

CHALLENGING ISSUES CHANGING LIVES

Case work Report 2020

Pliny Soocoormanee



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Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Peter Tatchell Foundation's case work report for 2020 – Challenging Issues: Changing Lives. The Peter Tatchell Foundation has remained a life line for many during the coronavirus pandemic.

This report documents our work giving advice, support and practical aid to individuals who are victims of injustices, such as discrimination and hate crime.

We are particularly proud of our success in helping to win asylum in the UK for refugees fleeing persecution by repressive regimes.

Despite our limited size and funding, the Peter Tatchell Foundation still manages to make a positive difference to the lives of many people every year. Since 2012, we have helped over 1,600 people through our case work. Special thanks to our Executive Officer, Pliny Soocoomanee, for his dedication and effort in making this happen.

All of this was only made possible with the incredible support of our amazing donors – our success starts with **your** generosity. If you feel touched by what you read in this report, please consider [making a gift](#) to help us continue this work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy N. Hooke'.

Jeremy N. Hooke Esq. DipFA MLIBF
Chairperson, Peter Tatchell Foundation

1. About us:

The Peter Tatchell Foundation (PTF) works for universal human rights, including, very importantly, LGBT+ human rights. The aims and objectives of the PTF are to increase awareness, understanding, protection and implementation of human rights, in the UK and worldwide. This involves research, education, advice, case work, publicity, lobbying and advocacy for the enforcement and furtherance of human rights law.

Through our case work, we are making a tangible, positive difference to the lives of people who have suffered discrimination, hate crime, miscarriages of justice, mental health issues and those who are seeking refugee status. One of our great strengths is our ability to respond professionally and compassionately to calls for help wherever they are from.

2. Requests for help:

The Peter Tatchell Foundation receives requests for help from all over the UK and around the world.

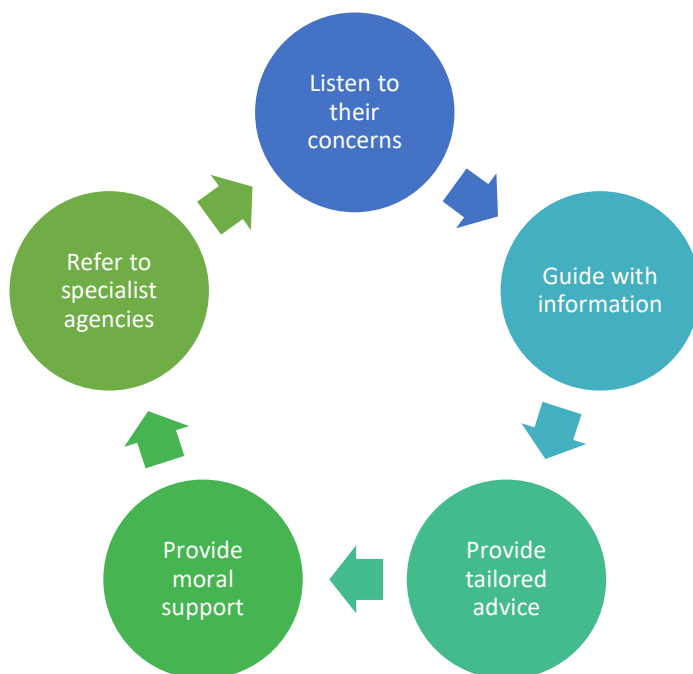


Fig 1. How We Help

Very often people contacting us are depressed, harassed and emotionally drained. The PTF is a small organisation with limited resources. Despite this, we assist people in a number of ways (see diagram left).

This case work service is provided free of charge and funded by our donors, to whom we are very grateful.

3. Key facts:

Case work 2020

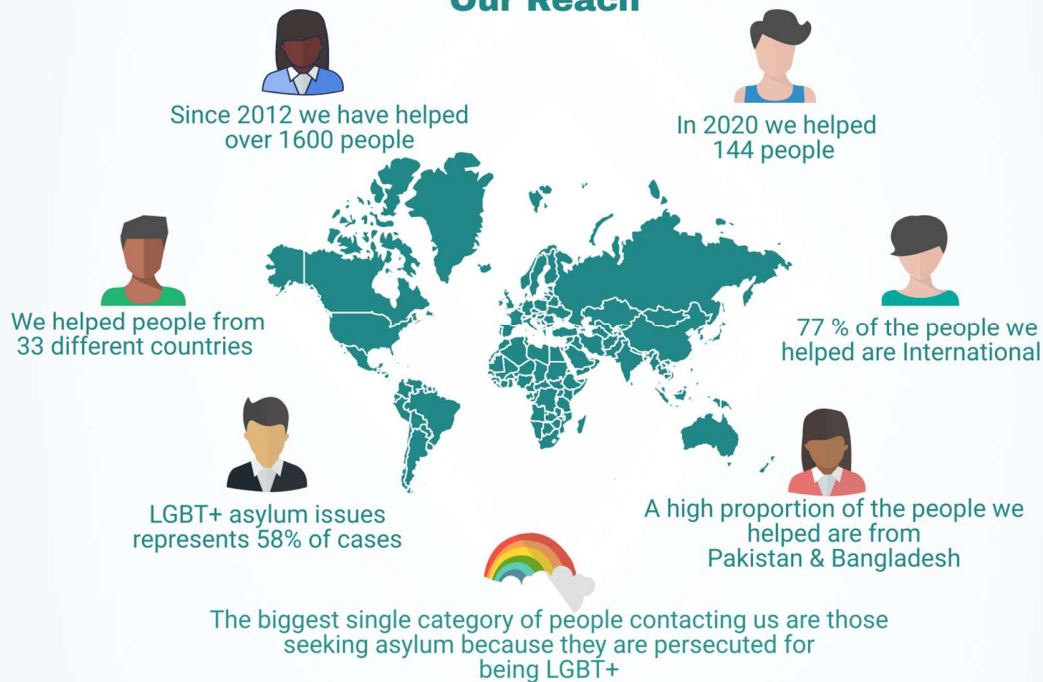


The year 2020 was marked with Covid-19. This impacted our operations. Yet, we remained a lifeline and a source of support for the voiceless.



We receive requests for help from all over the UK and around the world and despite our small size and limited resources we assist people by listening to their concerns, providing moral support & hope, guiding them with information and advice and referring them to appropriate specialist agencies

Our Reach



The Commonwealth

We helped 104 people from the Commonwealth



34 out of 54 Commonwealth countries still criminalise homosexuality

Casework over the years



The people we helped

In addition to LGBT + asylum cases. We assisted people facing a number of human rights issues such as discrimination, hate crime, harassment, police malpractice and historic gay sex convictions



The Foundation has been campaigning for compensation for those that have been discharged from the UK military for being LGBT+

4. Why do people come to us:

We are known for getting things done. Peter Tatchell is a nationally and internationally renowned human rights defender with over 54 years' experience. It is this high profile that makes the Peter Tatchell Foundation the first point of contact for help on issues such as discrimination, asylum, harassment and hate crime, particularly for LGBT people.

5. Some of the people we helped:

Khurram, Nationality: Pakistani

Pakistan is one of the countries in the Commonwealth that criminalises homosexuality. In terms of legal statutes, it has one of the harshest anti-gay laws in the world: with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. It is one of only a handful of states that stipulates such a penalty for homosexual acts. Political and religious leaders, who wield much influence, have frequently denounced LGBT+ people and especially LGB as “un-Islamic” and “immoral.”



Khurram story in his own words:

“From age 14, I knew I was attracted to men. Initially, I thought there was something wrong with me. I thought it was just a phase that will just pass.

“I did not have many friends at college, but I did meet a guy, Fahim, and we became very close friends. Over time, this friendship blossomed into love and he became my boyfriend. It felt so right to feel his touch, his body next to mine and his breath on my neck. We exchanged messages on our mobiles every day.

“Then one day my mum looked on my phone and discovered my little secret. She got very angry and we had a very heated row. She threw my phone to ground and smashed

it. I was restricted to the house for two weeks. She told me that if anyone found out about us, I would be killed. She ordered me to stop contacting my boyfriend immediately.

“How was I supposed to stop seeing him, the one person that understood me? The one person who was there for me. How could it be wrong what we were doing? So, we kept in touch at college.

“After a few months, Fahim just disappeared without reason. Then I got the shock of my life when someone at college told me he was dead. I was devastated. I sat alone in my room and cried for days. It was very tough to deal with, to get used to. I had no idea why or how he died and there was no way to find out.



“Two years later, when I was crossing a bridge, a car stopped next to me. Four men stepped out and asked if I was Khurram. One of them had a pistol aiming at me. I was shaking with fear, confused as to what was happening. I said that I was not Khurram. This was when one of them slapped me without warning. He hit me so hard that I nearly fell down. I was in such a state of shock that I uttered my name, hoping that this might calm them down.

“He then asked if I knew Fahim, my boyfriend. I did not say anything. They said that they knew everything about us. My world just came crashing down. I was at a complete loss and broke down in tears. During my confusion, one the guy put something over my face and I lost consciousness.

“When I regained my senses, my hands were tied and my eyes blindfolded. I started shouting for help and after a few minutes the blindfold was removed by a bearded man standing in the almost completely dark room. A door opened and another man came in and taped over my mouth. Then he started shouting and beating me and spitting on me. He was full of hatred and started punching and kicking me. The whole of my body was in pain.

“The bearded man then came out with the most shocking truth of all. He said that he was Fahim’s father and boasted that he had killed him. He said he knew everything. That what we had done was Haram in Islam. There would be no pity. Killing would be a good thing, a service to mankind. Then he grabbed a stick and started beating me. I begged him to stop, but he didn’t. I was completely at his mercy, but there was none. The pain was unbearable and eventually I passed out.

“When I came too again, I saw a woman approaching. I begged her for help, but she said she could not. She told me they had killed her son. It was Fahim’s mother. She started crying too. She also was in pain.

“I suppose seeing me in such pain and misery reminded her of Fahim and it changed her mind. She decided to help me; a miracle that saved my life. She untied me and led me upstairs onto the roof. She said it was the only way out and that I must jump.



“I didn’t hesitate and jumped down and ran for my life. I recognised nothing but just kept running away despite the great pain in my beaten feet and legs. I just kept running.

“As darkness fell, I looked around for a safe hiding place away from the road. I couldn’t risk my torturers finding me. There was a large refuse bin and I jumped into it and in pain and totally exhausted I soon fell asleep.

“When I woke up in the morning, I was so frightened to crawl out of my hiding place. I was truly petrified. I knew if they found me, I would be doomed. I had to get away. I had to leave the bin.

“As I ventured out, I saw a truck driver resting nearby. He was surprised and puzzled to see me crawl out and asked what had happened. I told him I’d been beaten up. Seeing

I was in a bad way he offered me a drink of water. He was going to Karachi and dropped me off on his way.

“I managed to reach a friend’s house and phoned my mother. I told her everything. She was the only person I felt I could trust. She sent me to my grandmother’s house to lay low. Nothing was to be said to my father, who is a very religious and conservative man. I stayed at my grandmother’s for a month. Still in shock and fear, I barely left the house.

“When I eventually got back home my father and my uncle asked me to marry a woman. When I objected, they flew into a rage and started beating me. My mum interrupted them saying I was too unwell and should delay getting married to a later date. After that life was hell. I was under daily pressure to marry. I could not sleep. I was trapped.

“Somehow my mother managed to convince my father to let me study abroad. It was agreed that after I’d finished my studies, I would marry a woman of their choosing.



“I came to the UK in 2018 to study at the University of Coventry. I knew life in the UK was different, yet I was stunned to see so many gay people free here. I made new friends on and off Grindr. I got a new life. It was almost like living in a different world.

“After my first semester my dad wanted me to return to Pakistan. I was still delaying this. Almost every day there were demands to return home to get married.

“At that time, I did not know about applying for asylum. By August 2019 I was confident enough in myself and in my sexuality to tell my mum that it would be dangerous to come back.

“Overhearing the conversation my dad flew into a rage again threatening to kill me if I returned. I got flashbacks of what happened to me before. He bellowed that I’d brought shame on the family. He told me to kill myself. He said I was nothing, I was not worth living. He even threatened to come to the UK and teach me a lesson.

“Overnight he cut all financial support. I was at a total loss and didn’t know what to do. I came close to killing myself. However, I met new people who accepted me for who I was and that gave me the courage to carry on. That is when I got in touch with the Peter Tatchell Foundation for advice.

“I applied for asylum in February 2020. Then Covid-19 hit us all. Like everyone else I struggled to keep going. I kept in touch with the Peter Tatchell Foundation. That human touch helped me to find my way through the stressful times and navigate my way through the asylum process.

“Today I am still waiting for my substantive interview with the Home Office. I am still very fearful that I might be sent back to Pakistan: This would mean certain death for me.

Wong*, Nationality: Chinese

Being gay in china can be full of contradiction. Whilst there are no laws criminalising homosexuality yet, LGBT+ people face a number of challenges and discrimination. Chinese society at large represses LGBTs and there can be severe professional and personal consequences.



Wong is 24-year-old gay men, he is being held in China by his parents because he is gay. This is his story in his own words.

Wong's own words:

“In 2018, I returned to China from the USA. I was feeling exhausted and wanted to sleep off the jet lag. My mum suddenly told me she was having a heart attack and wanted me and my dad to go to the hospital with her. I was so worried, so I went along.

“Once I got into the car, my dad was driving superfast in the opposite direction of the hospital. I thought it was weird. Then my mum told me she wanted me to talk to someone she knew. I did not understand what was happening. My dad insisted “You have to talk to this person; he’s your mum’s friend and he will help you with your ‘sexual confusion’. I didn’t really get it at first.

“It turned out my parents took me to Wuhan Mental Health Centre. I tried to resist but it was in vain. My dad got really aggressive, dragging me into the in-hospital unit. My dad is very strong, so I couldn’t even resist. I was terrified.



“I finally got in with a ‘psychiatrist’ who asked about my sexuality. When I told him, I was gay he simply said “It’s okay, but we will need to fix that, you have to make your parents happy, and we will make that happen. We have the right therapy”.

“They were trying to ‘cure me of my homosexuality’. The conversion entailed heavy dosage of medication (sedatives mainly, and antipsychotic medication), daily lectures about the ills of homosexuality is wrong and lowering my self-esteem. I was also conditioned to associate homosexuality to pain and unpleasant things.



“When I was being locked up, my friends managed to reach out to the police. I was told that the police did turn up but were convinced that there were no issues and they had simply left. I was devastated.

“I contacted a local LGBT organisation here. They had people pretending to be my family to come visit me to evaluate the situation. Once they knew I was being fed, not being beaten up, and still alive, they dropped my case. They could not do anything as my parents commanded much influence and the centre was well connected. I lost all hope.

“I stayed at the centre for nearly two months. From September 2018 to November 2018. They never made me or my parents think that my homosexuality was “cured.” They told my parents that’s its common occurrence for people to come back again.

“A few months later, I tried to run away to Beijing, my parents called their friends. Then they had the police catch me at the train station. They stopped me and prevented me from getting on the train. They took me to the police station without any specific reason. Then my parents showed up and took me home. I felt totally powerless.

“I haven’t been allowed to get out of the house since then. They confiscated my passport as well as my IDs.

“Recently, I called the police again in regard to my confiscated IDs and passport. The police responded that it’s family issues and they couldn’t do anything about it.

“Yet, I have not lost faith and I am reaching out to people so I can plan my freedom. The Peter Tatchell Foundation has been supporting and guiding me so far. One day, I will be free.

*Wong is a pseudonym we have used to protect his identity.



David Bonney, Nationality: British

In the UK, until 2000, there was a ban on LGBT+ people serving in the military. Before then, thousands of LGBT+ service personnel were removed or forced from service and abandoned. Worse, you could even get court martialled. The Military ban was lifted only in 2000 and it took another 8 years for the British army and RAF personnel to be allowed in full uniform to march at Pride in full uniform. Though Royal Navy personnel were allowed to wear full uniform at Pride from 2006. However, the damage done to the career and lives of many LGBT+ people cannot be underestimated. David is one of them.



David own words:

“I joined the Royal Air Force in 1987 age 17 and although I had experimented like so many others when younger I still wasn’t defining, or accepting myself as being gay at that time.

“I did my bit for ‘queen and country’ and fought in the first gulf war, where I recall sheltering from Scud missiles falling around me. It was around that time that I came to terms with my sexuality. I even had my first romance with a Norwegian Red Cross worker, whom I would like to meet again and say sorry.

“It was my first gay relationship. I was 22 and it was my first real relationship with a man and I panicked and broke it off. I struggled to explain to the sergeant I was sharing a room with why this man was crying in the corridor outside our room.

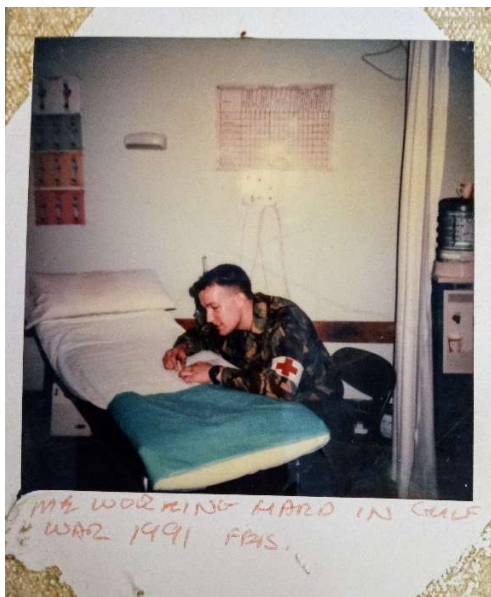
“I now set about leading my double life in the armed forces, I had to, as it remained illegal to be gay in the forces. This continued until, in a search of my room, a copy of Gay Times was found.

“This led to a two-year investigation, the bugging my communications, having people follow me, placing officers outside the local gay bars to spy on my going in, using the local police stations to take my friends too, to interview them and altogether create terror and fear amongst friends and associates.



“Most of my responses to the multitude of interviews they gave me had consisted of “well am I not permitted to have gay friends?”

“As you can imagine their frustration must have grown on their part and so began an increasing number of dirty tricks on their part, such as giving me short term postings to far flung parts of the UK without giving me a means to get there, so if I failed to turn up, I would be Absent Without Leave. However, they hadn't bargained on my very resourceful family.



“I endured threats of violence from my fellow service men after they had been interviewed, and a general feeling from others that they wish I would leave.

“After almost a couple of years of this treatment, I had had enough and finally confessed my “sins.” And so, a court martial took place in Cornwall at RAF St Mawgan in October 1993.

“I got sentenced to 6 months in prison of which I served 4; one month in solitary confinement and I got 2 months off for good behaviour. As you can imagine my time inside wasn't a barrel of laughs, with threats by those in charge to set me up with further offences.

“I now had lost my privacy and before it came out in the press I had to tell my very Catholic parents, RAF officer father and my brother who had apparently always known. My mother and brother accepted me with no problem, however my father took some time to accept the truth, and from then I was able to begin to have a more positive open relationship with my family.



“But what most people don’t realise is, with military law at discharge from your service they get to choose whether to list your offences or not, and what to list them as with the civil authorities. I continue to lose my rights to a private life as I must declare my ‘criminal record’. This declaration has damaged my prospects of promotion as a nurse.

“It took more than 20 years to get to the stage where the armed services admitted they were wrong. But for me the struggle still wasn’t over. I then had to go to the RAF - to my bullies - and ask for my medals back.

“I did eventually get my honourable discharge and later the decorations I was awarded serving my ‘queen and country’ under fire.

The Peter Tatchell Foundation has been campaigning for amends to be made by the government regarding LGBT+ military personnel. Among other things and in collaboration with charity Fighting with Pride, the Foundation is campaigning for financial compensation for people like David who were the victims of homophobic laws.

David was the last person in the military to have been court-martialled for being gay.

6. Case work in brief:

In 2020, despite the coronavirus pandemic, we have reached out to 144 individuals who requested assistance. Many of these individuals required extensive correspondence and support. This is illustrated in Fig 2. Case work over the years.

Since 2012, we have assisted over **1,600** people.

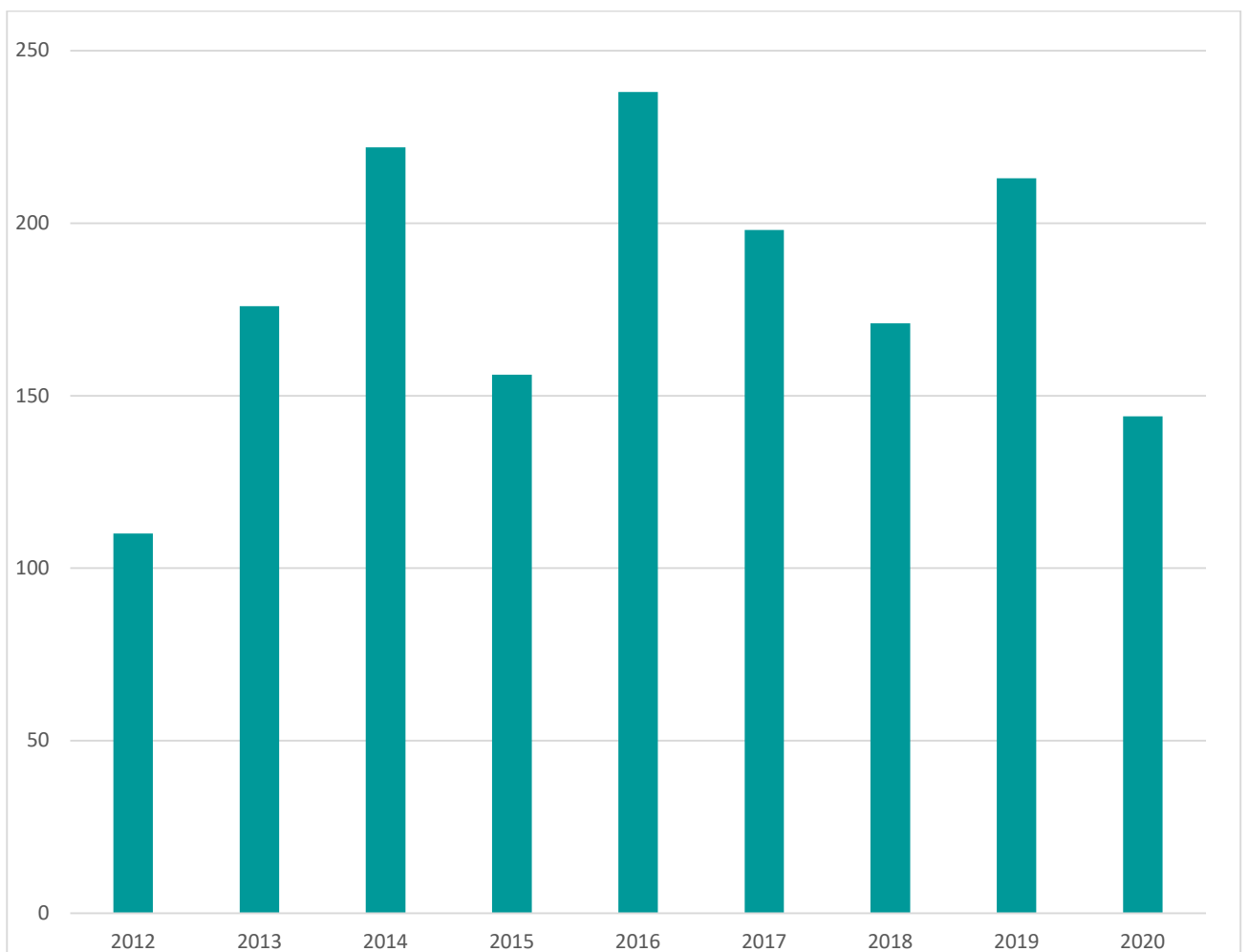


Fig 2. Case Work Over the Years

7. Global reach:

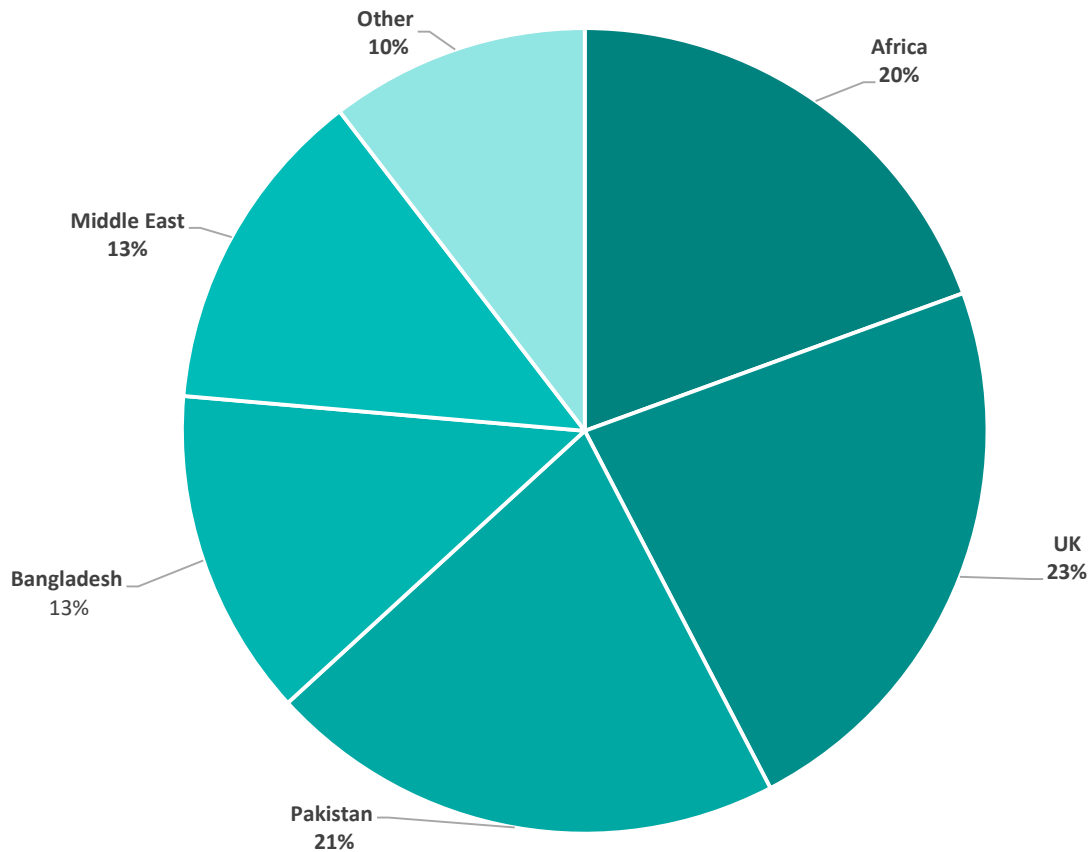


Fig 3. Case Work: Requests for Help by Country of Origin & region

Nearly 80% of people we help have an international background. Over three quarters of the people we help are from the Commonwealth, which remains a bastion of homophobia with 34 out of 54 countries still criminalising homosexuality. Eight have a maximum sentence of impose life imprisonment. In Brunei the death sentence has been suspended but not repealed. In parts of two Commonwealth countries, Nigeria and Pakistan, homosexuality can result in a death sentence.

We have helped people from 33 different countries, namely: Argentina, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Egypt, Gambia, Guyana, Hungary, India, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Kenya, Malta, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, Saudi-

Arabia, Somalia, Spain, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, UK, USA and Zimbabwe.

8. The range of issues:

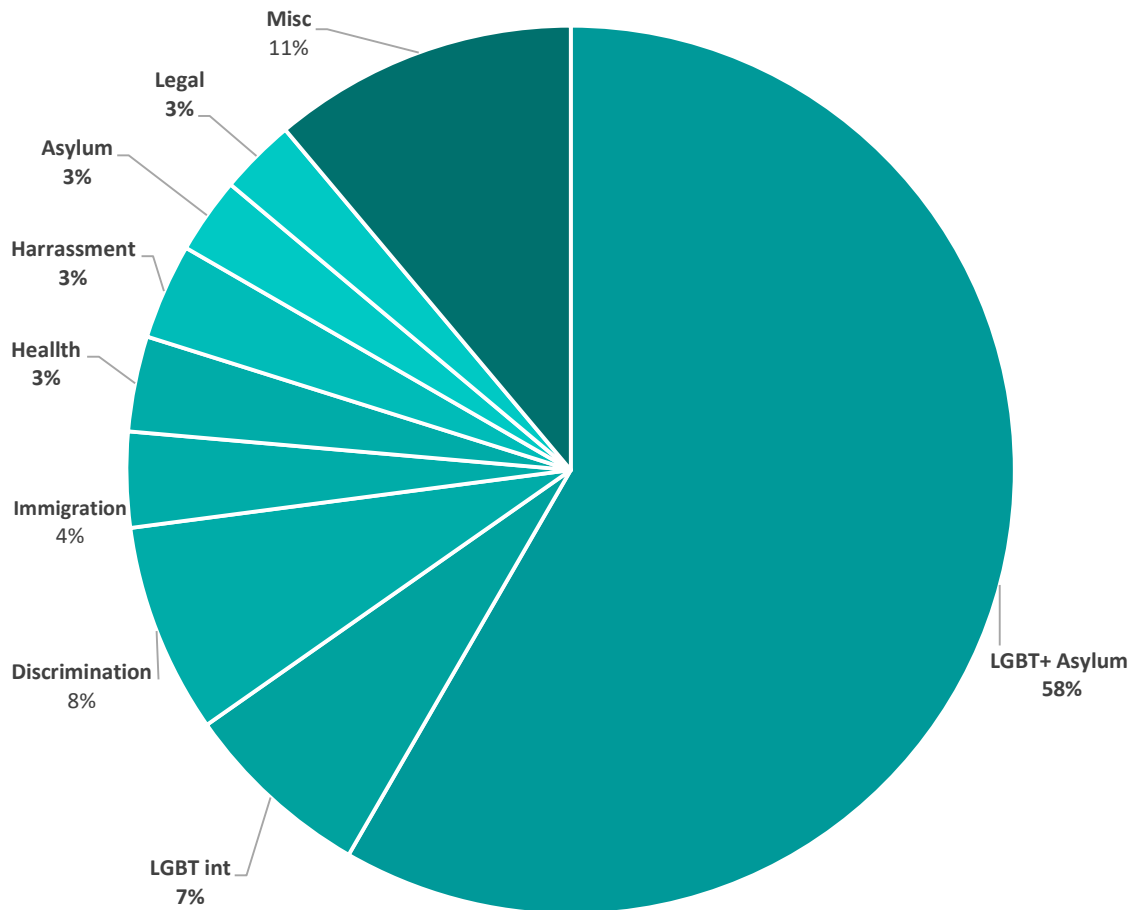


Fig 4. Case Work: the Range of Issues

A significant number of calls for help we receive are from people seeking asylum based on their sexual orientation.

LGBT+ asylum seekers face a number of challenges if they are to obtain refugee status.

One of the requirements of the Home Office is that LGBT+ asylum seekers provide

evidence of their sexuality. Very often there is minimal guidance on how this can be achieved.

LGBT+ asylum seekers often describe the stress they undergo during their interviews with staff of the Home Office.

While their case is being processed, they are not allowed to work and very often there is a huge delay in processing their applications. In extreme cases, it has been known to take up to thirteen years.

Furthermore, the UK has one of the biggest detention systems in Europe and there is currently no time limit on the length of detention. Many asylum seekers are fearful of deportation as they rightly assume that it could well mean a death sentence.

2020 has also been marked by our campaign to push for compensation for servicemen who were dishonourably discharged from the army and who had their medals taken.

The Foundation has also assisted people on many different issues including discrimination, hate crime, homophobic hate crime and civil liberties. The category LGBT-int represents LGBT+ people from different countries seeking non-asylum advice.

9. Support our work:

Please consider donating to the Peter Tatchell Foundation to cover the cost of helping someone who comes to us in need.

The Peter Tatchell Foundation depends entirely on individual donations. We do not receive any statutory funding. Whatever you can give is greatly appreciated. No donation is too small for us.

Everything we have done to support these people is thanks to our amazing supporters.

You can make a donation by visiting our website:
www.PeterTatchellFoundation.org/donate

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