

## **THE SAFE TO BE ME FUND: BUILDING BRITAIN'S INVESTMENT IN GLOBAL LGBTI+ RIGHTS**

---

Outline recommendations

---

*By Equal International*

# The Safe To Be Me Fund: Building Britain's investment in Global LGBTI+ rights

Author: Equal International

The Baring Foundation commissioned Equal International to outline the rationale for and potential design of a new UK fund to support LGBTI+ civil society in the Global South and East. This report provides high level recommendations for this fund and is accompanied by a separate technical analysis.

This report was developed with contributions from Government donors, private foundations and civil society worldwide. The authors surveyed a wide range of current literature and spoke to a range of actors, as well as consulting with the UK Alliance for Global Equality.

The Baring Foundation would like to thank the authors, Daniel Rogers, Maria Stacey and Anton Ofield-Kerr of Equal International, as well as the civil society actors, government officials and private foundations who made valuable contributions to this report.

## About Equal International

Equal International is a leading inclusive development consultancy focused on addressing the needs of marginalised communities through research, strategy and programme support. Equal International are thought leaders in consultation and co-creation processes.

[www.equalinternational.org](http://www.equalinternational.org)

**Equal** 

## About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation is an independent foundation which protects and advances human rights and promotes inclusion.

Since 2015, our International Development programme has supported civil society organisations to address discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI+) individuals and communities in sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on lesbian and transgender communities.

This report is supported by:

**The Baring  
Foundation**

# THE SAFE TO BE ME FUND: BUILDING BRITAIN'S INVESTMENT IN GLOBAL LGBTI+ RIGHTS

## Outline recommendations

*By Equal International with support from the Baring Foundation*

---

*This paper calls for the creation of a new  
UK supported fund – the Safe To Be Me Fund –  
which resources local LGBTI+ civil society to create  
change for their communities, building their capacity,  
resilience and networks to challenge discrimination,  
develop safe spaces and protect rights.*

---

A Technical Analysis to accompany this report will be available at:  
[www.baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/the-safe-to-be-me-fund](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/the-safe-to-be-me-fund).

---

# Summary

---

In September 2020 members of the UK Alliance for Global Equality (UKAGE) published *Leading the Way*.<sup>1</sup>

It set out the need and rationale for the UK government to contribute an average of 0.3% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) per year over five years to fund new commitments to help safeguard and protect LGBTI+ people around the world.

In *Leading the Way*, a key recommendation for the UK Government was to:

**> Create a new flexible funding mechanism based on the principles outlined in this paper, to ensure any future UK funding commitments on LGBTI+ rights have maximum impact within the communities they aim to serve.**

A little under a year since the publication of *Leading the Way*, the daily challenges faced by many LGBTI+ people worldwide have increased due to COVID-19 and ongoing discrimination, for example in Chechnya where LGBTI+ activists report being the subject of discrimination, imprisonment, and even beatings and state sponsored torture. At a time of crisis for LGBTI+ people, this report reiterates the call for the creation of a new funding mechanism by the UK Government. This would position the UK as a consistent, strategic funder and supporter of LGBTI+ communities around the world.

Crucially, this is a unique opportunity to connect diplomacy and development for the UK, linking the Safe To Be Me Fund to the soft power and broad strategy of the newly formed Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

## THE SAFE TO BE ME FUND

History tells us that change for LGBTI+ people happens from within their country. Whether it is decriminalising same-sex relations, ensuring access to health care or giving people the tools to make progress in their lives, a strong civil society is needed to build alliances and push for change. The Safe To Be Me Fund will enable this to happen.

The new fund will enable local civil society to get the support it needs to push back against a growing tide of anti-LGBTI+ legislation and sentiment, as seen for example in Hungary where LGBTI+ content is banned in schools and on kids TV,<sup>2</sup> in Indonesia where public lashings are given for being gay,<sup>3</sup> in Ghana or Uganda where LGBTI+ organisations are regularly raided by the police,<sup>4</sup> and so many other countries where basic liberties are under attack.<sup>5</sup> It will support local actors to challenge these discriminatory laws and practices, to fight against homophobia and transphobia, to change harmful social norms and to defend and promote the human rights of LGBTI+ people.

<sup>1</sup> *Leading the Way: The role of global Britain in safeguarding the rights of the global LGBTI+ community*, The Baring Foundation, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/15/hungary-passes-law-banning-lgbt-content-in-schools](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/15/hungary-passes-law-banning-lgbt-content-in-schools).

<sup>3</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/28/77-lashes-gay-couple-indonesia](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/28/77-lashes-gay-couple-indonesia).

<sup>4</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-56325310](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-56325310).

<sup>5</sup> [www.forbes.com/sites/jamiewareham/2020/11/11/350-transgender-people-have-been-murdered-in-2020-transgender-day-of-remembrance-list/?sh=164f8c7765a6](https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiewareham/2020/11/11/350-transgender-people-have-been-murdered-in-2020-transgender-day-of-remembrance-list/?sh=164f8c7765a6).

## KEY PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE NEW FUND:

---

### 01

#### **Accountability**

Create the fund in a transparent and accountable way, with adequate consultation.

---

### 02

#### **'Nothing about us without us'**

Manage the fund using participatory grant making and co-creation as key pillars, putting the 'nothing about us without us' principle at the heart of the new fund.

---

### 03

#### **Dependability & flexibility**

Provide long term, multi-year, flexible funding to achieve lasting social change.

---

### 04

#### **Grassroot support & relevance**

Support local, grassroots LGBTI+ rights civil society organisations, building their capacities and skills and enabling local people to make change that is relevant to their specific contexts.

---

### 05

#### **Collaboration & local reach**

Utilise intermediary organisations to ensure funds and capacity support reach grassroots LGBTI+ organisations who are often not able to register as legal entities, prioritising LGBTI+ led intermediaries from the Global South and East.

---

### 06

#### **Evidence & impact**

Ensure evidence is generated and impact is measured, in order to build long term, appropriate and effective support for social change.

---

# Outline recommendations

---

The 2020 report, *Leading the Way*, produced by the members of the UK Alliance for Global Equality with support from the Baring Foundation, made clear the case for increased UK investment in global LGBTI+ rights. During the past year things have got worse for LGBTI+ communities around the world.

## INTRODUCTION

We re-iterate all of the findings and recommendations of last year's report and in this 2021 follow-up briefing, we:

- provide an update on the increasingly urgent case for greater UK support for Global LGBTI+ rights;
- provide new evidence of the urgent need for this support; and
- outline the steps which the UK Government can take to demonstrate international leadership in safeguarding and promoting LGBTI+ rights.

Outlined in this briefing are concrete recommendations on how this support should be given, utilising the range of Global Britain's financial, political and diplomatic assets. We also make the case that now is the right time for this new investment in global LGBTI+ human rights as the moral case for action could not be stronger and the price of inaction is rising daily.

*“History has shown us that in times of crisis those most marginalised tend to suffer disproportionately.”*<sup>6</sup>

Through the Global Britain Strategy, the UK commits to being a strong force for good in the world as the Prime Minister reiterated at the recent 2021 G7 Meeting.

In its role as co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC), the UK is already showing global leadership in championing Global LGBTI+ rights. The objectives of the ERC's new five-year strategy are to:

- Eliminate violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).
- End criminalisation of LGBTI+ people.
- Advance implementation and monitoring of SDGs for LGBTI inclusion.
- Enlarge and building the capacity of the ERC.<sup>7</sup>

The new Safe to Be Me Fund will demonstrate the UK's leadership role in the achievement of these ambitions.

UK funded programmes, delivered in partnership with the LGBTI+ movement, have delivered successful outcomes that provide immediate safety and protection to LGBTI+ individuals under threat, improve institutional protection against discrimination and increase the participation of minority groups in political and public life. Examples include Human Dignity Trust's support for measures to decriminalise LGBT people in nine countries, and the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy which supported greater representation of LGBTI+ people in democratic processes in 18 Commonwealth countries. Both organisations worked closely with local civil society to achieve these successes.

<sup>6</sup> *Vulnerability amplified: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBTIQ people*, OutRight International, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> *Equal Rights Coalition Strategic Plan 2021-2026*.

## SAFE TO BE ME: GLOBAL LGBTI+ CONFERENCE, LONDON 2022

In 2021 the UK announced its first global LGBTI+ conference to be held in June 2022, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the first official London Pride marches. This conference will be the largest of its kind and will focus on making progress on legislative reform, tackling violence and discrimination, and ensuring equal access to public services for LGBTI+ people. Hosting the conference represents a golden opportunity to promote the UK's leadership on LGBTI+ rights, and is a stage for Global Britain to champion the best of British values.

## CURRENT FUNDING FOR LGBTI+ RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT BY THE UK GOVERNMENT

As outlined in *Leading the Way*, just 0.04% of all international aid is allocated to LGBTI+ causes.<sup>8</sup> This chronic underfunding has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen many governments, including the UK, postpone or cancel funds for LGBTI+ civil society at a time when their communities need them most.

The UK currently spends just 0.08% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) on LGBTI+ issues worldwide. Given the UK commitment to inclusion we are punching far below our weight on promoting LGBTI+ rights internationally.

## WHAT IS THE NEED FOR THE SAFE TO BE ME FUND?

*Leading the Way* made the case for action. LGBTI+ people suffer daily discrimination, violence and stigma. This is expressed in economic exclusion, social and political marginalisation, and results in a range of negative consequences including threats to freedom, health and ultimately life.

## Strengthening local civil society to influence and hold their governments to account

With support from the Robert Carr Fund, ARASA and the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) successfully mobilised and strengthened the capacity of leaders and activists of eleven organisations, including networks of key populations and people living with HIV in Botswana, Malawi and Tanzania to influence national funding platforms and processes. As a result of the project, country partners secured better representation for key populations on national decision-making bodies. This meant key population leaders were in a better position to secure improved allocations of national budgets for the communities they represent.

The pandemic has exacerbated LGBTI+ exclusion while generating new vulnerabilities specific to LGBTI+ populations.<sup>9,10</sup> There is growing evidence that LGBTI+ people have suffered disproportionately due to State responses and emergency powers being used to further existing discrimination, scapegoating, and an increased risk of violence, decreased physical and mental health, reduced employment opportunities and negative economic prospects.<sup>11</sup>

The 2021 Rainbow Europe Map reveals there has been widespread and almost complete stagnation on human rights for LGBTI+ people across Europe over the last 12 months.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Leading the Way*, the Baring Foundation, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SexualOrientationGender/Pages/COVID19Report.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SexualOrientationGender/Pages/COVID19Report.aspx).

<sup>10</sup> *Impacts of COVID-19 on women and LGBT+ people across Commonwealth and neighbouring countries of relevance to the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund*, Clugston and Spearing, July 2020.

<sup>11</sup> *Trans-legal mapping report*, ILGA World, September 2020; *The impact of Covid on advocacy in Africa*, Advocacy Accelerator, 2020; *Navigating civic space in a time of Covid: Synthesis report*, Institute of Development Studies, May 2021.

<sup>12</sup> [www.rainbow-europe.org](http://www.rainbow-europe.org), ILGA-Europe, 2021.

## WHY LOCAL FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIP IS NEEDED

There is a growing body of evidence<sup>13</sup> demonstrating the impact of community-led responses and outlining the importance of supporting and partnering with local organisations as the most effective and efficient way to achieve lasting social change. Effective, appropriate and sustainable long-term social change, and legitimate advocacy comes from local actors not international NGOs or ‘experts’.

*“Community-led responses are actions and strategies that seek to improve the health and human rights of their constituencies, that are specifically informed and implemented by and for communities themselves and the organisations, groups, and networks that represent them.”<sup>14</sup>*

While a growing global civil society sector has organised itself in response to increasing discrimination, just 0.04% of all international aid is allocated to LGBTI+ causes.<sup>15</sup> Within this, local grassroots LGBTI+ organisations receive an even smaller fraction. Furthermore, there is a need to prioritise funding for Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer (LBQ) women, intersex people and trans people as they receive a disproportionately low share of the funding.

National and regional LGBTI+ organisations have grown stronger in the past decade: there is now far greater capacity in the sector for LGBTI+ organisations to act as intermediaries and provide financial, technical and capacity support to small local organisations. It is through supporting these small, grassroots, activist organisations on the ground that change happens.

### Local civil society organisation supporting LGBTI+ people

Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) is a local CSO in Uganda which has for many years provided safe spaces and other support for LGBTI+ people, and has constantly worked closely with foreign Embassies to protect the lives and liberties of the local LGBTI+ community.

### Existing capacity of LGBTI+ intermediary organisations: UHAI EASHRI

East African grant-maker UHAI-EASHRI is an indigenous civil society organisation working with and for lesbian, bisexual and queer women and trans and gender diverse communities in East Africa. They have strong onward granting capacity and support civil society organisations through flexible funding and participatory grant-making models, which in turn leads to stronger and more effective local organisations.

*“As an indigenous fund in which grants are awarded through participatory grant-making, UHAI EASHRI explains, We do not simply support the field of Eastern Africa’s sexual and gender minorities and sex worker human rights—we are the field. Our staff, Board and peer grants committee are drawn from the movements we support, and so the expertise and knowledge of our movements shapes and drives our contributions. In our grant-making, capacity support, research and convening, we create opportunities for grantee partners to collaborate and form strong, lasting alliances.”* (UHAI-EASHRI).

<sup>13</sup> *Focus on human rights*, Global Fund, 2019; *Invest in advocacy: community participation in accountability is key to ending the AIDS epidemic*, UNAIDS, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> *Expanding needs, diminishing means: mapping of trends in funding for social enablers in Southern and East Africa*, Stacey, M., Hikuam, F., Chingore-Munazvo, N., Ofield-Kerr, A. & Armstrong, R., AIDS and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA), 2020.

<sup>15</sup> *Leading the Way*, the Baring Foundation, 2020.

## THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR THE UK GOVERNMENT TO PREPARE TO ANNOUNCE THE SAFE TO BE ME FUND

We call for the UK Government to meet the target set in *Leading the Way*, which asked for 0.3% of ODA to be allocated for global LGBTI+ issues. This level of investment over the 2022-27 period would firmly place the UK in a global leadership position on global LGBTI+ rights. The Safe To Be Me Fund is a practical solution to make investments at scale and ensure that a commitment from the UK Government would reach local LGBTI+ communities to create positive change.

Long term, reliable and flexible funding is essential to support the development of stable organisations capable of undertaking effective, sustained advocacy to protect and promote LGBTI+ rights at an individual, community, national and international level. In order to be truly effective, LGBTI+ organisations need low threshold access to financial, policy and technical support. This is particularly the case in relation to programmes to shift social norms, policies, structures and practices which are complex and can take many years to progress.<sup>16</sup>

## FOUNDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE SAFE TO BE ME FUND

LGBTI+ organisations are saying loud and clear that what is needed is a mechanism which both understands that structural change (building networks, shifting social norms, reducing stigma and discrimination, effecting policy change) requires long term investment, and understands that marginalised and criminalised LGBTI+ people face frequent threats and crises, which require nimble rapid response mechanisms.

The Safe To Be Me Fund should include the following elements:

- Long term, multi-layered, multi-country, regional and national level grants and strategic partnerships.
- Financial and political support for national LGBTI+ organisations via UK Embassies.
- Collaboration between UK overseas missions, civil society, foundations and the private sector.
- Rapid response funding for when crises emerge.
- Support to grassroots organisations, even those who are denied legal recognition in their own country.
- Established and managed through partnership and co-creation.

When creating the new funding mechanism, there are existing mechanisms in other sectors to learn from. These include:

- The multi-donor Robert Carr Fund, which has a strong focus on supporting the capacity development of key population networks to ensure HIV services reach the most marginalized by providing core funding to civil society networks.
- The FCDO's Disability Inclusion Capacity Building programme which shares some of the key principles of co-creation and participatory grant making, access to technical support, as well as long term, flexible funding.
- Canada's investment to advance human rights and improve socio-economic outcomes for LGBTQ2<sup>17</sup> people in developing countries. The investment has three streams: support for Canadian LGBTQ2 and intersex organizations in their efforts to collaborate with partners in developing countries; support for local and regional organizations and equality movements in developing countries; and support for partnerships and multilateral initiatives that contribute to policy, advocacy and research efforts in this area.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Expanding needs, diminishing means: mapping of trends in funding for social enablers in Southern and East Africa*, Stacey, M., Hikuam, F., Chingore-Munazvo, N., Ofield-Kerr, A. & Armstrong, R., AIDS and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA), 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Canada announces new funds in support of LGBTQ2 rights, Global Affairs Canada, 2019. [www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2019/02/canada-announces-new-funds-in-support-of-lgbtq2-rights.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2019/02/canada-announces-new-funds-in-support-of-lgbtq2-rights.html).

## GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE OF THE NEW FUND

The FCDO merger is an important opportunity to extend global reach and influence on LGBTI+ rights, beyond ODA priority and Commonwealth countries, enabling the FCDO to adopt a needs-based approach to supporting LGBTI+ people globally.

## COMBINING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, DIPLOMATIC REACH AND EFFECTIVE FUNDING

Political leadership has significant impact. Promoting LGBTI+ rights should be outlined as a priority theme in the FCDO's new departmental strategy. This will ensure all diplomatic missions will give this issue their attention and will provide the support that is needed in their particular context.

The FCDO must increase its own internal technical capacity to provide leadership in the field of LGBTI+ rights. This can be achieved through the establishment of a technical advisory group in partnership with UK civil society, utilising the UKAGE network as well as the interest and commitment of the foundation/philanthropy and the private sector who can serve as a resource for FCDO to utilize to increase the internal capacity within the department.

The FCDO should actively explore new partnerships with civil society, the private sector and other donors – both governments and private philanthropy – in order to leverage the UK's influence and leadership position and as a way to achieve even greater impact.

This report is supplemented by a Technical Analysis informed by in depth interviews with LGBTI+ civil society organisations from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and by a review of funding mechanisms which represent best practice. This technical analysis provides greater detail of what LGBTI+ organisations consider good practice from donors and intermediaries, as well as detailed recommendations for the creation of a new fund.

### Global support to local civil society organisations: Frontline AIDS Rapid Response Fund

Established with funding from PEPFAR and the Elton John AIDS Foundation, this fund provides micro-grants to LGBTI+ organisations, sex workers, people living with HIV and people who use drugs, in response to emergency situations in 50+ countries in Africa and the Caribbean. This fund is able to disburse small grants of up to \$7,000 for LGBTI+ people facing imminent danger. The fund is moving to a localised model whereby grants are disbursed more quickly and efficiently to where they are needed most, to community-based organisations firmly embedded within the marginalised communities they serve, to respond to emergency and challenging human rights violations.

## HOW DOES THIS FIT WITH FCDO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES?

### Global Britain is and must remain a moral force for good in the world and a force for global justice and co-operation.

The UK, through DFID and the FCO, and now the new FCDO, has long led the global fight against poverty, climate change and gender inequality. The integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy, *Britain in a Competitive Age*, describes the government's vision for the UK's role in the world over the next decade. The review makes clear Global Britain's ambition to be a Force for Good: supporting open societies, defending human rights and promoting gender equality.

In order to live up to these ambitions, action is needed now to ensure that our deeds live up to our words.

### A moral and financial case for action

Trade commissioners now also come under the authority of UK Ambassadors, creating an opportunity to capitalise on the economic dividend which free societies create. Evidence from the World Bank, Open for Business and others is clear and unequivocal – *an open society is not only good for human rights, it is good for business.*

Open for Business looked at the impact of LGBTI+ discrimination in four countries in Eastern Europe and concluded that anti-LGBTI+ activity comes at a cost and estimates that diminished public health outcomes and lost productivity in the LGBTI+ community cost the four countries more than USD 8.6 billion per year. On the other hand, a 10% increase in LGBTI+ rights in these countries is associated with a USD 3,700 per capita GDP increase.<sup>19</sup> Open for Business' report on the economic case for LGBTI+ inclusion in the Caribbean provides further compelling evidence for the business and wider economic case.<sup>20</sup>

### A new department: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

The UK possesses the third largest aid budget and diplomatic network in the world. And yet the UK's global efforts to promote LGBTI+ rights and equality lag behind our potential influence.

The creation of the new Safe To Be Me Fund will serve as a pathfinder – an example of what can be achieved when the UK Government utilises the significant reach and influence of its foreign missions along with its leadership in international development.

By aligning the UK's support to grassroots civil society organisations with its diplomatic and political influence, we will achieve meaningful and lasting change

Change like this takes time and skill to work closely with local civil society, aligned with political and diplomatic efforts. Reversing the damaging legacy of empire era legislation pervasive in many Commonwealth countries is vitally important and can create a new positive legacy for 21st century Global Britain.

By aligning political and development efforts, the result will be more than the sum of the parts and the un-coordinated, splintered approach of the past can be replaced with a deliberate, targeted and highly effective push for increased global equality, meaning a reduction in violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

<sup>19</sup> *The economic case for LGBTI+ inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Hungary, Poland, Romania and Ukraine*, Open for Business, July 2021.

<sup>20</sup> *The economic case for LGBTI+ inclusion in the Caribbean*, Open for Business, July 2021.

## PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

We believe that the Safe To Be Me Fund offers a practical solution for the UK Government to invest in LGBTI+ rights and hope it will work

to develop this approach for announcement at the Safe To Be Me conference in June 2022. Civil society is keen to support that work and recommends the Government:

---

### 01

Earmarks funding in the next comprehensive spending review for a fund that can be launched and scaled up.

---

### 04

Considers how LGBTI+ rights can be included as a priority theme in future FCDO and directorate strategies.

---

### 02

Assesses the best practice and lessons to be learnt from existing funds that support the rights of those being left behind.

---

### 05

Continues to include LGBTI+ rights in the FCDO's approach to inclusive development and mainstreaming in broad programmes.

---

### 03

Works in partnership with civil society, foundations and the private sector to contribute to the co-creation of the new fund.

---

The Baring Foundation

8-10 Moorgate

London EC2R 6DA

[www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)

Twitter: @baring\_found

July 2021