



Coalition for Equality - The Needs of Groups Beyond the Scope of the State Anti-crisis Plan

In order to address the Covid-19 (coronavirus) epidemic, the Georgian authorities have extended the state of emergency declared on March 21, 2020 until May 21. This decision has further aggravated the plight of vulnerable groups who cannot afford to adhere to social distancing requirements and are confined to quarantine without the most basic of needs.

The anti-crisis plan^[1] released by the Georgian authorities on April 24, 2020 has left numerous groups beyond the scope of state support: self-employed persons and those involved in precarious labour – mostly women (among them, nannies, janitors, caregivers), single mothers, homeless persons, women sex workers, etc. These groups, nevertheless, have been most severely affected by the crisis itself, as well as by the measures of social distancing and quarantine considered the most effective means to counteract it.

Despite consultations with community-based organisations (CBOs), the anti-crisis plan also fails to address the needs and priorities of LGBTQI people. Under these circumstances, queer people left without income and employment, as well as without the support of family members or community solidarity, find themselves at serious risk of homelessness^[2]. Their urgent needs, including rental subsidies and alternative housing or shelters have been overlooked by the state anti-crisis support programme.

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In its crisis response measures, the Inter-agency Coordination Council has offered largely fragmented feedback to CBO appeals and has not proactively addressed the complex challenges on the agenda.

The CBOs have received state support in the form of a few dozen boxes of food and personal hygiene kits, which have been promptly distributed as needed among groups of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. This, however, is an act of one-off humanitarian assistance and cannot be perceived as an adequate response to either the general or the currently critical needs of the LGBTQI community.

The state must therefore recognize the complexity of these needs and consider the fact that numerous queer people experiencing housing challenges during the pandemic are frequently either survivors of domestic violence or have been renounced and disowned by their families due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. They have severed ties with their families and hence, their return home is either risky or impossible. Structural and systemic homo/bi/transphobia, which reproduces these attitudes on a societal level, has for many years been manifested by the state in a lack of political will to alter the heavy legacy of negative attitudes towards queer people and develop a progressive social policy oriented towards the elimination of SOGI-based discrimination and related economic, employment, and healthcare inequalities.

The social policy of the Georgian state still fails to acknowledge homophobia, transphobia, and gender inequality as systemic and structural challenges. Hence, homophobia is still regarded solely as an individual issue, and consequently, selective punitive measures for individual homophobic manifestations prevail as the principal state strategy to combat homophobia in general^[3]. Gender equality, legal gender recognition, or proactive initiatives aimed at curtailing homophobia and transphobia via widespread educational and awareness raising interventions remain outside the scope of government Action Plans.

In view of the foregoing, we call on the state:

- To take into account the needs of lesbian, bisexual, and trans* women and queer people who have, due to the crisis, become doubly victimised by social and economic oppression brought on by the risk of losing their homes, as well as systemic homo/bi/transphobic violence and bullying and provide them with rental

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subsidies, shelter or alternative housing options;

- Apply additional measures aimed at providing assistance to vulnerable groups (including LGBTQI persons), whose needs have not been reflected in the government's anti-crisis plan;
- Openly express support for the LGBTQI community, especially at a time when, against the backdrop of the crisis caused by the pandemic, community members experience ever-increasing difficulties by having to endure the crisis in a homo/bi/transphobic environment;
- Launch a transparent process of developing inclusive social policies that will counterpoise systemic solutions to the challenges faced by vulnerable groups and will entail empowerment and equality, both in the post-crisis period, as well in the long run.

[1] http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=541&info_id=75972

[2] <https://cutt.ly/ZyhPZZb>

[3] <https://cutt.ly/YyhPXXj>