

The seven ways COVID-19 has hugely impacted LGBTI people

[Blog, Covid-19](#)

“While the Coronavirus does not discriminate, it has hit vulnerable communities disproportionately harder.” This is the conclusion of ILGA-Europe’s [rapid assessment report](#) on the impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTI people, organisations, and communities in Europe and Central Asia. In this blog, ILGA-Europe’s policy team share the seven main areas of life in which COVID-19 has specifically impacted LGBTI people.

Imagine being a young LGBTI person quarantined with a hostile family during the COVID-19 crisis. Or being a sex worker who has lost income and a place to stay. Imagine being HIV positive and finding your HIV/AIDS center has closed. For some people these were not hypothetical scenarios, instead these kinds of experiences have been their lived reality during the global healthcare crisis.

[The COVID-19 pandemic](#) has been a challenging period for everyone. However, it has been even more dreadful for already vulnerable and marginalised communities and people, who have also been negatively impacted by social distancing and other very needed prevention measures.

Based on inputs from a survey of ILGA-Europe members, direct communications, as well as public reports and webinars from members and organisations in the region, our policy team has identified seven areas where COVID-19 has remarkably impacted LGBTI people in Europe and Central Asia.

1. Health and access to health

LGBTI people have significantly lower health outcomes due to stigma and discrimination, biases held by healthcare providers, and lower socioeconomic status, which is often linked with lower access to comprehensive health insurance. ILGA-Europe received or observed reports from 30 countries of impacts on access to health overall in Europe and Central Asia from across Europe and Central Asia, showing how pre-existing limitations in LGBTI-affirming healthcare were exacerbated as healthcare systems redirected their resources, targeted mental health services were interrupted, or experienced radical increases in demand after moving online during confinement. Access to sexual and reproductive health were also negatively impacted.

2. Hate speech by political and religious leaders

Recent years have seen a rise in divisive and hateful rhetoric in election campaigns and public discourse, with minorities being scapegoated, and this has been translating into real hate in the streets. During the COVID-19 crisis, reports of targeted hate speech from political and/or religious leaders were received from 12 countries in Europe and Central Asia, confirming that in many countries across the region the current public health crisis is being used as another opportunity by religious leaders and hostile politicians and governments to blame LGBTI people for societal problems, further stirring up hatred against LGBTI people.

3. Domestic violence

Social distancing has proven to be particularly difficult for those who have been rejected by their families, are not out with their families, or might face LGBTI-phobia from their family members. The issue of increased incidence of domestic violence towards LGBTI people who found themselves in lockdown with their families was striking, with reports coming from 23 countries. Experiences of family rejection significantly impact on the mental health and stress levels of LGBTI people and can lead to harassment and, in worst case scenarios, to violence from family members. On top of that, those exposed to domestic violence were often unable to leave home due to confinement, and thus unable to report as easily or to request help.

4. Access to housing, food, and subsistence through public relief programmes

Problems accessing basic needs, public assistance, support, and service programmes were reported from 21 countries. This points to the greater than average rate of LGBTI people being unemployed and in precarious jobs, and living on very limited and unstable financial resources. In order to respond to the extreme vulnerability of people in precarious job and housing situations, many LGBTI organisations in these countries reported having shifted their previous plans and budgets to cover humanitarian aid gaps within states' response to the crisis, which indicates that LGBTI people in many countries are left behind public relief programmes.

5. Access to justice, registration, and other legal processes

Legal, judicial, and administrative processes that secure the rights of LGBTI people and rainbow families were impacted by the crisis. Due to the closure or curtailment of these processes in many states, ILGA-Europe received reports of problems with family and relationship registration, which is directly linked to family reunification issues during the crisis. Problems were encountered as well in accessing legal gender recognition and asylum.

6. Ability of LGBTI organisations to do advocacy and engage with policymakers

Reports of decreased access to policymakers and advocacy opportunities were reported in 19 countries. This is particularly concerning given the gaps in service provision and the human rights violations reported by community members. LGBTI people and organisations were caught in a closed-loop: while many members of LGBTI communities were unable to have their basic needs met, organisations charged with promoting their human rights were also blocked from advocacy spaces which are vital to ensuring that those basic needs are met or that voices of LGBTI people were heard by government representatives. In addition, many LGBTI organisations shifted their focus from advocacy and policy work to direct service provision and humanitarian aid for the community to address gaps discussed in the previous sections; this shift further impacted the ability of those organisations to engage with policymakers as well.

Public actions, demonstrations, protests, and Pride events were also impossible to hold in some countries and organisations reported not having the resources to move their advocacy work online or struggling to adapt to online work, or being forced to close or terminate segments of their work. In circumstances with already difficult advocacy contexts, the pandemic worsened these problems.

7. Other types of impacts

Impacts related to organisational issues, workplace discrimination, family reunification, and others were reported. In particular, ILGA-Europe has been closely monitoring measures adopted by states which notified a derogation from the European Convention on Human Rights, namely Albania, Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, North Macedonia, Romania, San Marino, and Serbia. These states, like all the others, remain legally responsible before regional and international jurisdictions, and have an obligation to protect vulnerable groups. Besides, some core fundamental rights cannot be derogated.