

MARCH-JUNE 2020

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

A SHORT REPORT OF
ILGA-EUROPE'S WORK

REASSESSING OUR ACTIVITIES & PRIORITIES

In mid-March, as Europe was overtaken by the COVID-19 pandemic and one-by-one countries began to go into lockdown, the team at ILGA-Europe felt we had to quickly adapt our work to respond to emerging needs.

It became very clear to us early on that the pandemic was hitting marginalised communities – such as LGBTI communities – disproportionately hard and that the social distancing and other prevention measures had particularly negative impacts on the lives of the most marginalised within LGBTI communities.

The specific challenges faced by LGBTI people have been diverse, ranging from increased economic precarity due to sudden loss of job and income, lack of safe housing and rising food insecurity, disruptions in access to healthcare and treatment, increased mental health issues, and risks of family and domestic violence. For the most part, the aggravated impact of the pandemic on LGBTI people is the result of pre-existing social and economic exclusion.

All this has happened at a time when many LGBTI groups and organisations are worried about their own survival, concerned by the immediate needs of their community members, and carrying out their work in increasingly challenging political environments.

As a result ILGA-Europe's team had to reassess our activities and priorities for 2020. We assessed what activities were still possible and relevant, and also identified new needs.

This report contains an outline of the work we have carried out since the beginning of the pandemic.



Evelyne Paradis
Executive Director

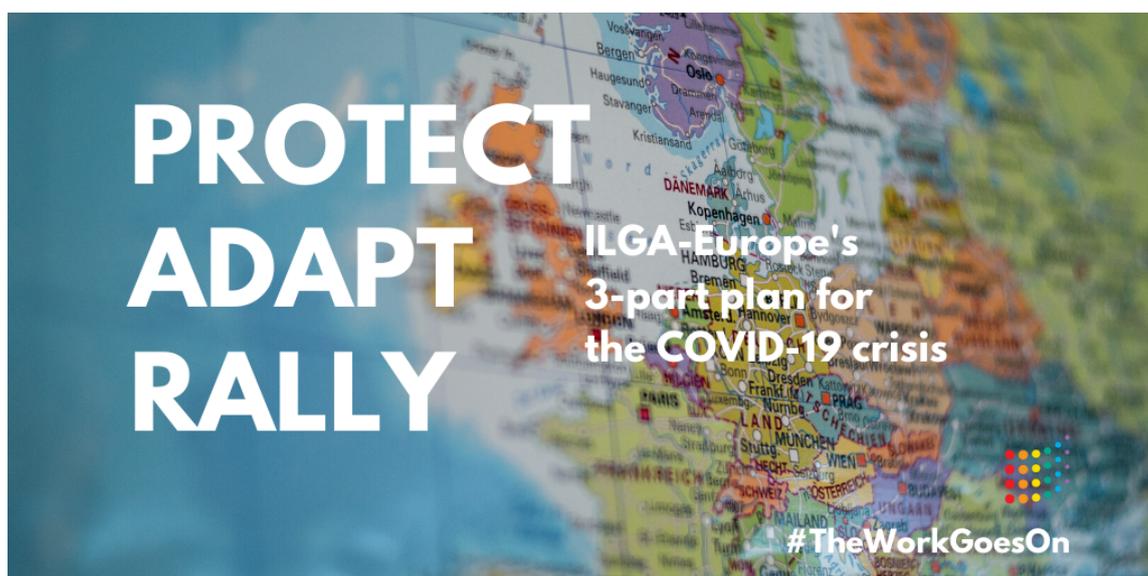


In April, as a response to the particular challenges for LGBTI groups and organisations, ILGA-Europe launched our three-part plan 'Protect, Adapt and Rally' to support LGBTI organisations in Europe and Central Asia through a rapidly changing landscape, and help them to continue their crucial work at the frontline.

AS PART OF THIS PLAN, THE ILGA-EUROPE TEAM HAS BEEN:

Carrying out important monitoring and documentation work to protect LGBTI people in Europe and Central Asia, including...

- **An impact paper** to list the potential and real impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting crisis measures on LGBTI people and communities in the region.
- **A rapid assessment report** based on our survey of members and ongoing communications with organisations about the impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTI communities in countries throughout the region. The report details the impacts across eight areas including health and access to health; hate speech by political and religious leaders; domestic violence; and access to public relief programmes. This report was disseminated throughout our international organisation contacts in the EU, Council of Europe and the UN.
- **Briefing documents** on obligations of states in the field of human rights in the context of COVID-19
- **Gathering evidence** of violations of LGBTI rights during COVID-19 for advocacy and strategic litigation purposes.



- **Providing advice and resources** to enable LGBTI organisations adapt to new working situations and conditions, through blogs and Instagram Live broadcasts, including on:
 - Transitioning to online campaigning and community organising
 - Communications in times of crisis
 - Digital security
 - Managing organisations and teams through the crisis
 - Working remotely
 - Re-thinking activities
 - Online management of finances
 - Online fundraising events.
 - We also provided details on legal service providers that are offering their services pro bono to LGBTI organisations.

- **Facilitating exchange of learning** amongst LGBTI activists on how to meet new needs of the LGBTI community which arise as the COVID-19 crisis continues and beyond. This was done through:
 - Webinars on: communications; community engagement during the pandemic; community outreach; and organising Prides online
 - Instagram Live broadcasts
 - An online peer support group for COVID-crisis communications

ADVOCACY ENGAGEMENT



The team also maintained a high-level of advocacy engagement with European institutions and governments – most of it informed by the input received through the activities carried out under the 'Protect, Adapt, Rally' plan. Among other things, we:

- Worked to ensure that equality for all and the EU LGBTI Strategy would remain high on the EU's political agenda – through meetings with Commissioners Helena Dalli and Věra Jourová, an open letter to EC President von der Leyen, and engagement with the Parliament's LGBTI Intergroup.
- Made sure that institutions and governments were informed about the impact of the pandemic on LGBTI people through meetings with high-level officials and submissions of our reports. Among others, we met with
 - EU Commissioners Věra Jourová, Helena Dalli, Stella Kyriakides
 - Fundamental Rights Agency Director, Michael O'Flaherty
 - Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister, Ann Linde
- We provided input to the
 - Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, and other CoE bodies
 - The European LGBTI Focal Points Network
 - The UN Independent Expert and other Special Procedures
- We took part in numerous webinars, Insta-lives and Facebook lives with policy-makers and relevant NGO partners relating to the effect of COVID-19 on the LGBTI community and its vulnerable populations, as well as related to international action, law, and recovery plans.



Another important part of our work has been turned to the impact of the pandemic on resources for LGBTI work in our region. Firstly, we have been monitoring the situation by launching a survey on the impact on funding for LGBTI groups, which we have shared with a range of funders/donors. We also provided an overview of funding opportunities for LGBTI activists during the COVID-19 crisis.

Secondly, we have looked at how to support LGBTI groups and organisations to meet their emerging and longer-term needs, and created the “No One Left Behind” Fund. We launched this new initiative with a mission to support the LGBTI movement’s capacity to effectively address socio-economic inequalities within LGBTI communities at this critical moment.

The objective of this Fund is to enable LGBTI groups and organisations to gain the skills and knowledge, build alliances and relationships, and/or test new types of activities, with a view to developing longer-term responses to underlying causes of social and economic inequalities which increase the vulnerability and marginalisation of LGBTI people, especially in times of crisis. Over the month of July, the team will be reviewing the 66 applications, with the aim of getting projects starting by the end of summer.

In short, throughout the past few months, a wealth of other work has been carried out by the dedicated teams at ILGA-Europe. In a further communication we will be talking to you about what is planned for the coming months, including our annual conference, which will take place online this year.

In the meantime, if you would like to find out any more about our work through the COVID-19 crisis, or access any of the resources we have created, please visit our [Protect, Adapt, Rally’ package](#).