

## **Questions by the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity – The Italian Case.**

In this article it is argued that, in addressing the covid-19 pandemic, the Italian State has failed to implement measures that would account for the needs of LGBTI individuals. The evidence suggests that civil society organizations have had to step in, substituting the State in providing basic aid and that grassroot movements have been particularly proactive and effective, organizing fundraisers and activities to help the community. Due to data accessibility, the main focus of the article is on the LGBTI organizations present in Campania, Italy, and the aim is to illustrate how such organizations have coped with the measures and the State's lack of support.

In addressing the covid-19 pandemic, the Italian State has not taken into account the needs of the LGBTI community or, as a matter of fact, the needs of any group with potential specific vulnerabilities. In the early stages of the pandemic, during the so-called phase one, the Italian government has implemented a [series of decrees](#) that have led to the enforcement of strict lockdown measures. Such measures applied to all residents and restricted substantially their freedom of movement except for essential workers and essential travels (which needed to be self-certified). Subsequently, during the so-called (and, as of June 2020, still ongoing) phase two, the government has allowed people to move around in order to achieve the “ricongiungimento familiare” meaning, family reunification, [a decision which was highly criticized by LGBTI activists and groups](#) all over Italy for being discriminatory towards non-heteronormative forms of family.

It should be noted that throughout the public debate around the covid-19 measures, LGBTI persons and organizations were hardly ever mentioned. The LGBTI community was indeed not involved in the design of measures taken to respond to the pandemic. To tackle the pandemic, the Italian Government decided to be advised solely by a (male-dominated) [scientific committee](#) which focused mainly on the containment of the virus. As a result, the needs of minority and more vulnerable groups were largely neglected.

Despite not being able to identify good practices in the State interventions in relation to covid-19 and LGBTI persons, it should be considered that civil society movements have been extremely active and have stepped in in order to cope with the governmental deficiencies.

Multiple fundraisers were organized in order to collect food and essential items. The [campaign](#) launched by “Comitato per i diritti civili delle prostitute Onlus” (Committee for prostitutes' civil rights) has managed to raise more than 20,000€ which were then used to support smaller

associations that helped prostitutes and sex workers, who were highly impacted by the lockdown measures. It is also worth noticing the case of Pride Vesuvio Rainbow, a grassroots movement near Naples that decided to [donate](#) the funding collected for Pride 2020 to the neighboring community. [Arcigay Naples also donated 500 protective masks to the Poggioreale prison in Naples](#), to help out with the lack of protective equipment that prisoners were experiencing.

Furthermore, the city of Naples and the main local LGBTI associations have undertaken a [joint action](#) in order to ensure that anti-violence centers and women shelters would also accept a quota of LGBTI people who were experiencing gender-based intimate partner violence. This measure should be considered remarkable since anti-violence centers and women shelters in Italy have always struggled to accept and be inclusive of subjectivities different than cisgender women (a study on the topic by Ferrara and Sciarra, 2020, is currently under peer review).

Despite such activities, the daily work of LGBTI associations drastically changed due to the lockdown measures. The Arcigay Youth Group in Naples has continued its weekly meetings online using the platform Google Meet. However, those who had not yet come out to their family have struggled in participating to such meetings. They feared being overheard or accidentally discovered by their family members, a state of mind that led to extreme stress and loneliness. Hence, the lockdown has been particularly detrimental to the mental health of these people, who have repeatedly asked activists for help and support. Finally, the platform that Arcigay Naples dedicated to LGBTI migrants and asylum seekers shut down as it was not possible to organize online activities due to the migrants' difficulty in accessing an internet connection.

In conclusion, it appears that the Italian government has not been responsive of the needs and vulnerabilities of LGBTI groups. The community was actually hardly mentioned in the public debate related to covid-19 in Italy, making it de facto invisible. However, LGBTI organizations have stepped in, filling, even if partially, the institutional void. Nonetheless, the government should have recognized the community's needs and should have worked together with LGBTI organizations in order to design inclusive policies. Moreover, emergency funding should have been granted to LGBTI people and, in general, to groups who experience multiple dimensions of discrimination.