

Challenging Issues, Changing Lives

2023 Case Work Report
by Pliny Soocoomanee



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Foreword



I am very proud and honoured to present the Peter Tatchell Foundation's casework report for 2023 – Challenging Issues: Changing Lives.

We are particularly proud of our success in helping win asylum in the United Kingdom for refugees fleeing persecution by repressive and homophobic regimes - helping them rebuild their lives after often years of suffering and trauma.

For example, in 2023, we continued to receive an increasing number of calls for help from Afghanistan following the escalating human rights abuses since the Taliban seized power. We have been working closely with Nemat Sadat and the LGBT+ organisation *Roshaniya* to alleviate the suffering of many and aid their escape to a safe or safer country.

We have also helped win asylum for LGBT+ refugees fleeing persecution and threats in Bangladesh, Russia, Iran, Uganda and Pakistan to name just a few.

This report also documents our wide-ranging work providing advice, emotional support and practical aid to individuals who are victims of injustices, such as discrimination, hate crimes, and police and medical malpractice. These include Yvonne Grey, an intersex victim of decades of violent and medical abuse, and Jeremy Bamber, who has been in prison for 38 years protesting his innocence, after an unsafe conviction where the police withheld vital evidence.

Despite our limited size and funding, our charity, the Peter Tatchell Foundation, continues to make a positive difference to many people's lives every year.

Since 2012, we have helped over 2,300 people through our casework. Special thanks to our Executive Officer and casework lead, Pliny Soocoormanee, for his outstanding dedication and care in making this happen.

All of this is only possible with the incredible support of our amazing donors – our success starts with their generosity. If you feel touched by what you read in this report, please consider making a donation to help us continue this life-transforming casework:

peteratchellfoundation.org/donate

Many thanks.

Peter Tatchell

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, casework, publicity, lobbying and advocacy for the enforcement and furtherance of human rights law.

Through our casework, 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.

Requests for help

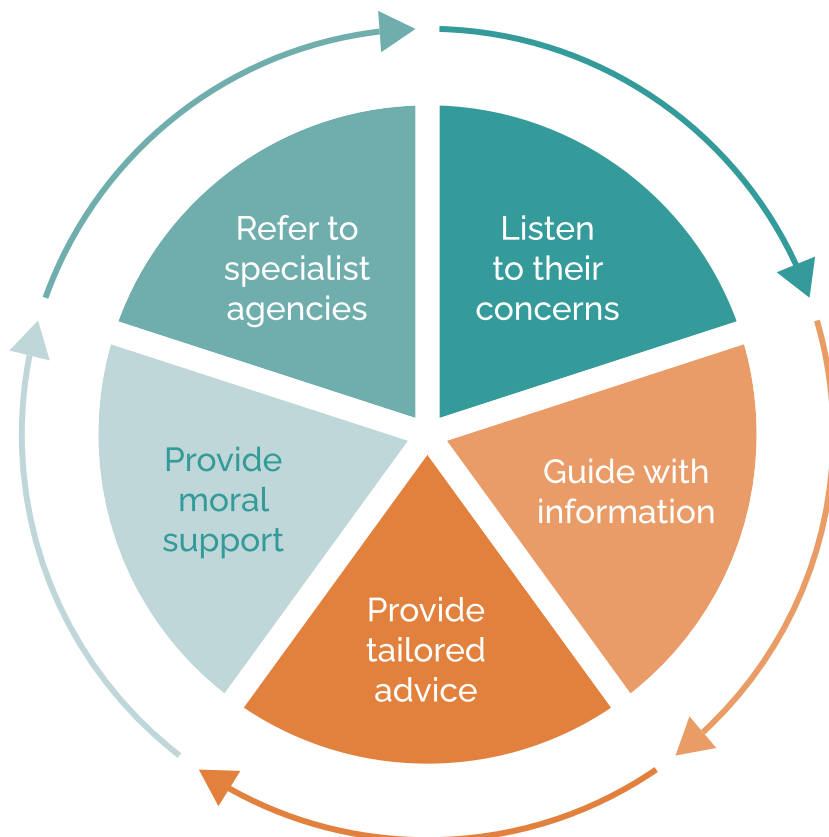


Fig. 1. How We Help



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

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.

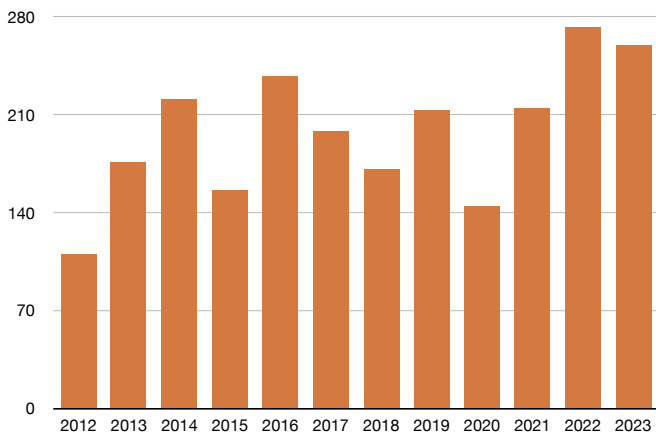
This Case work service is provided free of charge and funded exclusively by our donors, to whom we are very grateful.

Key facts:

Case work 2023

Despite our small size and limited resources, we receive help requests from across the UK and around the world. We listen, provide moral support, offer guidance, and connect people with specialist agencies.

Case work over the years



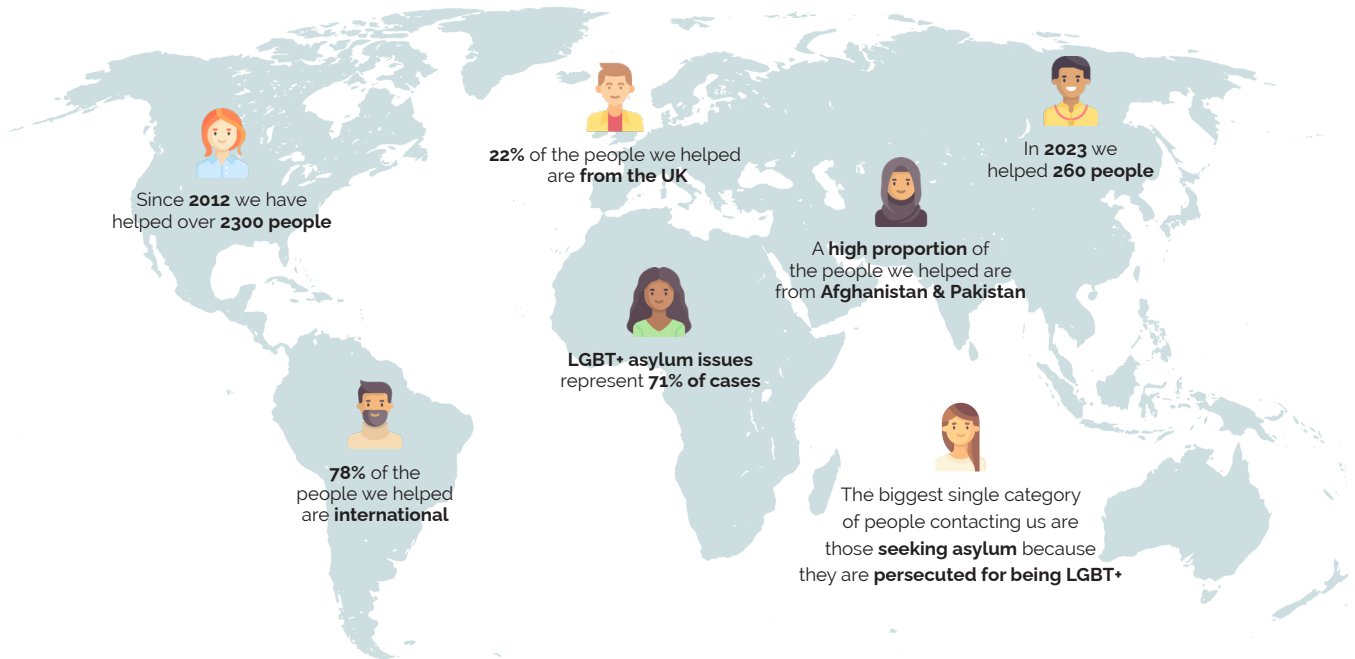
Our Reach



Beyond LGBT+ asylum cases, we assist individuals facing various human rights issues, including discrimination, hate crimes, harassment, police misconduct, and historic gay sex convictions.

Our reach

We helped people from **36 different countries**



Afghanistan & Pakistan



We received harrowing reports of severe persecution against LGBT+ individuals, women, human rights defenders, and liberals in Afghanistan. Calls for help from Pakistan have also surged as the situation deteriorates.



We helped **21 people from Afghanistan** and **57 from Pakistan**.

Why people come to us

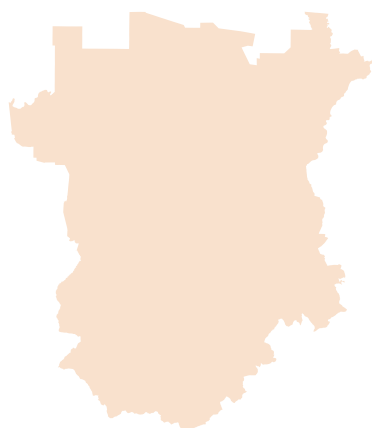
We are known for getting things done.

Peter Tatchell is a nationally and internationally renowned human rights defender with over 57 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.



Some of the people we helped

Dimitri*
 Nationality: Chechen



The Chechen Republic is a republic of the Russian Federation that enjoys wide autonomy under the warlord Ramzan Kadyrov.

Since 2017, there has been a violent crackdown on the LGBT+ community. Ramzan Kadyrov has even launched a 'virtue campaign' to encourage 'traditional values' and encourage so-called 'honour' killing.

Local authorities in Chechnya are even pressuring families to undertake such so-called 'honour' killing.

Law enforcement across Chechnya began rounding up, imprisoning and torturing gay men and women too.

Entrapment of gay people is common, often leading to torture, imprisonment and even death.

Dimitri*

Nationality: Chechen

**We used a pseudonym to protect his identity.*

Dimitri*'s story in his own words



I am Dimitri*, a Chechen living in one of the post-soviet countries.

For a few years, I have been struggling with my sexuality, and I was being harassed. But things got even worse when, on one fateful day, my relatives found out that I was gay when they eavesdropped on me. I thought I was being careful, but that was not enough. I was so afraid of what they would do to me that I ran away. I thought I could find my way and hopefully live peacefully. But I was terribly wrong; they searched for me and even reported that I was missing to the police. I was caught up by the police, who handed me over to my relatives.

I was told that I brought terrible shame to the family and that I needed correction. They started to beat me and said that only my blood would wash away the shame and sin that I brought to the family. I was beaten with a stick and punched so hard that I lost my teeth in the process.

Yet, they were not satisfied. I implored them to stop, but it was pointless. There was no one to go to for help, and I felt utterly powerless.

I did not know what would be done to me, and every day, I was terrified that they would kill me since so-called 'honour' killing is rife here. My relatives chose what was to be an even worse option. They reached out to my older brothers in Chechnya, who worked under Kadyrov and transferred me back to them in Chechnya.

They took my mother as well with me and warned me that she would be harmed and even killed if I ever dared to escape. They said they were doing me a favour and that I should be thankful that they were 'caring' for me and the family's honour. I was totally broken, losing hope day by day. What could I do? Who could I speak to?

I felt life was no longer worth living. I was their prisoner, and I did not know what to expect.

What came next was so traumatic that I still shiver while thinking of it. My brothers wanted to correct me. It has been horrible already. Could it get even worse? I dread to think of it. Soon, I was subjected to the most brutal torture. They experimented on me so they could replicate these gruesome techniques on others.

First, I was put in a pit in a village without food for many days. I can still remember how hard these days were in that small space where I was a prisoner. After some days, someone just appeared and threw a few scraps of bread at me. It fell on the ground, and I still remember devouring these crumbs.

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I was treated like a wild animal, and I remember how cold and hungry I felt during those days. It was horrible, and I just wanted the ordeal to end.

I was totally confused when they finally took me out of the pit. Sadly, this was not the end of my ordeal. I was forced to take several pills; I still don't know what they were, and then the torture started. They beat me up with hoses repeatedly, up to the point that my skin was broken and I was bleeding; even my screams imploring them to stop did nothing. There was no pity nor an end in sight for my torture.

At this point, I was physically and mentally broken, and I just wanted the pain to stop. I would have done anything to stop this pain. But they were not satisfied and took me later to watch others being tortured. They warned me that this would happen to me if I did not correct myself. To be honest, by now, I had lost all hope. I was living in hell. Every day was an agony.

Around the same time, my mother's mental health began to deteriorate. She was becoming increasingly erratic. It was as if she was here, but her mind was gone. It all happened in a very odd way. I can only suspect they were responsible for her situation as she has never been like that. But to this date, I don't know what they did to her. All of this abject treatment continued



until I started saying I did not know who I was. I began to agree that the torture and treatment was working. They decided to force me into a marriage and warn me that they will know for sure if I am cured after the marriage. They said if I did not sleep with my wife, I would disappear. No one would be looking for me, and my mother would disappear. They asserted that if this were to happen, our family would be totally cleansed.

I pretended hard to be heterosexual. It was the only way to survive. I was allowed a little bit more freedom, and at least the torture stopped. I realised this would be only a temporary respite and reached out to the Peter Tatchell Foundation with little hope for my case. I was too afraid to reach out to anyone in Russia. You see, so many people have been trapped by others pretending to help. I was terrified to ask for help; I thought my brothers would find out, and it would be my end. It took time to agree to take the risk. Luckily for me, I was able to escape Chechnya and Russia with the help of the North Caucasus Crisis Group.



Today, I am free and trying hard to rebuild my life, and I wanted to share my story with people about the terrible situation that gay men like me faced in Chechnya.

Imran*

Nationality: Pakistani

Imran
 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."

**Some names have been altered in this testimonial.*

Imran's story in his own words



Growing up as a schoolboy, I grappled with feelings of being different from my peers.

While they talked about women, I found myself wondering why they didn't talk about men, too. I was raised in a deeply religious family. I was taught that Islam forbade relationships outside of marriage, and same-sex relationships were condemned. This was reinforced by our Mosque's Imam, who warned of severe punishments for such "sins," including stoning to death.

One harrowing day, while playing cricket with friends, I witnessed a brutal scene of violence against two naked boys. They were being beaten with sticks and stoned by a frenzied mob while the police stood by.

My elder brother, who shockingly agreed with the violence, insisting the boys deserved to die on the spot. Their only crime, I later found out, was

that they were gay. Days went by after, and I could still hear their screams. I have been having nightmares ever since.

Obviously petrified, I struggled to come to terms with my own bisexuality. I was unable to confide in anyone for fear of persecution. People could have killed me.

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I felt I was alone, alone with this heavy secret that brought shame on me. I remained quiet and refused to talk to my first crush, Hasan*. It was a forbidden love. I was terrified that someone would find out about my feelings, and I would be killed. I never told him anything for fear of bringing harm to him and to me. The vision of these naked boys being beaten paralysed all my actions.

Around the same time, the family were pressuring me to get married. I resisted as long as I could. Trapped with no other choice, I was forced into a marriage. It was a loveless marriage. Every day, I kept asking myself why my life was so miserable despite my wife being very caring and looking after me very well. I always felt lonely and incomplete.

I decided to come to the UK on a study visa, hoping it would help me see clearly. This is when I met a fellow bisexual guy, Adil*. For the first time in my life, I felt understood, I felt heard, and I felt I was no longer alone. Eventually, we formed a relationship, and I delayed my return to Pakistan as much as I could.

One fateful day, during an argument with my wife, I let it slip that I was bisexual. This had an explosive effect. There was no understanding or attempt to engage with me but simply hate.



She told the family, and my whole life changed overnight. Threats and intimidation were frequent, and I was told that if I dared to return to Pakistan, they would hunt and kill me. Everyone that I knew there suddenly turned out to be hostile and even wanted my death. What choice did I have?

Fearing for my safety and unable to live discreetly anymore, I had no option but to stay in the UK. This is where I found support in the LGBT+ community, mainly through the Peter Tatchell Foundation and the Say It Loud Club. Last year, I even won the New Player of the Year Award from Graces Cricket Club, the First LGBTQI+ Cricket Club in the UK. I could finally be myself and free.

Although my relationship with Adil* broke down, I found love in the most unsuspected place. My friend Yusuf*

I hope I will be granted refugee status and able to live just like anybody else without the fear of being persecuted for who I love.



and I got closer until he became my partner. I had hoped we would live together, but fate decided otherwise. He was diagnosed with bone marrow cancer and sadly passed away in 2023. I felt again alone and struggling to navigate the asylum process. The Peter Tatchell Foundation has been assisting me on this complicated journey.

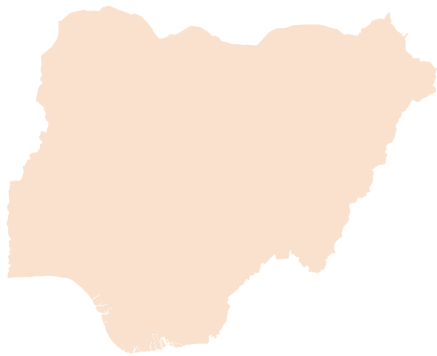
I have filed my asylum application and am currently waiting for the decision. This is mentally draining as I live every day with the fear of being put into detention or, worse, deported. Deportation would mean death for me in Pakistan.

Rosemary

Nationality: Nigerian

**Some names have been altered in this testimonial.*

Rosemary
 Nationality: Nigerian



In Nigeria, same-sex sexual activity is illegal under the Criminal Code Act and the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013 (SSMPA).

These laws criminalise acts described as 'carnal knowledge against the order of nature', 'gross indecency', same-sex unions, and LGBT advocacy, with penalties of up to fourteen years' imprisonment.

The laws apply to both men and women. Additionally, same-sex sexual activity is also criminalised at the state level through Sharia law – where homosexuality carries the death penalty.

Rosemary's story in her own words



I am Rosemary Ngozi Ogwuibe. I am a lesbian, and this my story.

Growing up, I always felt different, but I couldn't quite understand or explain why. In school, I was constantly surrounded by women and girls and when puberty hit, I found myself paying more attention to those young women rather than men. I felt an emotional and physical attraction towards women. Though I didn't fully understand what was happening to me, it felt right.

The people around me, including my teachers and mother, noticed I was different. As punishment and an attempt to "correct" me, my mother forced me to undergo female genital mutilation. It was torture. Even now, tears fill my eyes as I remember that event. The pain, trauma and shock never left me. The physical and psychological pain was immense,

and I had no one who understood what I was going through. My own mother believed it would correct me. From that moment, I couldn't feel any sexual pleasure because of what they did to me. In college, I shared a room with another young woman on campus.

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It was there that I began to understand my sexuality better and realised I wasn't alone. There were others who felt the same way. For the first time in my life, I felt understood. I understood myself better and could express my feelings. My roommate supported me and helped me heal from the trauma of female genital mutilation.

While in college, I met a young woman named Amy*. She became one of my greatest loves, though I didn't know it at the time. We met at a party, our eyes met, and we danced together. It was love at first sight. From then on, we were inseparable, though we had to keep our love a secret.

After finishing our studies at college, we moved to Lagos for work. In our small shared room, our love and connection blossomed. But we knew it was a forbidden love, and if anyone found out, we would face expulsion, rape, or even death.

We found a balance in our lives, but it was not to last. My family increasingly pressured me to get married. I was over 30, and my unmarried status raised suspicions. I was told I was bringing shame to the family. Cornered and without options, I succumbed to the pressure and was forced into a marriage to a man. It was hard, but I had no choice. Amy and I decided to keep seeing each other, knowing that she too would be forced into a marriage sooner or later. We believed that marriage would give us cover and allow us to see each other.

I got married. It was a loveless marriage, and every night felt like torture with my



husband next to me. But I still had some courage left, thanks to Amy. She continued to visit frequently under the guise of being my best friend. When my husband was not around, she would spend days with me.

But our little peace was not meant to last. One fateful day, we were careless. My husband came back earlier than expected and found us in bed together. What followed was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. I was beaten, spat on, and kicked like a beast. In the confusion, Amy escaped, but I was held in the house.

My husband screamed, called the neighbours, and summoned my parents. I was subjected to abject humiliation and beatings. When my mother arrived, she disowned me,

saying I was cursed and that the people around should decide my punishment. I feared I would be lynched on the spot.

In the chaos and shouting, I managed to run away. I didn't know where to go for refuge. My only hope was to find Amy. She hid me for some time and even arranged for my escape to Germany. I didn't know the country or what I would do there, but staying in Nigeria meant almost certain death.

In Germany, I felt completely lost. I got involved with a local church, and through them, I learned that the UK was more welcoming and had less of a language barrier. In 2009, I managed to reach the UK.

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The people who brought me to the UK used me for house chores and childcare but did not guide or help me apply for asylum. I didn't know what options were available to me.

By 2011, these people pushed me out onto the streets, and I had nowhere to go. I ended up sitting in a McDonald's, thinking about my life, having given up all hope. Just then, a Hungarian man approached me. Despite not wanting to talk to him, I opened up in tears and told him my life story. He took pity on me and helped me a lot during that time. He was like a guardian angel.

We lived together for some time before he returned to Hungary, where I once again felt alone. I gravitated towards a local Nigerian church, made new friends, but still kept my sexuality a secret. I met a man there who needed a place to stay, and I offered him a temporary arrangement. Little did I know this would have devastating consequences.

One month into his stay, while I was out shopping, my neighbour called to tell me Immigration Enforcement officers were at my place. I returned home to find three officers in my house. They believed the man staying with me was my husband and did not believe my explanations. The next morning, I was sent to the infamous Yarl's Wood Detention Centre. It felt like a prison,



with high walls and overcrowded conditions. I didn't know who to fear more—the inmates, if they found out I was a lesbian, or the guards.

After four months, I was released. During these dark times, I entered a romantic relationship with a woman who knew groups that supported lesbian refugees. Encouraged by her, I approached various groups, including

the Peter Tatchell Foundation. My first asylum claim was rejected, and I was devastated. I wanted to end my life but, with support, lodged an appeal. It was also rejected.

Now, I am planning to submit a fresh claim. If I had known about the available procedures and support earlier, I would have done this sooner.

Being sent back to Nigeria would mean death for me. I hope to make the UK my new home and give back to the country that I pray will grant me refuge.

Case work in brief

260 individual cases in 2023



In 2023, we assisted 260 individuals. Many of these individuals required extensive correspondence and support. This is illustrated in Fig 2. Case workover the years.

Since 2012, we have assisted over 2,300 people.

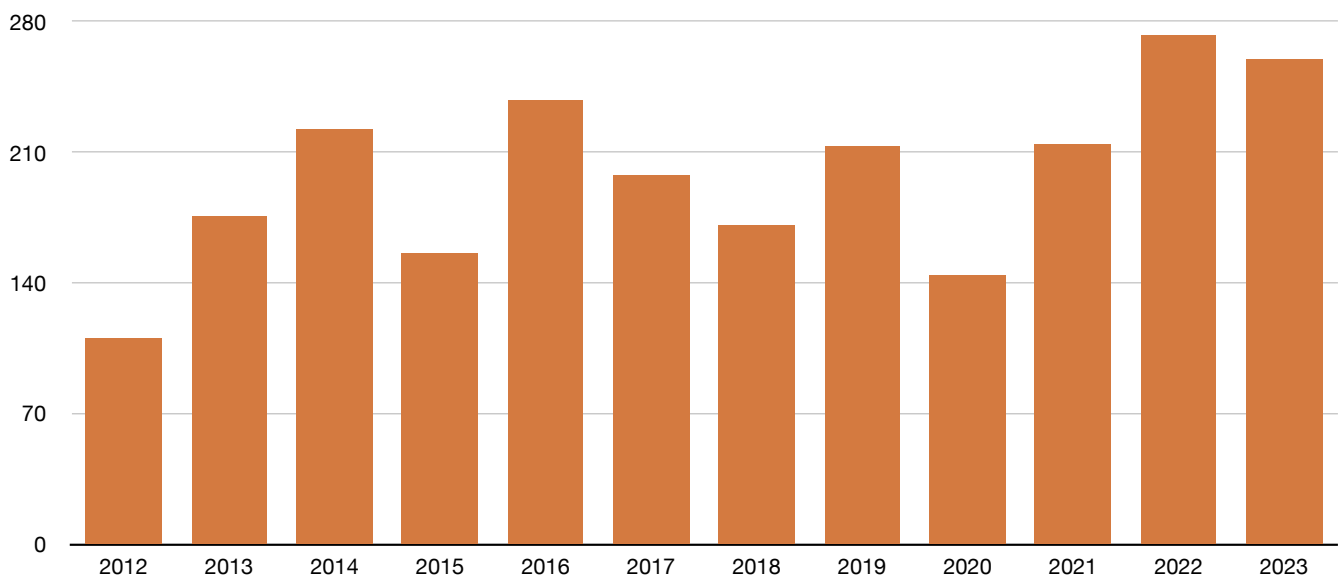


Fig 2. Case work over the years

Global reach

Around **77%** of the people we help have an **international background**.

Over 50% of the people that we assist are from the Commonwealth, which remains a bastion of homophobia with over half of the Commonwealth countries still criminalising homosexuality. An estimated 100–200 million LGBT+ citizens across the Commonwealth face criminalization simply for being who they are. These oppressive laws starkly violate the Commonwealth Charter, which promises equality and condemns all forms of discrimination.

The roots of these anti-LGBT+ laws trace back to British colonial rule, when homophobic legislation was imposed on these nations. Despite gaining independence, many of these countries have chosen to retain these outdated and unjust laws.

It is a tragic irony that the Commonwealth, which stands for unity and equality, continues to harbour such discrimination. In seven Commonwealth countries—Bangladesh, Barbados, Guyana, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda—same-sex acts are punishable by life imprisonment. In Brunei, the death sentence for such acts has been suspended but not officially repealed. Additionally, in certain regions of Nigeria and Pakistan, homosexuality is still punishable by death.

The Peter Tatchell Foundation stands firm in its belief that nations criminalizing LGBT+ individuals should face suspension from the Commonwealth. This stance is a call for justice and equality, urging the Commonwealth to uphold human rights and protect the dignity of all its citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation.

By advocating for this suspension, we aim to send a powerful message: that discrimination and persecution have no place in the Commonwealth.

Our reach extends across the globe. We have provided crucial support to people from **36 different countries**, each facing unique challenges. Our efforts have touched lives of people from : Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Egypt, Gabon, Ghana, India, Iran, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Kingdom (UK), the USA, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

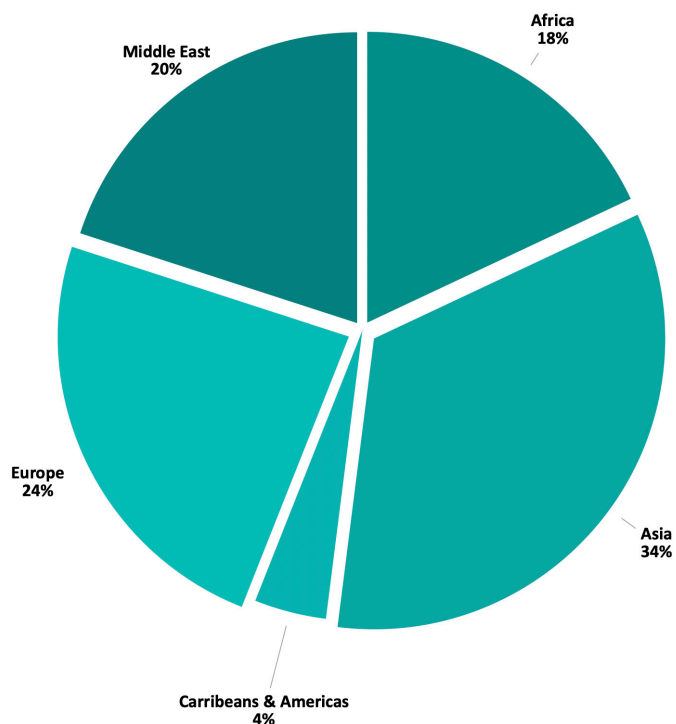


Fig 3. Case work: requests for help by country of origin & region

The range of issues

Over three quarters of the cries for help we receive come from individuals seeking asylum due to their sexual orientation.

These brave souls are fleeing persecution and discrimination, hoping to find safety and acceptance.

In our mission to support LGBT+ refugees, we are honoured to work closely with several dedicated organisations. Our partners include the Out and Proud African LGBTI group (OPAL), the African Equality Foundation, Let Voice Be Heard, Rainbow Tree, Out in Cov, and the Gay Indian Network (GIN). Together, we form a united front, offering comprehensive support and advocacy for those in need.

Both OPAL and GIN have been recognized with prestigious awards for their outstanding contributions to the LGBT+ community. Their tireless work has created safe spaces and provided vital resources for countless individuals, making a profound impact on lives worldwide.

Through these collaborations, we are stronger and more effective in our efforts to protect and uplift LGBT+ refugees

LGBT+ individuals seeking asylum encounter numerous obstacles on their path to obtaining refugee status. The process is fraught with

complexities and challenges, as depicted in Fig 4. The journey for claiming asylum. This journey requires immense courage and resilience, as these individuals navigate a system that can often be daunting and overwhelming.

For LGBT+ asylum seekers, one of the most daunting requirements imposed by the Home Office is the need to provide evidence of their sexuality. This often comes with minimal guidance, leaving individuals in

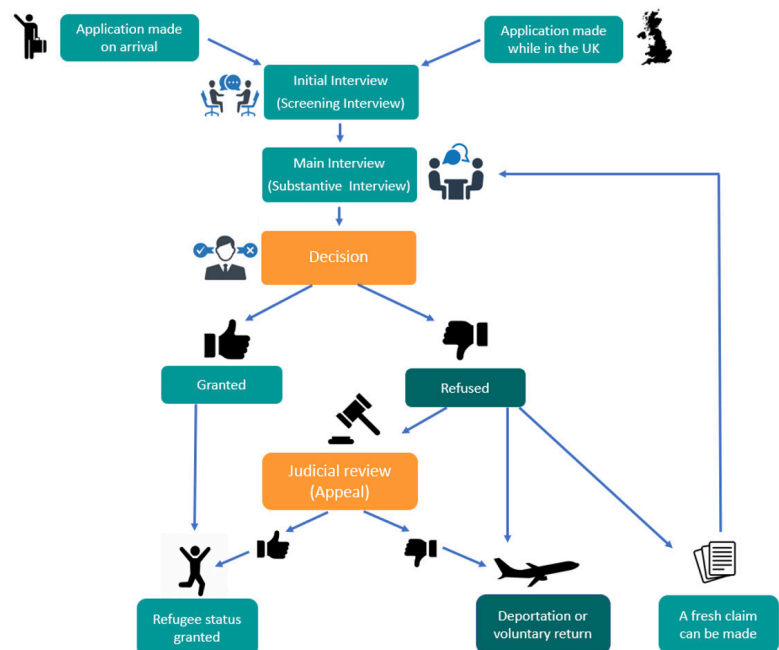


Fig 4. The journey for claiming asylum

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a state of confusion and distress.

During their asylum process, many describe the immense stress experienced during interviews with Home Office staff. The process begins with an initial screening interview, followed by a substantive interview scheduled at a later date. The gap between these interviews can vary drastically, with some waiting as long as four years for their substantive interview.

Throughout the processing period, asylum seekers are prohibited from working, compounding their difficulties as delays stretch on. In extreme cases, the process can drag on for up to thirteen years. In response to this, the Peter Tatchell Foundation is part of a coalition of 280 organizations, Lift the Ban, advocating for the right of asylum seekers to work.

Additionally, asylum seekers can be placed in detention centres, which are effectively prisons. These centres often place LGBT+ individuals in hostile, homophobic environments, as illustrated by the case of Rosemary. Many feel criminalized by this treatment. The UK has one of the largest detention systems in Europe, with no time limit on detention duration. Asylum seekers live in fear of deportation, which can be a death sentence.

In 2022, the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, initiated a controversial plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. Fortunately, in 2024, the new Labour government has scrapped this project within its first 100 days

in office, a decision warmly welcomed by the Foundation. Last, year for Pride in London, the Foundation with refugees from Uganda held a sitting protest in front of the Ugandan embassy.

Beyond supporting asylum seekers, the Foundation has assisted individuals facing a range of issues, including discrimination, hate crimes, homophobic hate crimes, and civil liberties violations. We have also provided support to those dealing with police malpractice and those in prison.

Through our work, we strive to offer hope, dignity, and justice to those who need it most.

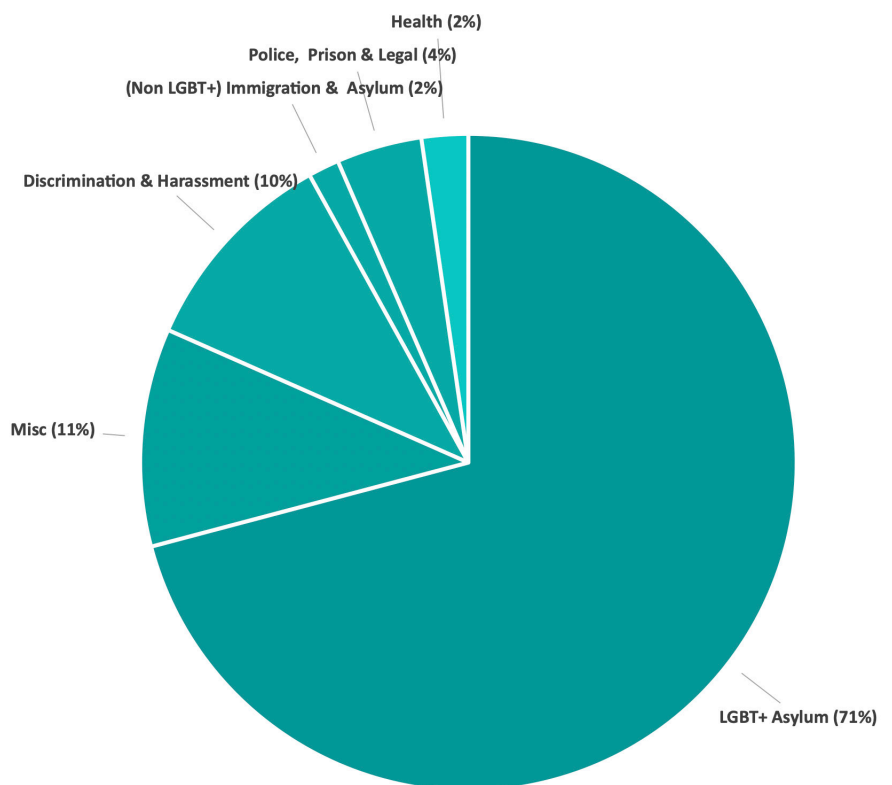


Fig 5. Case work: the range of issues

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

Special thanks to Simon Harris and Ferdinand Lu

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