LGBTIQ people as a result of the virus and surrounding containment measures are specific and amplified compared to the broader population.

We know from past emergencies not only that those more vulnerable become more so during crisis, we also know that crisis responses have not typically taken intersectional approaches, amplifying vulnerability even further. LGBTIQ communities are undoubtedly suffering, either due to the virus itself, or, more likely from the surrounding economic fallout.

The specific challenges faced by LGBTIQ people identified in OutRight's new report are:

- **Devastation of livelihoods** – rising food and shelter insecurity resulting from job loss, and economic fall out as a result of over-representation of LGBTIQ people in the informal sector and broad employment discrimination;
- **Disruptions in accessing health care**, including crucial HIV medication and gender affirming treatments, and reluctance to seek health care due to discrimination, stigma and refusal of services experienced by LGBTIQ people even outside a pandemic;
- **Elevated risk of domestic and family violence** – the most prevalent form of violence faced by LGBTIQ people on a day-to-day basis is heightened in circumstances of lockdowns, curfews and lack of access to support services and community resources;
- **Social isolation and increased anxiety** which are further heightened by being cut off from chosen families and the LGBTIQ community;
- **Scapegoating, societal discrimination and stigma** – there is an unfortunate history of LGBTIQ people being blamed for emergency situations, leading to further stigmatization, marginalization, violence and danger;

- **Abuse of state power** – repression, exclusion, and criminalization are all on the rise in countries prone to authoritarianism and regressive gender ideologies, with some states using the emergency situation to clamp down specifically on LGBTIQ people;
- **Concerns about organizational survival** – amplifying the effects even further are the impacts on LGBTIQ community organizations and spaces, which are a lifeline to countless LGBTIQ people. Organizations now face an uncertain future with funding cuts, lockdowns, and having to shift activities online while calls for direct, practical support are on the rise.

Download the report [here](#).

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## Isolation for intersex people: coronavirus revives trauma

*Prolonged lockdowns may exacerbate existing emotional, physical and economic problems for many intersex people.*

By Rachel Savage

Thomson Reuters Foundation (23.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3b3w3aX> - If the coronavirus hits hardest at the margins, among the most marginalised are those born intersex, neither clearly male nor female at birth and often struggling as adults with the fallout.

The impact on intersex people can be economic, medical or emotional, health experts say, and can worsen with isolation, as the pandemic limits access to healthcare and support.

Advocates worry about a prolonged lockdown for these already-isolated people, many traumatised by childhood operations that were not needed and carried out without consent to make their genitalia more masculine or feminine.

The United Nations estimates 1.7% of people are intersex, born with atypical chromosomes or sex characteristics.

About one in every 2,000 children undergo "normalising" genital surgeries, according to InterACT, a U.S. advocacy group.

### ***Something "not right"***

Jeanette Clark, who lives on her own in London, had internal testes removed at 16. She was told the surgery was necessary but not what it was or why. When she turned 50, Clark found out she was intersex after accidentally seeing her medical records.

"I've gone through absolute hell with it all," said Clark, who has Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, which leads people with male XY chromosomes to have female genitalia, but no periods or womb and internal testes instead of ovaries.

The 74-year-old had always felt there was something "not right": her bones broke easily and the pain she felt during sex led her to shun relationships after her marriage broke down.

People with CAIS, such as Clark, need to take the hormone oestrogen to protect their bones. But she was not given hormones until her 30s and has severe osteoporosis and arthritis.

Clark said an operation to correct a shoulder replacement has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic and that she has two thigh fractures that remain untreated. Nor can she keep up her massage and spa routine to ease all the pain.

"Obviously it's nobody's fault," she said. "But ... I feel that I'm in a similar situation as I was all those years ago, when I had no support or back up ... And that's quite hard to take."

### ***Trauma of secrecy***

Portugal and Malta have both banned unnecessary surgeries on intersex children, while the Indian state of Tamil Nadu outlawed the practice last year.

Research shows non-consensual surgery leaves intersex people at risk of physical and mental health issues and that they are likely to grow up poorer and less educated than their peers.

Attempted suicide was about four times higher among intersex people than the general population, according to a 2018 study of more than 1,000 adults in six European countries, led by the Karolinska Institutet, a Swedish medical university.

"Medical providers don't see what they're doing as traumatic," said Nikki Khanna, a San Francisco-based psychotherapist who is also intersex.

"While parts may have been necessary, the way in which it is done is what the trauma is around – the secrecy element."

A 2015 survey of 272 intersex Australians found 18% did not finish high school, against 2% of all Australians, according to research led by Tiffany Jones of Sydney's Macquarie University.

More than three-fifths earned under A\$41,000 (\$25,916.10), while the average Australian made almost A\$60,000 that year, according to the Intersex Human Rights Association of Australia (IHRA), an advocacy group, which cited official data.

### ***Just sit tight***

Alex David lives alone in Brisbane, Australia, and has post-traumatic stress disorder.

David, who uses the pronouns they and them - feeling neither male nor female - had genital feminisation surgery at birth, and then again several years later, but was not told until aged 17.

"Because of my situation I'm a bit worried about going to the hospital for any health issues," said the 36-year-old, who has other underlying health conditions.

"My specialist told me if I caught COVID-19, it would be potentially deadly. So I'm just having to sit tight."

Many intersex people shun healthcare altogether, which can worsen any health issues and increase the risks posed by COVID-19, health experts say.

"These people probably need access to counselling and support to help overcome those issues," said Morgan Carpenter, the co-executive director of IHRA.

### **Curses**

For intersex people in less developed countries, the challenges of the pandemic are exacerbated since many already live in poverty, on the margins and without family support.

"In countries where they isn't really a developed healthcare system, people would tend to rely more on kinship networks for support, said Surya Monro, a professor of sociology and social policy at the University of Huddersfield.

"But that can be very problematic for these people."

James Karanja, the director of the Intersex Society of Kenya, said he is helping 10 people in Nairobi to self-isolate at home, transferring them about \$100 each a month for rent, food and the hormones they need to stay healthy.

Intersex people tend to work casual day jobs that have dried up amid lockdown measures, so he expects more will need help.

Karanja also worries intersex people could be scapegoated.

"Most of the time we are seen as curses in the society, so our fear is that the community might think we are the reason for the pandemic," he said, although that fear has not come to pass yet.

"We are just taking one step at a time and (trying to) ensure that we survive," said Karanja.

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## **COVID-19 and the human rights of LGBTI people**

OHCHR (17.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2yPnJ0Q> - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people may be particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. People living with compromised immune systems, including some persons living with HIV/AIDS, face a greater risk from COVID-19. Homeless persons, a population that includes many LGTBI people, are less able to protect themselves through physical distancing and safe hygiene practices, increasing their exposure to contagion. [1]

**Access to Health Services:** LGBTI people regularly experience stigma and discrimination while seeking health services, leading to disparities in access, quality and availability of healthcare. Laws that criminalize same sex relations or that target trans persons due to their gender identity or expression, exacerbate negative health outcomes for LGBTI people, as they may not access healthcare services for fear of arrest or violence. Examples of health care discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression have been extensively documented in many countries. This discrimination can elevate the risk for LGBTI people from COVID-19.

**De-prioritization of required health services:** Given overloaded health systems, treatment of LGBTI people may be interrupted or deprioritized, including HIV treatment and testing, hormonal treatment and gender affirming treatments for trans people. Decisions about scaling back services should be medically-based and data-driven, and should not reflect bias against LGBTI people.

### **Stigmatization, discrimination, hate speech and attacks on the LGBTI community:**

LGBTI people have previously been blamed for disasters, both manmade and natural, and there are scattered reports of this happening in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. [2] In some countries, reports suggest an increase in homophobic and transphobic rhetoric. [3] There are also reports of police using COVID-19 directives to attack and target LGBTI organizations. [4] In at least one country, the State of Emergency has been used to propose a decree that would prevent transgender people from legally changing their gender in identity documents. [5] A few countries have put in place restriction of movement based on sex, with women and men allowed to leave their homes on alternate days, which have put non-binary and trans people at risk of heightened discrimination, as they may get stopped and questioned. [6]

**Domestic violence and abuse:** Due to stay-at-home restrictions, many LGBTI youth are confined in hostile environments with unsupportive family members or co-habitants. This can increase their exposure to violence, as well as their anxiety and depression.

**Access to work and livelihood:** LGBTI people are more likely to be unemployed and to live in poverty than the general population. Many in the LGBTI community work in the informal sector and lack access to paid sick leave, unemployment compensation, and coverage. [7] Additionally, due to discriminatory paid leave policies that do not cover all genders equally, LGBTI people may not be able to take time off from work to care for family members.

### ***What are some of the key actions that States and other stakeholders can take?***

States should recognize that LGBTI people are among those particularly vulnerable in this crisis, and take targeted steps to ensure that they are taken into consideration and their voices heard when addressing the pandemic:

- 1) Specific efforts should be made to ensure that LGBTI people are not subjected to discrimination or fear retribution for seeking healthcare. Health services that are particularly relevant to LGBTI people should not be deprioritized on a discriminatory basis.
- 2) Measures to address the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic should consider the particular vulnerabilities of the LGBTI people, including older persons and the homeless, and ensure that LGBTI people are fully covered.
- 3) Political leaders and other influential figures should speak out against stigmatization and hate speech directed at the LGBTI people in the context of the pandemic.
- 4) Shelters, support services and other measures to address gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic should take steps to include the LGBTI population.
- 5) States should not use states of emergency or other emergency measures to roll back existing rights and guarantees that apply to LGBTI people.
- 6) Measures restricting movement should provide protection for trans and gender non-conforming persons. Law enforcement officials should be instructed and trained not to discriminate against this population.

### **Sources:**

[1] See open letter by the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/sexualorientationgender/pages/index.aspx>

[2] In Iraq, writing on his Twitter account on 28 April, Muqtada al-Sadr Sadr - Shia cleric warned that the global outbreak would not subside unless governments repealed laws legalising same-sex marriages. See <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/03/28/Coronavirus-Iraqi-Shia-cleric-blames-gay-marriage-forcoronavirus>. In Israel, Rabbi Meir Mazuz reportedly called Gay Parades "parades against nature," and stated that the coronavirus is the "revenge". <https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2020/03/rabbi-blames-coronavirus-pride-parades/>. In the Caribbean Cayman Islands legislator Anthony Eden proposed that the Caribbean island should officially affirm Christian values in response to disasters and epidemics that he considers warnings from God not to allow same-sex marriage.

<https://www.caymancompass.com/2020/02/04/mla-eden-calls-earthquake-coronavirus-warnings-over-gay-lifestyle/?fbclid=IwAR26-RuhU8LueGkCF8RRiqwitQLvuAhrWMMdcdpEcfvgmiQXRJnGIIe0hk8>

[3] See also Human Rights Watch Press Release <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/03/uganda-lgbt-shelter-residents-arrested-covid-19-pretext>

[4] <https://76crimes.com/2020/03/30/ugandan-fear-of-covid-19-leads-to-23-arrests-at-lgbt-shelter/>

[5] See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/03/hungary-seeks-ban-legal-gender-recognition-transgender-people>

[6] <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trans-woman-fined-for-violating-panamas-gender-based-coronavirus-lockdown-rights-group-says-2020-04-10/>;

<https://www.nst.com.my/world/world/2020/04/580816/peru-restricts-movement-gender-during-covid-19-lockdown>; [https://twitter.com/victor\\_madriral?lang=en](https://twitter.com/victor_madriral?lang=en)

[7] See, for example, <https://www.openlynews.com/i/?id=41c7d175-c144-4e08-b0a0-c1060c78bcc5>. See also <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/peru-panama-introducegender-based-rules-for-covid-19/1790453>

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## **Prides are getting canceled, so now organizers are coming together for an online, global Pride**

***For the first time, Pride will come to every country on Earth on the same day as cities and countries band together to ensure LGBTQ people can celebrate despite the pandemic.***

By Bil Browning

LGBTQ Nation (15.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3eEvDdS> - Pride celebrations worldwide are being canceled or postponed, but organizers are coming together to ensure that LGBTQ people can still celebrate and support each other in 2020.

San Francisco, Boston, Annapolis, and other major American celebrations have already called off plans for this year, but an international group of Pride organizations is coming together to stage a Global Pride on June 27.

InterPride and the European Pride Organizers Association are working with national organizations in Canada, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States along with regional networks in southern Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin America to bring communities together for the Global Pride event.

The event will livestream online for 24 hours featuring contributions from Pride organizations worldwide, speeches from human rights activists, and musical performances.

Kristine Garina, president of the European Pride Organizers Association and Chair of Baltic Pride in Latvia, said, "The unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 mean that most Prides will not take place as planned in 2020, but we're determined that this won't stop us from coming together as a united, strong LGBTQIA+ community to celebrate who we are and what we stand for."

"Global Pride will show the LGBTQIA+ movement for the very best it can be, showing solidarity at a time when so many of us are mourning and strength when so many of us are feeling isolated and lonely. Above all, we will show our resilience and determination that Pride will be back bigger and stronger than ever before."

"For millions of people around the globe, Pride is their one opportunity each year to come together and feel a part of a community, to feel loved, connected and to know they aren't alone," Garina continued. "It's essential this year that as Pride organizers, we ensure there is still the opportunity to connect, even if we are connecting from home."

San Francisco Pride announced this week that 2020's parade and festival will be canceled, not postponed, due to COVID-19. This year's celebration, among the country's largest, was to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the first Pride Parade.

"This was not a decision we arrived at lightly," San Francisco Pride Executive Director Fred Lopez said in a press release. "Far from it: our staff has been in frequent talks with our board, our production team, our partners at many departments of City Hall, officials at other Pride organizations worldwide — and most of all, our LGBTQ communities."

"We need community and connection more than ever," J. Andrew Baker, co-president of Interpride, said. "[Global Pride] gives us an opportunity to both connect and celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community's resilience in the face of this pandemic and the true spirit of Pride."

"Pride 2020 represents a milestone for Pride events, with many honoring the 50th anniversary of their first gatherings and marches, such as New York to the first Gandhinagar Pride this year and we would not let that pass without recognition and celebration."

Over 300 parades and festivals have been canceled worldwide.

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## **'Conversion Therapy': ILGA World releases extensive global research into laws banning the discredited practice**

***A ground-breaking report released today by ILGA World has exposed how - thanks to the tireless advocacy of activists, survivors and grassroots organisations - States and health professionals across the world are speaking up against so-called 'conversion therapies'. Their joint efforts are crucial to protect people from a myriad of pseudo-scientific practices that continue to have a destructive effect on people's lives from a very early age.***

By Daniele Paletta

ILGA World (26.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3asO6aF> - [Curbing deception - A world survey of legal restrictions of so-called 'conversion therapies'](#) is an extensive global research into laws banning these discredited practices both at the national and subnational level.

The report also explores the vast field of techniques that have been used in the past—and continue to be used today—for the purpose of attempting to alter lesbians, gays and bisexuals' sexual orientation, to prevent trans youth from transitioning or make trans people de-transition, or to force our gender expressions and roles to align with the social binary stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

"As of February 2020, three UN member States (Brazil, Ecuador and Malta) have enacted nationwide laws to restrict so-called 'conversion therapies'", explains Lucas Ramón Mendos, Senior Research Officer at ILGA World and author of the report. "Subnational jurisdictions in three more UN member States (Canada, Spain and the United States) have done the same, hopefully paving the way for others to move in the same direction. For too long, experimentation and abuse has taken place under the legitimising cloak of medicine, psychology and science".

Throughout the 20th century, mental health practitioners resorted to medical experimentation, lobotomy, castration, masturbatory reconditioning, chemical and

electroshock aversion therapy, hypnosis and other brutal and inhumane techniques in their attempts to modify sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Oftentimes, children and adolescents have been the primary victims of these practices: in many cases, the discomfort with the child's gender non-conformity has been at the root of much of parents' and caregivers' motivations for subjecting their children to 'conversion therapies', as failing to comport with socially dominant models of gender expression, gender identity or sexual orientation is cast as a problem to be "prevented" and "corrected".

Protection from similar ineffective and cruel treatment is, unfortunately, as urgent as ever: as the report details, gruesome practices– including electroshock 'therapies', forced internments in 'clinics' and exorcisms – are still applied in numerous countries, pushing people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions to living miserable, self-loathing lives, up to the extreme consequences of committing suicide.

"Our research shows that, today, the main driving forces behind these harmful practices are religious leaders and prejudice. Many have ended up seeking 'conversion therapy' for themselves as they perceived their sexual orientation and gender identity in conflict with their religion," continues Mendos. "It is vital that we pay special attention and listen to the members of our communities with lived experiences of faith".

2020 could be an important year in the fight against 'conversion therapies'. "Bills to restrict these ill-informed practices have been introduced in national legislative bodies in at least 10 countries," explains Julia Ehrt, Director of Programmes at ILGA World. "Six court cases worldwide were litigated with positive results. State officials and governmental agencies are speaking up, together with human rights bodies. And, to date, more than 60 health professional associations in 20 countries have repudiated efforts to 'change' a person's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Legal reform is only one of the many avenues that can be explored to tackle 'conversion therapies': our report includes a wide array of tools that human rights defenders can use in their advocacy efforts".

As more and more survivors are finding the courage and strength to come forward, our communities are more determined than ever to put an end to 'conversion therapy'.

"Our lives are at stake", remind Luz Elena Aranda and Tuisina Ymania Brown, Co-Secretaries General of ILGA World. "For centuries, we have been told we need to be mended, to be changed, to be moulded to fit a binary. From a very early age, many of us come to internalise that something about them needs to be silenced. Attempts to turn us into people we are not are still being imposed onto us in the name of religion, culture, science and even out of ill-informed good intentions. Too many lives have been ruined, or ended, and many more will be if we don't act now. We hope that our research can raise awareness, and contribute to stop something that has harmed our communities so deeply."

### **Key figures (as of February 2020):**

- 3 UN member States (Brazil, Ecuador and Malta) have enacted nationwide laws to restrict so-called 'conversion therapies'
- In other 3 UN member States, subnational jurisdictions have enacted bans or restrictions on these practices: Canada (3 provinces and several cities), Spain (5 regions) and the United States of America (19 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico and numerous cities and counties)

- In 5 UN member States (Argentina, Uruguay, Fiji, Nauru and Samoa), mental health laws prohibit diagnosing patients exclusively on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity: these laws act as indirect bans
  - 10 countries have introduced bills in national legislative bodies to restrict these practices. In several other countries - including Australia, Canada, Mexico, and the United States - sub-national jurisdictions continue to discuss these bills
  - At least 6 court cases have been litigated in 3 different countries with positive results
  - The World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Medical Association and the World Psychiatric Association—as well as more than 60 health professional associations spread across more than 20 countries - have repudiated efforts to change a person’s gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation.
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