

# **Mechanisms to Protect LGBTI+'s Against Violence Must Be Developed!**

## **Outcome Report of Being LGBTI+ During Pandemic Forum**

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Starting at the beginning of 2020, the rising climate crisis started to show its global effects severely. A series of forest fires that started with Australia, the Covid-19 Pandemic that became a global crisis and continues to increase its severity globally, marked 2020.

While the effects of these sad and serious events in 2020 are still being felt, the discrimination and usurpation of rights caused by the rise of right-wing populism has deeply shaken LGBTI+'s and barred the ways to justice. Violence and loss of rights have increased significantly.

In particular, the Covid-19 Pandemic emerged at a time when vulnerable groups, namely the people living with HIV, the elderly, people with disabilities, women, LGBTI+s and many more, were experiencing social crises due to right-wing populism. This situation has been felt in Turkey especially as an economic and political crisis, violations of the right to health, and the right to life. LGBTI+'s were targeted in an institutional way. However, LGBTI+ policies have also been increased on the institutional level.

### **The Situation of LGBTI+ Community During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Young LGBTI+ Association conducted an online survey to assess the situation of LGBTI+'s during the pandemic and prepared a report regarding the survey results. Covid-19 brought sudden and major changes with it. It is difficult to say that this transformation is over. Distance rule, closed workplaces, working from home, suspended education, transition to online education, change in social relations, change of communication tools, difficulties encountered in access to healthcare and services, being in closed areas constantly. Considering these situations, the Young LGBTI+ Association examined the health, housing, economic situations, and well-being of LGBTI+'s living in Turkey. In this review, they aimed to reveal the transformation that LGBTI+ people are going through in the pandemic.

In addition to being able to display this change, the association also aimed to raise the issues of LGBTI+'s, identify their needs and demands, communicate the specified needs and demands to decision-makers, and facilitate support mechanisms for restorative solutions.

According to the study, 24% of the participants had chronic diseases. 9% of this 24% had trouble in access to medication. In addition, 15% of respondents did not have any health insurance.

23% of respondents said they had problems with healthcare services. These problems were about routine check-ups, dental examinations, HIV, allergies, HPV, drug prescriptions, and the suspension of psychiatric interviews. In addition to these situations, 77% of respondents expressed that they had no difficulties in healthcare services and were afraid to go to the hospital due to Covid-19.

### **What Did LGBTI+s Go Through During the Pandemic?**

- Due to the pandemic, the depression and anxiety levels of LGBTI+'s who had to move in with their families, relatives, and close circles increased.
- Many LGBTI+'s had to move to smaller cities from major cities during this relocation. Considering the low population, traditional and cultural codes of small cities, LGBTI+'s are exposed to an increased risk of discrimination and violence.
- Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, coming outs have dropped significantly and areas where they have to act closeted increased. This situation has increased conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress on LGBTI+s.
- The rate of receiving financial support decreased as much as the increase in dismissals and unemployment. LGBTI+'s struggled to meet their basic needs in this process. This also led to increased domestic violence and stress. In addition, isolation caused stress and low motivation. LGBTI+'s who returned to those they were closeted to and had to stay indoors felt intense pressure and stress and had to act in auto control. The situation of being closeted and the isolation environment have increased the violence on LGBTI+'s. For example, people who did not use their assigned name were systematically addressed with their assigned names in this process.
- In this period, LGBTI+'s faced intense situations of quitting or dismissal from their jobs and economic inadequacy. Especially those who were working on stage, art performers, sex workers, and seasonal employees experienced economic problems caused by the pandemic. During this period, sex workers faced a lack of customers or did not work due to the risk of contact. Sex work was one of the first professions to be discarded

and ignored. Digital sex work did not bring the expected income. Or the workers could not adapt to the technology. No mechanisms were introduced to overcome this adaptation failure.

- The cost of food and hygiene materials increased. The increased cost caused further economic burden.
- The decrease in access to psychological health services has impact future plans, education and work lives of LGBTI+'s.
- LGBTI+'s who applied for economic support mechanisms often could not benefit from these services.
- Due to current discriminatory and violent attitudes towards LGBTI+'s, these behaviors have intensified while LGBTI+'s already hardly coping with anxiety and stress.
- With the pandemic, socializing areas became unusable. Demands such as online events and thematic live broadcasts for civil society have increased due to this reason.
- While LGBTI+'s who continue their education came to a crossroads between freezing and leaving the school, online education sometimes brought positive changes with it. The stressful environment that LGBTI+'s were exposed to at school has relatively decreased. However, hardships such as internet connection problems, low quality of education, difficulty in focusing, low motivation, the inappropriateness of the home environment affected the education process negatively.
- Along with domestic violence, cyber violence has also increased in this period.

### **LGBTI+'s in Three Months of Covid-19**

The increase in LGBTI+ policies on the institutional level made the rights violations against LGBTI+'s visible. The Pandemic Report prepared by Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Association (SPoD) revealed the problems that LGBTI+'s are facing during the pandemic, together with analysis'. The report focused on the field experiences of SPoD in the first three months of the pandemic and what can be done against the rights violations that LGBTI+'s were exposed to during this process.

In the first three months of the pandemic, the number of applications for domestic violence and social assistance has doubled. During this process, it was observed that 183 - Social Support Line was insufficient in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity and HIV. It was determined that 144 - Social Assistance Line could not respond effectively to incoming calls due to the intensity. Therefore, it has been observed that institutions do not have information on LGBTI+'s due to the lack of inclusiveness and do not take the necessary steps in this regard.

In the first three months of the Covid-19 Pandemic, people who had not come out to the people they lived with, and people who came out but oppressed nevertheless, had difficulty accessing to psychological support.

SPoD suspended Sunday Conversations, a safe space meeting held every Sunday in the association office, due to the pandemic, however moved these meetings online as Distanceless Conversations. Therefore, Distanceless Conversations were opened to participants from out of İstanbul and received intense attention due to the pandemic.

As a striking example; in the first 45 days of the pandemic, SPoD's hotline took 214 applications. The hotline received 244 applications in the 45 days following the discriminatory statements of Head of Religious Affairs Administration against LGBTI+s and people living with HIV on April 24, 2020.

In a way, the 100% increase in applications regarding gender identity and sexual orientation-based discrimination after the aforementioned statement showed the intensity of oppression over the LGBTI+'s.

During the first three months of the pandemic, the SPoD provided consultancy to 60 people on legal support and access to justice. The interviews were conducted online and the discrimination and violence that LGBTI+'s who returned to their families were subjected to stood out among these interviews. In the face of these situations, the recommendations can be listed as follows under two headings;

### **Public Institutions and Organizations:**

- Support requests of LGBTI+'s who face discrimination and violence should be met.
- 183 and 184 hotlines should carry out comprehensive studies on issues such as gender identity, sexual orientation and sexual health.
- Social assistance and solidarity foundations should consider the problems that LGBTI+'s face during the pandemic.
- Considering that the Covid-19 Pandemic increases discrimination and violence against LGBTI+'s, public institutions and organizations should establish gender commissions to develop services for LGBTI+'s.

### **Local Governments:**

- Units that directly support LGBTI+'s should be established within the municipalities and these units should work actively.
- Obstacles faced by LGBTI+'s in accessing social assistance should be identified and policies should be developed to facilitate their access to these support mechanisms.

- Considering that Voluntary Counsellance and Test Centers have suspended their activities due to the pandemic, these centers should develop a crisis plan.
- Local governments should take a firm stand against human rights violations and position themselves in favor of human rights.

### **The New Normal and Current Situation**

With the date of June 2020, the process called "new normal" has started. Although this process relatively alleviated the measures such as curfew and travel prohibition, it did not have a curative effect in the epidemic. On the contrary, Covid-19 still retains its intensity and continues globally and in Turkey. With the pandemic, the increasing violence against LGBTI+'s in homes and in cyber world continues, and LGBTI+'s are targeted by right-wing populist governments and their representatives. Restriction of socialization areas increases the anxiety and stress on LGBTI+'s. Incidents of violence against LGBTI+'s continues. The form of violence is changing and violence becomes less visible during this process. Support mechanisms are unavailable and particularly restricted regarding the applications to legal remedies against domestic violence.

In the face of this situation, LGBTI+'s demand mechanisms against violence. Shelters and emergency hotlines are vital in this regard. In addition, LGBTI+'s and associations should be strengthened in employment. Similar studies of global LGBTI+ organizations largely overlap with each other. It is likely that the present damages would be intensified during the winter, accompanied by the Covid-19 Pandemic.



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