No One Left Behind: A Fund to tackle LGBTI socioeconomic inequalities

Blog, Covid-19, Funding

> Early in June, ILGA-Europe launched the ‘No One Left Behind’ fund, an initiative to tackle persisting socioeconomic inequalities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Read on to find out what it is, why we launched it and how we went about awarding 25 grants.

With ILGA-Europe’s ‘No One Left Behind’ fund, launched to tackle socioeconomic inequalities that have been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to support LGBTI organisations in Europe and Central Asia to strengthen their skills and knowledge in relation to socioeconomic inequalities, and to try out new approaches and to help them build relevant alliances. We managed to mobilise some new resources and also reallocated some money from our own budget, which was freed up as a result of the pandemic, creating a total fund of about €380,000.

The call for proposals closed on 5 July, and we received 66 proposals. We have awarded 25 grants and with this, we have exhausted the budget that we have available.

Why the ‘No One Left Behind’ fund?

Many LGBTI organisations in Europe and Central Asia in recent years have started to talk about the importance of addressing socioeconomic rights. It is important to recognise that even when civil and political rights and legal changes such as marriage equality or non-discrimination laws are advancing in some places in our region, many members of our communities are left behind because they face structural barriers in achieving basic safeties. This is especially true for members of underrepresented communities and people whose identities intersect (including Black people and People Of Colour; lesbians, bisexual, trans, non-binary and intersex people, sex workers, Roma, refugees and asylum seekers, disabled persons, among others).

Full equality will not exist if some LGBTI people have no access to education, if they are in precarious jobs, don’t get the healthcare services that they need, when they don’t have a roof above their head or when they are silenced and invisibilised during an economic crisis. Sadly, we increasingly see that these are real lived experiences for too many LGBTI people.

When the global COVID-19 crisis unfolded, many LGBTI organisations saw no other choice than to step-in and provide basic services to their communities. The livelihoods of many communities got so heavily affected that LGBTI activists and organisations began providing food and shelter whilst also trying to maintain their roles as advocates and community organisers. COVID-19 highlighted the urgency of addressing structural inequalities and showed clearly how much deeper the impact was on those with less power, security and visibility.

ILGA-Europe is looking to work with a consultant to provide support to the grantees of the 'No One Left Behind' fund. Click here for more information.

So, why then does the fund not support basic needs?

COVID-19 quickly shifted the focus of many activists from being advocates and community organisers to becoming service providers.

While there was and is undoubtedly a need to meet short-term needs of LGBTI communities, in the long term, it is not sustainable for LGBTI organisations to take on that role. Not only will they never have enough resources to support basic needs of LGBTI communities at large, but becoming involved in providing shelter and food fundamentally shifts attention away from their primary roles of being advocates and community organisers. However, while it is our belief that it is first and foremost the role of governments to provide basic needs to citizens. In cases where states fail to deliver, we consider it incredibly important to build the capacity of LGBTI organisations to tackle root causes of socio-economic inequalities and to build more resilience and strength in communities in responding to this crisis and future ones.

So, what does the fund support?

We have focused support under this fund under three headings:

· Support LGBTI organisations to learn more about the socioeconomic realities of LGBTI people and to strengthen their own capacities to carry out strategic response work.

· Support LGBTI organisations to carry out advocacy work and build alliances to ensure that LGBTI people have access to services and basic needs.

· Support LGBTI organisations to campaign and communicate so that the needs of LGBTI people are brought to the centre of the political and societal agendas.

Most of the projects which received funding focus on marginalised communities, such as LGBTI Roma, sex workers, migrants — or specifically on trans communities. In all such cases we have tried to make sure that communities affected are directly involved in decision making (and in most cases lead projects themselves). Through providing funding to these projects, we will support the visibility, organising and advocacy capacities of these groups who, often, have access to fewer resources.

What kinds of projects did we support?

Amongst the projects that we supported we have seen interesting examples of work in this field. Several organisations are planning to undertake research and mapping exercises to produce reports that can be used for advocacy and communication purposes. For instance, one group aims to map the root causes of socio-economic inequality experienced by LGBTI people with mental health issues and on that basis work with experts to find ways to strengthen the resilience of this group. Another group aims to build a database of unemployment LGBT Roma people as an entrypoint for advocacy. A third group will carry out a needs assessment of LGBTIQ refugees to advocate for a dedicated emergency shelter.

We in particular supported projects that included a clear plan on how data gathering would concretely be used to lead on change.

Various projects aim at developing tools to help LGBTI people access the labour market. Other projects focus on addressing homelessness by creating new alliances, or increasing access to health-care for marginalised communities by understanding the realities of communicaties and working together with healthcare professionals.

And the list goes on.

What’s next?

Many activists and LGBTI groups have known for years about the economic hardship and exclusion which many within their communities experience in their daily lives. Issues of unemployment, economic precarity, lack of access to adequate health care and housing, have been on the radar of many LGBTI groups for a long time. However, few of us have had the resources to do extensive and transformative work on socioeconomic inequalities. We need to build our knowledge, gather data, create new alliances, develop new relationships within institutions and governments to start instigating the needed changes in public policies, etc. In short, we all have a lot to learn.

The fact that we received 66 applications from all over the region, for a call for proposals that was narrowly focused, demonstrates that there is a great need for this work. So, for the coming ten months we aim to follow the work of our grantees closely and document the learning, so that it becomes available for everyone in the movement.

This is the beginning of a journey for ILGA-Europe to learn about how we can collectively address socioeconomic inequalities, in the hope that much more of this work can be supported in the future.