

RESEARCH REPORT ON  
LGBTI+ PERSONS'  
ACCESS TO  
SOCIAL SERVICES  
DURING THE PANDEMIC

# RESEARCH REPORT ON LGBTI+ PERSONS' ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES DURING THE PANDEMIC

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# 1. Foreword

The unpredictability, rights violations, and restrictions brought about by the pandemic have been an important experience for both the people conducting this research and the participants. We were able to find an expert to write the report long after the data collection period. Dear Yasemin Özgün and Evun Okumuş started working this report, which aims to shed light on the various processes involved in the access of LGBTI+ persons (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or bodily, gender and sexually diverse persons) to social services (access to housing, social assistance, psychosocial support, and post-violence support mechanisms) in September 2020, and we were able to finalize it after I also joined them in December.

I would like to state that this study, the results of which we have compiled into a report following comprehensive data collection and analysis efforts, is an important step in making visible the problems faced by LGBTI+ persons as they try to access social services during the pandemic.

We tried to include LGBTI+ persons living in different parts of Turkey in our research. Participation from different cities and districts played a vital role in ensuring the high reliability of the data collected as part of the research. On that note, I would like to offer my thanks to all participants who expressed the problems they faced while accessing social services in a candid and sincere manner.

In this report, which includes both quantitative and qualitative data, you will find information about the problems that LGBTI+ persons experience while trying to access social services and, the attitudes of public institutions and organizations, local governments and non-governmental organizations with towards these problems. One of the issues frequently mentioned by LGBTI+ persons regarding access to social services was their belief that they might face discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity when applying for any kind of social service or assistance. Given that equal access to social services is a fundamental human right granted to everyone, the reluctance or inability of LGBTI+ persons to access these services for fear that they might face discrimination poses a great problem. I hope that this report will make it possible for public institutions and organizations, municipalities and non-governmental organizations -especially those providing social services- to introduce new services for LGBTI+ individuals or improve the existing ones. Lastly, I would like to thank my dear Professor Ayşe Sezen Serpen for providing valuable assistance during the study, Halim Kir and Hatice Demir for coming up with the research idea, Sevcan Tiftik for proofreading and editing the report, and the SPoD team for their support. I hope you enjoy reading this report.

Yunus Kara

## 2. Introduction

The disease COVID-19, caused by a new type of coronavirus and is classified by the World Health Organization as a “pandemic”, first emerged in Wuhan, China and spread everywhere soon after. The pandemic had a negative impact on all segments of society. LGBTI+ persons, who already face discrimination frequently on the basis of their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, are affected even more severely by such incidences of social crisis and mass trauma. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTI+ persons have experienced serious problems regarding their access to housing, social assistance, psychosocial support, post-violence support mechanisms as well as basic human rights such as the right to live.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has stated that LGBTI+ persons may be among the more vulnerable groups in the COVID-19 pandemic compared to other parts of the society.<sup>1</sup> It was also stated that the inequalities faced by LGBTI+ persons in accessing health services due to stigma and discrimination make them more vulnerable as a group to the effects of pandemic. In addition, it was emphasized that legal regulations which turn LGBTI+ persons, especially trans people, into targets and the arrests and violence that occur as a result of these have an adverse effect on the health conditions these people.

LGBTI+ persons have been blamed for natural disasters and crises in different cultures all throughout history. A similar form of hate speech was also observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Examples of homophobic and transphobic hate speech have increased even further during the pandemic, even being adopted as a practice by certain political powers in some countries. For example, homosexual youth living in a shelter in Uganda, who were rejected by their parents and rendered homeless have been imprisoned by Presidential decree under the pretext of slowing the spread of COVID-19. In another example, a gender-based quarantine was forced upon trans people living in Panama<sup>3</sup> and it became apparent that there was no mechanism to protect them should they experience any form of abuse during quarantine. The statement that “the pandemic is a divine punishment for homosexuality” by the Israeli Minister of Health, Jakov Litzman, and the claim that the COVID-19 virus spreads because of same-sex marriages by Iraqi Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr are only some examples of hate speech at the state level during the pandemic.

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1 United Nations Human Rights. *COVID-19 and the Human Rights of LGBTI People*. April 17, 2020. Accessed on: 29.10.2020.

2 Osman Elbek, “COVID-19 Pandemisi ve Sağlıkın Sosyal Bileşenleri” (“COVID-19 Pandemic and Social Components of Health”) in “LGBTİ+ ve COVID-19 Pandemisi” (“LGBTI + and COVID-19 Pandemic”). Turkish Thoracic Society COVID-19 E-Books Series, 2020: 49-52.

3 On April 1, 2020, the state of Panama launched a gender-based quarantine schedule. In this schedule, men and women are quarantined on different days. Police officers and private security guards have since singled out trans people based on their appearance to either fine them or prevent them from buying essential goods. Moreover, this has nothing to do with whether they participate in the gender-based quarantine measures or what gender they have written on their IDs. See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/23/panama-set-transgender-sensitive-quarantine-guidelines>

And in Turkey, LGBTI+ persons have become the target of various hate speech and campaigns during the pandemic. School principals have sent messages to teachers at the instruction of the Ministry of National Education to warn children who hang drawings of rainbows on their windows to not feel alone during social isolation, and the President of the Radio and Television Supreme Council, Ebubekir Şahin issued a statement about the claims that the Turkish Netflix series Love 101 would have a gay character. In the aftermath of a Friday Sermon by the Directorate of Religious Affairs on April 24, 2020 which came in response to a social media movement called “LGBTI+ children exist”, where LGBTI+ persons posted their childhood photos and experiences on social media, incidences of hate speech targeting LGBTI+ persons have increased exponentially. This discriminative attitude was further institutionalized when the government started opening investigations against bar associations which condemned these statements, and state authorities of all levels started making their own statements expressing their solidarity with Prof. Dr. Ali Erbaş, the president of the Directorate of Religious Affairs.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, trans women’s right to housing and healthcare were violated when the police detained a group of trans women living in Bayram Street in Istanbul under the pretext of “coronavirus measures” and sealed their houses as well as the whole neighborhood.

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4 Social Policies, Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation Studies Association, Pandemi Raporu: COVID-19’un Üç Ayında LGBTI+’lar. (Pandemic Report: LGBTI+ People in Three Months of COVID-19) <http://spod.org.tr/SourceFiles/pdf-2020623151720.pdf>. (Accessed on: 22.12.2020).

## 2.1. The Significance of the Research

While the basic citizenship rights of LGBTI+ persons are protected and their participation to education, healthcare, and employment are supported through various efforts in many countries around the world, such projects and efforts that ought to prioritize the physical, mental and social well-being of LGBTI+ persons, a disadvantaged group of individuals, remain insufficient in Turkey. LGBTI+ individuals face discrimination and challenges based on their gender identity and sexual orientation on top of issues with accessing basic human rights prevalent in the general population which they also have deal with.

This research study aims to present a set of experiences by LGBTI+ persons regarding their needs for social assistance and to what extent they were able to access social services provided by public institutions and organizations, local governments and civil society organizations throughout the pandemic. The study will offer insight on how LGBTI+ persons are affected by the pandemic specifically, and all social crises in general, and what type of mechanisms are employed by relevant organizations in response to mitigate the impact. Thus, it will provide an important tool in the promotion of LGBTI+ inclusive improvements.

The scope of this study was determined as the needs of an individual during the pandemic and access to services provided by institutions that aim to meet these needs, given that the need for social services as well as the focus on this matter by a variety of institutions have both seen an increase. In addition, we believe that experiences regarding access to services during the pandemic are not independent of such experiences before the pandemic, and might parallel those during other social crises. Although the outputs in this report cover a one-month period during the pandemic, this research includes information about the experiences of LGBTI+ persons regarding access to such services before the pandemic and during other social crises as well.

## 2.2. Methodology

Since this study focuses on the experiences of LGBTI+ persons during the pandemic and includes efforts and practices aimed at improving the current situation, we predict that it will benefit LGBTI+ persons directly. The basis of all our suggestions and views on the practice of social services in a manner that is participatory and LGBTI+ inclusive is the participation and inclusion of all individuals in processes concerning themselves.

This is a descriptive (that reveals the current situation regarding a research problem of interest) study. It contains different variables related to the participants' age, education status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and employment status. In addition to these variables, the experiences of LGBTI+ persons regarding access to shelter, social assistance, psychosocial support and violence support mechanisms are also included. A complete inventory of the research population has to be conducted to clearly define the working group (sample). However, as it was not possible to get an accurate number of the all LGBTI+ persons in all of Turkey, the working group was defined as seven metropolitan cities with a high population (Adana, Ankara, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, İstanbul, İzmir, Samsun) from seven regions (Mediterranean region, Eastern Anatolia, Aegean Region, Southeastern Anatolia Region, Central Anatolia Region, Black Sea Region, Marmara Region). The data collection period was determined as between April 17, 2020 to May 17, 2020. In order to ensure high participation, the data collection period was extended for an additional week and ended on May 21, 2020. Great care was taken while preparing the survey to ensure that there were no leading questions and that the questions were all gender identity and sexual orientation sensitive. The questions were based on a literature scan and calls to our SPoD Help Line. The needs of LGBTI+ persons were analyzed and similar studies focusing on gender identity and sexual orientation in relation to the pandemic were examined.

Different social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), ads, accounts belonging to LGBTI+ associations from various cities in Turkey, and dating apps frequently used by LGBTI+ individuals (Hornet) were used to ensure the participation of all persons identifying as LGBTI+ in the study. SPSS (Statistics Program for Social Sciences) was used to analyze the data collected from the study.

### 2.3. Ethical Principles

In consideration of ethical principles and in accordance of Law No. 6698 on the Protection of Personal Data, participants were given informed consent forms. Participants were assured that their privacy would be protected and the data collected would be processed to be used in research, planning, and statistics. Personal information of the participants were anonymized before it was shared with team members other than the researcher as well as third parties. All research data was erased after the report was prepared.

### 2.4. Sampling

The research sample consists of LGBT+ persons living in Turkey. The data collection period was between April 17, 2020 and May 21, 2020. A total of 750 people were planned to be included in the study during this period. At the end of the period, 905 LGBTI+ individuals participated. 49 questionnaires were excluded from the study on account of certain questions not being answered at all or having incomplete answers. 856 LGBTI+ persons were included in the study.

In the study, a Personal Information Form which collects information about the LGBTI+ participants' gender identity, sexual orientation, and age, education and employment status and an Access to Services Form which collects information about participants' experiences, feelings and opinions regarding access to housing, social assistance, psychosocial support, and access to post-violence support mechanisms during the pandemic was used.

The gender identities of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study are listed in Fig 1. Of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study, 452 identified as male, 175 as female, 104 as queer, 58 as non-binary, 57 as trans and 10 as intersex.

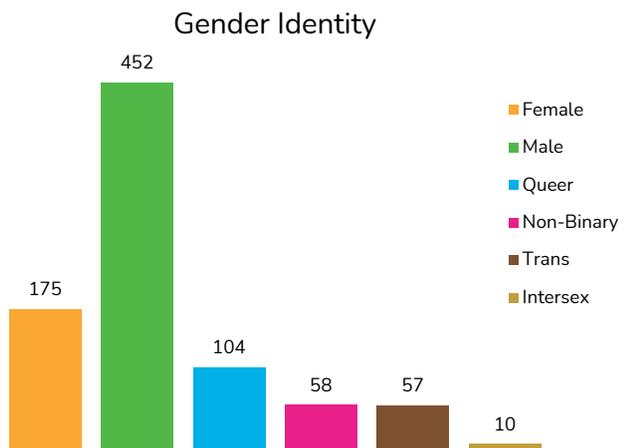


Fig 1. Gender Identity of Participants

The sexual orientations of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study are listed in Fig 2. Of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study, 443 people expressed that they identified as gay, 71 as lesbian, 221 as bisexual, 27 as heterosexual, 79 as pansexual and 15 as asexual.

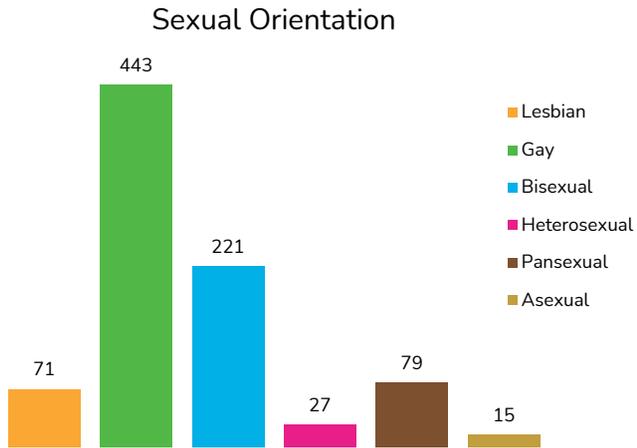


Fig 2. Sexual Orientation of Participants

The ages of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study range between 18 and 59, the average age being 27.3.

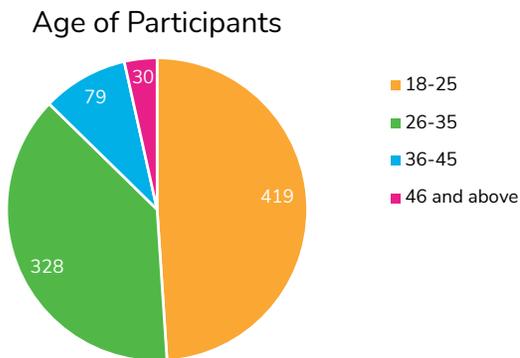


Fig 3. Age of Participants

The education status of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study is shown in Fig 4. It is observed that the most of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study are university or college graduates.

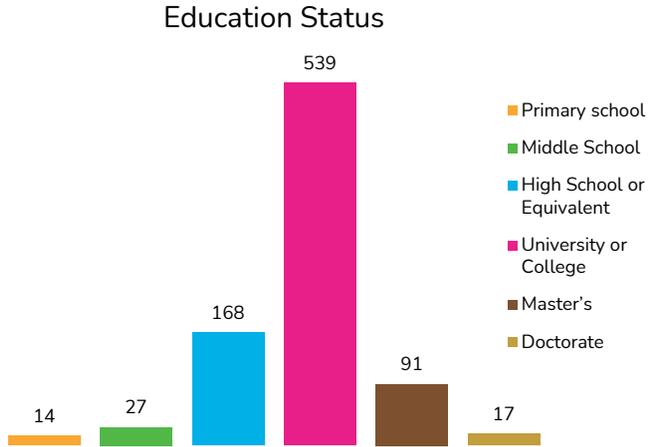
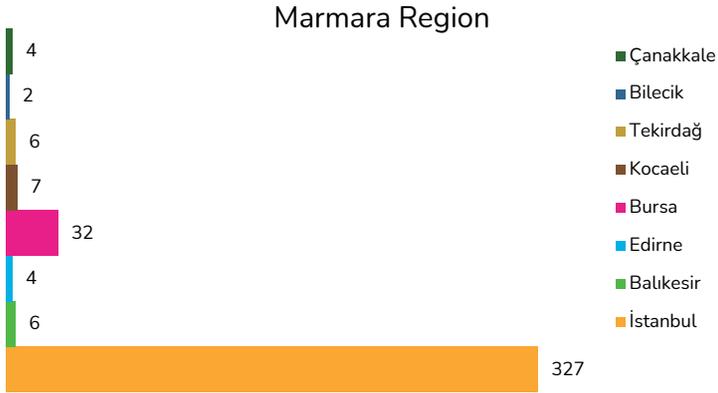


Fig 4. Education Status of Participants

The cities and districts where the LGBTI+ persons included in the study live / reside in differ from each other. It is observed that there are participants from all 7 regions of Turkey (Fig 5, Fig 6, Fig 7, Fig 8, Fig 9, 10 and Fig 11).



*Fig 5. Cities Where the Participants Live / Reside in  
- Marmara Region*

The LGBTI+ persons included in the study from the Marmara Region are predominantly located in **İstanbul** (Ataşehir, Avcılar, Büyükçekmece, Bağcılar, Bahçelievler, Bakırköy, Başakşehir, Bayrampaşa, Beşiktaş, Beykoz, Beyoğlu, Esenler, Esenyurt, Eyüp, Fatih, Florya, Gaziosmanpaşa, Güngören, Küçükçekmece, Kadıköy, Kağıthane, Kartal, Maltepe, Okmeydanı, Pendik, Sarıyer, Sefaköy, Şişli, Taksim, Tuzla, Ümraniye, Üsküdar, Yenibosna), **Balıkesir** (Bandırma, Bigadiç, Havran, İvrindi, Karesi), **Edirne** (Keşan, Uzunköprü ), **Bursa** (Mudanya, Nilüfer, Osmangazi, Yenişehir, Yıldırım), **Kocaeli** (Gebze, İzmit, Körfez, Kartepe), **Çanakkale** (Edremit, Biga), **Bilecik** (Bozüyük) and **Tekirdağ** (Çerkezköy, Çorlu, Muratlı).

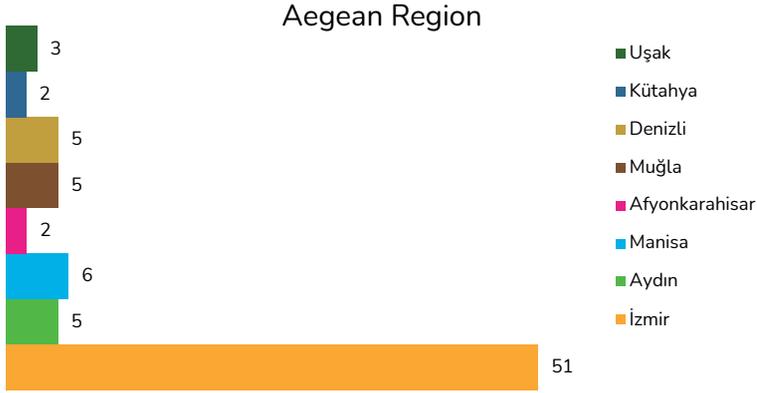


Fig 6. Cities Where the Participants Live / Reside in - Aegean Region

The LGBTI+ persons included in the study from the Aegean Region are predominantly located in **İzmir** (Bayraklı, Bergama, Bornova, Buca, Çeşme, Foça, Gazimир, Güzelbahçe, Karabağlar, Karşıyaka, Konak, Selçuk), **Aydın** (Karacasu, Kuşadası), **Manisa** (Akhisar, Şehzadeler, Turgutlu, Yunusеmre), **Afyonkarahisar** (Sandıklı), **Muğla** (Bodrum, Menteşe, Ortaca), **Denizli** (Merkezefendi, Pamukkale), **Kütahya** (Altıntaş), **Uşak** (Banaz).

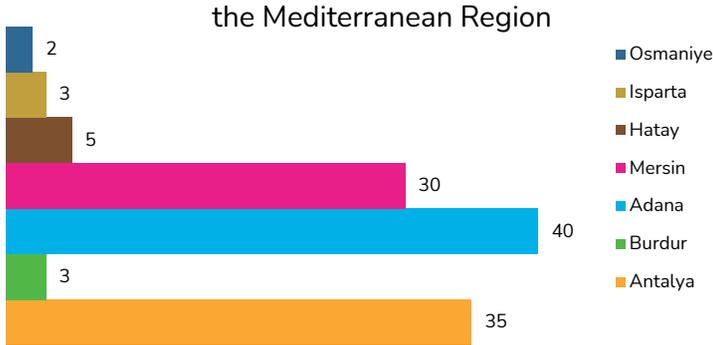
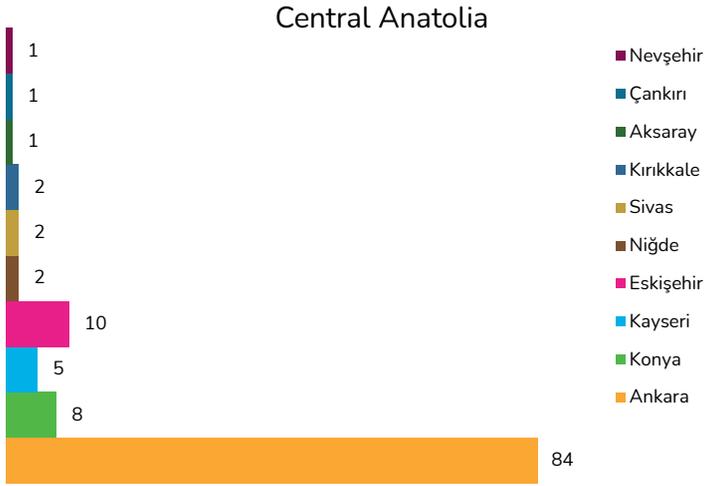


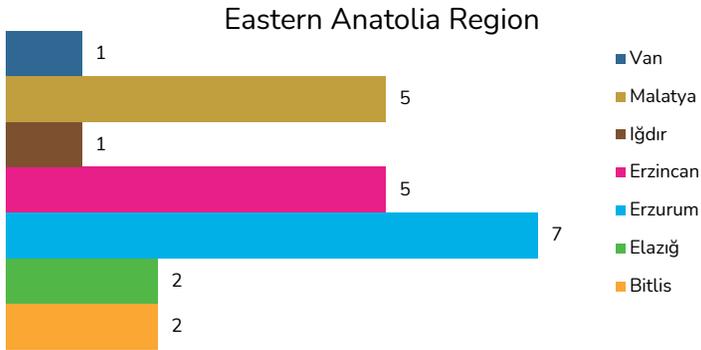
Fig 7. Cities Where the Participants Live / Reside in - Mediterranean Region

The LGBTI+ persons included in the study from the Mediterranean Region are predominantly located in **Antalya** (Alanya, Gazipaşa, Kepez, Konyaaltı, Manavgat, Muratpaşa), **Adana** (Ceyhan, Çukurova, Karaisalı, Seyhan, Yüreğir), **Mersin** (Akdeniz, Anamur, Erdemli, Tarsus, Toroslar, Yenişehir), **Burdur** (Bucak), **Hatay** (Antakya, İskenderun), **Isparta** (Yalvaç) and **Osmaniye** (Kadirli).



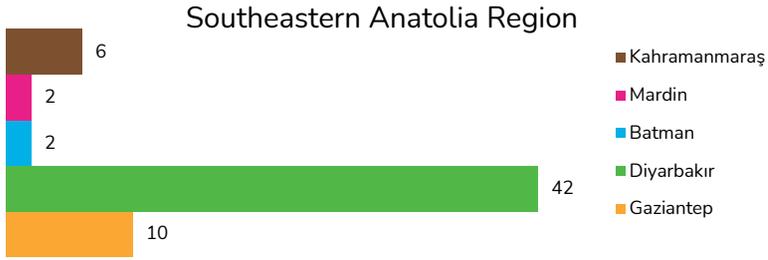
*Fig 8. Cities Where the Participants Live / Reside in  
- Central Anatolia Region*

The LGBTI+ persons included in the study from the Central Anatolia Region are predominantly located in **Ankara** (Bahçelievler, Eryaman, Etimesgut, Keçioren, Kızılay, Mamak, Sincan, Yenimahalle), **Konya** (Karapınar, Meram, Selçuklu), **Eskişehir** (Beylikova, Odunpazarı, Tepebaşı) **Sivas** (Şarkışla), **Kırkkale** (Yahşihan) **Aksaray** (Ortaköy), **Niğde** (Bor), **Nevşehir** (Ürgüp) and **Çankırı** (Çerkeş).



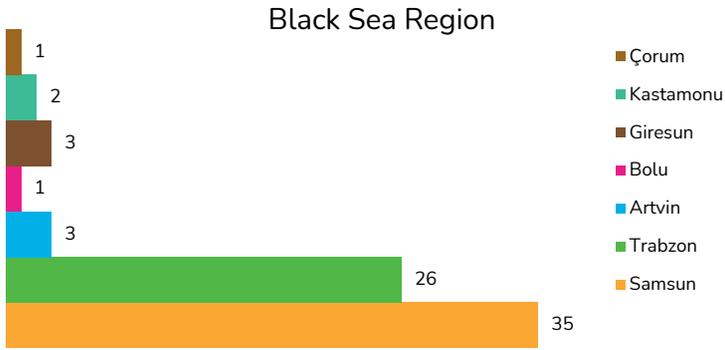
*Fig 9. Cities Where the Participants Live / Reside in  
- Eastern Anatolia Region*

The LGBTI+ persons included in the study from the Eastern Anatolia Region are predominantly located in **Erzurum** (Palandöken, Pazaryolu), **Erzincan** (Kemah), **İğdir** (Tuzluca), **Malatya** (Battalgazi, Pütürge, Yesilyurt), **Van** (İpekyolu), **Bitlis** (Adilcevaz) and **Elazığ** (Kovancılar).



*Fig 10. Cities Where the Participants Live / Reside in  
- Southeastern Anatolia Region*

The LGBTI+ persons included in the study from the Southeastern Anatolia Region are predominantly located in **Diyarbakır** (Bağlar, Çınar, Dicle, Kayapınar, Kocaköy, Sur, Yenişehir), **Gaziantep** (Nizip, Şahinbey, Şehitkamil), **Kahramanmaraş** (Onikişubat), **Batman** (Kozluk) and **Mardin** (Nusaybin).



*Fig 11. Cities Where the Participants Live / Reside in  
- Black Sea Region*

The LGBTI+ persons included in the study from the Black Sea Region are predominantly located in **Samsun** (Atakum, Bafra, Canik, Çarşamba, İlkadım), **Trabzon** (Akçaabat, Arsin, Çaykara, Of, Ortahisar), **Artvin** (Hopa), **Bolu** (Mengen), **Giresun** (Bulancağ), **Kastamonu** (Tosya, Taşköprü) and **Çorum** (Sungurlu).

A great majority of LGBTI+ persons included in the study answered “no” to the question “Are you still working in an income generating job?”. (Fig 12)

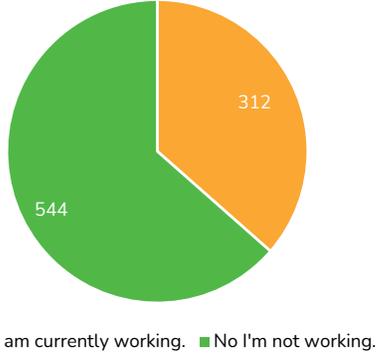


Fig 12. Employment Status of Participants

458 of all LGBTI+ persons included in the study have no income. The income of 398 people who stated that they have an income ranging between 200 and 25,000 TL, while the average income is 3780.62 TL.

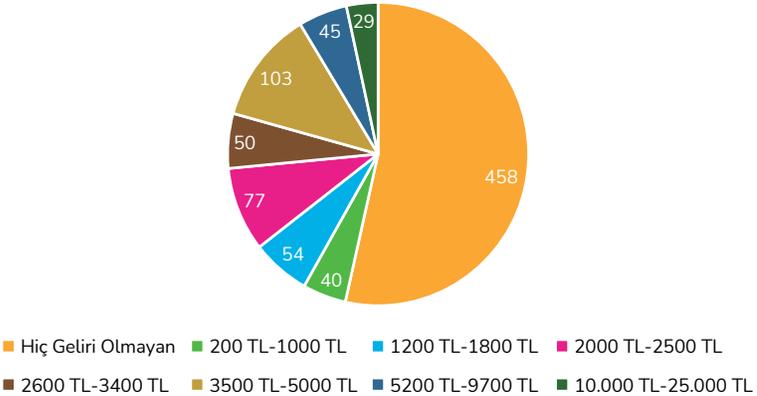


Fig 13. Income Status of Participants

A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study answered “no” to the question “Do you have a disability of any kind (physical, mental, etc.)?” (Fig 14).

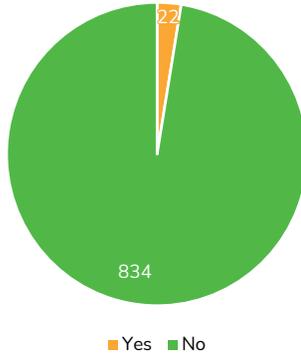


Fig 14. Disability Status of Participants

A great majority of the LGBT+ persons included in the study answered “no” to the question “Do you have any chronic infections / disease?” (Fig 15).

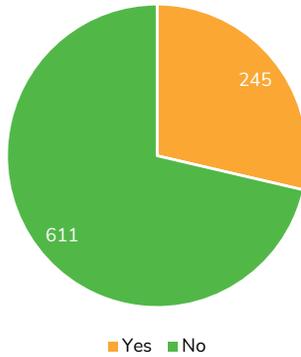


Fig 15. Chronic Infection / Disease Status of Participants

A great majority of LGBTI+ persons included in the study “ answered “no” to the question “Are you associated with any LGBTI+ civil society organization? (as a member, volunteer, professional worker, etc.)” (Fig 16).

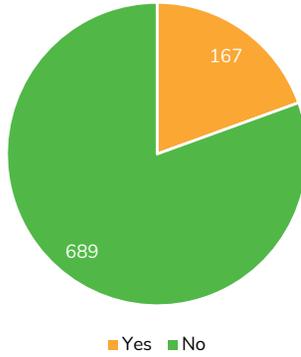


Fig 16. Participants’ Association with LGBTI+ Civil Society Organizations

## 3. Key Findings

- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study stated that they had no information regarding housing services, that they believed they could face discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity while accessing said services, and that they had to resort to staying with friends or family members.
- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study stated that they had no information regarding where and how to apply for social assistance during the pandemic, that they believed they could face discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity while accessing said assistance, that they believed the relevant organizations would have negative attitudes and practices, and that they sought help from friends.
- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study stated that they had no information regarding which institutions and organizations to apply for psychosocial support services during the pandemic, that they believed they could face discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity while accessing said services, that they had concerns regarding protection of privacy, that the relevant organizations would have negative attitudes and practices, that they sought help from friends and and that the aforementioned services are not free of charge.
- LGBTI+ persons included in the study who stated that they were exposed to violence and either did not or could not seek help from public institutions or organizations stated that they received threats and were afraid that they could be exposed to violence again, that there was a culture of impunity towards perpetrators of hate crimes and that public institutions and organizations produced hate speech targeting them, that they could face discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity while accessing said services, and that the relevant organizations would have negative attitudes and practices. In addition, it was stated by the participants that transphobia in particular is highly prevalent in these institutions and organizations, that evidence of violence is concealed, that victims of violence are given wrong or incomplete information and that the testimonies of these victims are not believed. Moreover, the pandemic which could possibly force people to go back to their families has shown that LGBTI+ persons do not feel safe even when they are with family members.
- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study believe that citizens and civil society organizations are not included in the processes related to the pandemic and that the methods utilized are not participatory.

- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study believe that no protective and preventive measures to ensure the safety and well-being of disadvantaged groups (women, children, people with disabilities, the elderly, LGBTI+ persons, people with HIV, refugees) during the pandemic were taken.
- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study believe that institutions and organizations do not offer LGBTI+ inclusive services during the pandemic.
- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study believe that they are not provided information about their special needs during the pandemic via brochures, videos, or broadcasts.
- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study believe that institutions and organizations give no attention to the special needs of LGBTI+ persons during the pandemic.
- A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study believe that there are no places for them to consult with if they have problems with accessing services or social assistance (not getting a response, discrimination, etc.).

## 4. Access to Social Services

Social services are defined as a set of systematic and programmed services which aim to address financial, emotional, and social problems of persons and families caused by environmental factors beyond their control and meet their needs, to prevent and solve social issues, and to improve and increase the living standards of people.<sup>5</sup> Access to housing, social assistance, psychosocial support and post-violence support mechanisms are the essential needs that form the basis of social services. In addition, the right to “a healthy life”, which is one of the most fundamental rights that each individual has, is considered natural and inalienable. The “right to health” has been accepted as a fundamental human right in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The aforementioned article grants all individuals “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” The right to health is attributed to “all individuals” in every international human rights agreement and declaration.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it follows that from a humanitarian and a legal standpoint, and in accordance with international agreements, the state should ensure and protect the right to a healthy life for all of its citizens without discrimination.

Global crises such as a pandemic are usually the times where the structural inequalities within countries are much more visible. Like in any other crisis, the people that have historically been the outcasts and victims of discrimination were also the ones who were dealt the biggest blow by the current pandemic. Not only do LGBTI+ persons belong to a higher risk group during the COVID-19 crisis, they also have much more difficulty accessing social services. In this section, we will go over some of the challenges faced by LGBTI+ persons while accessing social services (housing, social assistance, psychosocial support, post violence support mechanisms) during the pandemic.

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5 Social Services Law No. 2828. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2828.pdf>. (Accessed on: 06.12.2020).

6 Bayram Metin, “Sağlık Hakkı” (“Right to Health”), Sağlık Akademisyenleri Dergisi (Journal of Health Academics), Volume 4, Issue 1, 2017.

## 4.1. Access to Housing Services

LGBTI+ persons are subjected to a type of exclusion prevalent in both their day-to-day social relationships with general population and their relationships with their family. Moving away from their hometown as well as their family and never coming back is a method used by many LGBTI+ individuals to address the problems in their environment.<sup>7</sup> LGBTI+ persons who are at odds with, or rejected by their families, and either cannot or refuse to see their them have been forced to live with their families due to the loss of income and housing issues they experienced during the pandemic.

Economic insecurity affects human life significantly. Access to housing, which is an important factor in determining one's physical and mental health, is something that should be state provided. However one of the challenges that accompany the pandemic is that LGBTI+ persons are often forced into situations where they have to seek shelter in places where they do not or cannot feel at ease. It is also crucial that correct and reliable information regarding housing services should be readily accessible. In that context, it is important to learn about the experiences of LGBTI+ persons with housing during the pandemic, and to identify the problems they face.

A great majority of LGBTI+ individuals involved in the study answered “no” to the question, “Do you have any information about where to apply for social assistance?” (Fig 17).

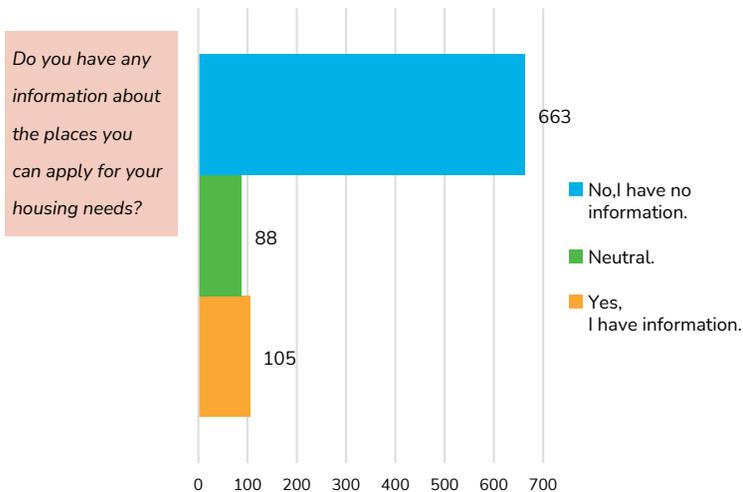


Fig 17. Participants' Level of Information About Hosuing Services

7 Gizem B. EKİTLİ, Mahire O. ÇAM “Bakım Sürecinde Zorlandığımız Alan LGBTİ’ye Yönelik Bir Gözden Geçirme” (“A Review of LGBTI, the Area We Have Difficulty in the Care Process”), *Psikiyatri Hemşireliği Dergisi (Journal of Psychiatric Nursing)* 2017; 8 (3): 179-187.

A great majority of the LGBTI+ persons included in the study answered “no” to the question, “Have you had any problems with access to housing during the pandemic?” (Fig 18).

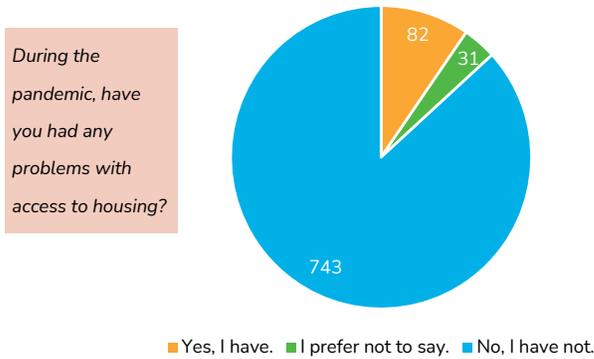


Fig 18. Participants' Problems with Housing During the Pandemic

82 participants who stated that they had problems with housing during the pandemic were asked the question, “Have you applied to any institutions or organizations for housing assistance?” 70 participants answered “yes”, while 12 participants answered “no”. The participants who answered “no” were asked about why they did not apply. Their responses are generally as follows:

“I don't think there is a useful service for that.”

“I am a trans man, I don't know what I'd have to deal with if I applied. So I stayed with friends.”

“I found a temporary place.”

“I don't know where to apply.”

“I don't know if an organization that provides housing assistance exists.”

“I stayed with friends and acquaintances as a guest.”

“I had to go to my family.”

*"I was subjected to violence at the hands of my family and was able to save enough money to move out, but it was still very difficult to get my belongings from there. I called a support hotline and they did try to help, but I was scared that if I got the police involved and got a restraining order my family would get even angrier and that no one would be able to protect me. So I did not ask for help from the police with housing or retrieving my stuff. "*

*"I went to my friends."*

*"Since we are so often ostracized..."*

*"I didn't think I would get a helpful answer while I was researching housing services. So I asked some friends for help, and I'm staying with one of them right now. "*

*"I was kicked out of the house by my family, but then they called me back."*

In summary, LGBTI+ persons stated that they had no information regarding housing services, that they believed they would face discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity while accessing said services, and that they had to resort to staying with friends or family members.

12 participants who applied to an institution for housing assistance were asked which institutions they applied to and whether they were able to receive assistance from these institutions. The answers are shown in Table 1.

| Applied Institutions or Organizations  | Total Number of Applicants | Whether Support was Received      | Name of the the Institution or Organization                                       |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| District Governorship / Governorship   | 1                          | No, I didn't receive any support. | Manisa Governorship   |
| Social Service Organization (For example, Social Service Centers, Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations etc.) | 7                          | No, I didn't receive any support. | Social Security Institution<br>SASF (Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation) |
| Mukhtar  | 1                          | No, I didn't receive any support. | Diyarbakır Kayapınar District Huzurevleri Neighborhood Mukhtar's Office           |
| Consulate  | 1                          | No, I didn't receive any support. | Consulate of Azerbaijan   |
| Municipality   | 1                          | I'm still waiting for an answer.  | Şehzadeler Municipality   |
|  | 1                          | No, I didn't receive any support. | Akyazı Municipality   |

Table 1. Institutions Applied for Housing Service and the Outcomes

As seen in Table 1, 12 participants who applied to an institution for housing assistance received no support. When the participants were asked why they thought they did not receive assistance, they answered as follows:

*"I don't know, I couldn't even get a reply."*

*"They took issue my residential address."*

*"I don't think there was any logical reason."*

*"I was rejected although I had no income, I do not understand."*

## 4.2. Access to Social Assistance

Combined with the discrimination that LGBTI+ persons already face, the physical distancing and isolation measures brought about by the pandemic create challenges for LGBTI+ persons preventing their access to social assistance. A fear of discrimination and being labeled continues to be a great obstacle preventing LGBTI+ persons from seeking help from a public institution or organization during the pandemic as well. LGBTI+ persons as a group are exposed to a higher degree of psychosocial stress than average due to labeling, discrimination, the prejudices of service providers and lower socioeconomic status, and have a much harder time accessing social assistance or a comprehensive insurance program due to the aforementioned reasons.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the conditions surrounding their access to social assistance is an area that merits extensive research.

A great majority of LGBTI+ individuals involved in the study said “No” when asked “Do you have any information about where to apply for social assistance?” (Fig 19).

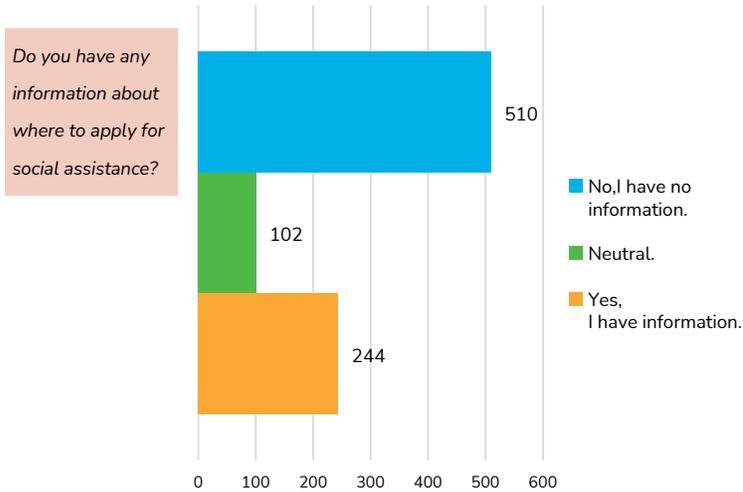


Fig 19. Participants' Information on Access to Social Aids

8 Koray Başar, "Covid- 19 Salgınında Hepimiz Aynı Gemide miyiz?" ("Are We All on the Same Boat in COVID-19 Pandemic?"). <https://kaosgl.org/haber/covid-19-salgininda-lgbti-lar-hepimiz-ayni-gemide-miyiz> (Accessed on: 01.12.2020).

Most of the LGBTI+ persons involved in the study answered the question “Do you need social assistance during the pandemic?” as “No” (Fig 20). However, the number of participants who stated that they need social assistance during the pandemic also appears to be significantly high.

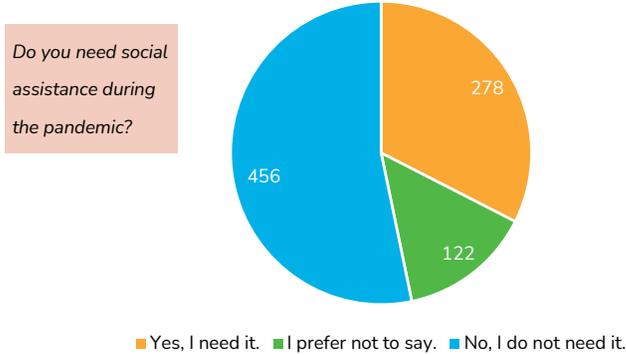


Fig 20. Participants' Need for Social Assistance During the Pandemic

278 participants who stated that they had problems in accessing social assistance during the pandemic were asked the question, “Have you applied to any institutions or organizations for social assistance?” and 140 participants answered “Yes”, while 138 participants answered “No”. The participants who answered «No» were asked about why they did not apply. Their responses are generally as follows:

“My friends have helped me.”

“I thought I would get no help.”

“I think the institutions would reject my application. “

“Because I am not fully informed.”

“I have no information about where to apply. “

“To give room for those who need it more than I do. “

*"I did not want it to amount to nothing and getting exhausted."*

*"I preferred to stick with my friends."*

*"Most of the time, I don't meet the application requirements. I've tried before, and now there is no accessible social assistance mechanism. All of them are locked and I don't want to disclose myself to the institutions yet. We all are already going through difficult times. I can't face homophobia and sexist attitude of the institutions on top of that."*

*"I don't believe that there is a reliable mechanism from which I would get positive results."*

*"I think they won't help."*

*"These are institutions filled with discrimination and prejudice."*

*"Aid may not be provided, discrimination is seen in many places."*

*"I do not meet the requirements. There must be someone who has lost their job in the family, but I only have my mother and she hasn't been working either."*

*“My friends support me. They won’t help a trans woman.”*

*“That’s because I think it won’t work and I don’t want my family to find out.”*

*“I am not open about my sexual identity and to keep it (sexual identity) that way.”*

*“They don’t get back.”*

*“I did not want to apply for I think it’s not likely for me to get it.”*

As it can be seen, LGBTI+ people have stated that they do not have information about access to social assistance, where to apply for social assistance during the pandemic, that they may be exposed to discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, that the relevant institutions or organizations may have negative attitudes and behaviors, and that they are supported by their friends.

140 participants who have applied to an institution for getting access to social assistance were asked to which institutions they have applied and whether they could get support from these organizations. The answers are demonstrated in Table 2.

| Applied Institutions or Organizations   | Total Number of Applicants | Whether Support was Received      | Name of the Institution/ Organization  |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Ministry / District Governorship / Governorate  | 10                         | No, I haven't got support.        | Istanbul Governorate<br>CIMER<br>Nilüfer District<br>Governorship Ministry of Interior<br>Konya Governorate  |
|   | 5                          | I'm still waiting for a response. | Ankara Governorate<br>Altındağ District Governorship<br>Esenler District Governorship  |
| Social Services Organization (For example, Social Services Centers, Foundations of Social Help and Solidarity etc.) | 24                         | No, I haven't got support.        | Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services<br>"Alo 144" Line<br>Beyoğlu FSHS<br>Pamukkale FSHS  |
|   | 52                         | I'm still waiting for a response. | FSHS (Foundations of Social Help and Solidarity)<br>Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services  |
|   | 8                          | Yes, I've got support.            | Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services (Pandemic Support Aid)<br>İŞKUR (Turkish Employment Agency)  |
| Municipality  | 27                         | I'm still waiting for a response. | Ankara Metropolitan Municipality<br>Istanbul Bahçelievler Municipality<br>Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality<br>Izmir Metropolitan Municipality<br>Çankaya Municipality<br>Yenişehir Municipality<br>Mersin Municipality |
|   | 6                          | No, I haven't got support.        | Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality<br>Kartal Municipality<br>Küçükçekmece Municipality<br>Nilüfer Municipality<br>Konya Metropolitan Municipality<br>Manisa Metropolitan Municipality<br>Şehzadeler Municipality         |
|   | 8                          | Yes, I've got support.            | Ankara Metropolitan Municipality<br>Beylikdüzü Municipality<br>Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality<br>Şişli Municipality  |

Table 2. Applied Institutions for Access to Social Assistance and Results

40 of the 140 participants who have applied to an organization for getting access to social assistance has not received support, as can be seen in Table 2. When participants were asked about the reasons for not getting support, the following answers were given in general:

*"I do not know. I think that could be because my residence still seems to be with my family, and because of the assets registered in my father's name..."*

*"It was said not many people were helped."*

*"They weren't concerned and there was no response."*

*"I was told that I was out of the target group."*

*"I can't get any response, almost none of my applications were confirmed. Unfortunately, it becomes daunting after a while."*

### 4.3. Access to Psychosocial Support Services

With the COVID-19 pandemic, both globally and in Turkey, particularly critical health services for LGBTI+ persons have been deemed “unnecessary” health services. Access to several services from the monitoring of certain diseases to HIV testing or psychological support. This situation also leads to the disruption of hormone intake of trans people and body adjustment process surgeries in particular, and HIV treatments for LGBTI+ people as well as anonymous HIV in general.<sup>9</sup> In addition, during the pandemic, the tendency to accuse, stigmatize and exclude LGBTI+ persons and those living with HIV, and the adoption and legitimization of all of these by state institutions have caused LGBTI+ people and those living with HIV to be made open targets.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the confusion and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, LGBTI+ individuals also experience severe mental and emotional problems as they are subjected to marginalization by the society. During the pandemic, especially non-governmental organizations have received an increasing number of applications related to emotional support, coming out process and social services. The effects of the pandemic on daily life and uncertainties about the future have triggered anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts in LGBTI+ people.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it is observed that the family homes are not defined as a safe space and lacks a support system for many LGBTI+ people who have to stay in their family home or have had to return to their family home.<sup>12</sup> In addition, free access to psychological support has become an important issue due to the economic problems increasing with the pandemic. LGBTI+ persons who have to stay in family homes have had to postpone or terminate their therapy process. Considering the aforementioned situations, LGBTI+ persons’ experiences with psychosocial support services gain importance.

Most of the LGBTI+ persons involved in the study replied “No” when asked “*Do you have any information about the places you can apply for psychosocial support (support for coping with the effects of the process, maintaining mental and social well-being) during the pandemic?*” (Fig 21).

9 Osman Elbek, “COVID-19 Pandemisi ve Sağlıkın Sosyal Bileşenleri” (“COVID-19 Pandemic and Social Components of Health”) in “LGBTI+ ve COVID-19 Pandemisi” (“LGBTI+ and COVID-19 Pandemic”). Turkish Thoracic Society COVID-19 E-Books Series, 2020: 49-52.

10 Kaos GL Association and May 17 Association, “The Report on the Human Rights of LGBTI+ Persons Living with HIV” <https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/hivleyasayanlgbtilerraporu2020.pdf>. (Accessed on: 5.12.2020).

11 Young LGBTI+ Association, Araştırma Raporu: COVID-19 Salgınında LGBTI+ Topluluğun Durumu (Research Report: The Situation of the LGBTI+ Community in the COVID-19 Pandemic). <https://genclgbti.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/covid-19-salgininda-lgbti-toplulugunun-durumu.pdf>. (Accessed on: 4.12.2020).

12 Social Policies, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association, *Pandemi Raporu: COVID-19’un Üç Ayında LGBTI+’lar (Pandemic Report: LGBTI+ People in Three Months of COVID-19)*. <http://spod.org.tr/SourceFiles/pdf-2020623151720.pdf>. (Accessed on: 4.12.2020).

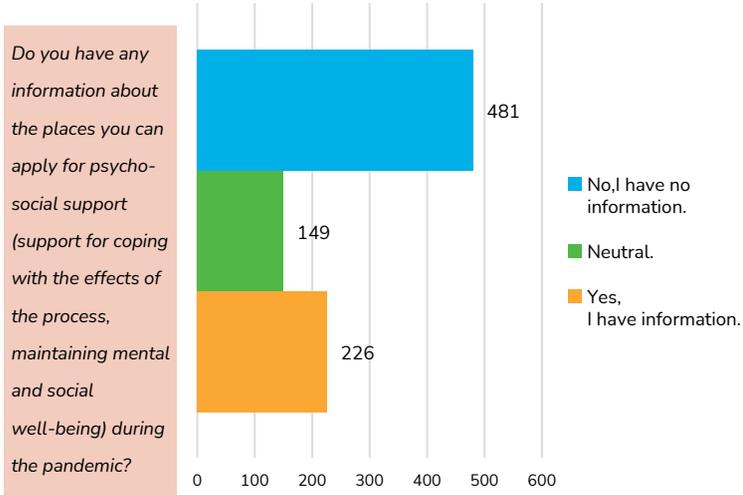


Fig 21. Participants' Information on Access to Psychosocial Support Services

A great majority of LGBTI+ persons involved in the study answered “Yes” when asked “Do you need psychosocial support during the pandemic?” (Fig 22).

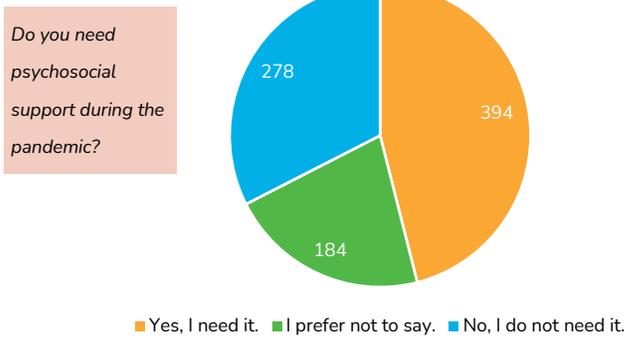


Fig 22. Participants' Need for Psychosocial Support Services During the Pandemic

394 participants who stated that they needed psychosocial support during the pandemic were asked, “Have you applied to any institution or organization for psychosocial support?” In total, 278 participants answered “Yes”, while 116 participants answered “No”. When the participants who answered “No” were asked about why they did not apply, their answers are as follows:

*“I don’t know where to apply.”*

*“I don’t believe support will be provided.”*

*“I am afraid of not being taken care of properly.”*

*“I’m trying to Fig it out myself.”*

*“I don’t think I can get results.”*

*“I have no information that I can get such a service for free.”*

*“I have already applied many times for psychological support. Each time I got a negative response. I’m not hopeful anymore. “*

*“I have no income to afford it. In places where I can get free help, the waiting period is quite long. And I am still hesitant about these issues.”*

*“I’m afraid of being exposed to discrimination.”*

*“For I am in quarantine with my family, I cannot use my personal space.”*

*“My financial situation is not suitable, besides, because I live with my family, I don’t have the opportunity to participate in online therapy at home.”*

*"I don't think they can talk about issues about gays."*

*"Because I'm not sure where can be safe and how safe it can be in this process. What's more, it's a pity that most of these services are not accessible while it is so risky to go outside."*

*"Frankly, I don't think support will do any good. I am also very concerned about the support I will receive from the government. For example; disclosing my identity etc. In addition, I think the reason why I don't apply to organizations such as associations is related to my self-confidence problems."*

*"I am worried about that the person I'll consult with may be biased."*

*"I am talking with my friends."*

As can be seen, LGBTI+ persons included in the study have stated that don't have information about access to psychosocial support services during the pandemic, which institutions and organizations they can apply to, that they may be exposed to discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity at the access point of the mentioned services, that they are worried about confidentiality, that they have concerns that the relevant institutions or organizations may have negative attitudes and behaviors, that they get help from their friends and that the mentioned services are not free of charge.

278 participants who have applied to an institution for getting access to psychosocial support were asked to which institutions they have applied and whether they could get support from these organizations. The answers are demonstrated in Table 3.

| Applied Institution or Organization   | Total Number of Applicants | Whether Support was Received      | Name of the Institution/ Organization  |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Ministry of Health  | 40                         | Yes, I've got support.            | The Ministry of Health Communication Center (SABİM)<br>Manisa Mental and Neurological Disorders Hospital<br>Sultan Abdülhamid Han Training and Research Hospital |
|   | 17                         | No, I could not get support.      | The Ministry of Health Communication Center (SABİM)<br>Beylikdüzü State Hospital   |
| Social Services Organization (For example, Social Services Centers, Foundations of Social Help and Solidarity etc.) | 35                         | No, I could not get support.      | Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services<br>ALO 183 Social Support Line   |
|   | 14                         | I'm still waiting for a response. | Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services<br>FSHS (Foundations of Social Help and Solidarity)  |
|   | 12                         | Yes, I've got support.            | ALO 183 Social Support Line<br>Çankaya Healthy Living Center   |
| Municipality  | 2                          | I'm still waiting for a response. | Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality   |
|   | 2                          | No, I could not get support.      | Izmir Metropolitan Municipality  |
|   | 2                          | Yes, I've got support.            | Kuşadası Municipality (Women's Counseling Center)<br>Izmir Metropolitan Municipality   |
| Non-Governmental Organization/ Foundations  | 151                        | Yes, I've got support.            | SPoD<br>Pink Life Association<br>Muamma LGBTI + Association<br>Young LGBTI + Association<br>Kaos GL Association<br>BİZ Association<br>HRFT                       |
| University  | 1                          | No, I could not get support.      | Istanbul University (Psychological Counseling Service)   |
|   | 2                          | Yes, I've got support.            | Boğaziçi University<br>Özyeğin University  |

Table 3. Applied Institutions for Access to Psychosocial Support Services and Results

As seen in Table 2, 55 of 278 participants who have applied to an organization for getting access to psychosocial support services could not receive support. When participants were asked about the reasons for not getting support, the following answers were given in general:

*“We could not talk about my sexual orientation; the other party was not that knowledgeable.”*

*“They didn’t have detailed information about HIV.”*

*“They did not have any information about HIV, and they could not direct me.”*

*“They didn’t want to understand.”*

*“They couldn’t talk about sexuality.”*

*“Information about my sexual orientation could not be provided.”*

*“They said they had no knowledge.”*

*“I could not get any information about HIV and COVID.”*

Another issue to be highlighted in Table 3 is that non-governmental organizations assume a great responsibility in providing psychosocial support services. It can be said that public institutions and organizations, municipalities that are obliged to provide psychosocial support are lacking in providing the aforementioned services, and non-governmental organizations are trying to fill this deficiency. In addition, as it can be understood from both Table 3 and participants’ statements, LGBTI+ individuals do not find the counseling capacity of public institutions and organizations sufficient, especially on HIV.

#### 4.4. Access to Post-Violence Support Mechanisms

The binary gender system, which is reproduced every day through the practices of social institutions, causes LGBTI+ identities and orientations to be excluded and discriminated against. During the pandemic, violence against LGBTI+ persons inside and outside the home increased, and the persistence of heteronormative ideology in public institutions and organizations has made the violence against LGBTI+ people even more invisible. In addition, LGBTI+ individuals face difficulties and obstacles in accessing post-violence support mechanisms. While there is no safe space where LGBTI+ people can take shelter, emergency help lines are also insufficient for the aforementioned issues. From this point of view, it is important to learn about the experiences of LGBTI+ individuals regarding post-violence mechanisms.

A great majority of LGBTI+ individuals involved in the study said “No” when asked, “Do you have any information about where to apply in case you are subjected to violence (physical, sexual, psychological, economic, etc.)?” (Fig 23).

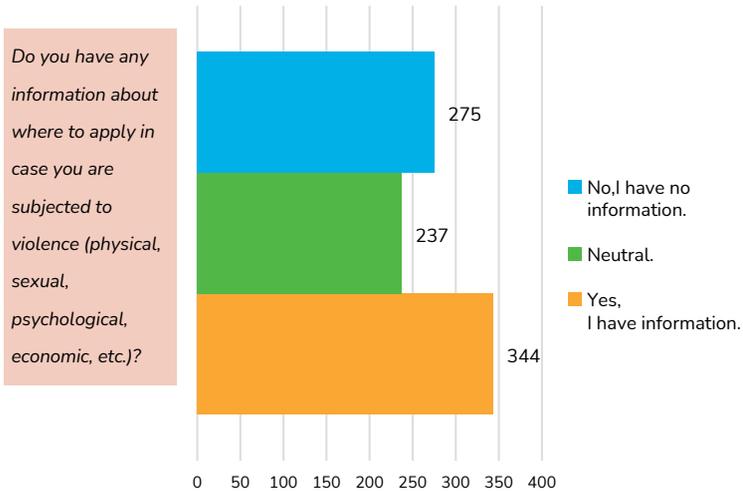


Fig 23. Participants' Information on Access to Post-Violence Support Mechanisms

The vast majority of LGBTI+ persons involved in the study answered “No” when asked, “Have you been subjected to violence during the pandemic?” (Fig 24). However, the number of participants who stated that they were subjected to violence during the pandemic also seems to be significantly high.

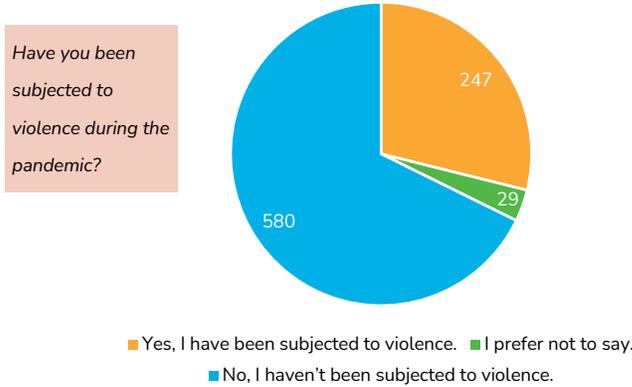


Fig 24. Participants' Exposure to Violence During Pandemic Process

247 participants who stated that they were exposed to violence during pandemic were directed the statement “Please indicate the type of violence you were exposed to” and the responses of the participants are shown in Fig 25.

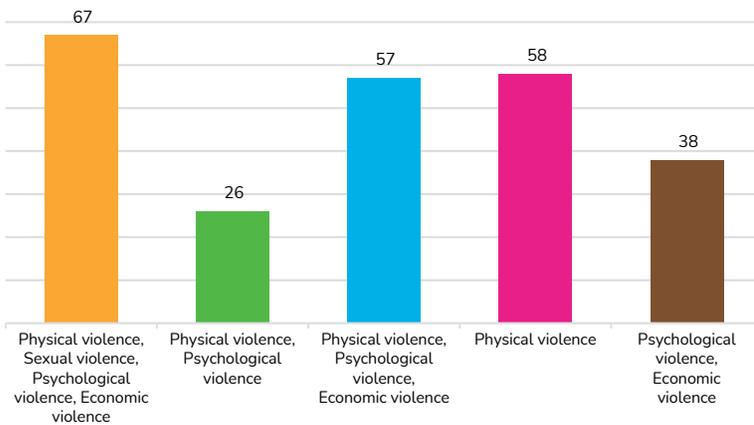


Fig 25. Types of Violence Participants Were Subjected

The types of violence that the participants were subjected to are observed to be physical violence (pushing, hitting, etc.); sexual violence (being forced to sexual intercourse without consent, sexual implications, etc.); psychological violence (contempt, intimidating, silent treatment, sulking, insulting, threatening, etc.) and economic violence (depriving of financial income, etc.).

When Fig 25 is examined, among 247 participants who stated that they were subjected to violence;

63 of them stated they were subjected to physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence and economic violence all together,

26 of them to physical violence and psychological violence,

57 of them to physical violence, psychological violence and economic violence, 58 of them to psychological violence,

38 of them to psychological and economic violence.

247 participants who stated that they were subjected to violence were asked, "Have you applied to any institution or organization to receive post-violence support?" and the answers are shown in Fig 26.

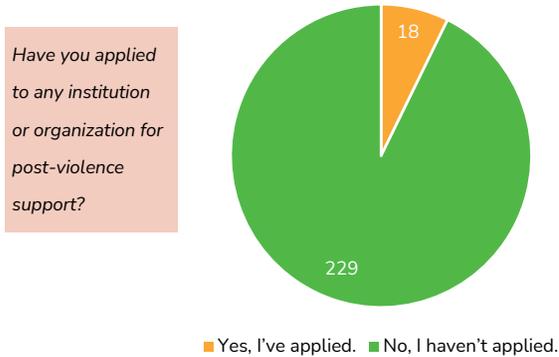


Fig 26. Application Status of Participants for Post-Violence Support

As can be seen in Fig 26, there are 229 participants who have not applied to any organization for post-violence support during the pandemic. The answers given by the participants who did not/could not apply, when asked a question about why they did not/could not apply, are as follows:

*"I'm not sure whether it can be a solution."*

*"Because I am afraid that they would believe my family and not me."*

*"They won't help, they won't believe me."*

*"My family would cast a veil over everything."*

*"My family has been doing this for years and nobody is listening to me."*

*"Especially my dad is intimidating and threatening."*

*"If I talk, I will be threatened."*

*"I'm afraid I would be exposed to violence again by my family."*

*"I'm afraid that there will be violence again."*

*"I wanted it to end as soon as possible and I wanted to forget."*

*"Nobody believes us and everyone despises us."*

*"The police would side with my family."*

*"None of the public institutions in the country wants to keep us alive."*

*"If you go there to apply, you will be subjected to violence again."*

*"I think they won't believe it. They don't want us to live."*

*"Based on my experience I can tell that they want us to die."*

*"Would they believe a trans woman or the perpetrator?"*

*"Nobody is standing by us. If I apply, that would be it. Nobody will get the punishment they deserve."*

*"After the recent statements of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, nobody would believe us."*

*“My family and relatives are threatening me. They constantly tell me that they would kick me out of the house.”*

*“I’m depending on my family right now. There is nothing I can do.”*

*“They wouldn’t believe a sex worker. It serves nothing but prolonging the process and agonizing you.”*

*“My family has threatened to kick me out of the house. My father has threatened to kill me.”*

*“Pursuing it leads to more violence.”*

*“Who would help when queer people are damned.”*

*“They are not getting punished anyways...”*

As can be seen, LGBTI+ persons included in the study who stated that they were exposed to violence and either did not or could not seek help from public institutions or organizations stated that they received threats and were afraid, that they could be exposed to violence again, that there was a culture of impunity towards perpetrators of hate crimes and that public institutions and organizations produced hate speech targeting them, that they could face discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity while accessing the mentioned services, and that the relevant organizations would have negative attitudes and practices. Moreover, the pandemic which could possibly force people to go back to their families has shown that LGBTI+ persons do not feel safe even when they are with family members.

18 participants who have applied to an institution for getting access to post-violence support mechanisms were asked to which institutions they have applied and whether they could get support from these organizations. The answers are demonstrated in Table 4.

| Applied Institution or Organization           | Total Number of Applicants | Whether Support was Received      | Name of the Institution/ Organization   |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services | 2                          | Yes, I've got support.            | ALO 183 Social Support Line   |
|   | 2                          | I'm still waiting for a response. | Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services - Istanbul  |
|   | 2                          | No, I haven't got support.        | ALO 183 Social Support Line   |
| Police Department/ Police Station             | 9                          | No, I haven't got support.        | Batıkent Police Station<br>Beyoğlu District Police Department<br>Çukurova District Police Department<br>Seyhan District Police Department |
|   | 2                          | I'm still waiting for a response. | Bahçelievler District Police Department<br>Şişli District Police Department   |
|   | 1                          | Yes, I've got support.            | Diyarbakır Provincial Police Department   |

Table 4. Applied Institutions for Access to Post-Violence Mechanisms and Results

As can be seen in Table 4, 11 of the 18 participants who applied to an institution for getting access to post-violence support mechanisms could not receive support. When the participants were asked about the reasons for not getting support, the following answers were generally given:

*"They sent me away and they didn't believe me."*

*"Transphobia is everywhere..."*

*"The person who attacked me covered everything, they believed him."*

*"They tried to help, but before that I had to wait for the weekend to end so that I could get a restraining order, and it would be too late for my safety. I was given the impression that support would be provided only after getting the restraining order."*

Examining the statements of LGBTI+ individuals who have been subjected to violence and who have not received support, it is seen that public institutions and organizations are not trusted, especially transphobia is common in these institutions and organizations, evidence of violence is stashed away, people subjected to violence are informed improperly/incompletely and these people are not believed. While it should be noted that only 18 of the 247 participants who stated that they were subjected to violence were able to apply/applied to an institution or organization, it is also striking that among the institutions shown in Table 4 there are some which have not provided post-violence support.

## 4.5. Attitudes Regarding Access to Services

Public institutions and organizations are one of the key actors in citizens' access to social services. It is important that these institutions and organizations, carry out social services effectively, efficiently and based on social justice. In this context, especially states, and therefore governments should:

- Include citizens and non-governmental organizations in the processes carried out regarding the pandemic and to follow participatory methods,
- Take protective and preventive measures for disadvantaged groups (women, children, disabled people, elderly people, LGBTI+ persons, individuals living with HIV, refugees) during the pandemic,
- Provide LGBTI+ inclusive services through its institutions and organizations, and to establish these if there are no such institutions or organizations available,
- Inform the LGBTI+ individuals regarding the pandemic process in relation with their special needs by brochures, videos, publications, etc.
- Establish mechanisms that can be consulted when faced with any problems (lack of response, discrimination, etc.) regarding services and social assistance.

Considering the aforementioned responsibilities and obligations, the attitudes of LGBTI+ persons regarding the currently provided services becomes important. The responses of LGBTI+ individuals included in the study to the questionnaire form prepared within this framework are shown in Fig 27.

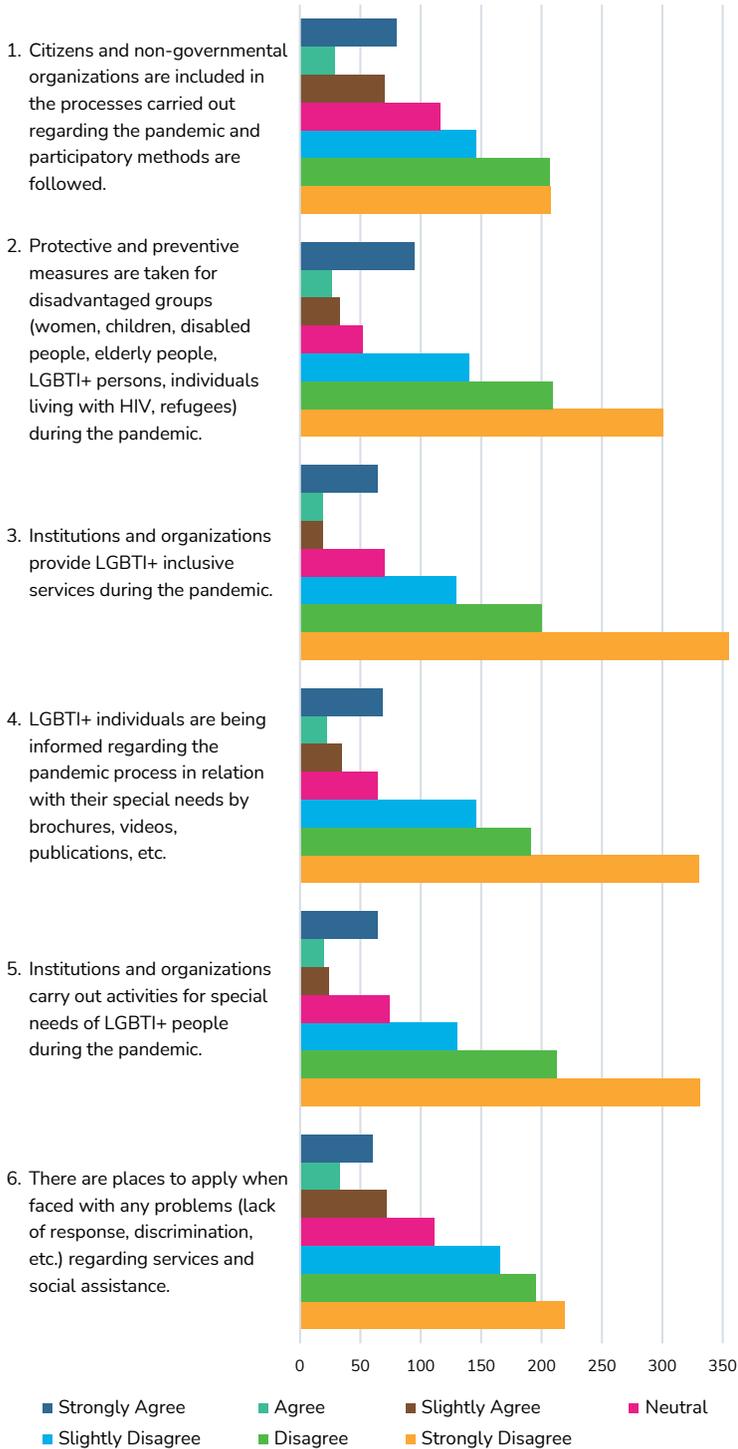


Fig 27. Attitudes Regarding Access to Services

As can be seen in Fig 27, the vast majority of LGBTI+ persons involved in the study:

- Thinks that citizens and non-governmental organizations are not included in the processes related to the pandemic and participatory methods are not followed.
- Thinks that protective and preventive measures for disadvantaged groups (women, children, disabled people, elderly people, LGBTI+ persons, individuals living with HIV, refugees) are not taken during the pandemic.
- Thinks that institutions and organizations do not provide LGBTI+ inclusive services during the pandemic.
- Thinks that LGBTI+ individuals are not being informed regarding the pandemic process in relation with their special needs by brochures, videos, publications, etc.
- Thinks that institutions and organizations do not carry out activities for special needs of LGBTI+ people during the pandemic.
- Thinks that there are no places to apply when faced with any problems (lack of response, discrimination, etc.) regarding services and social assistance.

## 5. Suggestions and Demands

- An emergency action plan should be prepared for LGBTI+ persons regarding needs such as housing, social assistance, psychosocial support and access to post-violence support mechanisms. It is necessary to establish mechanisms and allocate the necessary budget and resources in order to identify and meet the special needs of LGBTI+ persons who seek support during the pandemic.
- The differing needs of LGBTI+ people (disabilities, refugee/immigration status, living with HIV, etc.) should be taken into account in policy and service delivery.
- Units and commissions developing gender equality policies should be established within public institutions, and work should be started urgently to develop LGBTI+ inclusive policies during and after the pandemic.
- The capacities of service providers in public and local government institutions regarding rights-based and inclusive service provision should be enhanced. Training and supervision support on this subject should be obtained from LGBTI+ non-governmental organizations.
- Information about LGBTI+ rights should be provided through public service announcements.
- Public-civil society cooperation should be developed to meet the needs and demands of vulnerable groups severely affected by the pandemic. Non-governmental LGBTI+ organizations should also be directly involved in the process, and suggestions from field experiences should be accepted.
- Institutions or organizations that provide social service(s), especially the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, are required to provide services, practices and policies for LGBTI+ persons as the main service model. It is necessary to establish units within municipalities that directly support LGBTI+ individuals and ensure that these units are actively working.
- LGBTI+ people working in daily jobs or having lost their jobs in the pandemic should be included in employment activities to be carried out by public and local government institutions, and their equal access to work opportunities should be ensured.

- Communication campaigns should be carried out to promote that LGBTI+ individuals can safely apply to municipalities. Trainings on discrimination, gender equality and LGBTI + rights should be organized for municipal employees.
- Dialogue with non-governmental LGBTI+ organizations should be established, and partnerships should be developed with civil society in order to identify process- specific problems, needs and demands and to implement rights-based solutions.
- During the pandemic, a solid stance against human rights violations of the LGBTI+ should be taken publicly, as well as an egalitarian and pro human rights position to eliminate rights violations.
- All social work practices and interventions during and after the pandemic should be determined and carried out with participatory and transparent methods.

### 5.1. Suggestions and Demands for Housing Services

- Safe and accessible temporary housing facilities in line with COVID-19 measures should be provided for LGBTI+ people who have been subjected to violence.
- It should be ensured that LGBTI+ people are admitted to shelters within the scope of housing services or shelters should be established specifically for LGBTI+ people.

### 5.2. Suggestions and Demands for Social Assistance

- It is necessary to increase social assistance services by providing online psychological, social and legal support through Social Service Centers and Foundations of Social Help and Solidarity, and to establish crisis desks for LGBTI+ people.
- While evaluating social assistance applications, Foundations of Social Help and Solidarity should take into account that LGBTI+ persons' access to resources is severely limited during the pandemic. Short-term financial support should be provided to LGBTI+ people who have lost their jobs or are on unpaid leave, and programs should be developed for their participation in employment in registered and safe places in the medium and long term. The condition of being uninsured should not be sought in the social assistance applications of LGBTI+ people (who are still insured but not paid) who have to take unpaid leave.

- Programs should be developed to identify practices that prevent LGBTI+ persons' access to social assistance and to reach those in need. A data collection system focused on gender identity and sexual orientation should be established, and indicators related to LGBTI+ people should be included in all public surveys of needs and expectations assessment. It should be ensured that the problems, needs and demands of LGBTI+ people are made visible.
- The Social Services Law No. 2828 needs to be expanded within the framework of sexual orientation and gender identity and inclusive service models should be developed.

### 5.3. Suggestions and Demands for Psycho-Social Support Services

- A hotline for LGBTI+ people should be activated by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, and psychosocial and legal support should be provided by public institutions and organizations for LGBTI+ people.
- It should be ensured that Alo 183 Social Support Line would work more effectively on issues such as gender identity, sexual orientation and sexual health (sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS).
- Online psychological, social and legal support should be provided to LGBTI+ individuals through Social Service Centers and Healthy Living Centers.
- Voluntary Testing and Counseling Centers, which are managed in partnership with the General Directorate of Public Health, should be put into operation by local administrations so that people can receive HIV counseling and access rapid diagnosis and treatment opportunities. HIV is not an issue to be ignored or set aside in case of a crisis. A crisis plan should be prepared on how to use the existing and newly opened Voluntary Testing and Counseling Centers functionally in such crisis situations.
- Psychological and psychiatric support mechanisms for LGBTI+ people should be provided free of charge, especially by state institutions.
- Mental health professionals need to provide effective consultancy and support groups to solve the problems LGBTI+ people experience and advocate for influencing and changing the policies regarding LGBTI+ people.

#### ■ 5.4. **Suggestions and Demands for Post-Violence Support Mechanisms**

- LGBTI+ shelters should be established for LGBTI+ people who have been subjected to violence. Immediate action should be taken for the making of legal regulations in this regard.
- Emergency violence hotline and/or online systems should be established at provincial and district levels to provide easy access to LGBTI+ people who are exposed to violence.
- It is necessary to ensure that post-violence support mechanisms work actively regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.
- It should be ensured that national and international legal regulations (Istanbul Convention, CEDAW, Law No. 6284) are fully implemented.

S P O D