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COVID-19 CONTINUES TO ADVERSELY IMPACT LGBTQ PEOPLE

WHILE INITIAL PHASES OF REOPENING CREATE NEW ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

In partnership with [PSB Insights](#), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has been tracking the economic impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQ community. New data now show that while some states have reopened their economies amidst the ongoing threat of the virus, LGBTQ people, especially LGBTQ people of color and transgender people, are still being left behind.

At the onset of the pandemic, HRC and numerous advocates warned about and called attention to the [unique health and economic risks](#) facing the LGBTQ community. Through a series of reports, we have been able to document the disparate economic impact COVID-19 has had on LGBTQ people, especially transgender, Black and LGBTQ people of color:

- [LGBTQ Communities](#)
- [LGBTQ Communities of Color](#)
- [Transgender Communities](#)
- [Black LGBTQ Communities](#)

As some states and municipalities across the country have begun to institute policies for reopening their economies, significant attention must be paid to communities who are most vulnerable and living at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. New data and analysis from PSB and HRC now show that LGBTQ people are being left behind even as some businesses and public spaces across the country try to reopen. As people continue to go back to work, LGBTQ people will also continue to face elevated health risks associated with the virus, as they are [more likely](#) to have compromised respiratory and immune systems. This brief provides additional confirmation of what has long been known: the most vulnerable communities are being hit hardest by the pandemic, even in the reopened economy.

NATIONAL ECONOMIC FALLOUT AND THE PUSH TO REOPEN

For months, debates about whether to prioritize containing the spread of the coronavirus or reopen the economy have dominated public and policy conversations. According to the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, Gross Domestic Product (GDP)¹ drastically [fell](#) by roughly **one-third (32.9%)** in the second quarter of 2020.² While combating the economic crisis is important to ensure the security and well-being of every individual, the economy also relies on a healthy public and labor force. Moreover, governments and businesses must primarily prioritize the health of workers.

1 GDP measures the economic activity in an economy. Larger GDP numbers indicate more economic activity. When economic activity falls, it is one of many signs that an economy is struggling.

2 There are four financial quarters. The second quarter refers to the time from April 1 to June 30. The United States was in the third quarter at the time this brief was written.



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Without clear guidance from the federal government, states have taken different approaches to reopening. As of August 24, the New York Times [reported](#) that **21** states are currently reopened, **4** states and the District of Columbia are in the process of reopening, **13** states are pausing on reopening, and **12** states and Puerto Rico have reversed their reopenings.³ Inconsistent and often ineffective approaches to reopening - frequently followed by reclosures - shroud the path to real economic recovery and justice. Inadequate leadership from the highest office of the United States government contributes to and compounds the growing economic crises.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

PEOPLE DO NOT WANT TO LOSE THEIR LIVES FOR THE ECONOMY TO REOPEN

By May 26, more than a majority of states had initiated reopening policies after months of closure and quarantine due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Before and after parts of the economy reopened, the general population and LGBTQ population have overwhelmingly supported that the United States prioritize containing the coronavirus over reopening the economy. Since a majority of states tried to reopen, LGBTQ people have shown a modest increase in support for containing the virus rather than reopening the economy. The general population overall had a modest decrease.

- + HRC and PSB data show that **73%** of the general population and **78%** of the LGBTQ population preferred containing the virus over reopening the economy before the states initiated policies to reopen.
- + Whereas parts of the economy reopened, **69%** of the general population preferred containing the virus over reopening the economy and **80%** of LGBTQ people preferred containing the virus.

LGBTQ PEOPLE CONTINUE TO FACE ECONOMIC TURMOIL

While the nation overall is seeing an improvement in employment outcomes, LGBTQ people are still more likely to be experiencing adverse employment outcomes in the initially reopened economy, including higher unemployment rates and more frequent reporting of having their work hours reduced.

Generally speaking, the number of people reporting that they had a reduction in work hours due to COVID-19 has modestly decreased as parts of the economy start to reopen. LGBTQ people have experienced reductions in work hours due to COVID-19 more often than the general population, both before and after parts of the economy started to reopen. These trends continue to be more salient for LGBTQ people of color and transgender people.

- + The LGBTQ population was **20%** more likely than the general population to have experienced a reduction in work hours since some states initiated reopening policies.
- + Moreover, LGBTQ people of color are **44%** more likely and transgender people are **125%** more likely than the general population to have had a reduction in work hours since some states initiated reopening policies.

³ These numbers may change, as decisions are being made daily as new information is produced hourly. For this research brief, the numbers were calculated one final time on August 24, 2020 before this document was finalized before publication.



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Similarly, the number of people reporting that they lost their job due to COVID-19 has modestly decreased since states initiated policies to reopen. LGBTQ people, specifically LGBTQ people of color, still remain more likely to have lost their jobs since some states initiated reopening policies due to COVID-19 when compared to the general population. As parts of the economy started to reopen, bisexual people had a slight increase in unemployment due to COVID-19.

- + The LGBTQ population was **30%** more likely than the general population to have lost their jobs since some states initiated reopening policies due to COVID-19.
- + LGBTQ people of color are **70%** more likely and bisexual people are **80%** more likely than the general population to have lost their jobs since some states initiated reopening policies due to COVID-19.
- + Nearly **one-fifth** of bisexual people had reported becoming unemployed since some states initiated reopening policies due to COVID-19, a slight increase from when the economy was closed.

A NEW ECONOMIC PROBLEM ARISES AS OLD ONES CONTINUE TO FESTER

While reductions in work hours and job loss have modestly decreased since a majority of states have reopened, people continue to experience previously known disparities in employment as well as new economic challenges. Specifically, people are returning to work but now for less pay.

Across the board, respondents were more likely to be taking pay cuts since some states initiated reopening policies than before. Desperate to recuperate from the economic fallout, people must now choose to take less pay to work and survive.

- + The number of people in the general population who are taking pay cuts increased by **14%** from when the economy was closed to when some states initiated reopening policies:
 - The LGBTQ population experienced a **20%** increase in taking pay cuts.
 - LGBTQ people of color experienced a **54%** increase in taking pay cuts.
- + Furthermore, LGBTQ people were **50%** more likely and LGBTQ people of color were **150%** more likely than the general population to have taken a pay cut since some states initiated reopening policies.
- + One-fifth of LGBTQ people of color have taken a pay cut since some states have initiated policies to reopen.

LGBTQ PEOPLE HEAVILY RELY ON UNPAID LEAVE

Many people have had to resort to taking unpaid leave for various reasons relating to the COVID-19 crisis. Overall, the percentage of people having to take unpaid leave has decreased since some states initiated reopening policies economy by **14%** for the general population and **27%** in the overall LGBTQ population. However, the use of unpaid leave has increased for transgender people by **4%** and LGBTQ people of color by **23%**.

Even with fewer LGBTQ people taking unpaid leave since some states initiated reopening policies, significant disparities still exist. As **6%** of the general population has taken unpaid leave, compared to **11%** of LGBTQ people, **27%** of transgender people, and **16%** of LGBTQ people of color.



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CONCLUSION

With the pandemic sending devastating shockwaves through the national economy, many states have reopened in an effort to boost their economies with little guidance and support from top officials in the United States government. Reopening has reduced some of the adverse economic impacts that people are facing due to COVID-19. However, many of these impacts may be short-lived as the pandemic grows. In addition, many of these benefits may not be reaching some of the most vulnerable, including many in the LGBTQ community. Without a national strategy to contain the virus and direct support to the most vulnerable, the weight of the pandemic rests on the shoulders of those who already face the most inequities and injustices in their daily lives.

METHODOLOGY

- **Sample Size:** PSB conducted a series of 12 online nonprobability polls. Surveys were completed for 12,000 general population (adults, ages 18+) in the United States (1,000 respondents per poll).
- **Survey Timeline:** Polls were fielded between April 16-August 6, 2020.
- **Variance Estimation:** Because LGBTQ people make up a relatively small percentage of the United States population, their margins of error will naturally be larger in many general population surveys, including this data. Margin of error is not always an appropriate or necessary tool for measuring error or bias, particularly in the context of a nonprobability survey. Weighting is used in analyzing the results of nonprobability polls to reduce bias and increase external validity.
- **Weighting:** Data are weighted using Census Demographic targets to ensure the sample is nationally representative of the United States population. Data for sexual orientation and gender identity measures are weighted using HRC-advised methodologies.
- **Subcommunity Analysis:** Due to sample sizes, estimates broken out by race communities (e.g., Black communities) were not possible. This is because analyses were conducted by stratifying data before and after a time period. Stratification decreases bias in analysis and sample size.
- **Defining “since some states initiated reopening policies”:** With high levels of variation in policy for opening the economy by state and territory, a date was selected as an effective intervention for survey participants who responded before and after initial policies were in place across most states aiming to reopen the economy. May 26 was selected as the date by which survey responses were stratified into two groups. This was primarily influenced by 1) the dates in which states had initially reopened their economies and 2) the dates at which weekly polls conducted by PSB were completed. May 26 was determined to be the best date to stratify data because 1) it balanced sample sizes between respondents in two time periods equally as well as distributed power equally and 2) over a majority of states in the United States had initially reopened by May 26.