

44th session of the Human Rights Council
14 July 2020

Annual Discussion on Women's Rights (res. 6/30)
COVID-19 and women's rights (second part)

Statement by the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Federation

Joined by: International Lesbian and Gay Association; Swedish Federation for LGBT Rights – RFSL;
Amnesty International

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Madam President,

This statement was prepared in consultation with the Eurocentralasian Lesbian* Community (EL*C).

We are grateful for all the organizers of this panel as COVID-19 has affected women disproportionately, especially lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex (LBTI) women and persons. Those facing additional layers of discrimination based on race, colour, age or migrant background, have been impacted even more prominently.

LBTI women have historically faced discrimination in employment, situations which were exacerbated by the pandemic, when many lost their jobs and any source of income. Trans women who are doing sex work, have been particularly vulnerable due to containment measures which has in turn forced many to resort to more unsafe and precarious conditions in order to work. For example, in Argentina, a trans woman, unable to work on the street due to isolation measures, was forced to take her client home, where he stabbed her several times in April.¹

LBTI families have also faced additional challenges due to lack of legal recognition of their relationships, for example the inability to stay in the same country with a partner or their children or to join them.

At the same time, many LBTI women have been forced to isolate in hostile family conditions, increasing experiences of domestic and family violence. For instance, a local group in Singapore reported several emergency requests for housing by lesbians who were scared to live at home because of emotional and physical violence from their parents.²

We also see that intimate partner violence skyrocketed during the pandemic, including in LBTI relationships. Hence, this phenomenon has been mostly reported in relation to heterosexual couples, with extremely limited information on violence in LBTI relationships.³

Trans and gender non-conforming persons have been specifically affected by gender-based curfew laws and policies in several Latin American countries. In Peru, a number of trans women were detained by the police when they tried to go out on the "women-only" days.⁴ In Colombia, many trans persons have been denied access to stores or even attacked by police and non-state actors when they went outside.⁵ Fortunately, these policies have recently been reversed.

In addition, trans persons and particularly trans women were deprived of access to hormonal treatment and transition-related health services as they were considered non-essential. Intersex women find themselves in a similar situation.

The pandemic has changed the patterns of lesbophobic and transphobic violence and harassment. Empty streets became a playground for physical attacks, while the spike in online communications created new or heightened vulnerabilities in relation to online hate speech and online harassment experienced by LGBTI women and persons.

Isolation, violence and further stigmatization have exacerbated mental health problems experienced by LGBTI women. According to research from Canada, 42% of the LGBTQI2S⁶ community reported significant impacts on their mental health in the current situation.⁷ Elderly persons from our community only face further isolation.

In many countries, including but not limited to Egypt, Iran, Poland, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States, public leaders blamed COVID-19 on LGBTI persons.⁸ This increased pre-existing hatred and stigmatization of LGBTI women.

We have witnessed a number of state responses which neglect to take a human rights and gender just approach and which take advantage of the crisis to further pass homophobic and transphobic laws which violate the rights of LGBTI women and people. For example, Hungary implemented a law reversing the ability for trans people for legally changing their gender.⁹

In other countries, the pandemic stalled important legislative or policy developments which may benefit LGBTI women and persons. For instance, in France, the extension of medically assisted procreation to single and lesbian women has been postponed 'because of the health crisis, provoking outraged reactions from parliamentarians'.¹⁰

The pandemic has also stalled several important court proceedings which could improve the situation for LGBTI women. Specifically, in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados and Saint Lucia where the criminalization of same sex intimacy, including between women, is being challenged.¹¹

At the same time, LGBTI organizations in all parts of the world have mobilized to support their communities, including by providing grants for food and medication, shelters, psychosocial support and documentation.

In Colombia and Mexico, civil society groups assisted trans sex workers who have been unable to work due to the pandemic by providing medical care and financial support.¹²

In Egypt, a number of grassroots LGBTI groups offered mental health support services and information, including advice on sexual health, digital security, protection from family violence, and enhancing economic situation from home.¹³

In South Africa, organizations are assisting LGBT migrants and asylum seekers who do not have access to food, government aid, or other forms of essential goods.¹⁴

There have also been examples of good practices from some states.

For instance, in the Indian state of Manipur, a local government has established quarantine centres and facilities for trans individuals who are returning to the state and must self-isolate to ensure that they can receive safe and non-discriminatory housing.¹⁵

In Manizales, Colombia, the Women and Gender Equity's Secretariat, with the support of the Technology and Communications Secretariat, launched a pilot project to help sex workers, and in particular trans sex workers, to continue doing their job through the internet during lockdown.¹⁶

In Florida, United States, a local school district changed a remote learning platform utilized by schools to enable their trans students to use their preferred name.¹⁷

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to OHCHR for producing a paper on COVID-19 and LGBTI people.¹⁸ We are calling on all the states to implement the ASPIRE guidelines on COVID-19 response and recovery¹⁹ prepared by the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. We suggest all the stakeholders to collect data on the impact of COVID-19 on LGBTI women and persons, especially on the issue of intimate partner violence as currently there is almost no data on the problem.

Thank you.

¹ Crónica de un intento de travestimiento en Grand Bourg' (*PH*, 23 April 2020) <<https://diarioph.com.ar/atacaron-a-cuchillazos-a-una-travesti-en-malvinas-argentinas-no-fue-un-crimen-pasiona/>> accessed 29 June 2020.

² OutRight Action International, 'Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ people' <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/COVIDsReportDesign_FINAL_LR_0.pdf> accessed 29 June 2020.

³ See, e.g. Josef Patrick McAulay, 'Covid-19 and L.G.B.T.+ Victims of Domestic Abuse: Suffering in Silence' (*University of Oxford Centre for Criminology*, 6 July 2020) <<https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/centres-institutes/centre-criminology/blog/2020/07/covid-19-and-lgbt-victims-domestic-abuse>> accessed 13 July 2020; Linda A. Thompson, 'With the world in lockdown, for some, being at home is as dangerous as being outside' (*Equal Times*, 22 May 2020) <<https://www.equaltimes.org/with-the-world-in-lockdown-for?lang=en#.XwxFdC1h1QI>> accessed 13 July 2020; 'Unsafe at Home: COVID-19 Isolation Increases Risk for LGBTQ+ Community' (*UVM Health Network*, 12 June 2020) <<https://www.uvmhealth.org/Pages/Coronavirus/Staying-Healthy/unsafe-at-home-covid19-isolation-increases-risk-LGBTQ-community.aspx>> accessed 13 July 2020.

⁴ La Voz, 'Coronavirus and transphobia in Peru: forced trans women to scream "I want to be a man"' (*La Voz*, 07 April 2020) <<https://www.lavoz.com.ar/ciudadanos/coronavirus-y-transfobia-en-peru-obligaron-a-mujeres-trans-a-gritar-quiero-ser-hombre>> accessed 12 June 2020.

⁵ Las2Orillas, 'The nightmare that a trans person lived in an ARA supermarket' (Las2Orillas, 19 April 2020) <<https://www.las2orillas.co/la-pesadilla-que-vivio-una-persona-trans-en-un-supermercado-ara/>> accessed 12 June 2020; Juan Camilo Maldonado, 'Burlas, discriminación y puñaladas: la violencia que revela el Pico y Género' (*El Espectador*, 03 May 2020) <<https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/burlas-discriminacion-y-punaladas-la-violencia-que-revela-el-pico-y-genero-articulo-917657/>> accessed 12 June 2020.

⁶ LGBTQI2S stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex and Two-Spirit is a term used by some Indigenous North Americans to describe Native people in their communities who fulfil a traditional third-gender (or other gender-variant) ceremonial and social role in their cultures.

⁷ Egale Canada & INNOVATIVE Research Group, 'Impact of COVID: Canada's LGBTQI2S Community in Focus' (6 April 2020) <<https://egale.ca/egale-in-action/covid19-impact-report/>> accessed 29 June 2020.

⁸ See e.g. Emma Powys Maurice, 'Powerful image proves that while coronavirus is changing our way of life, it will never slow down homophobia or antisemitism' (*PinkNews*, 22 May 2020) <<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/05/22/coronavirus-homophobia-antisemitism-nazism-california-lockdown-protest-gavin-newsom/>> accessed 12 June 2020; Tris Reid-Smith, 'LGBT+ groups ask UN to fight homophobes using coronavirus to spread hate and violence' (*Gay Star News*, 19 May 2020) <<https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/lgbt-groups-ask-un-to-fight-homophobes-using-coronavirus-to-spread-hate-and-violence/>> accessed 12 June 2020; Aykan Erdemir, 'Turkish government scapegoats LGBTI Community for Covid-19 Pandemic' (*Ekathimerini*, 11 May 2020) <<https://www.ekathimerini.com/252534/opinion/ekathimerini/comment/turkish-government-scapegoats-lgbti-community-for-covid-19-pandemic/>> accessed 12 June 2020; Gregor Gowans, 'WROCLAW PRIEST BLAMES CORONAVIRUS ON HOMOSEXUALITY & ABORTION' (*Wroclaw Uncut*, 5 March 2020) <<https://wroclawuncut.com/2020/03/05/priest-coronavirus-lgbt-abortion/>> accessed 21 June 2020; Jake Kwon, 'Virus outbreak linked to Seoul clubs popular with LGBT community stokes homophobia' (*CNN*, 13 May 2020) <<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/12/asia/south-korea-club-outbreak-intl-hnk/index.html>> accessed 12 June 2020; Umberto Bacchi & Maria Georgieva, 'LGBT+ group sues Ukraine religious figure linking coronavirus to gay marriage' (*Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 13 April 2020) <<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-ukraine-lgbt/lgbt-group-sues-ukraine-religious-figure-linking-coronavirus-to-gay-marriage-idU5L8N2B16C7>> accessed 10 July 2020.

⁹ Jose A. Cano, 'Orban takes advantage of pandemic to cut transgender people's rights in Hungary' (*Cuartopoder*, 19 April 2020) <<https://www.cuartopoder.es/internacional/2020/04/19/orban-aprovecha-la-pandemia-para-recortar-los-derechos-de-las-personas-trans-en-hungria/>> accessed 12 June 2020.

¹⁰ 'Gille Le Gendre juge "impossible" d'adopter la PMA pour toutes "avant l'été"' (*France 24*, 21 May 2020) <<https://www.france24.com/fr/20200521-gille-le-gendre-juge-impossible-d-adopter-la-pma-pour-toutes-avant-l-ete>> accessed 13 July 2020.

¹¹ The Commonwealth Equality Network & Kaleidoscope International Trust, 'LGBTI+ in the Commonwealth in the COVID-19 Era' <<https://www.commonwealth-covid19.com>> accessed 29 June 2020.

¹² Televisa News, 'Casa Frida operates as a refuge for LGBT + community' (*Televisa News*, 21 May 2020) <<https://noticieros.televisa.com/videos/casa-frida-refugio-para-comunidad-lgbt/>> accessed 12 June 2020; El Tiempo, 'La sororidad en tiempos de pandemia' (*El Tiempo*, 19 April 2020) <<https://www.eltiempo.com/bogota/la-sororidad-en-tiempos-de-pandemia-486048>> accessed 12 June 2020.

¹³ Information provided by a local group.

- ¹⁴ Nickita Maesela, 'Transgender refugees turn to NGOs for help as coronavirus wreaks havoc' (*City Press*, 16 April 2020) <<https://www.news24.com/citypress/News/transgender-refugee-and-asylum-seekers-turn-to-ngos-for-help-as-coronavirus-continues-to-wreak-havoc-20200416>> accessed 12 June 2020.
- ¹⁵ Vangamla Salle KS, 'Manipur: Now, dedicated quarantine centres for transgender persons' (*East Mojo*, 21 May 2020) <<https://www.eastmojo.com/coronavirus-updates/2020/05/21/manipur-now-dedicated-quarantine-centres-for-transgender-persons>> accessed 12 June 2020.
- ¹⁶ Secretaría de las Mujeres y Equidad de Género <<https://www.facebook.com/SecMujerMzl/>> accessed 29 June 2020.
- ¹⁷ Emily Bloch, 'New Florida policy aids transgender students doing distance learning amid coronavirus' (*USA Today*, 25 May 2020) <<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/05/25/coronavirus-policy-aids-transgender-students-doing-distance-learning/5227785002/>> accessed 12 June 2020.
- ¹⁸ <<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/LGBT/LGBTIpeople.pdf>> accessed 10 July 2020.
- ¹⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/SexualOrientation/SOGI-GuidelinesCOVID19_EN.docx> accessed 10 July 2020.