



RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

Insights from OutRight's COVID-19
Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund



OUTRIGHT
ACTION INTERNATIONAL



Introduction

In times of crisis the most marginalized communities tend to suffer disproportionately compared to the broader population, and LGBTIQ people are no exception. Across the world LGBTIQ people experience higher levels of discrimination, violence, exclusion, and deprivation, especially where same-sex relations or transgender identities are criminalized. And in times of crisis all of these vulnerabilities are amplified.

Even when governments and humanitarian organizations make relief efforts available, too often they exclude LGBTIQ people by taking a binary gendered approach, choosing unsafe spaces (such as police stations) for distribution, using non-inclusive definitions of “family”, or due to homophobic or transphobic relief workers. Due to the nature of the COVID-19 crisis, the surrounding lockdown and distancing measures keeping people isolated from their chosen families and LGBTIQ organizations, and due to the immense economic fall-out, the effects on LGBTIQ populations have been, and continue to be, particularly devastating.

The effects are exacerbated by the fact that many LGBTIQ people are excluded from the formal workforce due to discrimination even outside a pandemic. As such, many are left to informal work without job security, and have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Early on in the pandemic, OutRight Action International set out to understand exactly how LGBTIQ people were being affected by the pandemic, the measures imposed for containment, and the corresponding economic downturn. The findings of our report, *Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ People*, released on May 7, 2020, surpassed our expectations of the level of crisis facing LGBTIQ people.



Photos: Left: Members of Arus Pelangi in Indonesia. Right: © George Frey from protest outside Salt Lake City in 2009. (Subject is not associated with this report.) Front page cover: Members of “SHE” and “Equals, Inc.” from Barbados.

We found that LGBTIQ people are facing:

1. **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;
2. **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;
3. **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;
4. **Social isolation and increased anxiety** which are further heightened by being cut off from chosen families and the LGBTIQ community;
5. **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;
6. **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;
7. **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.

In summary, OutRight's research report sounds the alarm by showing that without urgent interventions, LGBTIQ people will experience dramatic increases of hunger, homelessness, violence and even death because of the pandemic.

The Need

OutRight has been fighting for LGBTIQ equality everywhere for 30 years, and we have a network of strong connections with activists all over the world. As we heard more about the devastation of livelihoods that LGBTIQ people were facing and the challenges organizations were experiencing in trying to meet the need, OutRight was well positioned to respond swiftly. In April 2020 we launched a COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund. The fund aims to support LGBTIQ people and organizations where governments, religious organizations, humanitarian relief agencies, and other programs fail to do so. The Fund supports OutRight's COVID-19 response work and provides small grants to LGBTIQ groups that are providing food, shelter, medicine, mental health services, and documenting and defending against human rights abuses.

During the three weeks that the Fund was open for applications (April 8-30), we received almost 1500 appeals for help from 131 countries. Between the findings of our report, and the overwhelming number of calls for help expressed in the applications to our Emergency Fund, it became painfully clear – for LGBTIQ people, especially for the most vulnerable, such as trans and gender diverse populations, COVID-19 is a crisis within a crisis. A crisis of hunger, domestic violence, homelessness, lack of access to healthcare, and even death.

*Members of Humraz Male Society
from Pakistan box food and
supplies.*



PAKISTAN

A trans woman called Liza in Russia told us that: “I will call the ambulance only if I am suffocating; only if I feel a very real threat to my life. I’m afraid that if I get hospitalized, they will notify my family – that would be the worst. I am also afraid that I will be placed in the men’s ward, and that the doctors will not understand my situation, that they will treat me worse than others. And how, under such circumstances, could I continue my course of hormone treatment, which cannot be interrupted?”¹

¹ Interview, *Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ People*

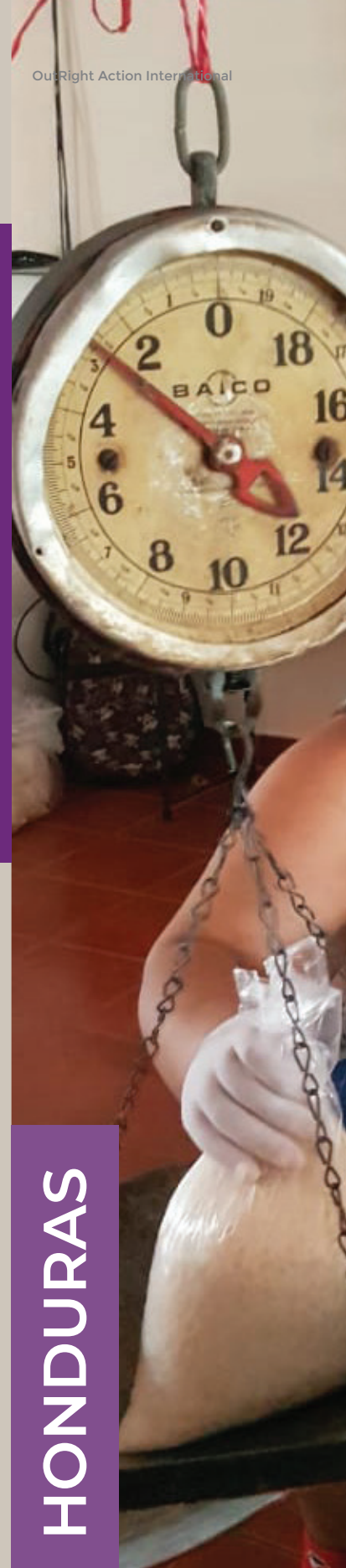
Collating data from all of the Fund applications made it clear that the priority appeals to the Fund correspond to the priority findings identified in OutRight’s report, *Vulnerability Amplified*.

Overwhelmingly, 55% of applications appealed for support to alleviate hunger, linking to the devastation of livelihoods that people described in OutRight’s research interviews. Perhaps this should not be a surprise: LGBTIQ people are overrepresented in the informal employment sector, without job security, and often relying on daily wages, and were therefore strongly hit by the pandemic.

William in Belize told us for our research that he is a drag entertainer, that “as an effeminate gay person, this is the only job I can find”, but without events or shows, he earns nothing. While “Donna Canlas” (pseudonym), a bisexual man from the Philippines, works as a hairdresser. The salon closed indefinitely, leaving him with an empty bank account.

A member of the group
Artemisa Lesbico Feminista

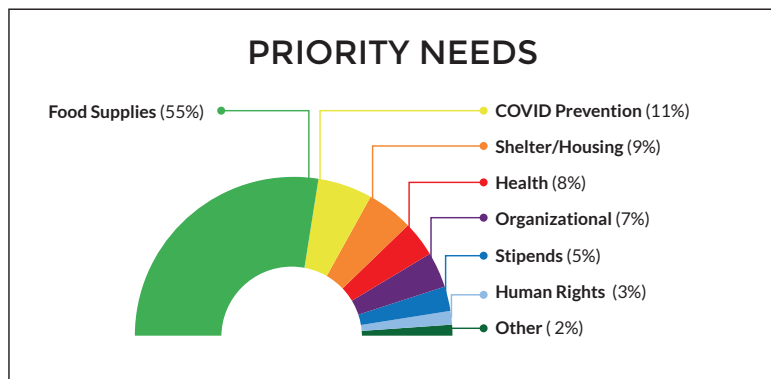
HONDURAS



Almost 20% of requests to OutRight's Fund related to healthcare, COVID-19-related or otherwise. Again this should be unsurprising: even in places with strong legislative and policy protections, LGBTIQ people experience discrimination, hateful attitudes and even refusal of service in hospitals.

Slightly more than 10% of requests to OutRight's COVID Fund related to threats to the survival of LGBTIQ organizations. For example, LGBTIQ organizations requested help paying fees like rent, wifi, and other expenses that are a prerequisite to daily operations. They also requested funding for human rights documentation to capture the impact of unexpected developments like increased policing of neighborhoods related to the pandemic. Many of these requests are a consequence of changes with donors. Some funders have redirected funding away from human rights and into COVID relief, have stopped funding altogether due to their own economic situation, or committed funds have become inaccessible due to organizations' inability to meet contracted activities as a result of the pandemic. This particular issue is also indicative of the scale and long-term nature of the crisis: LGBTIQ organizations may be facing long-term impact and even inability to continue operations.

FIGURE 1: NEEDS EXPRESSED



Lua Stabile, from Brazil, told us: “If trans people have viruses and go to a hospital, people will be discriminatory, people will not choose to save trans lives when people have to choose who lives. I do not doubt that we are the people who will be discarded from medical care.”²

2 Interview from *Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ People*

The Fund was open for applications to both registered and non-registered organizations serving LGBTIQ populations (whether broadly, or specifically targeting a subset) in all regions of the world except the USA, Canada, the European Economic Area, Switzerland, the UK, Australia and New Zealand.



Kyrgyz Indigo and Labrys deliver staples for LGBTIQ people in Kyrgyzstan. Photo courtesy of the groups.

KYRGYZSTAN

We received a total of **1,488 qualified applications** from **131 countries** in **all regions** of the world.

FIGURE 2: POPULATIONS SERVED

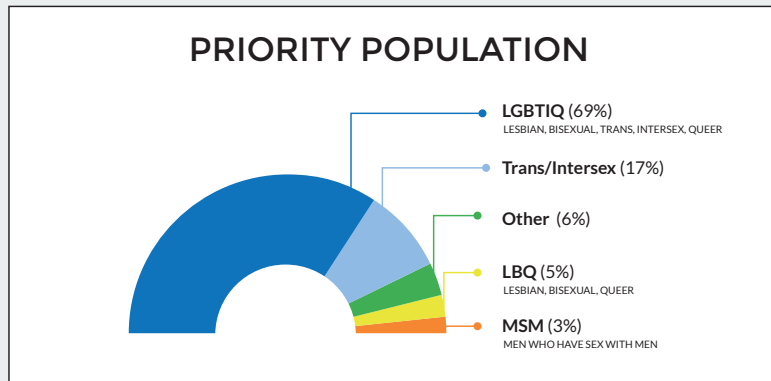
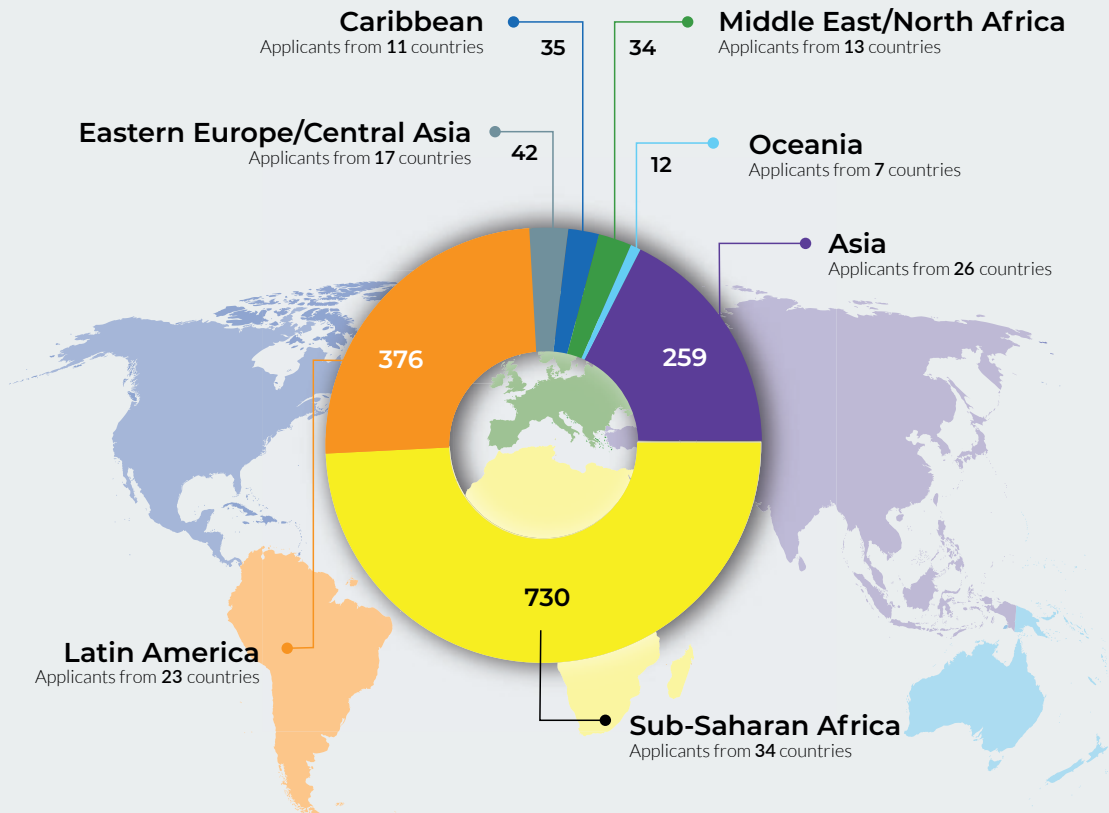


FIGURE 3: WHERE APPLICATIONS CAME FROM



Proposal Review Process

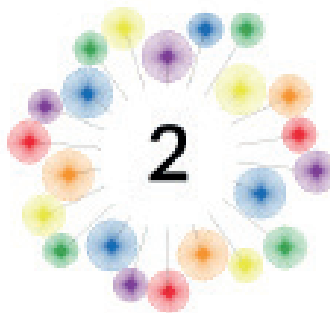
The review process for assessing the 1488 applications OutRight received was managed by OutRight's Senior Advisor for Global Advocacy, **Paul Jansen**, who has spent over a decade as a grant-maker, and **Yvonne Wamari**, OutRight's Africa Program Officer.

To ensure objectivity, due diligence and speed, we created a three-tier review process.

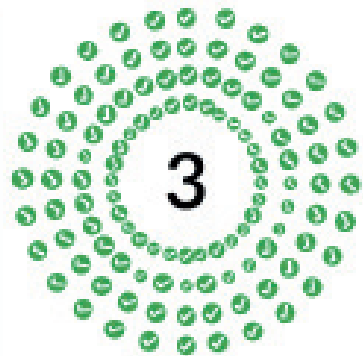
FIGURE 4: REVIEW PROCESS



We recruited over 200 external volunteer reviewers who were trained on how to do a first screening of all the applications based on a multifaceted criteria. Each volunteer reviewed 15-30 applications and each application was reviewed by 2-3 separate reviewers.



In the next stage all applications were reviewed by OutRight staff who each reviewed 80-100 applications.



Applicants with the top scores were additionally screened through reference checks before final approval by OutRight. Reports on the grants issued will be submitted to OutRight in the coming months.

Grants

So far, OutRight has issued three rounds of **grants**. While we are no longer accepting applications, we have kept all eligible applications on file in the hope that if we raise more funds, another round of grants can be issued.

\$12m

funding requests

1,488

eligible applications received from communities in need

\$1m+

funds raised (as of 16 July 2020)

90

total grants made (as of 16 July 2020)

FIGURE 5: FUND APPLICATIONS BY USE

55%

alleviation of hunger



20%

health care



10%

organizational survival



\$703K

total grants made (as of 16 July 2020)

\$7,111

average grant amount (as of 16 July 2020)

437

average number of people served per grant

Funds Raised

We are extremely grateful for the generosity and solidarity of the Founding Partners of our Emergency Fund: Calvin Klein, Inc., Dunn Family Charitable Foundation, Gilead Sciences, Inc., and Microsoft Corp. With the help of generous partners and contributors, **we have raised over one million US dollars so far – an impressive amount which meets only a fraction of the need.**



MONTENEGRO

*Members of the group
LGBT Forum Progress*

Conclusion and Recommendations

The volume of applications we received for the COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund, and the type of help that was requested corresponds to the findings of OutRight's report, *Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ People*. Together, the two initiatives overwhelmingly show that **the need facing LGBTIQ people across the world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and surrounding containment measures, is dire.**

We need immediate action from governments, the UN, and the philanthropic sector to prevent an LGBTIQ humanitarian crisis.

In the short term relief efforts provided by governments and humanitarian agencies have to be inclusive of LGBTIQ people. Donors should not pivot away from LGBTIQ organizations, and should, if possible, increase their support at this time. And, in the long term, we need comprehensive, sustainable measures to ensure genuine and lasting inclusion and acceptance of LGBTIQ people in all development, public health and disaster relief efforts to ensure that if a future crisis hits, LGBTIQ people do not fall through the cracks.

“We received the funds and we have already delivered assistance to 9 trans homes... Thank you very much to OutRight Action International for allowing us to help the trans community in Lima.”

– Yesenia Alvarez, Director of Instituto Político para la Libertad



PERU



“Thank you OutRight, for granting funds in response to COVID-19 for lesbian, bisexual women, and transman members of the organization. With this, we can help our LBT members and families. We are glad that there are groups who still provide help, especially for the LGBT sector.” Thank you and *mabuhay po kayo!*

—LOVE

PHILIPPINES