



Submission to the Call for Inputs to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders to the 64th Human Rights Council

Submitted by **Global Action for Trans Equality**

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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.

Address: 580 Fifth Avenue, Suite 820, New York, NY 10036

Website: <https://gate.ngo/>

Email: info@gate.ngo

1. Introduction

Over the years, trans and gender diverse human rights defenders have worked at the intersection of multiple crises, including coordinated anti-gender opposition and the collapse of funding. This submission documents the consequences of that intersection for the mental health and psychosocial well-being of trans and gender diverse human rights defenders. It draws on two global surveys conducted by GATE in 2023 and 2026, as well as a community-led national report by a trans-led organization, Fem Alliance Uganda (FEMA).

The evidence demonstrates that psycho-emotional stress and burnout are the most widespread organizational impacts of anti-gender opposition reported by trans- and gender diverse-led organizations worldwide. This psychological harm is a deliberate strategy designed to restrict civic space by spreading misinformation, enabling discrimination and violence, and manipulating funding landscapes to exhaust the very people who sustain these movements.

2. Mental Health Impacts on Trans and Gender Diverse Defenders

Trans and gender diverse communities face severe stigma, discrimination, and socioeconomic marginalization, which directly contribute to their disproportionate vulnerability to mental health crises and diminished psychosocial well-being. Compounding this vulnerability is a dangerous convergence of international funding cuts and coordinated anti-gender movement campaigns. These attacks systematically manifest as hate speech, the introduction of criminalizing legislation, and escalating violence against trans and gender diverse human rights defenders. GATE presents this submission to address the critical data gap regarding the mental health and psychosocial well-being of these trans and gender diverse human rights defenders.

In 2023, GATE conducted global research on the impact of the anti-gender movement on trans and gender diverse movements, collecting survey responses from activists and organizations across seven regions. Among the organizational impacts examined, psycho-emotional stress and burnout experienced by staff, volunteers, and board members emerged as the most widespread, reported more frequently than limited access to funding, event cancellations, or legal threats and proceedings. This impact is significant because trans and gender diverse activists' well-being is crucial for an organization's ability to work effectively (GATE, 2023, pp. 11-18).



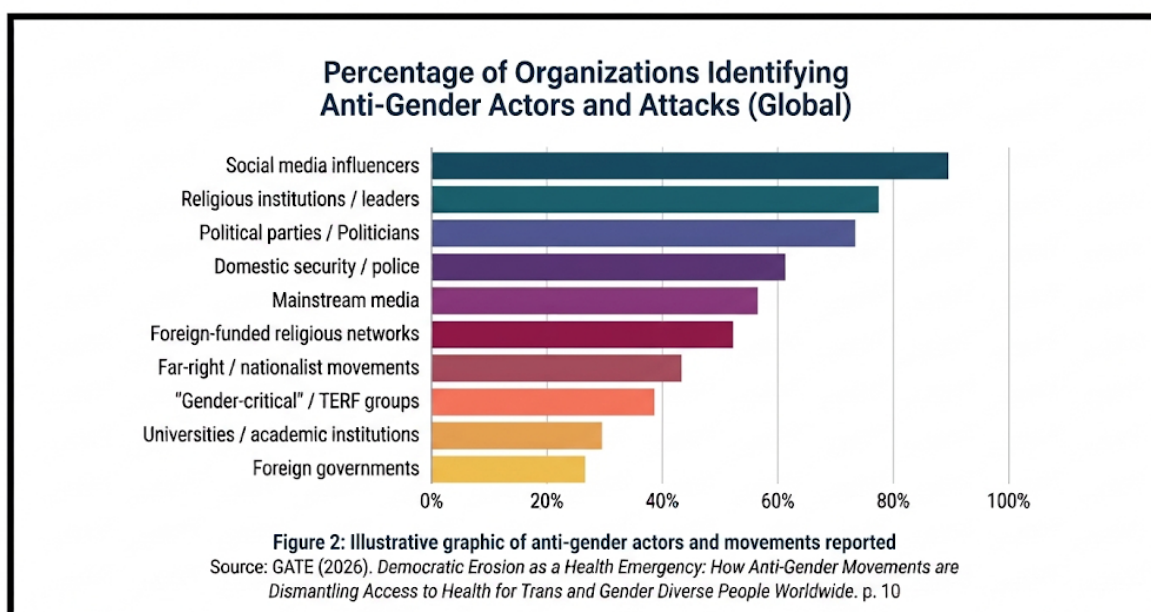
As shown in Figure 1, the overwhelming psychological and emotional stress reported among staff, volunteers, and board members leads directly to severe exhaustion. This exhaustion inevitably deteriorates the critical community services that their organizations sustain - including HIV prevention, legal aid, emergency shelter, and psychosocial support. In some cases, this cascading crisis forces human rights defenders not only to weaken organizational capacity but also to abandon the movement entirely. The subsequent pause and closure of essential services led by trans and gender diverse organizations leave vulnerable communities without access to life-saving resources. For trans and gender diverse persons facing family rejection and State persecution, the availability of these services could determine their survival and death.

Beyond service disruptions, other commonly reported consequences include restricted access to funding and legal threats and proceedings. Together, this pattern of attack by anti-gender actors represents a deliberate strategy to dismantle the survival of trans and gender diverse human rights defenders themselves and their movements (GATE, 2023, pp. 16-18).

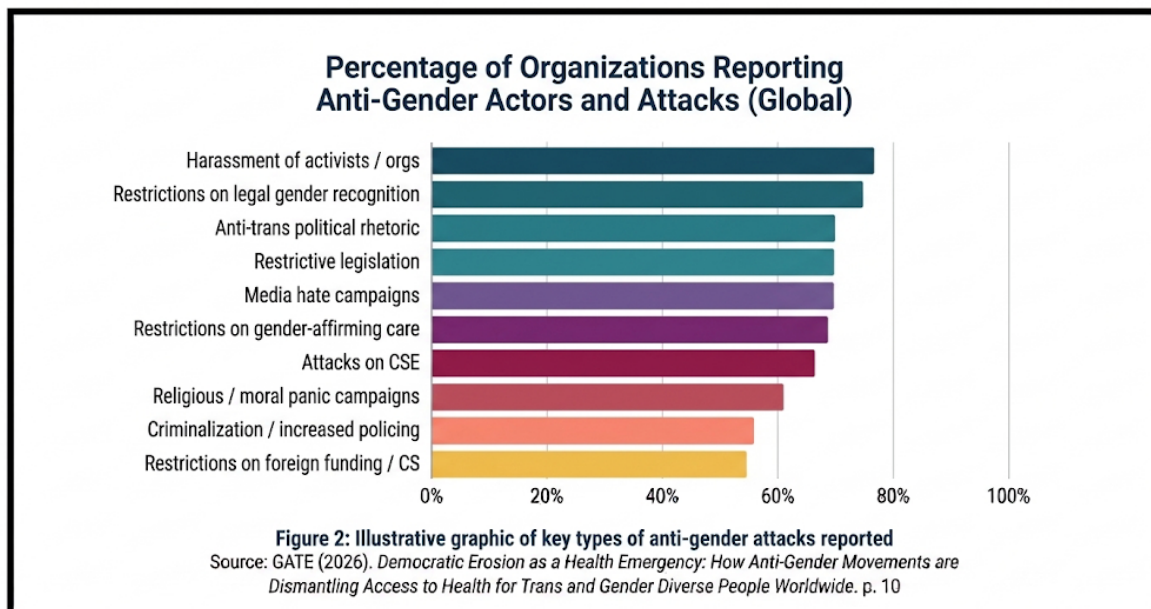
3. Structural Drivers of Harm and Barriers to Care

Data collected three years later confirms that this attack by the anti-gender movement has been rapidly intensifying. In 2026, GATE surveyed 64 trans-led member organizations across five global regions on how the anti-gender movement is dismantling access to health for trans and gender diverse people worldwide. More than half of the respondents (55%) are from trans and gender diverse organizations based in Sub-Saharan Africa, 13% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 11% from the Asia-Pacific, 6% from Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and 3% from the Global North (GATE, 2026, pp. 7).

According to the 2026 study led by GATE, 92% of respondents report that anti-gender movements have become more visible over the past three years (with 80% noting a significant increase). Participants identified that these attacks are multisectoral and increasingly digitally mediated. Social media influencers and content creators are the most visible drivers of hate speech and disinformation (84%), followed by religious institutions (73%), political actors (69%), security services (56%), and mainstream media (52%). The transnationality of these actors is also well documented, as foreign-funded religious networks appeared in 47% of responses (GATE, 2026, pp. 7-10).



This opposition deliberately undermines organizational resilience. While 89% of organizations report reduced funding opportunities and 83% report heightened security risks, 70% also face increased community demand for support. This widening gap between what communities desperately need and what exhausted organizations can provide has led 77% of respondents to report severe staff burnout (GATE, 2026, pp. 7-10).



Consequently, access to healthcare has been severely compromised. 92% of respondents report that HIV services have been affected, 72% report disruptions to mental health services, and 83% note that healthcare providers have altered their clinical practices due to anti-gender pressure. Ultimately, this hostile environment causes profound psychological trauma. Organizations report high rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal ideation among defenders and community members. Because 89% of respondents cite fear of discrimination, arrest, and retaliation as their top barrier to care, many avoid health facilities entirely. This systemic fear directly contributes to a break in the HIV cascade of care, unsafe self-medication, and deteriorating health outcomes, a reality that poses a particular threat to young trans and gender diverse individuals (GATE, 2026, pp. 7–12).

The following two cases, drawn from community-led national research supported by GATE's regranting, illustrate how these global patterns of anti-gender movement manifest at the national level and how they compound at every step, in the law, healthcare, and human rights defenders' well-being.

3.1 Case: Uganda

In Uganda, healthcare access for trans and gender diverse persons is severely restricted by an escalating anti-rights climate and anti-LGBTIQ+ bills, which have further criminalized the lives of community members. The 2025 community-led research conducted by Fem Alliance Uganda (FEMA) - supported by GATE and UNAIDS - documents the devastating downstream effects of the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the funding cuts.

First, the tightening grip of anti-gender movements has emboldened State and non-State actors, making personal safety a daily concern. Trans and gender diverse individuals in Uganda face rising rates of physical attacks, arbitrary arrests, blackmail, and mob violence. Seeking justice is rarely an option, as law enforcement is often complicit in harassment and extortion, creating a deep fear of secondary victimization. This hostility extends to online spaces - which are increasingly surveilled - and to the workplace (FEMA, 2025, pp. 27-32).

At the same time, external donors hesitate to support trans and gender diverse initiatives because of concerns about grantee safety and the legality of financial transactions, while domestic fundraising is stifled by systemic stigma. This funding crisis triggers a devastating “domino effect”, as one community leader noted, the withdrawal of major funders such as USAID has forced peer organizations and drop-in centers to close, fundamentally undermining the survival of vital community infrastructure (FEMA, 2025, pp. 25-32).

The human cost of this multi-sectoral discrimination is catastrophic. The few clinics offering trans-inclusive care are operating under severe threat, forcing many to limit services or close entirely. Driven by a justified fear of being outed or reported to authorities, many trans and gender diverse individuals avoid seeking healthcare altogether, leading to surging rates of depression, anxiety, and untreated medical conditions (FEMA, 2025, pp. 25–27).

Amidst profound adversity, trans and gender diverse individuals in Uganda continue to demonstrate extraordinary resilience. Trans and gender diverse activists take proactive steps to foster solidarity, even without external resources. As one advocate shared, *"I even started an organization for trans men. We don't have funding, but we carry a vision of helping ourselves... Despite the threats, the accusations, and the fear, I try to keep going by holding on to that vision."* (FEMA, 2025, pp. 32).

Uganda stands at a critical crossroads. GATE's 2023 global survey corroborates this picture from the perspectives of trans and gender diverse human rights defenders. Representatives from Ugandan trans-led organizations reported that the human rights situation for trans and gender diverse communities was worsening, that activists faced verbal attacks, and that some collectives closed. In contrast, others were denied registration; one respondent described the ministry responsible for registration as *"selective when it comes to registering LGBT organizations."* Attacks were coordinated among anti-gender actors, yet incidents went unreported, or, where reported, went uninvestigated—owing to a lack of proper legislation and political will. Respondents also reported suspended operations, canceled events, diminished advocacy opportunities, weakened long-term strategy, internal conflicts, and legal threats and proceedings (GATE, 2023, pp. 37–39).

The most significant organizational consequences reported were psychological and emotional stress and burnout, physical harm to staff, volunteers, and board members; forced relocation of staff and offices; and fewer community members accessing services. (GATE, 2023, pp. 37–39).

4. Recommendations

The mental health and psychosocial well-being of trans and gender diverse human rights defenders are fundamental to human rights infrastructure. When trans and gender diverse human rights defenders are sustained, movements endure, and communities are served. The following are the recommendations from our trans-led organizations and members to the key stakeholders.

To Member States:

- Repeal all criminalizing laws in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, which act as structural drivers of psychological as well as physical harm for trans and gender diverse defenders.
- Repeal all laws limiting the freedom of assembly and expression for trans and gender diverse civil society, including laws restricting access to funding related to human rights protection, Pride bans, and so-called “anti-propaganda” laws.
- Enact human rights defenders’ protection legislation and create rapid-response protection mechanisms (emergency relocation funds, safe housing, legal aid) explicitly targeting trans and gender diverse defenders facing imminent threats.
- Implement specialized training and internal accountability protocols for police and prosecutors to address hate-motivated crimes.

To Donors and Philanthropic Actors:

- Offer long-term, unrestricted funding to trans-led organizations, explicitly making defender well-being, emergency response, and community-led resilience-oriented services eligible budget lines.
- Finance physical security and psychosocial support simultaneously to address the intertwined consequences of anti-gender attacks.
- Treat mental health support as a core, rather than supplementary, component of HIV and broader healthcare initiatives to mitigate the psychological toll of hostile environments.

To Mental Health Professionals and Service Providers:

- Eliminate pathologizing practices within clinical settings and health systems, including by adopting ICD-11 guidelines and establishing trans-competent healthcare services that integrate comprehensive psychological support.
- Expand outreach through mobile clinics and telemedicine, particularly in rural areas; pass policies ensuring non-discriminatory, gender-affirming, and holistic healthcare, including HIV prevention and treatment, mental health, and reproductive health; and support ongoing research on the specific health needs of trans and gender diverse communities.
- Develop trans-competency training for all healthcare providers, co-designed directly with trans communities.
- Implement robust privacy protocols suited for criminalized contexts, recognizing that a breach of confidentiality can fatally expose a defender to prosecution or violence.

5. References

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