

# African Rainbow Family



**A World Without Prejudice**

**Submission To Women and Equalities Committee on  
Unequal Impact: Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the  
impact on people with protected characteristics.**

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## **Executive Summary**

- African Rainbow Family (ARF) is a dedicated United Kingdom (UK) Registered Charity (Reg. Number: 1185902) that provides practical supports for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTIQ) community including refugees and people seeking asylum around counselling, financial, training and relief from poverty and unemployment. Established in 2014, in response to African nations' wake of toxic and draconian anti-gay laws, persecutions and environment which seek to criminalise LGBTIQs for the preference of whom they choose to love.
- We provide inclusive LGBTIQ safe space for practical and social activities for mutual support, empowerment and solidarity for LGBTIQ people of African heritage as well as the wider BAME community. African Rainbow Family has developed a national network of over 500 members with branches in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and London respectively.
- We are a self-help group for LGBTIQ refugees and people seeking asylum in providing peer support in areas of emotional, psychological and physical needs in order to reducing isolation, low self esteem and lack of confidence. We signpost our over 500 members who are seeking asylum in the UK based on their sexuality to services such as Solicitors as we cannot give legal advice and medical professionals. We offer advice about self representation and campaign individually and collectively against immigration detention of especially of LGBTI people seeking asylum.
- We advocate for improvements in the UK asylum system and procedures for fairness to people fleeing persecution based on their sexuality or gender identity and seek for them to be treated with respect, sensitivity and dignity. Members of ARF contributed to the Investigation into the Home Office's Handling of Asylum Claims Made on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation conducted by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, John Vine CBE QPM and many more platforms.
- Our members have contributed into UK Parliament inquiries such as the APPG on Refugees and Migration's Inquiry into the Use of Immigration Detention in the UK and The role that UK parliamentarians can play in championing LGBT rights worldwide and responding when such rights are threatened with particular respect to UK Asylum Seekers. Our oral and written submissions were referenced in their individual final [reports](#) in 2016.
- African Rainbow Family is a member organisation of the UK Alliance for Global Equality (UKAGE). UKAGE is a coalition of UK-based civil society organisations consisting of Stonewall, Human Dignity Trust, Kaleidoscope Trust, UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group, International HIV/AIDS Alliance, All Out, STOPAIDS and African Rainbow Family working together to promote and support progress in global LGBT rights. We promote the human rights and equality of LGBT+ individuals and communities in countries outside the UK, to end persecution and discrimination against them.
- African Rainbow Family also works in partnership with Amnesty UK LGBTI Network to campaign and advance the rights of LGBTI refugees.
- African Rainbow Family is a Full Member (High) Organisation of The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), Geneva, Switzerland.
- This evidence is submitted on behalf of ARF and wish for ARF to be referenced in the final report. ARF intends to address Unequal Impact: Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the impact on people with protected characteristics with particular respect to LGBTIQ people seeking asylum in the UK.

## **UK Situation In Relation To Coronavirus (Covid-19)**

1. The UK government guidance on reported number of cases and deaths from Covid-19<sup>1</sup> as at the 29th April 2020 states that:

*"As of 9am on 29 April, there have been 818,539 tests, with 52,429 tests on 28 April.*

*632,794 people have been tested, of whom 165,221 have tested positive. As of 5pm on 28 April, of those who tested positive for coronavirus in the UK, 26,097 have died.*

*This new figure includes deaths in all settings not just in hospitals. The equivalent figure under the old measure would have been 22,286."*

## **LGBTIQ People Seeking Asylum and Refugees: Covid-19 Impacts**

2. LGBTIQ refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK have been disproportionately and significantly affected by this Covid-19 pandemic. Most of whom have underlying compromised health conditions and need self isolation. They live in crowded section 4 accommodation with only about £37 weekly income and are unable to buy basic goods supplies and foods due to increase in prices at their corner shops. Many others have no recourse to public fund (NRPF): do not get any financial support at all and are destitute without accommodation.
3. We know not how many people have claimed asylum based on their sexual orientation and or gender identity in the UK. An estimate of 1,200-1,800 yearly is said to be likely in 2009<sup>2</sup> as no figures were published by the Home Office. The Home Office experimental statistics published in August 2019 shows that in 2018, there were 1,502 asylum applications made that had sexual orientation as part of them<sup>3</sup>. Of this number and many undocumented numbers, are our 500 members.
4. Many of our members are members of a vulnerable group being LGBTIQ and seeking asylum with immune-compromised health conditions and at high risk of contracting Covid-19. Consequently, they have to self isolate, quarantine and stay at home.
5. Being in isolation would likely worsen our members' physical and or mental health as they do not have relatives here in the UK to help them. Some of our members that are destitute suffer from added layer of lack of safe space to isolate.
6. Some members going to shop outside their areas as there are no African or Asian shops that stock food items that meet their cultural and religious needs around where they live have no alternative but to use public transport even when this heightens their risk of contracting Covid-19 and cannot afford to take taxis to these shops. They live on approximately £37 per week for food and household needs from the Home Office.

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<sup>1</sup> Number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and risk in the UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Support Trust, 'Over Not Out: The housing and homelessness issues specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender asylum seekers' (2009) – Page 11 <http://www.metropolitan.org.uk/images/Over-Not-Out.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Experimental Statistics: Asylum claims on the basis of sexual orientation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-year-ending-june-2019/experimental-statistics-asylum-claims-on-the-basis-of-sexual-orientation>

7. Pre Covid-19, our members were able to have hot meals and food parcels in our branches to supplement their weekly subsistence from the Home Office. Now, all 500 of them have reported to us that they are starving and nearly 350 of them are contemplating the need to go out in public in search of food.
8. This if undertaken, exposes them to contracting Covid-19 and or infect others in the community. This could potentially stretch the NHS.
9. Our members felt that the Home Office did not take into consideration any negative impact that the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown could have on LGBTIQ people seeking asylum and refugees. Kemi, pseudo name of one of our members, says:

*"We are not seen as human beings. We came to seek sanctuary in this country after facing the most horrific dangers to our lives in our home countries based on our sexuality and gender identity. The Home Office gives us thirty something pounds to live on every week yet they did not think of increasing it in these difficult times when food and other essential items have increased in prices! How were they expecting us to live?"<sup>4</sup>*

10. African Rainbow Family is gravely concerned with the rise in the scale of homophobic attacks that some of our members have reported that they encounter daily in the Home Office shared accommodations that they live in. Pre Covid-19, members were able to manage these attacks by attending our monthly group meetings and different LGBTIQ specific events that we organised in-between meetings or just come to spend times away at our offices. This however, is not possible as we are working remotely in response to the government's guidelines in relation to Covid-19.
11. Self isolating, observing the government's guidelines of stay home, save life and save the NHS in those shared accommodations has been negatively impactful on our members' mental health and wellbeing given the amount of homophobia they are subjected to on a daily basis. The following was a quote from TH, one of our members:

*"I don't know how I am going to survive this! My other housemates always make homophobic comments at me whenever I pass through the communal areas. They usually say: it is because of these gay people that God is punishing the whole world and causing this unimaginable number of deaths. I wish for these gays to be struck down by lightning."<sup>5</sup> Says TH, member, African Rainbow Family.*

### **Effects of Covid-19 on our Charity**

12. As a small Charity that takes the wellbeing of its members seriously, African Rainbow Family has a responsibility to respond to the growing number of concerns raised and identified within the group.
13. We have taken many steps in supporting people's physical and mental health and ensuring that our members' health and wellbeing are maintained during this period of pandemic crisis and necessary isolation. Each of our branch Coordinators and about 25 volunteers coordinate the logistics for buying and delivering food items, basic goods, personal protective equipment (PPE) for each member on a daily basis albeit virtually, actively reaching members, respond to their needs whilst growing our network and supporting other people seeking asylum alike.

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<sup>4</sup> Kemi, member of African Rainbow Family.

<sup>5</sup> TH, member African Rainbow Family.

14. We have been able to give 80 identified most vulnerable members out of our 500 members who are really in desperate need of support right now; £30 per week feeding money to buy food and other essentials during this pandemic. We believe no one should ever die of hunger regardless of their immigration status.
15. Also we give £10 per month to all the 80 members to top up their phone credits and buy data so they can join our virtual meetings online, other online activities and call their loved ones during this pandemic.
16. We are running different sorts of virtual online activities during this Covid-19 pandemic to enable all 500 members stay positive and get supported through our online socialising meetings, online support meetings, online music nights, online movie nights, online bread making competition, online karaoke just to name a few. We believe isolation, depression and loneliness kill people from inside.
17. These activities, as members have said in feedbacks; help them to stay positive, strong and connected with other members and their loved ones.
18. We give £10 each to another set of 60 members for local transport (taxi) when going shopping in order to minimise the number of people they come in contact with. This we believe would reduce the spread of Covid-19 to or by our members.
19. As a Charity of limited means, we had to Furlough our part time staff and cannot afford to top up the Furlough above the 80% that we can claim back from HMRC's Job Retention Scheme.
20. All of these, we have been able to accomplish with the generosity of other charitable organisations that have awarded us grants. We currently have an online fundraising ongoing: [Covid-19 Pandemic relief for LGBTQIA People](#).<sup>6</sup>

## **Conclusion**

21. African Rainbow Family takes the health and safety of our members and the population at large very seriously. We encourage our members to keep safe and healthy at home. We urge the Home Office to consider increasing the amount of weekly subsistence for LGBTIQ and non LGBTIQ people seeking asylum urgently during this Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Some deaths can arise out of hunger and inadvertently counted as due to Covid-19.
22. Finally, there is need for the government to make a statement to address homophobic attacks upon LGBTIQ people seeking asylum in Home Office shared accommodations to avoid some of them becoming homeless or having suicidal ideation.

## **Recommendations**

- Radical reform of the UK asylum system especially for LGBTIQ people.
- People seeking asylum and safety in the UK based on their sexual orientation and or gender identity must be protected from homophobic abuse in shared houses. LGBTIQ only dispersal accommodations is of preferred choice.
- Increase the weekly subsistence of people seeking asylum in line with the mainstream benefit system.

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<sup>6</sup> Covid-19 Pandemic relief for LGBTQIA People: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/covid19-pandemic-relief-for-lgbtqia-people>

- Allow people seeking asylum to work whilst waiting for decisions on their asylum applications. This means no restrictions on the type of work that they can apply for in the labour market.
- Urgent condemnation of homophobic attacks on LGBTIQ people seeking asylum in asylum shared accommodations; including anywhere else.