

A LIFELINE IN A CRISIS

The COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ
Emergency Fund 2020-2022

April 2023



**OUTRIGHT
INTERNATIONAL**

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About Outright

Outright International works together for better LGBTIQ lives.

Outright is dedicated to working with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, with staff in over a dozen countries, Outright works with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies and civil society partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

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Introduction

COVID-19 pushed many people back into hiding, back into insecure housing with unsupportive family members, back into economic fragility. The Outright COVID-19 Fund was one critical way to help.

– Jinsiangu, Kenya

In April 2020, Outright International (“Outright”) launched the COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund to offer emergency support to organizations serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Through groundbreaking outreach and diligence in an ever-changing crisis, Outright has issued 355 grants totaling USD 3.8 million to groups from 108 countries, reaching over 170,000 individuals.

In non-pandemic times, LGBTIQ people face high levels of discrimination, violence and social and economic exclusion, especially where same-sex relations or trans identities are criminalized. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation dramatically worsened. Some of that deterioration was inadvertent, as financial markets collapsed and entire sectors were closed. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that COVID-19 prompted the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.² But for many LGBTIQ people around the world, COVID-19 also exacerbated and amplified intentional and targeted discrimination and violence. Scapegoating and blaming of marginalized groups swelled in many countries, including Uganda, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe.

Governments struggled to enforce public health measures and buttress health infrastructure to respond to burgeoning demand. Many governments opted for overly restrictive responses that did not take the lived realities of

low-income and otherwise vulnerable people into account. Banning movement, prohibiting public transport and terminating non-COVID-19-related government services exacerbated marginalization and increased hunger and illness. Coercive – and at times violent – enforcement of lockdowns and social distancing pushed those who are often socially ostracized, such as unhoused people and sex workers, into a perilous battle for survival.

Ultimately, many national approaches to fighting COVID-19 magnified stigma and discrimination against LGBTIQ people. Around the world, LGBTIQ people are overrepresented in the informal economy, which was temporarily decimated in most countries. Quickly, loss of employment triggered food and shelter insecurity, pushing some LGBTIQ people back into unsafe domestic settings where they faced an increased risk of violence. Beyond discrimination in access to health care, COVID-19 caused disruptions in the continuity of care for chronic illnesses such as HIV and cancer in some countries, as well as access to gender-affirming care, such as hormone treatments. Cut off from services, friends and chosen families, many LGBTIQ people faced severe social isolation, anxiety and mental health challenges, beyond the more visible problems of food and housing as the over 3,800 requests for support that Outright received indicated.

COVID-19 didn’t create new problems. It shone a light on how massive the problems are for the population we serve.

– Triangle Project, South Africa

There is overwhelming evidence from around the world that trans and gender-diverse people are more often subject to discrimination and violence, including physical and sexual violence, than their cisgender peers.³ For trans and gender-diverse people, every aspect of their

lives – access to education, employment, housing and mental and physical health care – often depends on the ability to present a valid government-issued identification that aligns with their gender identity and expression.⁴ When a government does not enable legal pathways to change a gender marker, or actively obstructs such efforts, individuals can have limited or no access to state services. In COVID-19 times, the lack of a national identity card matching a person’s gender identity could be fatal, as reported by Fund applicants from Bolivia and Pakistan. It could mean no access to a COVID-19 vaccine.

Significant structural and practical work remains to address the needs of LGBTIQ people in humanitarian crises. Indeed, global and national crisis-response systems often fail to recognize the needs of LGBTIQ people which, as COVID-19 has illustrated, leads to myriad unintended consequences of increased physical and psychological

insecurity, and, at times, negative health outcomes or even death. Outright’s COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund was able to support targeted relief efforts, conceived and implemented by LGBTIQ-led organizations that had expertise and deep trust with the individuals they serve. It should ultimately serve as a model to be advanced and scaled up in future humanitarian relief contexts by any actor working in the field.

The Fund showed the transformative and life-saving impact of committed and diverse people, networking across languages and time zones, to sustain basic individual needs and nurture the global movement in support of the rights of LGBTIQ people. This briefing shares impacts, lessons learned and insights from a little over two years of grantmaking under Outright’s COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund.

At a Glance: Outright’s COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund

Overview

355 grants issued in 108 countries totaling USD 3.8 million impacting over 170,000 people

Grant Dollars Issued by Year (USD) \$3.8 Million Disbursed from 2020 to 2022

2020:	\$998,000
2021:	\$2.6 million
2021 & 2022 (vaccine round):	\$222,000

Eligible Fund Applications Received

2020:	1,520
2021:	1,500
2021 & 2022 (vaccine round):	832
Total eligible applications received:	3,852

Grants Issued

2020:	126
2021:	212
2021 & 2022 (vaccine round):	17
Total grants issued:	355

Priority Needs Areas in 2020 and 2021

2020: food, health care, COVID prevention, shelter/housing, organizational support, stipends, human rights, other

2021: income generation, food, advocacy, combatting violence, shelter, health care

Geographic Distribution of Grants by Region

Middle East & North Africa:	25
Sub-Saharan Africa:	92
Mexico, Central & South America:	80
Caribbean:	26
Asia:	84
Pacific:	9
Eastern Europe:	20
Western Europe, U.S. & Australia:	19

Geographic Distribution of Grants by Region and Funding Amounts (USD)

Middle East & North Africa:	\$257,000
Sub-Saharan Africa:	\$948,000
Mexico, Central & South America:	\$788,000
Caribbean:	\$292,000
Asia:	\$879,000
Pacific:	\$91,000
Eastern Europe:	\$203,000
Western Europe, U.S. & Australia:	\$329,000

From Idea to Impact: Outright's COVID-19 Emergency Fund

Outright, as well as many organizations supported through the Fund, does not typically provide services corresponding to basic needs, the way the Fund ultimately did. But in the face of an unprecedented crisis, communities were struggling for survival, and so were the organizations that represented them. We knew that we had to do what we could to support them. I am very proud of the pivot that the COVID-19 Fund represented and am excited about how to take lessons learned forward into advocacy for queer humanitarian response.

– Maria Sjödin, Executive Director, Outright International

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 virus a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. By then, some Asian countries and Italy had already announced lockdowns and quarantines, and were reporting rising death tolls.⁵ At the time of the WHO announcement, Outright understood immediately from conversations with its extensive partner networks that the potential devastation for LGBTIQ people was clear. Outright had begun to hear stories about COVID-19 and ensuing lockdowns and the impacts the virus and lockdowns were having on organizational partners. Then, reports of human rights abuses by government forces implementing harshly imposed movement restrictions surfaced. The pandemic's economic toll started to set in. As informal economies shut down, organizational

partners and individual activists in Outright's networks across the globe were losing their jobs and funding, and consequently, their ability to provide services and pay staff. At every turn, LGBTIQ people faced neglect, marginalization, discrimination and violence as the world adapted to the virus and lockdowns.

Outright's COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund opened for applications in April 2020 to both registered and non-registered organizations serving LGBTIQ people. Paul Jansen, Outright's Senior Director for Global Programs and Grant-Making, recalls:

As more lockdowns were announced, we thought, what should we do? We decided, "Let's raise funding to help our communities respond to the COVID-19 emergency." We thought we would raise USD 100,000 and issue 10 grants. We kept the application simple and as accessible as possible, working in six languages. We circulated it on social media and via our networks. Immediately, we were just blown away by the response: 1,500 applications in a matter of weeks.

The information gleaned from applications to the Fund was clear and told a horrifying story: for LGBTIQ people, especially for the most vulnerable such as trans and gender-diverse people, COVID-19 was a crisis within a crisis. The proposals coming into Outright buttressed the findings of Outright's timely report, "Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ People," published in May 2020.⁶

LGBTIQ people were facing crises of hunger, domestic violence, homelessness, lack of access to health care,

isolation, exclusion, and, in some instances, death. Stories poured in to Outright from all over the world about LGBTIQ people unable to fund sufficient food or support their children. Some faced an awful choice: to risk violence and humiliation by returning to families who had cast them out because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or face hunger, violence, arrest, and detention for being on the streets in a lockdown.

Within a month of opening the Fund's call for applications, Outright received proposals from 131 countries, with requests totaling more than USD 12 million. The needs overwhelmed available resources.⁷ Outright worked diligently to ensure funding could be allocated quickly and that reporting on grant spending was as easy as possible for grantees that were busy undertaking life-saving work. For partners in crisis, ease of reporting was critical. Six months into launching the Fund, Outright had distributed USD 967,000 in small grants (USD 2,500 to USD 10,000), making the Fund the largest LGBTIQ-specific global COVID-19 relief initiative.

Securing donations from individuals, governments, corporations and foundations allowed Outright to radically increase the potential for making an impact. Some donors found that, beyond financial contributions, staff involvement in the Fund's work was transformative for their own challenges in the pandemic. "COVID-19 had made us all feel powerless," said Phil Yeo, Advocacy & Outreach Content Lead at Google.org, which provided the single largest contribution to the Fund. "Working with Outright was very compelling from an employee engagement perspective. With this Fund, we engaged over 300 employees to help review proposals, and in some instances, assist with translation as needed. This gave employees a way to respond, to take direct action... Some staff told us it was the best volunteer experience they had had since joining us."

In 2021, as the pandemic raged on, new COVID-19 variants challenged populations desperate to return to some normalcy and regain livelihoods. Outright's work was far from over. Fundraising and calls for proposals continued. Demand was as high as ever. Proposals told more harrowing stories of the impact of COVID-19 and were filled with ideas to address the diverse needs and interventions that merited support.⁸ In 2021, Outright received 2,332 eligible applications and issued 212 grants to groups in 87 different countries, totaling over USD 2.5 million.

Launching the Vaccine Round

As safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines became increasingly available in some countries, and some pandemic-related restrictions lifted in those places, access to vaccines became the next challenge for many in underserved communities. Equitable distribution of vaccines remains a crucial component in the fight against COVID-19. But for many countries and their LGBTIQ people, the cost of vaccines – and access to vaccines, including travel costs to get to vaccination sites – makes obtaining vaccines difficult, insufficient or delayed. Misinformation, discrimination in the provision of health care services for marginalized people and mistrust of health care providers resulting from years of mistreatment in such settings further hampered LGBTIQ peoples' vaccine access.



A health worker inoculates a person against COVID-19 during a free vaccination programme for trans people organised by Darjeeling district legal aid forum in Siliguri on August 21, 2021. Photo by Diptendu Dutta/AFP via Getty Images

Informed by these trends, Outright launched a new, and final, call for proposals in late 2021 to address the issues and challenges that LGBTIQ people have and have had in accessing COVID-19 vaccines. Eligible projects could focus on any aspect of vaccine equity challenge: advocacy for vaccine access, improving equitable access to vaccines, improving awareness of vaccine availability and combatting misinformation about the safety and efficacy of vaccines.

Transgender people in Kazakhstan are in the worst position. Kazakhstan has a harsh law that requires sterilization to change gender markers on identity documents. Therefore, transgender people without identity documents that correspond to their gender identity are limited in access to vaccinations and fear of stigma prevents people from seeking quality medical care.

– A partner from Kazakhstan

Again, Outright encountered a massive demand for support, outstripping available funding. The Fund received 832 eligible proposals and ultimately issued 17 grants totaling almost USD 230,000 to groups in 14 countries.

Grants supported work to address the key challenges that partners had identified in accessing vaccines for LGBTIQ people, such as:

- **Lack of government-issued identity documents for trans people.** In many countries, access to vaccines required producing a government-issued national identity card. This presented an impossible obstacle for trans people who do not always possess an identity card that with a name or gender marker that corresponds to their gender expression, as we saw in Bolivia, Pakistan and Indonesia. In these countries local community partners had to support trans people in getting the right paperwork to access the vaccines. In others, like Kazakhstan, there was no way to get identity documents. In some instances, applicants sought to run mobile vaccine clinics for marginalized people or provide in-home vaccines without requirements for state-issued identity cards.
- **Lack of smartphones and email to register in advance for a vaccine.** Many countries required advance digital registration to procure a vaccine appointment, especially when supplies were limited early on. Such registration required access to a smartphone and/or internet access to secure a timeslot. This excluded many people who are not financially able to afford such technology or were not able to afford the data required for such advance registration due to COVID-19-related job loss. Some applicants sought to step in and assist with digital registration for vaccine appointments so that people could secure a COVID-19 vaccine.
- **Misinformation and vaccine hesitancy among LGBTIQ people.** According to some general studies and proposals to Outright's COVID Fund, concerns for vaccine safety and a history of negative, abusive and/or discriminatory services from health care providers made some LGBTIQ people reluctant to seek a COVID-19 vaccine. To combat disinformation, applicants to the Fund proposed to run workshops, produce and disseminate education flyers and execute media campaigns to ensure accurate information about the vaccine and its efficacy.

There were a lot of myths about the medicine in the vaccine. They said it will kill the person within [two] years, once you inject... They said if you inject you are most likely to get a clot. Others would say it will change the sexual feelings and that it will affect your hormones.

– Thirty-two-year-old lesbian from Uganda

Four Profiles of Impact, Strength and Solidarity

Triangle Project, South Africa

2020, USD 8,480

2021, USD 10,000

Triangle Project is a nonprofit human rights organization offering health and other support services, community engagement and empowerment and research and advocacy to ensure the full realization of rights for LGBTIQ persons, their partners and families in South Africa. Many of Triangle's clients are unhoused. A significant percentage live with chronic illnesses such as HIV and tuberculosis, making them extremely vulnerable to complications if they contract COVID-19.⁹

With funding from Outright's COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund, Triangle was able to respond to the enormous increase in demand for their services that occurred as the pandemic spread in 2020. As South Africa announced a 21-day complete lockdown, Triangle had permits in place from government departments and was able to continue to provide critical necessities, such as nutrition and toiletries, particularly to unhoused LGBTIQ+ people. Triangle also provided funds to rural groups in under-resourced areas of the country so they too could access food items and other basic needs. Over 2,700 LGBTIQ+ people benefited from this urgent program.

While South Africa's public health system was overwhelmed with COVID-19 response, Triangle relied on Outright funding to provide stipends to community health care workers. This, coupled with essential medications, meant that HIV+ people and those with other chronic illnesses could have some continuity of care, either in their homes or, if unhoused, wherever they were living, despite the pandemic.

How are we going to go from feeding 100 people to 1,000 people? How can we go from burying 5 people to 10 people to 15 people? How can we do this? I was really grateful to the Outright fund. In the early and worst days of COVID-19, it allowed us to continue our services uninterrupted and unrestricted.

– Sharon Cox, Health and Support Services Manager, Triangle Project

When clients who lacked support structures died of COVID-19 or other illnesses, Triangle paid for funeral, cremation or burial services. "They didn't live with dignity, but could we help them die with at least a bit of dignity? Yes, at least we could be sure they could be buried or cremated with dignity," said Shannon Cox.

Triangle was also able to ensure increased coverage of mobile phone data, roaming data and transportation so that clients could stay in touch with Triangle staff and access some services, including mental health services, digitally. Communications became more important than ever, and such flexible organizational funding was lifesaving for clients in need.

Haven for Artists, Lebanon

2021, USD 10,000

2022, USD 10,000

Haven for Artists is a nonprofit feminist organization based in Beirut that works at the intersection of art and activism, campaigning and advocating for women's and queer people's rights. Haven combines creative and humanitarian methods to facilitate a safe space for the exchange of knowledge, tools and skills to create a more just world.

In 2020, Lebanon faced the double crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the catastrophic port blast that killed over 220 people and displaced hundreds of thousands. The Haven for Artists team provided LGBTQIA people with assistance, such as hygiene kits, toiletries and rent support, and in three instances, emergency surgeries.¹⁰ Critically, Haven was able to pay staff to oversee relief and fundraising efforts which ultimately increased the financial support for the distribution of humanitarian supplies.

After the blast, Haven for Artists provided support to LGBTQIA people and single mothers with nutrition, cash, rental assistance, medicines, clothing, baby kits, appliances and bedding, among other essential needs. This mass distribution, aided by Outright's core support, along with other donors, reached over 1,800 people.

Haven also co-established the Yalla Care Coalition focused on the rights and needs of LGBTQIA individuals, and, for the research, data analysis, and writing of the ground-breaking Yalla Care Report, conducted a comprehensive multifaceted needs assessment of 310 people who identify as LGBTQIA living in the greater Beirut area of Lebanon. As the director Dayna Ash notes, "This report was the first of its kind, written for the community, by the community and aimed to support the community. This was more than a report, this was a call to action."

With Outright and other funder support, Haven for Artists was also able to secure a community space for LGBTQIA people and women where the organization hosts exhibitions, workshops and concerts which build knowledge and solidarity.

Our organization would not have been able to provide urgent relief, open a cultural center and write this first-of-its-kind report on the needs of Lebanon's queer people without the Outright COVID-19 Fund supporting staff salaries and some activities. The flexibility allowed us to have better projects, higher impact and longevity. Sustainability and longevity for our organization will enable our ability to respond effectively and urgently to crises that arise.

– Dayna Ash, Executive Director,
Haven for Artists

Bandhu Social Welfare Society (Bandhu), Bangladesh

2021, USD 18,000

Bandhu Social Welfare Society (Bandhu) is a nongovernmental organization that implements essential sexual and reproductive health and rights activities, including HIV intervention, legal support, capacity building and policy advocacy to bring positive change and address social, religious, cultural and legal impediments to the protection of human rights. Bandhu specifically works to support sexually and gender diverse people who often face myriad difficulties in accessing citizen services, including health care.

Very few donors came up with COVID-19 emergency support for [a] sexual and gender diverse population. There was almost no support from the government side. It was a great help to us and the community here. We could face the COVID-19 emergency and respond.

– Shale Ahmed, Bandhu

As COVID-19 spread, Bandhu witnessed a staggering rise in economic, medical and psychological needs of trans people and *hijras* as unemployment was particularly widespread.

In response, Bandhu relied on the Outright COVID-19 Emergency Fund support to provide cash assistance, food relief and vocational skills for over 500 trans people and *hijras*¹¹ and personal protection equipment for 500 people. It also provided a two-day training for 24 people about digital safety and digital hygiene (involving regularly updating and cleaning electronic devices, using passwords that follow security protocols, organizing the files stored on the device, optimizing settings and more) for trans and gender-diverse people.

Bandhu viewed income generation and economic empowerment for trans people and *hijras* as a key priority during COVID-19. This led Bandhu to create new trainings in entrepreneurship development, computer skills and dance performance as vocational skills that could lead to greater economic stability. After completion of the training, Bandhu selected 15 people to receive small grants as seed money to start their own businesses. Bandhu also provided support with writing resumes and introductions to potential employers.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports invited the dancers to perform at a national youth day celebration which the president of Bangladesh attended as the chief guest. It was the first time that trans people had ever performed for the country's leadership and marks an important step forward in addressing the endemic discrimination trans people face.

Waria Crisis Center, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

2022, USD 14,570

The Waria Crisis Center supports trans women in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to address the many economic, social and legal challenges they face, given the stigma and discrimination toward sexual and gender minorities in Indonesia. The Center runs a shelter for ailing, older trans women and provides shelter, food and any other essential needs, including health care.

To support its community, the Waria Crisis Center applied for funding from Outright's COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ

Emergency Fund to provide for vaccine access. The Center had witnessed high rates of death among elderly trans people in the early days of the pandemic and understood the importance of ensuring vaccines and building up immunity among trans people.

Aware of mistrust of health care workers among their constituents based on past discrimination, Waria staff members first ran education and advocacy meetings with the trans women they support. The objective was to educate them about the vaccine, dispel any rumors and answer their questions. These education efforts were very successful in encouraging trans women to agree to receive the vaccine.

Through vaccine socialization meetings at the community level, we were able to gain the willingness of our fellow trans women to participate in the vaccination program. This can be interpreted as a strengthening of personal awareness of the value of self-health. Being healthy and having immunity to COVID-19 is also the basis of the collective strength of trans women in the fight against the threat of the virus and the potential for further discrimination.

– Waria Crisis Center

Support from the Fund made it possible for 329 people to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. This included 215 trans women, 22 of whom had no national identity card that corresponded to their gender expression. The funding also supported an additional 114 people – partners, family members, close friends and others in the community who had a close tie with Waria's trans clients. Of the 329 people who received COVID-19 vaccines, 22 were HIV-positive.

To implement the program, Waria staff were required to engage government health officials to plan vaccine allocations and venues. This engagement had multiple benefits that may ultimately reduce instances of discrimination in the health sector in the future. Waria staff noted that public health staff fairly and adequately conducted pre-vaccine health checks for trans women with underlying medical conditions including HIV, which was unanticipated and a positive development.

Food Assistance

COVID-19 created a situation in which many people in Kenya lost their jobs. And we saw that intersex, transgender and gender non-conforming people often were the first to be laid off. There were a lot of economic issues and people didn't have food. The Outright grant really came through for us to be able to provide people with food packages – rice, salt, cooking oil, cornmeal, sugar – and other needs, like masks, sanitizer and sanitary pads.

– Jinsiangu
Kenya

Organizational Sustainability

With the Outright money, we paid rent for a small shop and paid salaries for those who work in the shop. But the space is also an office for our organization, and it is a shelter for our members who need safety. It produces a small livelihood for the members. It's been so difficult during COVID-19, but the shop is everything for us. Our members rely on this livelihood to survive in the midst of the pandemic.

– Lesbian Organization Against
Violence and Inequality
Philippines

Mental Health Support

We provided individual psychological support for more than 20 trans people. A lot of people are scared, powerless and isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are not enough available mental health professionals who are familiar with and/or sensitized to work with trans people in Serbia.

– XY Spectrum
Serbia

Shelter/Rent Assistance

We had a member who had been homeless since he was 15 years old when his family kicked him out for his sexual orientation. When the pandemic hit, he was 18. We worked with the Barbados Alliance to End Homelessness and helped him get a job, and then we assisted by paying rent for one week of each month to help him build up his resources. He has a home now which he is able to sustain for himself.

– Equals Barbados
Barbados

Healthcare

We provided support to 18 intersex people and their families, mainly from Mexico, but also from other Latin American countries, who are vulnerable because of lockdown. We gave priority to people who needed medicines and hormonal treatments or to intersex people who had contracted COVID-19.... One recipient wrote and said, "I have a wound that constantly becomes infected as a result of the unnecessary surgeries I underwent as a child, and thanks to you I was able to buy what I needed to heal."

– Brújula Intersexual
Mexico

Challenges of Grantmaking to LGBTIQ Movements During COVID-19

As Outright received thousands of applications for emergency assistance for food, medicine, and rent, the challenge of moving money to address these needs became the next hurdle. Grantees of the COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund and Outright identified some of these obstacles and assiduously worked together to address them.

- The urgency of the needs in COVID-19 exacerbated the impact of discriminatory civic frameworks. Some LGBTIQ groups operate in countries where **discriminatory laws restrict their ability to legally register** as a nonprofit entity. This can make **banking and financial transactions nearly, or actually, impossible**. In some instances, Outright staff worked with in-country fiscal sponsors and found other creative ways to ensure funding could reach those in need as efficiently as possible.
- Governments issued ad hoc lockdowns and movement restrictions that made life extremely unpredictable for grantees. Without official movement permits, trying to go shopping could put someone in jeopardy. Violating such restrictions put grantees at

risk of arrest, abuse and discriminatory treatment by police. Outright's Fund allowed for flexible support, with time extensions and few, if any, restrictions, so that groups could implement and adapt activities to mitigate the risks of conflicting with public health orders, while still providing life-saving support.

- As COVID-19 enveloped the world, it directly impacted many grantees personally. Some projects were delayed as **staff contracted COVID-19, cared for sick family and friends**, and in some instances, lost colleagues and loved ones. The flexibility of the Fund ensured that grantees could prioritize the shifting mental and physical demands of working through a pandemic, for example, by hiring contracted help to support front-line staff who needed to take time off work.



A healthcare worker takes the temperature of an LGBT activist in Mexico City. Activists distributed free meals for people who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 in May 2020. Photo by Pedro Pardo/AFP via Getty Images

Progress Despite the Pandemic

As Fund grantees worked diligently to assist beneficiaries and sustain their organizations, in some instances the COVID-19 crisis and the invigorated engagement supported by Outright funding launched new and impactful ideas. While it is still early, there is hope that some of these new efforts will have long-lasting positive dividends in the fight for the protection of the rights of LGBTIQ people.

Some groups found that their ability to respond to COVID-19 and support their members required more **sustained dialogue with health officials** that they had ever maintained before. Discrimination and stigma had consistently undermined past efforts, but as the urgency of COVID-19 spread, some Outright partners found

that **engagement with the authorities sparked greater**

tolerance and concern for the health of LGBTIQ people, particularly trans and gender-diverse people. Similarly, the crisis facing LGBTIQ refugees in COVID-19 times prompted one grantee to **more assertively engage with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** to find improved solutions for particularly difficult cases requiring resettlement. The dialogue with UNHCR improved the organization's ability to provide services and has sharpened UNHCR's focus on the plight of LGBTIQ refugees in that country, yielding, at least in some instances, more efficient problem-solving in a very challenging context.

Some groups found new coalitions to advocate for improved government measures in the face of COVID-19. Such intersectional efforts strengthened messaging and buttressed the potential for long-term impact. As Sharon Cox from the Triangle Project in South Africa noted, "COVID-19 prompted us to suddenly start work with partners we had never worked with before.... Some phenomenal new partnerships and coalitions began, across sectors and movements. We worked together to advocate for a people-centered response to COVID-19. And **we built a real sense of solidarity.**"

COVID-19's horrific economic downturn prompted some partners to invest significant time and effort into developing new projects to support the livelihoods of their members, to insulate them from future shocks as much as possible. Small investments into new vocational skills are already yielding some income and may generate **greater autonomy and economic stability for marginalized people** in the future.

Members of the LGBT community take a photo after receiving vaccines against COVID-19. A vaccination campaign was organized during Pride by the NGO Prantakatha in Kolkata, India in June 2021. Photo by Debajyoti Chakraborty/NurPhoto via Getty Images



Strategic Philanthropy Means Investing in Experts

Outright International's COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund was made possible thanks both to the visionary support of leading institutional grant-makers, and resilient grantees who knew exactly how to apply funding. Our partners share their perspectives below on the importance of the Fund and Outright's role in facilitating its operation.

The role that Outright played in response to COVID-19 for the LGBTIQ movement – creating this Fund, calling for proposals, carefully vetting applications and working efficiently to empower local groups closest to the problems – made them the ideal fit for our funding philosophy. We wanted to act quickly in this crisis.

– Phil Yeo, Google.org

We learned in periods of crisis, our community faces more discrimination and more violence. We need to be able to navigate these challenges and have funders who will support our expertise in addressing the needs of intersex, transgender and gender non-conforming people in Kenya.

– Jinsiangu, Kenya

With Outright, we were able to quickly get funding to small grassroots organizations across the globe who had very nuanced understandings of their local contexts, in an efficient and effective way. We know that historically marginalized groups are disproportionately affected in a crisis. Small, minority-led groups face greater uncertainty in funding during a crisis. So, with COVID-19, we wanted to make sure those groups continued to be able to serve their communities and ensure their organizational sustainability: to be prepared for future shocks, COVID-19 and otherwise, to sustain the LGBTIQ-serving movement and support individuals most marginalized, affected and in need.

– Alex Gray, Director of International Funds, Center for Disaster Philanthropy

Recommendations

For Governments

- Consult LGBTIQ communities in all planning and implementation of national pandemic control strategies, including vaccine distribution.
- Address food shortages urgently. Relief efforts, particularly related to food support and economic relief, must be made available to everyone regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Identify and resolve delays and disruptions in access to health care for people living with HIV, trans people, intersex people and other sexual and gender minorities who have long-term health and wellness needs.
- Rebuild the confidence of LGBTIQ people and other marginalized groups in vaccines and government health services. Government-supported health care providers should acknowledge histories of structural disparities and make efforts to repair trust.
- Ensure access to justice and services for all those enduring family or intimate partner violence. LGBTIQ people may be forced to endure physical and psychological abuse and violence within hostile home environments. Access to emergency housing, shelters, hotlines and other services for victims of violence should be inclusive of all LGBTIQ people in need.
- Condemn anti-LGBTIQ hate speech and scapegoating. Governments at all levels must immediately call out harmful rhetoric that risks inciting violence against LGBTIQ people.
- Prioritize decriminalization and anti-discrimination provisions in law and policy. By definition, laws that criminalize people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity give rise to exclusion, discrimination and rejection from needed care.

For All Donors Involved in Pandemic and Crisis Response

- Be flexible, stay committed and increase support, including general operating support and poverty alleviation funds.
- Ask what communities need and support their most immediate priorities. Contribute to and support emergency relief funds at the local, national, regional and global levels, ensuring that they are inclusive of LGBTIQ communities.
- When funding large humanitarian relief organizations, donors must hold partners and award grantees accountable for incorporating non-discrimination policies and practices based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) that ensure LGBTIQ needs are competently addressed as part of all humanitarian assistance.

For UN Agencies, Humanitarian Relief Organizations, Nongovernmental Organizations and Private-Sector Entities Involved in Pandemic and Other Crisis Response

- Ensure inclusive emergency relief health services, including vaccine distribution, by engaging LGBTIQ communities, understanding their needs, forging partnerships and tailoring programming to LGBTIQ realities.
- Seek out partnerships with LGBTIQ organizations to develop responsive support and defer to local expertise on how to implement distribution of relief assistance in safe, respectful and secure ways.
- Collaborate with LGBTIQ communities to develop tailored information that combats misinformation about vaccines and clearly states the availability of safe health services and safe spaces and availability of social support.
- Include LGBTIQ issues when describing the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A gendered framework is vital, and it is also vital that these impacts are analyzed through an inclusive gender lens, rather than restricting impacts to cisgender women and girls only.
- Develop global guidance on ensuring an inclusive response to pandemics and other health emergencies. Incorporate lessons learned from COVID-19 into global guidance for future emergencies so that future national responses consider LGBTIQ people and leave no one behind.



A staff member of Lady Mermaids Bureau (LMB) prepares distributions for sex workers during the nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the COVID-19 at their office in Kampala, Uganda, on May 13, 2020. LMB is a Ugandan sex worker-led organization that advocates for the human rights of sex workers in Uganda. Photo by Sumy Sadurni/AFP via Getty Images

Lessons Learned for Outright

At Outright, we had often used the word nimble to describe ourselves but our response to COVID-19 took the meaning of nimbleness to the next level. Outright hadn't before made grants at the speed or volume we did during COVID-19; however, we knew we had the expertise and experience to pull it off.

Grant-making is hard – raising the funding is harder. If an organization has funds, they can figure out how to disburse those funds.

Inviting volunteers to help qualify thousands of applications not only helped immensely with getting through the first round of 1,500 proposals in a timely manner, but also proved invaluable as it resulted in more financial support to Outright and the Fund from individuals and their institutions when volunteer reviewers got a chance to really understand the vast need among LGBTIQ communities.

The fund delivered a good opportunity to bring a huge variety of stakeholders together to work on a common objective: private sector, governments and civil society all worked together to coordinate and cooperate to pool resources and make them available to vulnerable LGBTIQ communities. The joint efforts and engagement, for example, on the aforementioned application qualifications, and the dissemination of Outright's Fund updates and reports has indeed created a better and deeper understanding of the situation of LGBTIQ people across the globe.

The role of the private sector was crucial, as it represented the vast majority of donations to the Fund, allowing Outright the ability to make impactful grants across vast geographies. The funds provided by the private sector allowed us a flexible and tailor-made response with few restrictions and requirements. That was of the utmost importance to serve those organizations and communities with the greatest need

in regions and countries where there were very limited possibilities for them to access other ways of support.

Outright's ability to connect and engage with the private sector in our work allowed for significant funds that – without Outright and our partners – wouldn't have reached global LGBTIQ communities.

At a mission-driven organization like Outright, it is expected that staff share in the mission and sense of urgency. However, in launching and running the COVID-19 Fund, Outright staff went above and beyond at a time when many were sharing their binge-watching on social media as a result of working from home. Without the highly committed Outright staff, the Fund would not have existed, would not have had nearly as much money to distribute, and would not have reached as many groups.

The Fund enabled Outright to collect voluminous new data. For example, the Fund has played an important role in uncovering the poverty trap that entraps so many LGBTIQ people.

While a pivot in the crisis situation was necessary throughout the pandemic, Outright didn't lose sight of critical long-term goals. When we had data on how the crisis disproportionately affected LGBTIQ communities, we invested in the long-term advocacy needed to change the humanitarian sector to be inclusive of LGBTIQ people.

Lessons learned from our work on the COVID-19 Fund have positioned Outright to act swiftly and decisively when crisis hits. For example, when Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, Outright launched an emergency fund within 12 hours. This was made possible due to the expertise acquired in operating the COVID-19 Fund, expertise which will continue to have dividends for many years.

In Gratitude

Outright is extremely grateful for the generosity and solidarity of the COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund’s supporters. We could not have the impact we do without their leadership and contributions. The Fund was established:

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Endnotes

- 1** LGBTIQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer. This acronym is inclusive of a broad range of people. However, it is not exhaustive, nor is it universally accepted or used. Throughout this report, deference is shown to local terms used by beneficiary groups.
- 2** International Monetary Fund, "IMF Annual Report 2020: A Year Like No Other," 2020, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/ar/2020/eng/downloads/imf-annual-report-2020.pdf> (accessed 29 August 2022), p. 8.
- 3** UN Human Rights Council, "Report of the Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," A/HRC/38/43, 11 May 2018, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/38/43> (accessed 29 August 2022).
- 4** Ibid.
- 5** "Coronavirus: The World in Lockdown in Maps and Charts," BBC, 7 April 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52103747> (accessed 29 August 2022).
- 6** Amie Bishop, "Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ People," Outright International, May 2020, https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/COVIDsReportDesign_FINAL_LR_0.pdf (accessed 29 August 2022).
- 7** For more, see "Responding to a Crisis: Insights from Outright's COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund," Outright, 17 July 2020, https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/7x9.75_BriefingPaperRevised_2.pdf (accessed 29 August 2022).
- 8** For more, see "Responding to a Crisis: Insights from Outright's COVID-19 Global Emergency Fund," Outright, 26 August 2021, https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/BriefingPaper_0821.pdf (accessed 29 August 2022).
- 9** "Guidance for COVID-19 and People with HIV," Clinical Info, last updated 22 February 2022, <https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/en/guidelines/guidance-covid-19-and-people-hiv/guidance-covid-19-and-people-hiv> (accessed 29 August 2022).
- 10** LGBTQIA refers to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual.
- 11** In South Asia, "hijra" refers to an identity category for people assigned male at birth who develop a transfeminine gender identity.



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