



# Single Step in 2020

# Single Step at a Glance

Our mission is to support, motivate and empower LGBTI (“Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex”) youth, their families, friends and allies in Bulgaria. Our activities include: a free and confidential online support chat, staffed by 20 trained volunteers, personal psychological counseling in 10 cities across the country, support groups, HIV & sexual health prevention program, raising-awareness campaigns, cultural, art, and social events.

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, our team adapted its activities and provided online access to our services. As additional support and a source of information, our psychologist created a special podcast in which she discussed current and important topics with guests.



# Target Group



Our core constituency is LGBTI youth (13 – 25 yo) and their parents. They are an "invisible" group of young people, for which only 2 alternatives exist: (i) a life spent in hiding due to the prevalent stigma or (ii) fleeing the country in pursuit of a better life abroad. Those who stay behind experience a hostile social environment that often leads to mental health disorders, psychological and substance abuse, depression, thoughts of suicide or actual acts of suicide. Their parents, on the other hand, fall victims to oppressive social stigma and shame and very often lack any reliable information on LGBTI matters.

**Staff & 20 volunteers:** one of our most valuable asset is the team of volunteers who operate our psychological support services. In addition to them, we have our incredibly professional team that structures and operates the services, updates them according to the needs of the community and makes sure to never leave anyone behind.

## Inputs

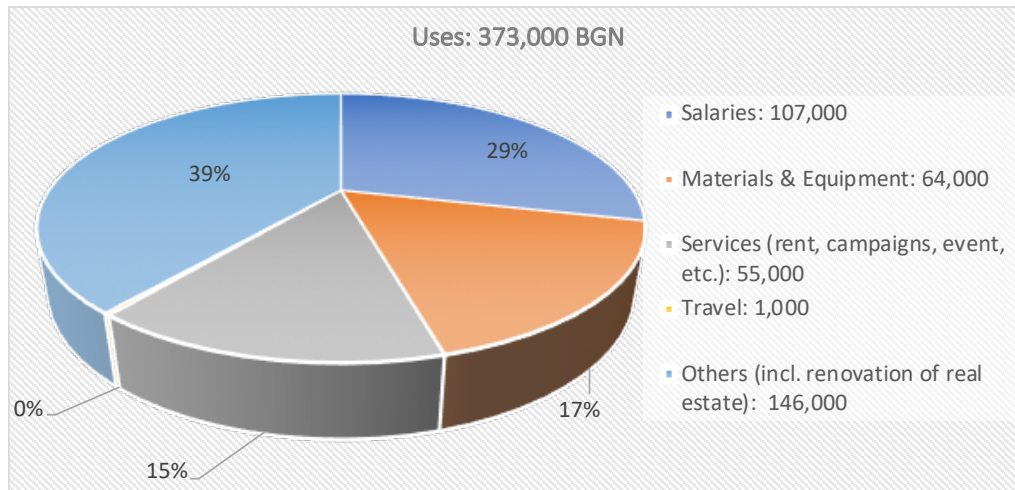
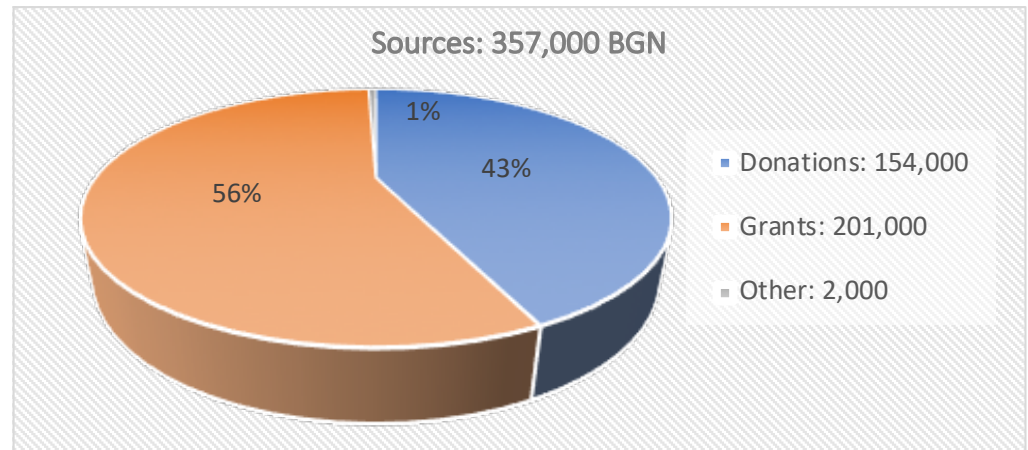
**Pro-bono professionals:** we have received significant generous support by incredible professionals from different spheres: PR and advertising, film-making & production, creative teams, graphic design, singers, artists, sport athletes, etc.



**Our Advisory Board** consists of recognizable, legitimate public figures, both Bulgarian and international, LGBT and allies, representing the full spectrum of society: business, entrepreneurs, politicians, NGO & academic people, media figures, artists, etc. [The Advisory Board](#) provides strategic direction and invaluable contacts to the organization; its firm stand for our cause provides clout and credibility to Single Step, domestically and internationally.

# Sources and Uses

In 2020 we financed our activities and operational expenses through diversified sources. Our fundraising efforts were mainly focused on the renovation and furnishing of the real-estate property, which would turn out to be our community centre and is the heart of our social entrepreneurship model.



Note:  
All amounts are in BGN.

# Activities – Psychological Support

## Online Chat

Available on our website, operating nightly between 8 and 11 pm – free, confidential and accessible throughout the country. Staffed by 20 volunteers.



## Support Group for Parents

Takes place in Sofia, twice a month with parents of LGBTI youth



## Support Groups for LGBTI Youth

One that takes place in Sofia, and one online, twice a month with LGBTI youth between 17 and 25.

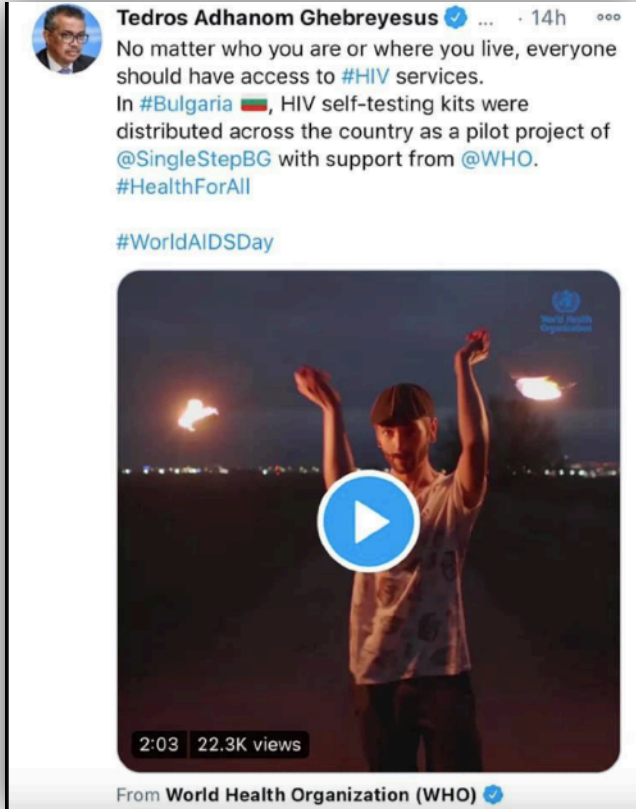


## Psychologists Network

9 professionals from 9 cities throughout Bulgaria provide consultations to users of our chat and helpline.



# Sexual Health and HIV Program



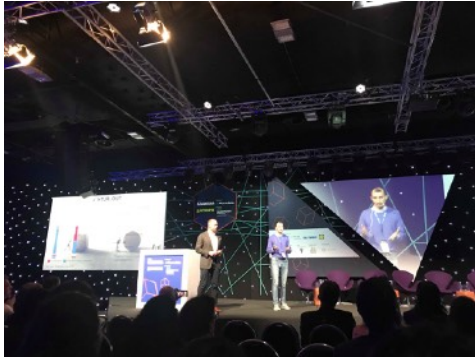
The health program of Single Step started with counseling services on HIV prevention and treatment and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This was later scaled up with another major initiative – the first ever in Bulgaria HIV self-testing campaign in the country #endHIVbg. As part of the counseling services within the Program we work with people at high risk of HIV infection as well as people living with HIV (PLWHIV) from around the country who seek emotional support and guidance on how to navigate the healthcare system in order to initiate antiretroviral treatment (ART). Huge recognition for us and for our initiative #endHIVbg came from the World Health Organization on the occasion of the World HIV / AIDS Day. Bulgaria is one of the few countries in the world that does not offer the opportunity for home testing for HIV, a problem we are actively working on. Single Step created the first national home HIV testing initiative of its kind, which aroused great interest among our community and showed that it is the best alternative for rapid diagnosis and follow-up treatment. You can read the entire article [here](#).

On the occasion of the World AIDS Day on December 1st, hosts from one of the largest TV stations, wore our HIV ribbons, as a symbol of support.



# VentureOUT & Career Support

## VentureOUT for companies and LGBTI people



In continuation of our mission to provide specific resources to empower LGBTI people in Bulgaria, we developed a career center for young LGBTI people who are just starting their careers. We offer free consultations, direction, and advice at the start of your career: how to prepare a CV and a cover letter, what to expect from your professional life, how to choose an LGBTI-friendly employer and how to prepare for the final part of that journey – the interview. In 2020, the program managed to implement 58 consultations, 41 of those people found a job, and 3 were provided with training.



# Attitudes Towards LGBTI Students in Bulgarian Schools Report



On March 6th, Single Step Foundation and Bilitis Resource Center Foundation presented the report "Attitudes towards LGBTI students in Bulgarian schools", which was written on the basis of a national survey conducted for the 2017/2018 school year. In this first for Bulgaria national quantitative survey 880 participants aged 14 to 19 years from all 28 districts of the country took part. The main purpose of the study was to learn more about the experience of LGBTI students at school – do they face harassment, do they report for incidents, do they receive support, etc.

One of the main messages of the report was the fact that hate speech is not considered a problem at school – both by school staff and students, that it is widely tolerated, which in turn leads to harassment and violence. The majority of respondents do not report abuse, and when they do, they do not receive effective support. We stressed that the data is symptomatic for many marginalized students that are harassed on many different grounds (weight, ethnic origin, etc.) and that such a hostile school environment is detrimental to the entire school community.

The full report can be read [here](#).

# CampOut 2020

## CampOut: Behind the Mask

This year in the annual summer workshop for LGBTI artists we had 13 participants who worked together for 5 days on a common project that managed to combine all genres' features and will be presented in the fall in the newest creative space in Sofia - The Steps.

The genres were as following: genre "Makeup" with mentor Alina Manova, genre "Acting" with mentor Martina Apostolova, genre "Fine Arts" with mentor Borche Ristovski, genre "Photography / Videography" with mentors Kostadin Krastev - Koko and Lubomir Pechev.

Guest speakers this year were Azis, Rene Karabash, Stefan Valdobrev and Nikola Ivanov, and Kosta Karakashyan was the artistic coordinator of the various activities.



# Activities – Campaigns & Events



Single Step Foundation presented "**Don't Tell Mama**", a new Bulgarian novel that goes beyond the boundaries of genre, beyond literary traditions, and beyond prejudice. But this is not just a "gay" book. This is a plot that has been unfolding for over 40 years in more than 10 countries on four continents, which characters are beyond limits, the conventional and the familiar. "Don't Tell Mama" is something like magical realism, defending the most important right of the modern man - the right to be himself.

The online live premiere took place on May 8th (Friday), on the FB page of Single Step, in partnership with GLAS Foundation and with the assistance of STREAMER.BG and Ligna Group. It included a conversation of the journalist Georgi Toshev with the author Nikolay Yordanov, a short dance film, introducing us to the world of its characters, as well as a Q&A session.



Single Step Foundation and HBO Bulgaria hosted a discussion of the award-winning film *Welcome to Chechnya* on Monday, November 30, which was streamed live on the Single Step and HBO Bulgaria FB pages.

Discussion Panelists: David France, Director Alice Henty, Producer Kevin Jennings, Executive Producer Veronika Lapina, activist, Russian LGBT Center Kosta Karakashyan, film contributor, Editor, out.bg

The discussion was moderated by Ivan Dimov, founder of Single Step Foundation.

*Welcome to Chechnya* is a powerful and eye-opening documentary about a group of activists who risk unimaginable peril to confront the ongoing anti-LGBTQ pogrom raging in the repressive and closed Russian republic of Chechnya.

# Activities – Campaigns & Events



Single Step announced the photo competition **Love Is Love** to celebrate the beauty of love, diversity and acceptance. It was open to anyone who sees the world through their photo-lenses and can capture love in its most colorful and impactful form.

The photo competition was part of Single Step's activities, through which we celebrated Pride Month together, from anywhere in Bulgaria.

The competition was open to all, amateurs and professionals, without age restrictions. Portrait, studio, candid, conceptual, documentary, art, street... all genres were welcome and the entries were selected by a jury of professional photography artists and critics.



In 2020 Single Step was one of the 29 organizations, selected from 800+ candidates, by **Google.org Impact Challenge** on Safety, a €10m fund to support organizations across Europe that are working on challenges related to hate, extremism, and child and youth safety, both online and offline. Supported by Google Europe and the company's platforms, we started developing our Digital Indie Lab – a production house and an accelerator for young, socially-engaged content creators, in whatever format they choose. Digital Indie Lab's goal was to support young online creators and their idea, to provide them with the opportunity to learn from experienced mentors, and finally, to see their online project in action.

# The Steps: Sustainable Social Enterprise

Single Step Foundation established Single Step Ltd., which is 100% owned by the Foundation. 100% of the Ltd.'s profits go to Foundation to ensure sustainability. After Single Step Ltd. purchased a property in central Sofia with a mortgage loan by Unicredit Bulbank in 2019, we invested all our efforts to renovate and furnish our community space. Our activities and plans were severely interrupted by the multiple lock-downs due to the pandemic, but the majority of renovations were finalised in 2020.



# Selected Results

- 540 served chats from more than 100 towns
- 10 LGBTI young people in Support Group; between 10 and 12 parents in the parental Support Group
- 134 session LGBTI youth and parents as well as LGBT adults in Sofia
- 9 psychologists in 9 cities: Sofia, Stara Zagora, Kardzhali, Haskovo, Pleven, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Burgas and Varna
- 13 episodes of the podcast of our psychologist
- 250 consultations for sexual health, 1000 sent free HIV tests, 45 PLHIV as beneficiaries of our HIV program
- 41 people found a job through our VentureOut initiative
- 4 organised events with 60 people and more than 4000 viewers
- Renovating and furnishing our community space The Steps

# Team



Ivan Dimov  
*Founder and Chairman  
of the Board*



Nikoleta Gabrovska  
*Executive Director*



Anna Joukivskaia  
*Psychologist*



Momchil Baev  
*HIV Program Manager*



Natasha Dobreva  
*Legal Consultant*



Konstantin Kunev  
*VentureOUT Manager*



Evgeni Kirilov  
*Communications & Media*



Niya Petrova  
*Events & Campaigns*

# Thank You to Partners and Funders

