



Response to joint questionnaire of special procedures regarding the LGBT community in Israel

The Aguda is the umbrella association which coordinates seventeen LGBTQ organizations in Israel. The goal of the Aguda is to bring about equal rights, while furthering the welfare and safety of community members. The Covid - 19 crisis has prompted the urgent need for the Aguda to find new venues for meeting the community needs. Needs, which have both expanded and changed in their nature.

To date, State and government agencies have taken no measures to evaluate the needs of the LGBTQ community under this crisis. Nor have any measures been taken to try to meet the unique and increased difficulties face by the community. On some levels, this perhaps because of the speed and degree of uncertainty in which the crisis developed. On other levels, it may be due either to the inability or unwillingness to recognize that the LGBTQ community has special needs under these circumstances.

Regarding medical treatment related to Covid – 19, there is no available evidence to indicate that LGBTQ persons were subject to discrimination in receiving COVID-19 interventions. Every Israeli citizen is entitled to health care services under the National Health Insurance Law.

However, the Aguda was confronted on its own with the task of examining the effect of the crisis on the LGBTQ community, trying where possible to adjust its operations and services to meet the challenges and changing needs. To achieve this goal, a study was conducted by the Aguda in April to pinpoint the effect of the Covid - 19 crisis on the community. In addition to serving the Aguda, this study can now be used as a starting point to draw the attention of the State and government agencies to the unique needs of the community.

The study found that members of the LGBTQ community were harder hit by the effects of the crisis than members of the broader general community. This throughout the scope of problems caused by the crisis; economic hardship, loss of income or employment, the impact of home isolation, mental health issues, and being cut off from ongoing medical treatments. More marginalized parts of the LGBTQ community have been hurt even harder. This in particular in regards to transgender persons and others whose gender identification does not conform to the 'accepted' societal norms. Already suffering from higher levels of unemployment members of this part of the community have had been placed on unpaid leave or terminated from their positions of employment in higher percentages than other members of LGBTQ community.

Two other sections of the community, the youth and elderly have also faced challenges unique within the community. Due to economic hardship many young people have had to go back to live with their parents and core families. This can mean being forced back into the closet or facing a homophobic oppressive environment. Older members of the community who already faced serious issues of loneliness and isolation before this crisis found themselves in even deeper seclusion, amplified by the uncertainties and fear which this crisis has aroused.

Along with issues faced by individual members of the LGBTQ communities, the LGBTQ organizations face the challenge of refocusing operations on changing needs and structure within our community. This in addition to having to deal with substantial financial problems as the scope of the economic crisis in the wake of Covid – 19 becomes more profound. In many instances previous sources of funding may no longer be available.

Above all, it will be the task of the Aguda and the organization it is comprised of reexamine the needs of the LGBTQ community on an ongoing basis, bringing these to the attention of the State and government agencies. Experience has taught that LGBTQ needs and issues will not be dealt with without strong public prompting to do so.

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