



LGBTQI+ organizations in Central America

A qualitative assessment of rights,
living conditions and collective action

GUATEMALA · EL SALVADOR · HONDURAS
NICARAGUA · COSTA RICA

52 PARTICIPANTS · 5 FOCUS GROUPS

2021 study · Revised and expanded edition 2026

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Credits and scope of this edition

Assessment of LGBTQI+ organizations in Central America

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Fieldwork

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Institution

Puntos de Encuentro · Costa Rica.

Original study 2021. The original appendix identifies participation as covering 2020–2021.

Revised and expanded edition September 2026.

This edition presents an academic revision of the 2021 assessment and a separate documentary update. The fieldwork retains its historical scope. Later sources inform the interpretation and recommendations; they do not constitute a new round of interviews or a measurement of the organizations' current circumstances.

The geographical scope comprises Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. References to Central America refer to these five countries; the study did not include Belize or Panama.

LGBTQI+ is used as an inclusive term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex people, and other sexually and gender-diverse populations. The original mainly used LGBTQ. This broader terminology does not establish that all populations were represented or that specific findings on intersex people are available.

Participant quotations originate in the Spanish report. Page references identify the page of the 14-page PDF file, whose printed numbering is inconsistent. Quotations in this English edition are translations. The appendix lists organizations without personal names.

Reference for the original study

Carcache, F., Castillo Aramburu, V., & Bojorge, K. (2021). *Diagnóstico: Situación de los grupos de la diversidad sexual en Centroamérica* [Assessment of the situation of sexual diversity groups in Central America]. Puntos de Encuentro.

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Qualitative study · Five countries · 52 participants

Executive summary

This assessment identifies capacity-building needs among sexual and gender diversity organizations and activists in five Central American countries during the COVID-19 crisis. Its main contribution is to show how income loss, discrimination, educational barriers and weakened support networks were linked to the ability to sustain collective action.

Five online focus groups were held, one per country, each lasting 90–120 minutes. The consolidated participation figure is **52 people**: 11 from Guatemala, 4 from El Salvador, 11 from Honduras, 11 from Nicaragua and 15 from Costa Rica. The design was qualitative and exploratory. The findings describe participants' experiences and priorities; they cannot be used to estimate prevalence or statistically represent the LGBTQI+ population of each country.

Participants situated the pandemic within pre-existing inequalities. They described job losses, difficulties maintaining independent housing, returns to hostile family environments, disruptions in access to services and increased demand for psychosocial support. Moving activities online helped maintain connections while revealing gaps in connectivity, privacy and security.

Organizations expressed interest in coordinating agendas, documenting violence, supporting continued education and strengthening advocacy. They identified internal tensions, the urban concentration of resources and difficulties financing sustained work. Training priorities included leadership, legal knowledge, mental health, digital security, administration and economic autonomy.

The documentary update adds reference points on employment inclusion, protection of intersex people, access to justice and restrictions on civic space. These sources strengthen a programmatic direction: combine protection and support with education, decent work, organizational resources and participation across territories. Implementation should be agreed with participating groups and assessed through indicators of effective access and quality of support.

Keywords: LGBTQI+; Central America; community organizations; human rights; COVID-19; social inclusion; qualitative research.

1 Introduction and objectives

Puntos de Encuentro originated in Nicaragua as a feminist organization working to transform inequality and discrimination. According to the assessment's institutional background, its regional work combined audiovisual production, leadership development and partnerships with local organizations. Its gender and generational approach connected communication with community work and young people's participation.

The report dates the establishment of Asociación Puntos de Encuentro in Costa Rica to late 2020, in a context of restrictions on Nicaraguan civil society. It also refers to a qualitative exploration conducted in 2018–2019, whose themes informed training activities during 2020. This institutional background explains the interest in identifying partnerships and needs for programming in 2021.

The assessment approaches groups, organizations and activists as actors defending rights and developing community responses. Although their accounts include circumstances experienced by other LGBTQI+ people, the primary focus is the organizational environment. The study should therefore not be confused with a population-wide living conditions survey.

Overall objective

To understand the working conditions, challenges and capacity-building needs of sexual and gender diversity organizations and activists in the five participating countries, in order to inform partnerships and support.

Specific objectives

1. Identify organizations, groups and activists involved in promoting and defending LGBTQI+ people's human rights.
2. Explore their operating conditions, priorities, interests, difficulties and needs for individual and collective capacity development.
3. Identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration to undertake collective action.

The assessment prioritizes a contextual understanding of participants' experiences. National, territorial and identity-related differences require attention in their own right, even where concerns are shared. Similar problems appearing in several focus groups do not imply that their frequency, severity or institutional response is identical.

2 Context and analytical perspective

The crisis in its historical setting

The study took place against the backdrop of the pandemic and the economic and social disruptions of 2020–2021. ECLAC (2021) documented the effects of COVID-19 on poverty, inequality, employment and social protection in Latin America. This context helps situate accounts of income loss, but aggregate data cannot automatically be applied to LGBTQI+ people or to each country in the assessment.

The original report also mentions displacement, insecurity and damage associated with the 2020 hurricanes. These elements form part of the context described by the study, although the focus groups cannot measure their relative contribution. Unsupported rankings of countries' pandemic management or economic deterioration are not retained.

Institutional diversity also matters. Costa Rica's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (2020) recorded that the Civil Registry had been processing and registering same-sex marriages since 26 May 2020. This development precludes portraying the region as a uniform legal environment. Formal recognition alone does not establish the absence of everyday discrimination.

Rights and inequalities

Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are distinct dimensions. Exclusion may relate to one or several of them and intersect with poverty, age, territory, disability or migration status. The assessment does not contain sufficiently disaggregated information to compare these intersections systematically.

Meyer's (2003) minority stress model provides a framework for interpreting the relationship between social stigma and mental health among lesbian, gay and bisexual populations. Its use here is conceptual: it is not a clinical assessment and does not permit automatic extension of its findings to all identities. Sexual and gender diversity is not, in itself, a pathological explanation for distress.

3 Methods and limitations

The study used an exploratory qualitative approach. A database of activist and organizational contacts was compiled, followed by bilateral outreach and formal invitations. An interview guide structured discussions of organizational conditions, the pandemic, partnerships and capacity-building needs. Five focus groups were conducted using Zoom, each lasting 90–120 minutes.

Country	Participants
Guatemala	11
El Salvador	4
Honduras	11
Nicaragua	11
Costa Rica	15
Total	52

Note. The consolidated figure in this edition is 52. The original reported 59, although the country figures added up to 52. The correction was confirmed during editorial review. The original list of names is not, on its own, a verified attendance register.

Recruitment through organizational contacts constitutes non-probability selection. It may have favored people connected to existing networks and able to access the internet. Unequal participation across countries and the underrepresentation of lesbian groups acknowledged in the original limit comparison. There is insufficient disaggregation by age, identity, sexual orientation, rural residence or ethnicity.

The source report does not detail individual session dates, recording, transcription, coding procedures, saturation, participant feedback, consent procedures or ethics review. The absence of this information from the document does not establish that these practices did not occur; it prevents retrospective verification. COREQ offers a reference for improving the transparency of future reports (Tong et al., 2007), rather than certification of this study’s compliance.

This edition reorganizes the available report without recoding original transcripts. It does not estimate rates, causal effects or changes over time. Participant accounts, analytical interpretation and documentary sources remain distinct.

4 Findings on the organizations

4.1 Operating conditions

Participating organizations differed in their degree of formalization. Some held legal status, others were applying for it, and others operated as groups organized around shared interests. This diversity shaped resources and perceived opportunities to sustain activities, although the study did not systematically compare budgets or funding requirements.

Voluntary work was an important foundation of several groups' activities. A participant from a lesbian group stated: "we work as volunteers; we are activists" (Carcache et al., 2021, PDF p. 5; translated from Spanish). This account situates rights advocacy in conditions of limited remuneration and helps explain the tension between personal subsistence and organizational continuity.

Reported income sources included garment assembly factories, tourism, food sales, domestic work and street-based activities. These occupations cannot all be classified as informal employment without information about contractual conditions. The central finding is the diversity of livelihood strategies and concern about their stability, rather than an estimate of informal employment.

In Nicaragua, participants associated new oversight requirements with the 2020 Foreign Agents Regulation Law and expressed uncertainty. This observation is presented as a perception at the time of fieldwork. Subsequent developments in civic space are addressed in the documentary update.

4.2 Resources and continuity

Some organizations attributed reduced support to the redirection of funding toward pandemic responses. Others reported never having accessed international cooperation funding. The report contains no financial data that would allow this change to be quantified or attributed to a single cause.

Sustainability required more than training: paid time, working conditions, operating resources and mutual support arrangements. This is an interpretation of accounts about voluntary work, unequal access to funding and expanding community demands, and informs the recommendations in this edition.

5 The pandemic and living conditions

5.1 Income and housing

Participants linked job losses and falling income with difficulties paying for independent housing. Some accounts described returning to households where they experienced rejection or violence. Others referred to increased exposure to risk while seeking income on the streets. These experiences show how economic conditions can constrain autonomy and options for protection.

Employment discrimination was a particular concern in accounts from trans women and lesbians. The study cannot establish its extent across the region, but it does show that participants interpreted barriers to employment in relation to stigma as well as the contraction of opportunities during the pandemic.

5.2 Support networks and community responses

The closure of meeting spaces interrupted training, social interaction and support. One account stated: “The pandemic weakened the movements’ organizational strength” (Carcache et al., 2021, PDF p. 5; translated from Spanish). Reduced face-to-face contact affected both internal coordination and relationships with communities.

Groups adapted their activities through telephone calls and social media. Participants in El Salvador reported distributing food, hygiene products and information. In Costa Rica, they described assisting LGBTQI+ people displaced from other countries. The report does not provide coverage or outcome records that would allow the reach of these responses to be assessed.

An approximate figure of 10,000 displaced people, mentioned by one organization in the original, lacks a defined time period, population definition and verifiable source; it is therefore not used as a demographic estimate. The substantive finding is retained: organizations perceived demand for support to exceed their resources.

The responses described demonstrate adaptation and mutual support. They also suggest a programmatic tension: responding to immediate needs can displace training and advocacy when funding and staffing are limited.

6 Violence and access to rights

6.1 Protection and justice

Focus groups recorded perceptions of hostility, violence and difficulties securing institutional protection. Participants mentioned harassment and abuse attributed to public authorities, alongside particular concern for trans women. These references are participant accounts, not judicial findings about individual cases.

The report includes a figure of 16 deaths in Honduras during 2020, described by participants as hate crimes. Without a verifiable source and classification criteria, this figure is not presented as a validated statistic. This edition uses “bias-motivated violence” for the analytical pattern, while leaving the legal classification of individual events to the appropriate investigation.

Lack of data was a central concern. However, the assessment does not establish that no State produced information or that concealment was a general intention. The supported formulation is that participants perceived gaps in recording, visibility and response. Better documentation requires distinguishing events, indications of motive, sources and procedural status.

6.2 Education and recognition of identity

Accounts described family violence, school bullying, early departure from home and interrupted education. An account of sexual exploitation during adolescence demonstrates the need for child protection; sexual exploitation of a minor should not be termed “sex work.”

In El Salvador, participants questioned the inclusion of sexually and gender-diverse adolescents in an educational program. The study did not directly evaluate that program, so the perception is not presented as an institutional finding. Participants also expressed concern about changes to rights-recognition mechanisms without sufficiently identifying the relevant legal provisions.

Difficulties with identity documents were associated with barriers to education, employment and credit, particularly for trans people. A distinction is made between lacking documentation and holding documents that do not reflect one’s gender identity: the original could not establish which situation applied to each case.

7 Comprehensive health and well-being

Participants described difficulties accessing HIV-related care and programs during the pandemic. The report does not provide service-level records by country that would support a claim that programs were completely suspended in all five countries. The finding concerns perceived interruptions and barriers, whose extent requires administrative verification.

Emotional distress featured prominently. Participants related it to violence, rejection, weakened networks, economic uncertainty and lack of opportunities. Some accounts referred to depressive symptoms and deaths by suicide in their communities. No clinical instruments were administered or mortality records analyzed; these conversations therefore cannot establish an epidemiological increase or causal attribution to the pandemic.

Requests included safe discussion spaces, peer support and training to recognize situations of risk. These needs point toward comprehensive care linking physical health, emotional well-being, sexual and reproductive rights, and continuity of HIV care, without reducing LGBTQI+ health to a single condition.

The World Health Organization's (2021) LIVE LIFE guide provides a reference for suicide prevention at national and community levels. This assessment proposes using it to inform training and referral arrangements involving trained personnel and identified local services. Community support requires clear boundaries and professional coordination.

The distribution of responsibilities also deserves attention. People sustaining support networks may face excessive demands while experiencing difficulties of their own. Integrating supervision, rest and psychosocial support into team operations is a programmatic recommendation, not a finding from a burnout assessment.

Care practices should respect confidentiality, autonomy and self-identification. Access to services or activities should not depend on publicly disclosing sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status.

8 Participation and digital security

Online communication enabled continued contact and activities when face-to-face meetings were restricted. However, participants reported differences in internet access, suitable phone availability and technological knowledge. Organizational teams' acquisition of skills did not automatically resolve communities' access barriers.

Security was another concern. Accounts included social media attacks and fears about outsiders entering meeting spaces. The report does not document incidents through a technical methodology capable of establishing frequency or attribution. It does reveal an explicit demand for training, resources and risk-reduction protocols.

Privacy at home affected participation. Some young people preferred in-person activities because they lacked a safe place to talk at home. Online participation therefore cannot be considered accessible solely because connectivity exists: who shares the device, who can overhear and what information remains visible also matter.

An appropriate response should combine digital literacy, material support and in-person or hybrid options where feasible. Proposed measures include connectivity assistance, safely used devices, meeting access controls, account protection and procedures for responding to harassment. These should be tailored to each organization's capacities and risks.

Data collection requires particular attention. Documenting a violation or enrolling someone in an activity can disclose sensitive information. Recommendations include collecting only necessary data, defining access permissions, agreeing retention periods and avoiding public participant lists. These are proposals for future interventions, not claims about the original protocol.

Digital inclusion should expand people's ability to participate autonomously. Measuring only connections or attendance overlooks those who leave an activity because of costs, lack of privacy, fear or accessibility barriers.

9 Partnerships and collective agendas

Participants recognized the need to coordinate efforts to document violence, defend rights and expand advocacy capacity. Shared areas of action included preventing school dropout, protection from family violence and sexual exploitation, and support in accessing justice.

Participants recalled collaborative efforts to promote legislative proposals and raise awareness among institutional staff. In Honduras, they described an equal opportunities initiative that, in their view, had not progressed. The absence of identification and legislative tracking prevents a precise account of its trajectory; the testimony illustrates frustration with political responsiveness.

Coordination faced internal obstacles. Participants mentioned fragmented agendas, limited awareness of other organizations' work, competition for prominence and difficulties reaching consensus. They also described tensions involving technical staff perceived as distant from community experiences. This does not justify judging someone's competence by their identity; it does raise questions of accountability and community participation in decisions.

Territorial differences were important. Participants from rural areas described less access to information, training and support, alongside limited communication with organizations in capital cities. The report cannot measure this gap, but provides grounds for reviewing the distribution of resources and opportunities for representation.

Partnerships require procedures as well as commitment: shared objectives, agreed responsibilities, ways of resolving disagreements and transparent resource management. This edition recommends including lesbian, trans, youth and rural voices in agenda-setting and providing practical support for participation.

Collective capacity does not require uniformity. Organizations can maintain distinct priorities while agreeing on bounded actions, such as a referral pathway, an educational campaign or a shared incident register with data protection safeguards.

10 Training needs

Participants requested practical methods grounded in their experiences, opportunities for exchange and political education. Their interest went beyond information acquisition to include argumentation, negotiation, discourse analysis, citizenship and sustaining a culture of rights.

Leadership was linked to listening, collective responsibility and attention to the needs of people experiencing violence. Some contributions referred to restorative justice and community prevention. Any such work should respect affected people's wishes and safety, without replacing investigation, protection or access to appropriate remedies.

Legal knowledge was another priority: understanding laws, documenting cases, identifying reporting pathways and supporting victims. Participants also requested tools for transparency and corruption prevention in organizational management and in scrutiny of State action.

Economic priorities included administration, value chains, entrepreneurship, leadership and seed funding. Participants described difficulties connecting with businesses and learning about experiences in other countries. References to initiatives in Colombia and Mexico are retained as expressions of interest in exchange, rather than models whose effectiveness was established by this study.

Accounts of adult sex work should be interpreted without moral judgment or assumptions that they describe the entire community. Interest in expanding income options does not justify disregarding people's agency or reducing employment exclusion to insufficient training.

Barriers to training included work schedules, transport, costs, connectivity and interrupted educational trajectories. A modular, accessible offer accompanied by material support is therefore recommended. Evaluation should consider practical application and continued participation, alongside attendance and satisfaction.

Mental health, self-care and digital security complete an agenda that should be prioritized with each group to avoid excessive demands and duplication of courses.

11 Documentary update

Subsequent developments and additional reference points

The documentary review undertaken in September 2026 selected institutional and academic sources relevant to the assessment's themes. It is a thematic update, not a systematic review or exhaustive inventory of current legislation. The following references should be read within their dates and scope.

Access to justice in Honduras. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued its judgment in *Vicky Hernández et al. v. Honduras* on 26 March 2021, notified on 28 June. It found the State responsible for the death of Vicky Hernández, a trans woman and activist (IACtHR, 2021). This development complements accounts of seeking justice; a judgment's existence does not establish full compliance.

Employment inclusion. The International Labour Organization's (2022) guide addresses barriers throughout the employment cycle and supports locally adapted responses. It provides a reference for extending the economic agenda beyond entrepreneurship through work with employers, workers' organizations and public authorities.

Intersex people. In April 2024, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 55/14 on discrimination, violence and harmful practices against intersex persons. This development adds a dimension not explored by the assessment. Its inclusion calls for specific future consultations, rather than retrospective reconstruction of experiences that were not documented.

Civic space in Nicaragua. Report A/HRC/60/92 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2025), covering June 2024–June 2025, documents further restrictions and a cumulative total of at least 5,535 organizations whose legal status had been cancelled since 2018. This figure concerns civil society generally, not LGBTQI+ organizations exclusively. The context calls for reassessing the feasibility and safety of partnerships described in 2021.

12 Discussion and implications

The findings describe a close relationship between living conditions and organizational capacity. Income loss makes housing, connectivity and participation harder to sustain; weakened networks may, in turn, limit access to information and support. This is a plausible interpretation of the accounts, not a demonstrated causal chain.

Economic and educational demands challenge programming focused exclusively on awareness-raising. UNESCO (2016) documents the importance of violence related to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression for the education sector's response. This reference supports the need for protection and continued education, without providing a specific rate for the Central American sample.

UNHCR's (2021) discussion paper on LGBTIQ+ people in forced displacement and statelessness offers a protection framework for addressing the needs reported in Costa Rica. It encourages consideration of diversity and displacement together; it cannot establish how many displaced LGBTQI+ people were living in the country.

Regional coordination should recognize differences. A legally constituted organization and a voluntary group may need different forms of support. Similarly, delivering an activity from a capital city does not guarantee rural participation. Accessibility depends on resources, time, trust and safety.

The original acknowledged the underrepresentation of lesbian groups, but its causes cannot be attributed solely to the pandemic or hurricanes. Future research should examine how contact networks are constructed, who is left out and what facilitates participation.

The update reinforces the value of periodically reviewing protection pathways and partners' circumstances. It does not establish that priorities expressed in 2021 remain unchanged in 2026. Their continuity should be explored through a new consultation with more diverse participation and adequate methodological reporting.

The assessment contributes questions and guidance for support decisions. Its value increases when evidentiary limits are explicit and situated accounts are not turned into universal descriptions.

13 Programmatic recommendations

The following recommendations combine the assessment's priorities with the documentary review. Implementation requires agreements with organizations, resources and adaptation to each national context.

Education and economic autonomy

Support continued education and re-entry through scholarships, transport and connectivity assistance, and coordination with educational institutions. Include adults whose education was interrupted, alongside protection measures for children and adolescents. Combine employment training with employer engagement, discrimination prevention and support for viable economic initiatives.

Health and protection

Establish pathways for psychosocial care and access to health services, with clear responsibilities, confidentiality and professional referral. Train community teams to provide support without assuming clinical functions for which they are not prepared. Strengthen documentation of violence and access to legal advice without exposing people who report incidents.

Sustainability and participation

Combine training with operating funds, recognition of work and support for groups without legal status through context-appropriate arrangements. Agree territorial priorities and include lesbian and rural groups in decisions and resources. Integrate digital security and team care into everyday operations.

Area	Proposed indicator
Education	Continued or resumed education with agreed follow-up
Employment	Access to and retention in paid opportunities under decent conditions
Health	Completed referrals with confidentiality protected
Protection	Cases supported with consent and safe follow-up
Organization	Available operating resources and fulfilled collaboration agreements
Participation	Sustained access for rural and underrepresented groups

Note. These are proposed indicators, not measured results. Targets, timelines and responsibilities should be defined with participating groups. Sensitive information should not be collected solely to meet monitoring requirements.

14 Conclusions and research agenda

The 2021 assessment documents the experiences of organizations and activists sustaining community work during a crisis. Their accounts connect rights advocacy with material needs: income, housing, education, health, connectivity and continuity of support networks.

Participants described the pandemic as aggravating existing difficulties and changing how they organized. At the same time, community responses demonstrated adaptability. Capacity development should recognize both the constraints groups face and the knowledge they produce through their work.

The priorities expressed support comprehensive programming developed with organizations and responsive to territorial differences. Training becomes more relevant when accompanied by resources, opportunities and institutional protection. Recommendations should not shift onto individuals and groups responsibilities that also belong to States and other actors.

The documentary update provides reference points for reviewing strategies, but cannot replace new field evidence. Follow-up research should expand participation among lesbian groups and bisexual, intersex, non-binary, rural and other insufficiently described populations, without assuming that their needs are homogeneous.

Recruitment, participant characteristics, ethical procedures, analysis and feedback to participants should be explicitly documented. Interviews could also be combined with review of records and institutional sources where this can be done safely.

Priority questions concern how organizational capacities have changed since 2021, which barriers persist, which forms of support improve effective access to rights and how to distribute resources more equitably across territories. Addressing them would enable a progression from an exploratory assessment to a monitoring strategy, without attributing results to this edition that have not yet been produced.

Appendix Recorded organizations

The list derives from the appendix to the 2021 study. It retains the names recorded there and does not verify their legal names, current operating status or endorsement of this edition. Personal names and entries without explicit affiliations are omitted; repeated organizations appear once.

Guatemala

Asociación IDI; Diversidad Sexual Amigos y entre Amigos (ODASA); Reynas de la Noche; Grupo de Apoyo Xela (GAX); Asociación Somos; Visible; Diversity; OTRANS.

El Salvador

Las Hijas de Safo; Alejandría; Jóvenes y Jóvenas Voceras; Entre Amigos.

Honduras

FOROSIDA; Asociación Kukulcan; Derechos Aquí y Ahora; Colectivo Violeta; CEPRES; Rompiendo Barreras; Asociación para una Vida Mejor (APUVIMEH); Fundación Llave; Asociación Iguales; Consumel Trans; ASONAPVSI DAH.

Nicaragua

Redtrans; Movimiento Feminista de la Diversidad; Sindicato de Mujeres Trans; ANIT; Mesa Nacional LGBTQI; Voces Caribeñas; Colectiva Casa de los Colores; ARTEMISA; Grupo Diverso de Adolescentes y Jóvenes de El Viejo; ADESENI.

Costa Rica

IRCA CASABIERTA; Fundación Gente Positiva Costa Rica; Obetica; Asociación de Diversidad de Género de Puntarenas; Gente Diversa; Instituto Alternativo; Grupo de Apoyo Amor a la Diversidad de Tila; Creando la Diversidad; Colectiva Lésbica Feminista Irreversibles.

Scope of the register

The number of listed organizations is not the number of participants. Some original entries contain more than one person; others repeat names or lack an affiliation. The total of 52 participants corresponds to the consolidated country breakdown, not a count of entities.

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