



**Submission for the Call for Inputs: Raising their voices: Human rights defenders  
respond to the human rights crisis by the Special Rapporteur on human rights  
defenders**

Submitted by **Global Action for Trans Equality**

**29 September 2025**

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Founded in 2009, [Global Action for Trans Equality](#) (GATE) is an international advocacy and expert organization focused on gender identity and expression. GATE works towards justice and equality for trans and gender diverse communities at the global level. Rooted in our movements, we collaborate with international, regional and national strategic partners to ensure access to resources, knowledge, and decision-making spaces.

**Introduction**

Over the years, the anti-gender movements have had a rising influence across different regions, spreading misinformation and seeking to roll back fundamental rights. Trans and gender diverse human rights defenders have been a primary target and have faced an unprecedented convergence of challenges.

This submission documents how coordinated anti-gender movements have successfully restricted civic space by spreading misinformation and enabling discrimination and violence. This has evolved from disparate national movements into influences on UN spaces and funding landscapes. This systematic attack on trans and gender diverse human rights defenders undermines not only trans and gender diverse rights but also the universality and indivisibility of human rights principles.

## The Anti-Gender Movement's Attacks on Trans and Gender Diverse Human Rights Defenders

The primary threat confronting trans and gender diverse human rights defenders emerges from coordinated anti-gender movements that have transformed from disparate national actors into a well-funded network deploying sophisticated strategies across multiple fronts (GATE, 2023, p. 19).

Our 2023 global research to uncover this opposition was conducted through surveys in English, Spanish, and Russian from July to November. The survey itself became a target. Of the 500 initial responses, 400 had to be discarded as anti-gender actors flooded them with transphobic rhetoric (GATE, 2023, pp. 11-15). This disruption of research demonstrates the movement's determination to silence the work of trans-led organizations.

Across all seven regions studied, the study showed that anti-gender actors exploit similar universal discourse topics such as family values, sex education, abortion, children's protection, and Western ideals (GATE, 2023, pp. 16-17). These narratives generate public fear and outrage, enabling rapid mobilization. While predominantly right-wing, these movements increasingly include actors with mixed political ideologies.

Social media has served as the primary platform for coordinating attacks and spreading disinformation (GATE, 2023, pp. 16-22). Even when platforms receive reports of violent threats and false information, our trans and gender diverse respondents report that the social media platform providers rarely take action to remove content or sanction accounts.

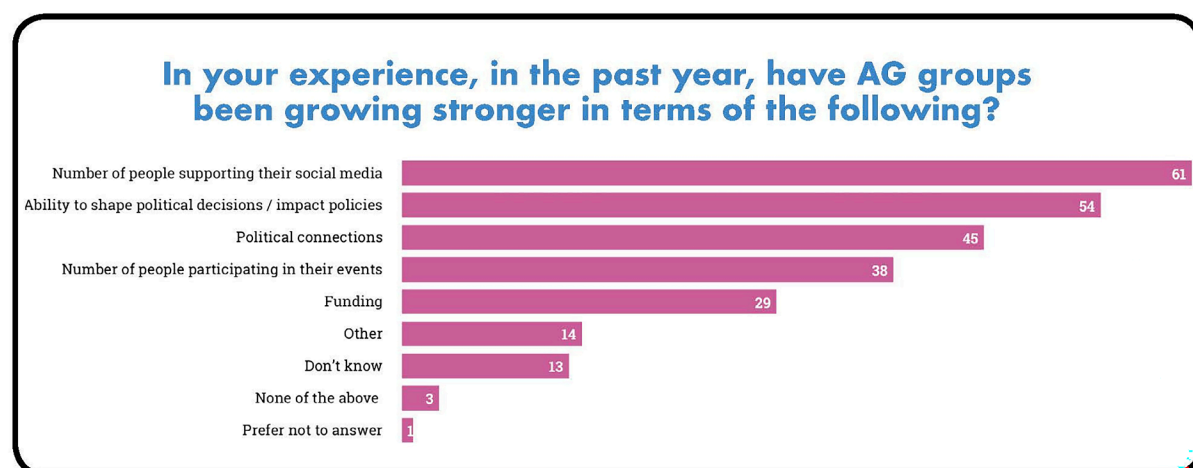


Figure 1: Growth of anti-gender groups' influence in the past year (GATE, 2023, p. 19)

As Figure 1 shows, anti-gender movements are gaining strength and influence over social and political processes, especially in the area of social support and manipulation. Additionally, the respondents identified the lack of political will, inadequate legislation, and failure to hold perpetrators accountable as the most common and biggest challenges for countering anti-gender opposition.

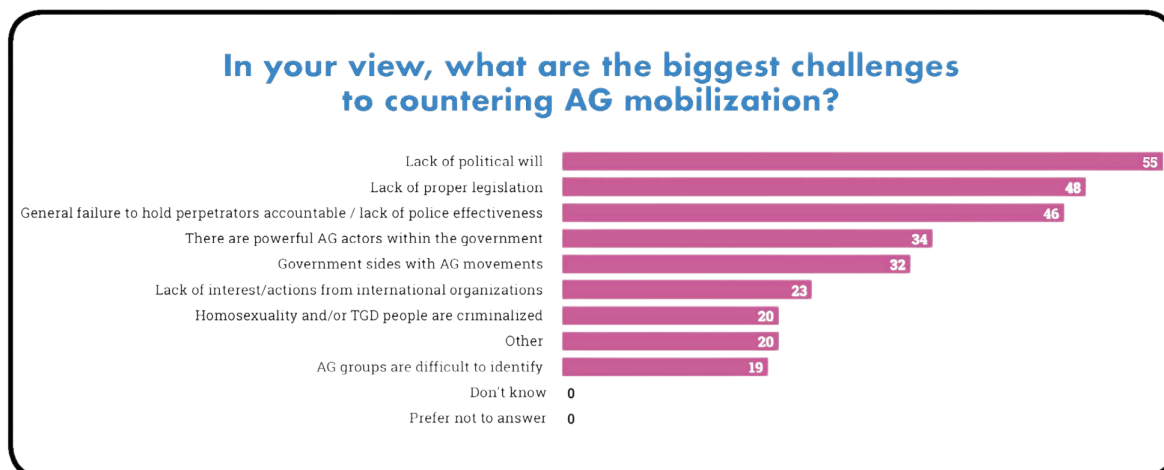


Figure 2: Biggest challenges to countering anti-gender opposition (GATE, 2023, p. 18)

Given the challenges, anti-gender actors have successfully influenced policy implementations affecting trans and gender diverse communities. In Africa, some anti-gender groups have political affiliations, with members often holding government and parliamentary positions. These groups promote specific misinformation in their public communications, focusing on sex education, sex work, family values, and Western ideals to garner support for their agenda, strengthening the anti-gender movement and expanding its support base (GATE, 2023, pp. 24-25). A notable case is Uganda, where homosexuality and trans and gender diverse identities are criminalized. Trans and gender diverse organizations often face criminal accusations of ‘promoting homosexuality,’ resulting in office closures, staff relocations, and permanent shutdowns of operations. However, police frequently refuse to investigate incidents of attack or harassment due to a lack of political will (GATE, 2023, pp. 37-40).

Similarly, in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the expansion of Russian-style ‘LGBTQI propaganda’ and ‘Foreign Agent’ legislation represents state-sanctioned anti-gender mobilization across the region. In several countries in the region (Armenia, Georgia), physical attacks on organizations were also reported; however, they were ultimately closed without holding perpetrators accountable. This constitutes patterns of State-enabled violence (GATE, 2023, pp. 66-74).

In Asia, anti-gender actors in the region focus on abortion, marriage, Western ideals, incorrect upbringing, and family-centered population policy. Anti-gender actors spread false news, targeting ethnic and religious minorities and the LGBTQI community, and influenced policies related to trans and gender diverse individuals. This results in psycho-emotional stress and burnout for trans and gender diverse activists (GATE, 2023, pp. 40-50).

In Latin America, trans and gender diverse and LGBTQI activists and their organizations receive verbal abuse, which is frequently coordinated between various anti-gender actors (GATE, 2023, pp. 135-141). Organizations report being forced to cease operations and needing to cancel events (GATE, 2023, pp. 152-153).

In Europe and North America, some anti-gender groups are directly represented in government and elected bodies. Most are categorized as mixed on the political ideology spectrum, though a significant number lean right-wing, with a small minority identifying as left-wing, and more recently, groups claiming to be feminist have joined forces with anti-gender actors such as the Texas GOP, coordinating with trans-exclusionary radical feminist groups and collaborating with fundamentalist Christian organizations (GATE, 2023, pp. 101–107). Although the majority of their funding details remain hidden, respondents believe anti-gender groups are well-funded (GATE, 2023, pp. 131–134). These actors use social media, public events, and political lobbying to shape decisions and policies. Their approach focuses not only on trans and gender diverse issues but also on spreading racism, xenophobia, and broader attacks on so-called ‘woke culture.’ (GATE, 2023, pp. 157-165).

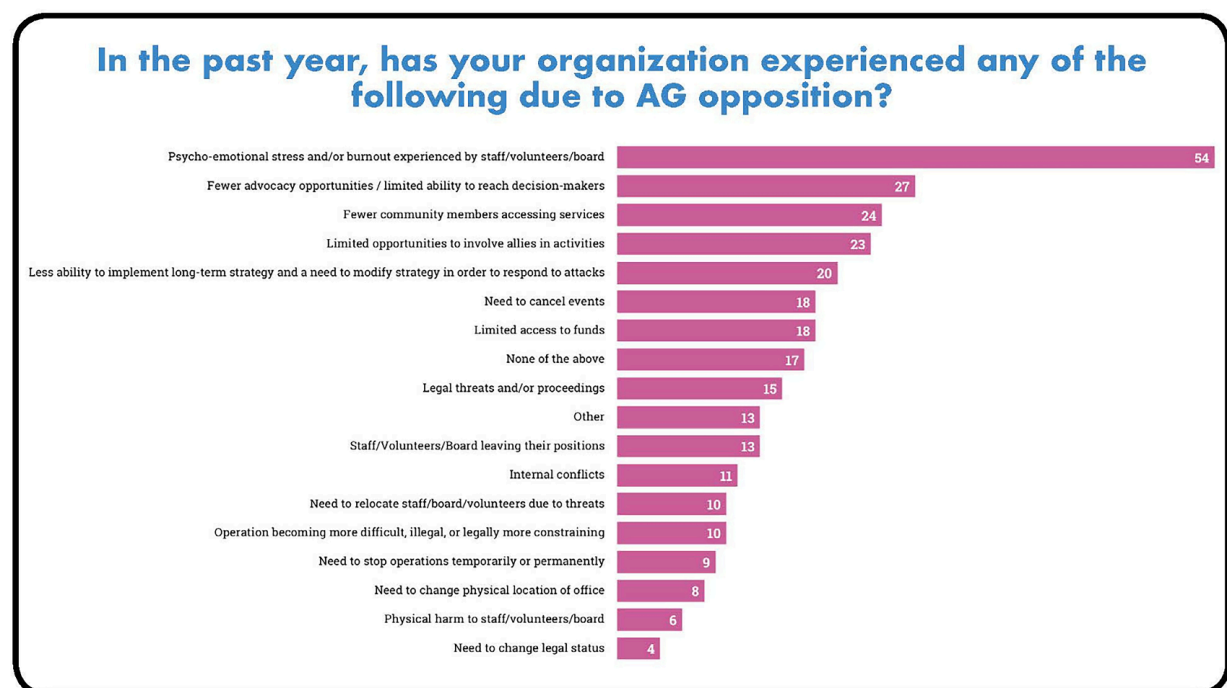


Figure 3: Organizational impacts experienced due to anti-gender opposition in the past year (GATE, 2023, p. 18)

As Figure 3 shows, the impact of anti-gender opposition on trans and gender diverse human rights defenders is manifold. Given hostile environments, the majority of organizations reported experiencing psycho-emotional stress and burnout among staff, volunteers, and board members, making this the single most widespread impact of anti-gender opposition. This resulted in significant challenges that compelled human rights defenders to leave the movement, thus weakening the organizations’ capacity.

Furthermore, many groups noted a reduction in advocacy opportunities and a limited ability to reach decision-makers. The respondents also commonly mentioned fewer community

members accessing services. Anti-gender actors hinder advocacy by obstructing access to decision-making spaces and shrinking funding landscapes. As a result, organizations lose their operational capacity. The pause and closure of essential services led by trans and gender diverse organizations leave vulnerable communities without access to crucial resources such as HIV prevention, legal aid, emergency shelter, and psychosocial support. These services can mean the difference between survival and death for trans and gender diverse individuals, particularly those who are facing family rejection and State persecution.

Other commonly reported consequences included the cancellation of events, limited access to funds, and the emergence of legal threats and proceedings. Together, these findings illustrate that anti-gender opposition affects organizations across multiple dimensions to create a vicious cycle, and this pattern represents a deliberate strategy led by anti-gender actors to entirely dismantle the capacity and survival of trans and gender diverse human rights defenders (GATE, 2023, pp. 16-18).

### **Anti-Gender Opposition at the United Nations Level**

Anti-gender actors have expanded from influencing national governments, discriminatory policies, State-enabled violence, and spreading misinformation through media into coordinated transnational campaigns that now impact UN spaces, posing systematic attacks that threaten not only trans and gender diverse rights but also undermine the architecture of human rights and its institutions.

The most significant manifestation involves the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls systematically using the UN's official platforms to attack civil society organizations defending trans and gender diverse rights (AWID, 2023). The Special Rapporteur's repeated focus on sex-based, female-only spaces, amplification of detransitioner narratives, and framing of trans rights as conflicting with women's rights is of significant concern (AWID, 2023). Through her official role and published reports, the current mandate holder directly echoes anti-gender movement rhetoric, which attempts to exclude trans and gender diverse HRDs from the UN mechanisms and undermine the hard-won achievements of feminist and LGBTQI human rights defenders.

For example, on 4 January 2024, the Special Rapporteur published a letter to the World Health Organization, disseminated through OHCHR's mandate page (Alsalem, 2024), Twitter, and LinkedIn, explicitly attempting to invalidate and undermine the development process of gender-affirming care guidelines by WHO by questioning the objectiveness of the working group, including GATE's research capacity, methodological rigor, and professional legitimacy. Her letter to the WHO was picked up by tabloid and right-wing media in the UK and US, in which they directly smeared GATE as an organization and personally targeted GATE's Executive Director, Erika Castellanos.

When the Special Rapporteur's communications, reports, and media presence are weaponized against civil society, they provide authoritarian governments and anti-gender movements with UN-legitimized justification for the erasure of trans and gender diverse human rights

defenders from multilateralism. In addition, this constitutes a new form of reprisal, where it is not the States attacking civil society for UN engagement, but the mandate holders themselves using anti-gender arguments to attack feminist concepts of gender and feminist and trans human rights defenders.

### **The Systematic Defunding of Trans and Gender Diverse Human Rights Defenders' Work**

According to GATE's 2023 (pp. 18-19) global research on the impacts of anti-gender movements, respondents from different regions highlighted that a major challenge faced by trans and gender diverse communities is limited access to funding, which severely constrains their ability to advocate for their rights. The defunding of trans and gender diverse human rights work represents a coordinated effort led by anti-gender opposition aimed at weakening trans and gender diverse movements. This strategic defunding particularly targets health and HIV services, which have historically been crucial funding streams for trans and gender diverse organizations.

The impact of this targeted defunding is starkly illustrated in the 2025 Aidsfonds report, which examines funding from 2019 to 2023 for HIV programs that serve key populations, including gay and bisexual men, other men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, sex workers, and transgender individuals, in low- and middle-income countries, revealing significant declines amidst anti-gender mobilization. In 2021, at the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS, governments recommended ending AIDS as a public health crisis by 2030. Since then, funding to meet this goal has fallen dangerously short of the estimated \$5.7 billion needed annually in low- and middle-income countries for prevention programs targeting key populations (Aidsfonds, 2025, pp. 4-9).

By 2025, UNAIDS (2023) estimates \$29.5 billion will be needed annually for HIV programs in low- and middle-income countries, with \$5.7 billion allocated for comprehensive prevention efforts for key populations. Despite this, investments are shrinking. In 2023, only \$19.8 billion was available for HIV programs in these countries, nearly \$10 billion short of the funds needed to meet 2025 targets. This is the lowest funding level since 2011 (Aidsfonds, 2025, pp. 14-15).

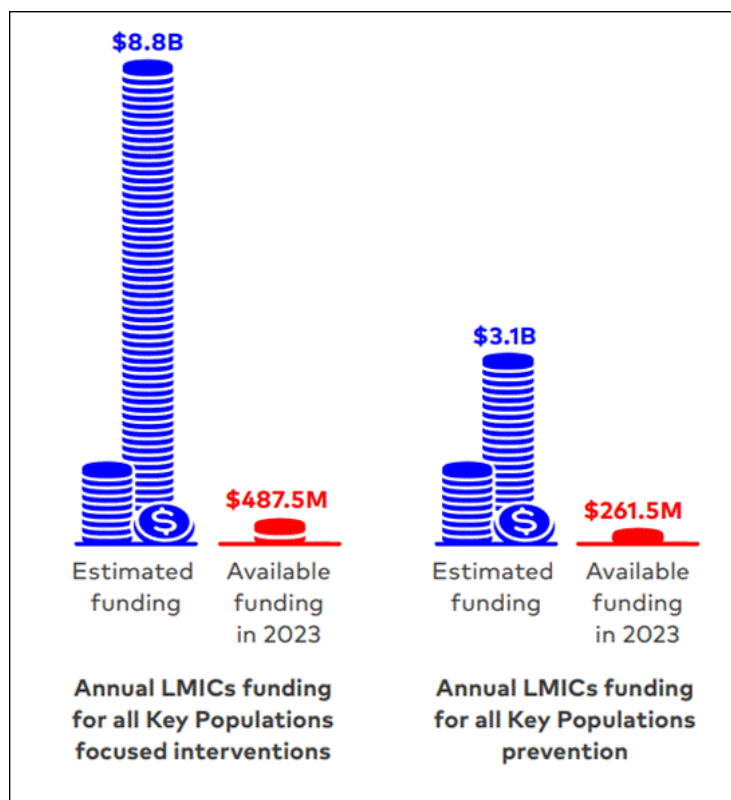


Figure 4. Estimated funding needed vs. actual funding available in 2023 (Aidsfonds, 2025, p.7)

Year	Total	Global Fund <sup>143</sup>	PEPFAR <sup>144</sup>	Domestic public sources <sup>145</sup>	Other bilateral <sup>146</sup>	Philanthropies <sup>147</sup>
2019	\$4.5M	\$2.7M	\$468,682	\$361,174	\$310,793	\$664,576
2020	\$7.2M	\$4.8M	\$808,935	\$370,273	\$193,547	\$1.1M
2021			\$717,664	\$552,034	\$177,842	\$1.8M
2022	\$31.6M	\$23.3M	\$1.2M	\$172,665	\$0	\$2.6M
2023			\$1.0M	\$23,247	\$0	Not available
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$43.3M</b>	<b>\$30.8M</b>	<b>\$4.2M</b>	<b>\$1.5M</b>	<b>\$682,183</b>	<b>\$6.2M</b>

Figure 5. Total HIV resources for transgender people in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, 2019-2023, by funder (Aidsfonds, 2025, p.35 Table 15)

Meanwhile, resources are falling behind in terms of needs. Most countries face setbacks due to high levels of stigma, discrimination, violence, and discriminatory laws and policies, with increasingly hostile environments driven by anti-gender movements, along with growing government restrictions that hinder their ability to operate freely. These increase barriers to essential HIV services for key populations and heighten their vulnerability to HIV (Aidsfonds, 2025, pp. 8-9).

This systematic defunding creates an unsustainable environment for trans and gender diverse human rights defenders and threatens the very survival of organizations providing life-saving services to vulnerable communities and their capacity to prevent further deterioration of human rights protections for their communities.

## **Conclusion**

The combination of anti-gender opposition and funding cuts has created an unprecedented threat to trans and gender diverse human rights defenders and the broader framework of human rights.

The path forward necessitates fundamental changes in how the international community supports trans and gender diverse human rights defenders. Governments must establish enforceable international standards that require social media platforms to combat disinformation and incitement, while ensuring user safety and freedom of expression. Additionally, States and UN bodies must guarantee the meaningful participation of trans and gender diverse communities in policymaking and create safeguards to prevent communications from being weaponized against civil society. Funders should provide long-term, flexible, and unrestricted support directly to trans and gender diverse-led organizations and allocate specific resources to ensure their safety and well-being.



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