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Briefing Paper

Resourcing LGBTQI+ movements in the Global South and East to build inclusive civic space

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Key findings

Research from Pakistan, Thailand and Argentina shows that LGBTQI+ movements build inclusive civic space by expanding participation in public and political life, changing discussions of democratic outcomes, and building coalitions that strengthen demands around democracy and rights.

Funding LGBTQI+ movements is central to a strategy of protecting civic space and democracy. Investment in LGBTQI+ movements must be recognised as an investment in democracy.

International funding is at its best when it works collaboratively with local organisations to build their long-term resilience, enabling them to withstand fluctuations in resource availability and minimise the risk of backlash.

Funders can support LGBTQI+ movements in accessing diverse funding opportunities across a wider range of issue areas (e.g. climate and democracy support) and for intersecting population groups (e.g. ethnic minorities and vulnerable women), reflecting their broadening alliances with other groups in civic space.

LGBTQI+ movements operating under restriction can be resourced through supporting intersecting movement strategies (such as coalition-building between aligned movements) and trusted, movement-led intermediary funders.

Funders can resource pathways that enable activists to enter civic space, including by supporting their social and economic security, and their engagement in cultural and community spaces.

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About this publication

This briefing paper is part of a research project to study how LGBTQI+ movements shape inclusive civic space in three restrictive contexts: Pakistan, Argentina and Thailand. The research was designed collaboratively with the Global Philanthropy Project and ODI Global. In addition to this briefing paper, the project outputs include three forthcoming country reports based on qualitative research.

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About Global Philanthropy Project

Global Philanthropy Project (GPP) is a collaboration of funders and philanthropic advisors working to expand global philanthropic support to advance the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people in the Global South and East globalphilanthropyproject.org.

About ALIGN

ALIGN - Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms - is a digital platform and programme of work that supports a global community of researchers, practitioners and activists, all committed to gender justice and equality alignplatform.org.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CBO	community-based organisation
CSO	civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
GRR	*Global Resources Report: Government & Philanthropic Support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Communities*
GSE	Global South and East
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex. The plus sign represents other diverse sexualities and gender identities. When referring to specific identities, shortened versions of the acronym are used, e.g. LGB for lesbian, gay and bisexual
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ODA	official development assistance
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1 Introduction

The global movement for LGBTQI+ rights is confronting an unprecedented convergence of challenges. After steady progress towards equality and inclusion, LGBTQI+ movements must now contend with a global rise of authoritarian populism, democratic backsliding, and state-led repression (Nord et al., 2025). Cuts to official development assistance (ODA), such as bilateral aid, and philanthropic giving are combining with the intensifying anti-gender backlash. This threatens hard-won gains of LGBTQI+ movements and undermines their capacity to respond. In the current moment, these movements must be recognised for their contribution to creating an inclusive civic space, which is vital to pushing back against exclusionary and undemocratic forces.

This briefing paper draws on research in Pakistan, Thailand and Argentina to analyse how LGBTQI+ movements contribute to open and inclusive civic space. The research is based on interviews and focus group discussions with civil society activists, organisers, policy-makers, lawyers and academics. It found that the movements have expanded participation in public and political life, changed discussions of democracy, and held civic space open through rights-based coalitions in the face of backlash.

This brief argues that investment in LGBTQI+ movements is therefore an investment in democracy. It does this by showing how these movements build inclusive civic space and how the resourcing of their efforts contributes to the opening of civic space for all. Effective and strategic resourcing can help movements build on their community foundations to amplify their advocacy and strengthen their long-term resilience.

Box 1 Definition of resourcing

Resourcing primarily refers to financial resources, whether from income, community fundraising or external donors. Non-financial resourcing may include the provision of: legal, financial and administrative infrastructure; physical spaces, land and property; digital security and communications infrastructure; access to knowledge, research, travel, networks and convening; emergency protection and rapid-response support; relationships with public institutions, the media and allied movements; and volunteer labour, mutual aid and community-generated resources. Social movement theory sometimes treats access to allies, trust, media visibility and knowledge of protest actions as movement resources (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). Better-educated and elite activists are more likely to have resources than less privileged groups (Thompson and Tapscott, 2010).

Resourcing shapes the possible activities for social movements, and it affects whether movements can take advantage of a political opportunity that arises.

Box 2 Definition of civic space

Civic space is broadly understood as the space and conditions in which civil society operates. It is the conditions that allow people and groups to participate in public life and exercise rights such as freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. It includes laws and policies on organising, fair registration rules for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), access to funding and resources, media freedoms, and protection from harassment and surveillance.

Adapted from CIVICUS Monitor (n.d.) and OECD (2024).

The lessons and recommendations outlined in this brief will support funders to create the conditions that enable LGBTQI+ movements to build inclusive civic space.

2 The changing funding context

Funding to LGBTQI+ movements in the Global South and East (GSE)[1] has undergone significant changes in the last few years. A wider move away from funding human rights, social movements and gender equality, combined with the anti-rights backlash and democratic decline, has had strong impacts on LGBTQI+ movements. The funding cuts announced in 2025 suggest that global LGBTQI+ funding has reached a high point and is now declining.

2.1 Backlash and democratic decline

Recent years have seen an escalating backlash against LGBTQI+ people and rights. Anti-gender actors are opposed to the expansion of gender equality and inclusion in laws and policies (Khan and Michalko, 2026). They have led a highly successful campaign to frame LGBTQI+ rights as contesting family values, threatening children and undermining national sovereignty (McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023). Political and media discourse in many countries has specifically targeted transgender people, resulting in increased violence and further marginalisation (Outright International, 2025).

This backlash is accompanied by a rise in authoritarian governments, which has constrained the ability of LGBTQI+ communities to advocate effectively for their rights and inclusion. As authoritarianism increases, a key strategy is to shut down civic space for liberal or rights-based actors, which limits the capacity of women and other marginalised communities to participate (Roggeband and Krizsán, 2021). A free civil society is a condition of democracy, as it holds governments to account and amplifies citizens' voices (Pospieszna and Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2022). But today, 'shrinking' civic space characterises the wider illiberal turn in geopolitics (Reid, 2024).

2.2 Restrictive international landscape

Within this context of anti-gender politics and democratic backsliding, LGBTQI+ movements have experienced sudden and significant changes in funding streams. Prior to 2025, the United States (US) Government was a top funder of the global LGBTQI+ movement and played a critical donor leadership role through flagship mechanisms such as the Global Equality Fund (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026).[2] The US terminated LGBTQI+ rights support in its foreign assistance in 2025 and, in January 2026, withdrew its funding to 31 United Nations (UN) entities, including

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1 The GSE includes (1) Asia and the Pacific, (2) Eastern Europe and Central Asia, (3) Latin America and the Caribbean, (4) South West Asia and North Africa, and (5) sub-Saharan Africa.

2 The *Global Resources Report* (GRR) indicates the US Government as the fifth largest government donor across 2013–2024 based on reported awards; however the report notes significant gaps in data availability for the USG and the Global Equality Fund. The United States Government's totals in the GRR should therefore be read as a significantly limited snapshot of the government's financial support for the global LGBTQI+ movement.

the UN Population Fund and UN Women, both of which support rights-based gender inclusion (Lynch, 2026). Future funding is conditional upon recipient agencies' adherence to the expanded 'global gag rule', which bars funding to recipients that provide abortion services or counselling, recognise diverse gender identities, and provide services to trans people (Charbonneau, 2026).

In addition, several recent US policy changes appear to target philanthropic institutions that fund LGBTQI+ rights and movements, leading some progressive philanthropic organisations based in the US to move cautiously (Beaty, 2025). The international funding landscape is further affected by shifts in other countries that traditionally support human rights, democratisation and civil society. Instead they now prioritise defence and military capabilities (Romero, 2025). This new priority is most evident among European states, which are acting in response to Russia's war in Ukraine (Thomas and Miller, 2025).

2.3 Country restrictions and declining domestic funding

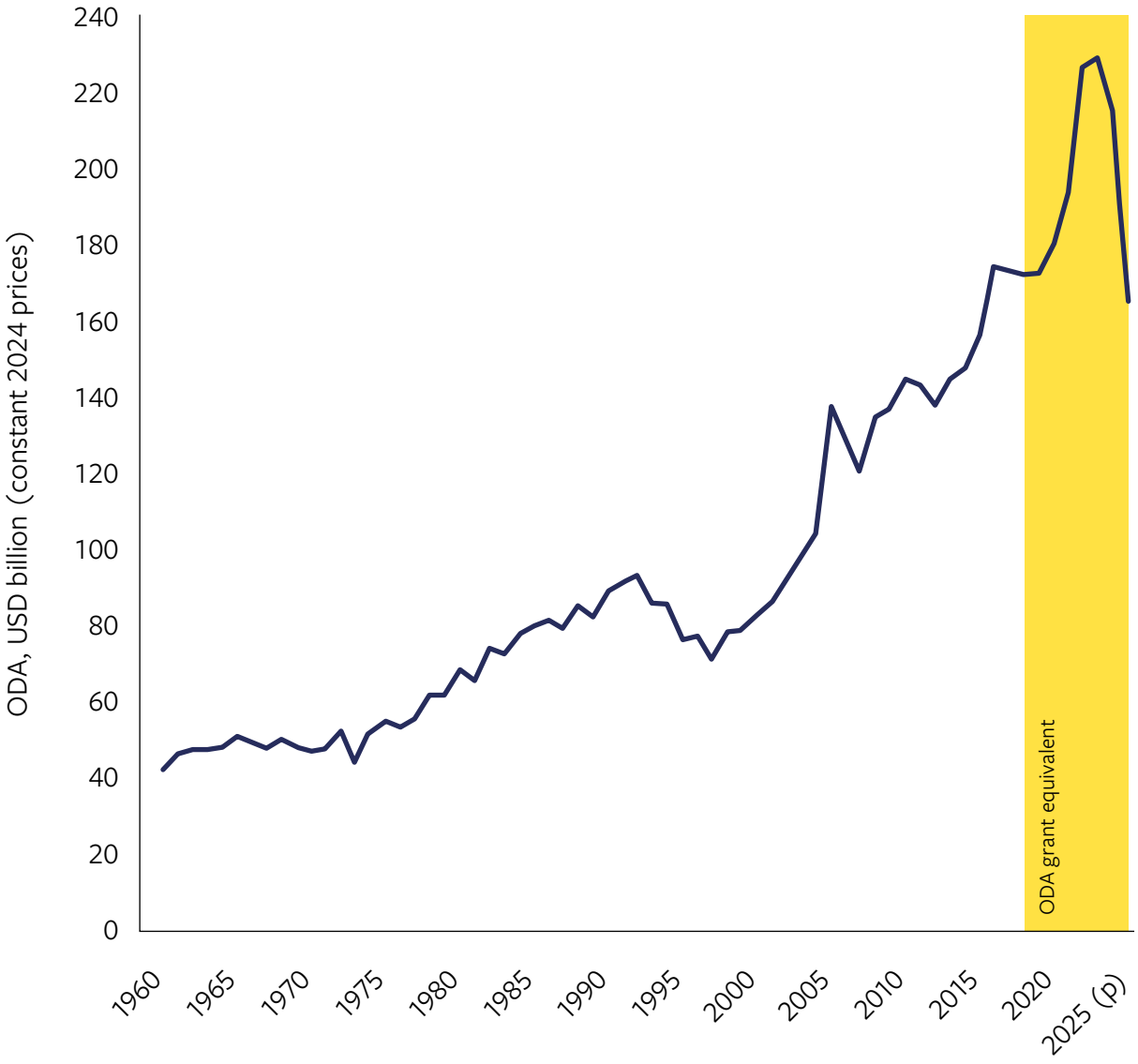
Authoritarian governments exercise control over civic space through restricting foreign funding flows to organisations, prohibiting lobbying by civil society organisations (CSOs), imposing obstructive bureaucratic requirements for registration, and sometimes using violence and harassment (Noorlander, 2022; Biekart et al., 2023; Ogbeche, 2023). In such contexts, this increasing hostility leads to risks for both funders and grantees. Grantees may be at risk if they accept foreign funds that target them for government scrutiny and fuel accusations of foreign interference. Funders are at risk of not meeting recipient country government regulations and becoming unable to fund certain activities or groups. For example, the recent anti-homosexuality acts in Senegal and Ghana both contain provisions that criminalise financial support to LGBTQI+ organisations (BBC Africa, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

Countries that provide some domestic funding to LGBTQI+ rights, such as Thailand and Argentina, have changed their approach in response to political shifts. Argentina saw a sharp negative swing in domestic financing and support for LGBTQI+ rights following the election of Javier Milei (see Section 3.3), as did Brazil during the tenure of President Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2023). Such political volatility means that funders may experience higher barriers to their engagement, and greater government surveillance of their grant-making, thus increasing the risks for supporting LGBTQI+ rights.

2.4 Cuts to the volume of funding

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries' ODA dropped by 23.1% in 2025, the largest single-year decline in history (see Figure 1). While there had been some decline in previous years, the unprecedented 2025 drop was largely prompted by the US withdrawal from international co-operation under President Donald Trump.

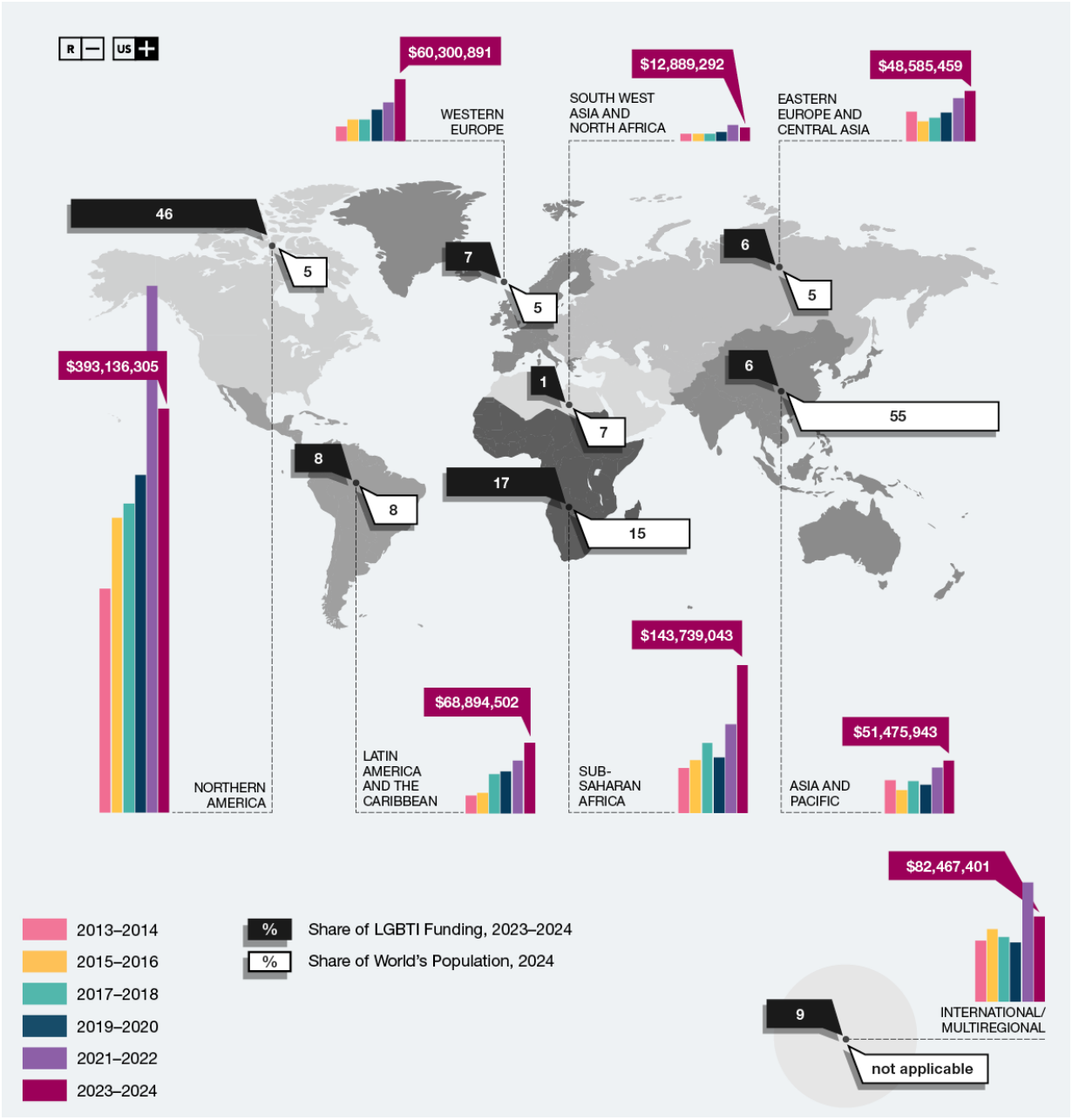
Figure 1 Total ODA contributions from DAC countries, over time



Source: OECD (2026)

The ODA cuts and restrictive environments in donor and recipient countries fuel existing disparities in funding for LGBTQI+ movements. In 2023–2024, all global LGBTQI+ foundation funding accounted for less than 33 cents out of every $100 of overall worldwide foundation funding, a 6 cents decrease since 2021–2022 (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026). Between the 2021–2022 and the 2023–2024 reporting periods of the *Global Resources Report* (GRR), global LGBTQI+ funding decreased by about $44 million (5%), driven by a $122.5 million (25%) drop in funds to grantees working in the US (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026; see Figure 2). This is the first decrease documented in the 12 years of the GRR.

Figure 2 Global LGBTQI+ funding by world region, 2013–2024



Source: GRR data (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026: 33)

Although funding to GSE countries increased overall, the most recent data does not yet reflect the known and anticipated 2025 cuts to LGBTQI+ movements. The Human Rights Funders Network estimates that human rights-focused ODA will drop by between $1.4 and $1.9 billion annually by 2026 (Thomas and Miller, 2025). The visible decline in funding to grantees in the US signals a funding ecosystem entering a period of financial strain, amid rising anti-rights mobilisation and democratic backsliding.

3 How LGBTQI+ movements shape civic space

An open and vibrant civic space is a key pillar of democracy. Freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression allow citizens to organise, participate, communicate and hold power-holders accountable. It is a space where marginalised groups can make their claims and social movements challenge inequalities.

LGBTQI+ movements contest dominant norms that restrict who is recognised as a legitimate civic actor. They challenge restrictive laws, such as censorship or limits on public assembly, that often target LGBTQI+ communities first and pave the way for restrictions on other groups. Movement building through community centres, Pride marches, online platforms and alliances also develops political consciousness and platforms for those excluded from mainstream politics.

This section discusses how resourcing affects LGBTQI+ movements' efforts to build inclusive civic space in Pakistan, Thailand and Argentina. It shows how LGBTQI+ movements do so by expanding public presence, broadening citizenship, expanding political participation, building new social justice alliances and shifting public discourse.

3.1 Pakistan

Pakistan is currently an electoral autocracy, with the military as the dominant political stakeholder and the civilian government subservient to its control (Talbot, 2022). Civic space is repressed, with intermittent and inconsistent openings. Despite their marginalised social and political status, over the last two decades, LGBTQI+ activists have succeeded in entering civic space to claim their rights. The *khwajasira* community has had the most success due to their historic recognition as a third gender in Pakistan.[3] Homosexuality is criminalised under 19th century laws, introduced by British colonial rule, which remain in place, while NGOs supporting rights related to sexual orientation are not allowed to register (World Bank, 2024). LGB groups cannot formally organise without risking arrest (Human Dignity Trust, 2024). Intersex people are incorrectly conflated with *khwajasiras* by backlash actors, as well as policy-makers, and face distinct forms of discrimination (Awan, 2024).

3 '*Khwajasira*' is an umbrella term that covers trans women, trans persons, non-binary persons and others. They are part of a distinct subculture comprising people assigned male at birth but who 'identify as third-gender persons with a female soul', which is a subtle but significant difference from western conceptualisations of transgender persons (Awan, 2024).

How Pakistan's LGBTQI+ movement has shaped civic space

Pakistan's LGBTQI+ activists have made important contributions to building an inclusive civic space, despite high levels of social stigma, media bias and political opposition. The research shows that groups have deployed multiple successful strategies. They have increasingly engaged in creative arts and participated in cultural projects, including film, literary, dance and other events. This cultural participation began to alter public perceptions about *khwajasiras*, and the events and spaces also offered opportunities for LGB people to network. While *khwajasiras* protested high levels of violence against their community, they also formed their own formal organisations (often supported by HIV/AIDS funding) that were used to launch successful rights-based advocacy campaigns. As protests and advocacy efforts gained substantial political attention, in 2009 *khwajasiras* won the legal right to identify as a 'third gender'. This led to the milestone Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018, expanding their access to citizenship rights and entitlements.

The *khwajasira* community has built new alliances, partnerships and coalitions as its members have gained voice and confidence in their role as civic space actors. Most impactfully, their role as activists alongside young feminists at Aurat Marches (annual International Women's Day events held in urban centres since 2018) drew unprecedented attention to sexual politics and gender diversity. Further events, such as Moorat Marches, secured new allies for trans voices, while current allyships with other social justice movements related to land, water and climate issues indicate *khwajasiras*' broadening role in civic space. Public discourse has shifted, both amplifying their rights-based claims but also giving voice to right-wing campaigns that have fuelled a backlash. Due to the ongoing risks to LGBI activists and individuals, underground and online community networks are essential to forging collective action and identity-based claims in the current context.

How international funding impacts the movement

Pakistan's formal civic space for LGBTQI+ organising is heavily dependent on thematically narrow, tightly regulated access to foreign funding. Since 2015, Pakistan has received an average of $500,000 annually in grant awards focused on LGBTQI+ issues and populations (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026). This amount does not reflect the funds available for HIV/AIDS and international development more broadly, but comes from human rights funding resources from mostly private and public foundations that is directed to different groups (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026; Mustafa, 2022).[4] Funding that directly benefits *khwajasiras* and gay men is often channelled through UN agencies, international NGOs or national NGOs, through HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. The Global Fund support to address HIV/AIDS steadily increased until

4 The GRR does not track general HIV/AIDS funding, only that which is explicitly focused on LGBTQI+ people. Broader HIV/AIDS funding is also likely to reach LGBTQI+ populations. For more information about HIV/AIDS funding, refer to Funders Concerned About AIDS' Resource Tracking report: https://fcaaids.org/funding-data.

2023, when it peaked at $32 million, exclusively channelled through the Ministry of Health and the UN Development Programme. By 2025, the amount had declined to $13 million (Global Fund, 2026b).

International funding has both helped and hindered the development of a politicised identity and efforts to create inclusive civic space. International funding for HIV/AIDS contributed to the growth of a professionalised NGO sector, providing relatively stable incomes for some *khwajasiras* and convening spaces for activists within health-related programmes. Western funds to support creative and cultural events (see previous section) provided indirect support for fostering collective action in public spaces. South Asian solidarity has nurtured networks of advocates and organisations. This ecosystem of support, from global to regional and local, underpins an open civic space.

International resource flows to a country that is both politically restricted and socially conservative must be cognisant of the sensitive context to be effective. For example, when the US Embassy held a Pride gathering in 2011, it may have intended to signal support, yet it triggered backlash from religious and far-right groups that allege LGBTQI+ issues are a western agenda and put individuals at risk from their own families and communities as a result. In contrast, more indirect forms of support that provided opportunities for NGOs to hold meetings and events have played an important role in building collective action agendas for civic activism. Resources for LGBTQI+ individuals to participate in arts exhibitions, festivals and theatre performances are instrumental to shifting public perceptions and building community confidence.

Activists interviewed for this research suggested ways forward for international funders to effectively channel resources to the movement in an environment of active backlash and increasing restrictions on the receipt of foreign funds. The LGBTQI+ rights-based approach promoted by many funders is viewed by many activists as a contributing factor to the backlash, due to its association with the western discourse both on human rights and LGBTQI+ issues. Many *khwajasiras* preferred an approach emphasising their cultural roles and civic rights as ordinary citizens, rather than a framing that aligned them with politicised international LGBTQI+ rights discourse.

While NGOs have benefited from donor funds, the unpredictability in resource flows, due to changes in funding priorities, and the resulting decline in support has had serious consequences. Organisations related to HIV/AIDS service provision and advocacy have lost funding, resulting in a disproportionate impact on the *khwajasira* community. The loss of funding has pushed these organisations to reprioritise their activities and reduce their advocacy.

As a result of these fluctuations, respondents in Pakistan were cautious about re-engaging with international donors. They critiqued the paternalistic attitudes and tight control by international donors and said that undue interference in setting priorities had been counterproductive.

Although most LGBTQI+ actors in Pakistan receive very little funding, those that do have been hard-hit by the decline in resources. They rely on formal NGOs and community organisations to support their advocacy, provide safe spaces and offer a source of employment. Nonetheless, LGBTQI+ groups continue their unfunded activism and networking, and some even note that they have a new flexibility in their work once freed from donor conditionalities.

3.2 Thailand

Thailand is a military-monarchy autocracy, with mixed repression of civil society. The pro-democracy protests in 2020–2021, led by young people, included many LGBTQI+ people (Teeratanabodee, 2025). Protestors made significant progress in enabling greater freedom of speech on both LGBTQI+ rights and democratic reform, opened more space for youth, women and queer people to participate safely, and developed new alliances between social justice movements. A significant outcome was the passage of the same-sex marriage bill, which came into effect in January 2025.

Despite these gains, there have been parliamentary attempts to restrict foreign funding and to control the activities of NGOs which, if successful, would undermine the country's stated commitments to open civic space (Amnesty International et al., 2021).

How Thailand's LGBTQI+ movement has shaped civic space

Thailand's pro-democracy protests of 2020–2021 had significant participation from LGBTQI+ activists in leadership, as well as shaping demands and developing new forms of protest activity. While they did not achieve their aim of constitutional reform, the protests opened a new conversation about representation, rights and democracy that has significantly changed the civic space landscape (McCargo, 2021).

Interview respondents pointed to a dramatic discursive change since the protests in how LGBTQI+ issues are talked about and represented. There is now more media visibility, including in 'Boys' Love' and 'Girls' Love' TV series, and this greater representation means greater positive discussion of LGBTQI+ lives. Beyond new social acceptance, respondents found much more open space to work on addressing inequalities, improving service provision and strengthening advocacy and policy influence. Pride organising has significantly expanded since 2021, receiving more government support, increasing LGBTQI+ visibility and public awareness of persistent inequalities. Pride marches themselves are an expression of open civic space.

The civic opening has led to a deepening professionalisation and maturity of the LGBTQI+ movement. Community-based organisations (CBOs) are moving from volunteer structures into NGOs and social enterprises through partnerships with government, domestic and international funders, and the private sector. The growing strength of CBOs has also increased their

representation on national committees and created more opportunities to contribute to policy-making. Even when advocacy does not immediately succeed, building coalitions and maintaining a visible presence strengthens future influence.

The 2025 Marriage Equality Act, legalising same-sex marriage, was a significant win for the LGBTQI+ movement. The public pressure for the law reshaped perceptions of collective political agency as powerful and successful, and opened the door for public mobilisation on other issues. It showed that collective action can successfully push for change with the right conditions and political opportunity, setting a precedent for other actions in civic space. This gain for LGBTQI+ rights has changed public perceptions of how democratic action can push the government to change policy.

Thailand's protests combined democratic demands with LGBTQI+ rights issues, demonstrating how inclusion is fundamental to democracy. Civic space has become more open to democratic organising and more supportive of diverse voices. However, the expansion of civic space in Thailand has been geographically uneven. Civil society outside Bangkok is notably restricted, particularly in the Southern Border Provinces, where martial law has been exercised amid an insurgency. Provincial CBOs described significant barriers to accessing both domestic and international funding, due to the complex requirements, ranging from registration documents to financial records. While large organisations compete against one another for funding, small groups highlighted chains of dependency with large organisations.

How international funding impacts the movement

Thailand has received an average of about $1 million annually in grant awards focused on LGBTQI+ issues and populations since 2015 (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026).[5] As Thailand is an upper middle-income country, it is not fully dependent on international funding for social justice issues. Thailand's LGBTQI+ sector receives substantial funding from domestic sources, including the national and municipal governments and commercial or social enterprises. The government provides 90% of HIV/AIDS funding, and 9% comes from international funds, including around $20 million per year from the Global Fund (Viriyathorn et al., 2024; Global Fund, 2026a). The Global Fund is due to transition out of Thailand in 2028 and started reducing disbursements in 2023.

The consistent funding to the health sector has helped develop a strong civil society sector in Bangkok, with established, robust NGOs with extensive networks reaching LGBTQI+ people. Foreign funding that provides long-term support has been effective in enabling self-sufficient organisations, through developing organisational capacity and institutional knowledge.

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5 The GRR does not track general HIV/AIDS funding, only that which is explicitly focused on LGBTQI+ people. Broader HIV/AIDS funding is also likely to reach LGBTQI+ populations. For more information about HIV/AIDS funding, refer to Funders Concerned About AIDS' Resource Tracking report: https://fcaaids.org/funding-data/

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) was particularly highlighted for taking this approach. Its focus on building staff communication and strategy skills, internal policies, and networks provided a donor exit strategy and cushioned the blow of its eventual closure. Funders that focused on organisational strengthening and self-sufficiency have helped some organisations retain their position in civic space and develop into a mature rights movement with strong capacity for service provision and advocacy.

Although Thailand's LGBTQI+ movement is not entirely dependent on foreign funding, it has been severely impacted by the recent funding cuts and turbulence in the funding ecosystem. Organisations have closed projects, let staff go and reprioritised their work. Communications and advocacy have been particularly hard-hit, as these longer-term activities, which are key to maintaining civic space, have been deprioritised in the crisis as organisations provide immediate life-saving support instead, primarily in the health and HIV/AIDS sectors.

The change in the funding landscape has accelerated the trajectory towards social enterprise, with some LGBTQI+ organisations filling the gap by developing new income-generating activities, selling products or charging fees for services. For those unable to generate their own income, some are pivoting towards government priorities to qualify for government funding, which, in many cases, leads them to compromise their principles or self-censor to survive. International funding is seen as providing more independence than domestic grants, notwithstanding critiques of donor conditionality, and it facilitates civil society to engage in policy advocacy with the government.

One critique of foreign funding is that donors direct it to the same few organisations, resulting in less representation of some groups and perspectives in civic space. A common concern from respondents is that foreign funding stops at medium-sized NGOs and does not reach the grassroots. Like in Pakistan, this has led the LGBTQI+ movement in certain directions, towards formalised NGOs working on health and HIV/AIDS, with a particular focus on transgender women, and men who have sex with men. NGOs that receive less funding are those taking a rights-based approach, critiquing the government, or supporting ethnic minority communities, migrant workers and lesbian, bisexual and queer women's and intersex-focused groups.

The broader turn towards commercialisation is exemplified by Bangkok's current bid to host WorldPride 2030. The government is supporting the bid, indicating its receptiveness to LGBTQI+ inclusion if it contributes to the national economy. It sees WorldPride as an opportunity to increase LGBTQI+ tourism and the 'pink dollar', aligned with the government's soft power policy of promoting Thai culture and tourism (Open for Business, 2024). Therefore, some LGBTQI+ civic actors are reframing their claims around economic motivations as well as rights. This is beginning to cause disagreements between those who see the economic frame as an opportunity to gain support and visibility, and those who argue it is a form of 'rainbow capitalism' and 'pinkwashing'.

3.3 Argentina

Argentina has been a global leader in LGBTQI+ rights, introducing landmark reforms, including legalising same-sex marriage and adoption (2010), passing the first-ever nationwide gender self-identification law (2012), lifting restrictions on blood donations from gay and bisexual men (2015), and creating a public sector employment quota for *travesti* and trans people (2020).[6] These advances were driven by sustained advocacy from feminist and LGBTQI+ movements, supported by strong CSOs.

Despite these advances, Argentina is undergoing a period of political and social transformation that is reshaping the country's civic and human rights landscape. In 2023, libertarian economist Javier Milei was elected president amid a severe economic crisis (de la Torre, 2025). His administration has pursued a radical reform agenda focused on deregulation, fiscal austerity and the restructuring of the state, using confrontational rhetoric towards social justice movements, particularly those associated with gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights (ibid.). At the 2025 World Economic Forum in Davos, President Milei accused what he termed 'the LGBT agenda' of attempting to 'impose on us that women are men and that men are women just because they perceive themselves that way' (Buenos Aires Herald, 2025). Although key legal protections remain in place for now, some laws (e.g. the employment quota law) have not been respected. Ongoing attacks on institutions and regressive policies have led to greater insecurity for LGBTQI+ communities and put previous gains at risk.

How Argentina's LGBTQI+ movement has shaped civic space

The LGBTQI+ movement has played a significant role in expanding civic space in Argentina. Since the 1980s, organisations such as the Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA) have worked alongside other social movements on human rights, violence and HIV/AIDS, establishing a tradition of cross-movement organising based on the principle that discrimination and repression undermine democracy (Brown, 2002). This experience also contributed to the emergence of broader mobilisations such as Ni Una Menos ('Not One [Woman] Less'),[7] by providing organisational strategies and opening spaces for collective action (Universidad Nacional de las Artes, 2025).

Mass mobilisation has remained central to this contribution. Pride marches have evolved from relatively small gatherings in the 1990s into major political demonstrations that bring together CSOs, activists and allies around demands for equality, anti-discrimination, social inclusion and

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6 *Travesti* is a gender identity and socio-political identifier in Latin America for those assigned male at birth who identify with feminine gender identities and perform feminine gender roles. *Travestis* are considered distinct from trans women (Roe, 2021).

7 The Ni Una Menos ('Not One [Woman] Less') movement is a feminist and social justice movement that originated in Argentina in 2015 to protest femicide and gender-based violence following the murder of Chiara Páez (Medina, 2023).

policy reform (Corrales, 2012). The movement has also forged strong alliances with feminist, human rights, and other progressive movements, helping connect LGBTQI+ rights with wider agendas. As one interview participant described it:

> 'Argentina is one of the few countries that has this articulation and this commitment of all social movements to the LGBTQI agenda and [it] is reciprocal.'

These coalitions were instrumental to major legislative achievements, including marriage equality and abortion rights, with the *travesti* movement playing an active role in the reproductive rights campaign (Corrales, 2012; Viggiano and McGuirk, 2022).

More recently, the 2025 Federal March of Anti-Fascist and Anti-Racist Pride demonstrated the movement's continued capacity to mobilise diverse sectors of civil society in defence of human rights and against political repression (de la Torre, 2025). This long-term growth of the movement during the politically supportive years helped develop policy expertise and strong networks that led to legal protections. Overall, the LGBTQI+ movement's contribution to civic space extends beyond advances in LGBTQI+ rights: it has broadened opportunities for political participation, strengthened civil society networks, fostered alliances across social movements and helped embed equality and human rights within Argentina's broader democratic agenda.

How international funding impacts the movement

The domestic funding context has become increasingly difficult for LGBTQI+ organisations since the election of Milei's government, which dissolved the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity and defunded multiple programmes (Agencia EFE, 2025). Because it is categorised as an upper middle-income country, Argentina receives limited ODA and other forms of international support. Argentina has received an average of about $0.5 million annually in grant awards focused on LGBTQI+ issues and populations since 2015, with a peak of $1 million in 2023 (Global Philanthropy Project, 2026).[8] The current decline in international funding for gender and social justice movements (which study participants said began in 2025) is matched by a decline in domestic funding support. These challenges are compounded by the country's economic crisis and the rise in anti-gender politics.

Most participants noted that, apart from funding linked to the HIV/AIDS response during the 1990s and 2000s, Argentina's LGBTQI+ movement has historically received relatively little direct international funding. Small organisations are the most affected, as they receive funds via

8 The GRR does not track general HIV/AIDS funding, only that which is explicitly focused on LGBTQI+ people. Broader HIV/AIDS funding is also likely to reach LGBTQI+ populations. For more information about HIV/AIDS funding, refer to Funders Concerned About AIDS' Resource Tracking report: https://fcaaids.org/funding-data/

regranting by larger national and international NGOs, resulting in a reduced grant amount and increased bureaucratic burden. Community organising work by informal groups that were not funded laid the groundwork for LGBTQI+ participation in civic space.

This self-funded model creates both opportunities and constraints. Community support has enabled organisations to pursue locally defined priorities and build strong networks of solidarity with other social movements, allied politicians and pro bono lawyers, strengthening coalitions and collective action.

At the same time, limited and unpredictable funding constrains organisations' ability to sustain their activities, invest in organisational development and plan for the long term. These challenges are particularly acute in the current context, where heightened attacks have increased the resources needed to protect past gains, respond to backlash and sustain civic participation.

International funding, when it has been available during times of more open civic space, has strengthened the foundations of the movement and scaled up the gains, supporting organisations to build coalitions, convene gatherings, pursue strategic litigation, implement advocacy campaigns and organise cultural initiatives, including arts festivals. International funding allowed the movement to build networks and develop expertise for policy advocacy that led to the existing legal gains. For instance, intersex participants highlighted that international funding was critical in helping them 'build a community' by connecting a previously fragmented movement. Other participants also noted that international funding helped cover essential operational costs that enabled organisations to sustain their activities.

However, current funding cuts, combined with a hostile political and economic environment, have constrained the LGBTQI+ movement's organisational capacity, its ability to build alliances with other social movements (including the feminist movement), increased mental ill-health among its leaders and limited its sustained participation in civic space. While this situation affects the entire LGBTQI+ movement, participants observed that trans and intersex communities have been affected the most.

The experience of Argentina shows that international funding can play an important role in strengthening the capacity of community-led, self-funded movements during times when the policy context is more receptive. Its significance is most apparent when the domestic context shifts to become less supportive of LGBTQI+ rights, while a broader socioeconomic crisis further limits the movement's capacity to protect civic space. Movements that have been consistently funded have more resilience to pivot in times of crisis because activists are not operating from a position of scarcity and burnout. With their organisational foundation secured, organisations are able to dedicate resources towards addressing immediate challenges rather than closing operational gaps that should have been addressed prior to the moment of crisis. More organisational stability provides capacity and resources to develop and implement resistance strategies that will sustain the movement through periods of heightened pressure.

4 The risks of reducing international funding to LGBTQI+ movements

Where LGBTQI+ movements in the GSE rely heavily on foreign funding streams and there is little domestic government or philanthropic support, they are especially vulnerable to international funding shocks (Romero, 2025). The funding crisis of 2025 exposed the fragility of the aid, humanitarian and development sectors, as many organisations faced abrupt cuts, delayed disbursements and growing uncertainty about future support. LGBTQI+ organisations faced job losses and project closures (Outright International, 2025). Some organisations likened the cuts to 'an earthquake', with aftershocks including rising homophobia and violence, economic precarity, exit of activists from the sector, loss of relationships and movement infrastructure, and the inability to plan for the long term (Kaleidoscope Trust, 2025). The closure of big programmes, like Freedom House's Dignity for All Consortium, funded by USAID, has also increased pressure on other funders to step in, meaning resources are spread even more thinly. Immediate impacts have already been documented, and further waves of impact are anticipated, as existing funds are spent down and not renewed.

The case studies demonstrate how these changing funding conditions for LGBTQI+ movements shape civic space. The following are some of the key risks highlighted by this research:

- The contraction and destabilisation of international funding correlates with the rise in anti-gender politics. The loss of resources within LGBTQI+ and other rights-based movements has ceded civic space and made it easier for backlash actors to exercise influence (Romero, 2025). This was evident across all three case studies.
- The political shift away from funding LGBTQI+ rights has constrained civic space by narrowing the topics that movements can focus on. As donors move funding towards less politicised issues, such as healthcare, service provision, or gender-based violence prevention and support, organisations will follow. Some organisations are strategically realigning with donor or government objectives to survive, as in Thailand and Pakistan. The shift towards less politicised issues may help organisations retain or secure funding in the short-term, but it reduces movements' ability to contest and challenge, and to hold governments to account, thus constricting their participation in civic space over the long term.
- As funding cuts result in project closures and staff terminations, movements lose valuable infrastructure and expertise, institutional knowledge and organisational capacity (Thomas and Miller, 2025). Movements are forced to redirect resources towards immediate crisis response and maintaining basic operations, rather than the longer-term work of building advocacy agendas, coalitions and movements (Kaleidoscope Trust, 2025). These dynamics further close civic space, weaken civic participation and delegitimise movements.

- Authoritarian governments' attempts to stop international funds reaching local LGBTQI+ activists and organisations through legislative and bureaucratic means compound the impact of funding cuts, particularly affecting financial resourcing of informal or unregistered groups and smaller grassroots organisations. Restrictions on funding close civic space by reducing the participation of the most marginalised movement actors.
- When funding predominantly goes to the same large and medium-sized organisations and issues considered 'safe', more marginalised groups and organisations, often located outside major cities, remain under-resourced and have more difficulty claiming civic space. This in turn makes civic space less inclusive.

5 Recommendations

Research from Pakistan, Thailand and Argentina demonstrates how LGBTQI+ movements build inclusive civic space by expanding participation in public and political life, changing discussions of democratic outcomes and building coalitions that strengthen demands around democracy and rights. These movements help build and defend a broader and more inclusive civic space for all citizens, which sustains the success of democracy in the long term.

Resourcing is vital for the movements' ability to strengthen civic space, thereby also strengthening democracy. It can help movements build on their community foundations to amplify their voices even in contexts of shrinking civic space and backlash.

As resourcing pathways change because of political constraints, the following recommendations suggest ways forward for funders.

Fund LGBTQI+ movements as a central part of a strategy to protect civic space and democracy

- Recognise LGBTQI+ movements as key democratic actors working to expand civic space for the benefit of all.
- Fund local LGBTQI+ organisations directly where possible, along with trusted, movement-led allies.

Resource the infrastructure and material conditions for LGBTQI+ movements' civic participation

- Fund LGBTQI+ participation and leadership in the arts, culture, community spaces and online organising.
- Support coalition-building between movements that share similar goals and strategies.
- Support activists to participate in global and regional solidarity building, advocacy and knowledge-sharing.
- Fund the social and economic support systems that enable LGBTQI+ communities to enter and hold civic space.
- Adapt due diligence requirements to risk; cover compliance and associated banking, security and administrative costs; ensure grant amounts keep pace with the cost of inflation.

Build the long-term resilience of LGBTQI+ movements to withstand funding fluctuations

- Provide long-term, flexible funding to support LGBTQI+ movements' autonomy to engage in civic space.
- Fund the true costs of operations for grantees and accompany them to address operational gaps that may leave them vulnerable in more restrictive times.
- Invest in resilience strategies, e.g. organisational strengthening activities, building organisational reserves and leadership development.
- Encourage grantees to develop diverse and innovative revenue streams.

Find creative ways to support LGBTQI+ movements with high risks of backlash and constraints on civic space

- Work closely with grantees to ensure funding is in line with their priorities, develop risks assessment and mitigation planning, and avoid outcomes that increase backlash.
- Support LGBTQI+ activists' well-being to minimise risk of burnout and attrition of movement leadership.

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