

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ)¹ people often experience extreme forms of oppression and discrimination throughout the globe based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTIQ is an acronym describing specific identities for sexual and gender minorities (SGMs) and is a way of categorizing persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). The term LGBTIQ is used globally, and the meanings and usage may vary in different contexts.

Sweden is one of the largest funders in the world for the protection of the human rights of LGBTIQ persons.² The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) is working to strengthening LGBTIQ people's rights and is firmly committed to continue supporting human rights and opportunities for LGBTIQ people.

PURPOSE

This brief gives an overview of why working for LGBTIQ people's rights and freedom is relevant and important for Sida. It contains terms and expressions, an outlook of human rights for LGBTIQ people globally and Sida's global work to support LGBTIQ people's rights and opportunities. Strengthening human rights for LGBTIQ people is an area of high priority for Swedish development cooperation Agency (Sida) and it cuts across all other thematic areas³. This brief's main target group is persons working for Sida at Sida HQ and Swedish Foreign Missions. The brief may also be useful for Sida partners and others who are interested in supporting human rights for LGBTIQ people.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

Throughout the globe, LGBTIQ people experience discrimination, oppression and stigma, which often lead to serious human rights violations, undermining among

others the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴ In 2011, the first official UN report on the subject was created and in recent years, UN systems have made significant progress in recognising and promoting the rights of LGBTIQ people.⁵ For example, in 2016, the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (IE SOGI) position was developed at the UN,⁶ and several countries have appointed special envoys to advance the human rights of LGBTIQ people. More recently, the World Bank has included LGBTIQ people in their sustainable development strategy until 2030.⁷

Often, in response to the gains made for LGBTIQ people's rights, there has been an increasingly organized anti-gender and anti-rights opposition movement,⁸ often led by conservative and religious groups and political actors.⁹ These well-funded actors often advocate for protections for the family and family values, sponsor anti-sexual gender minorities legislation in often least developed countries, and lobby and advocate at international fora such as the UN.¹⁰

Currently, almost 40% of UN member states criminalize consensual same-sex sexual acts, many inheriting such laws during colonization,¹¹ with at least five countries punishing consensual same-sex with the death penalty.¹² In addition, many countries are backsliding on commitments to protect the human rights of LGBTIQ people, with only 11 countries protecting their citizens from anti-LGBTIQ violence in their constitutions, with Sweden being one of them.^{13 14}

1 Sida uses the acronym LGBTIQ in English (hbtqi in Swedish) in accordance with language used by the Government Offices of Sweden
2 Global Philanthropy Project 2021–2022 Global Resources Report: Government & Philanthropic Support for LGBTI Communities
3 Bistånd för en ny era – Frihet, egenmakt och hållbar tillväxt, 14 december 2023

4 UN. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [Weblink. Map of Jurisdictions that Criminalise LGBT People | Human Dignity Trust](#)
5 Centre for Human Rights. A Guide to LGBTIQ+ Rights in the UN and African Human Rights Systems. SOGIESC Unit of the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria. [Weblink.](#)
6 OHCHR. Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. [Weblink.](#)
7 Outright International. The World Bank's Historic Shift to Include LGBTIQ People. [Weblink.](#)
8 Astrae Foundation (2023) Global Resistance to Anti-gender Opposition. LGBTIQ+ Activism in Columbia, India, Kenya, Peru, and Serbia. [Weblink.](#)
9 Kvinna till Kvinna (2024) Hope and Resistance Go Together: The State of Women's Human Rights Defenders. [Weblink.](#)
10 UNRISD (2023) The International Anti-Gender Movement: Understanding the Rise of Anti-Gender Discourses in the Context of Development, Human Rights and Social Protection. [Weblink.](#)
11 ILGA World. Legal Frameworks, Criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts. [Weblink.](#)
12 ILGA World. Legal Frameworks, Criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts. [Weblink.](#)
13 ILGA World. Legal Frameworks, Constitutional protection against discrimination. [Weblink.](#)
14 The Swedish parliament decriminalized same-sex sexual acts in 1944.

3. INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION

Intersectional discrimination is the experience of power and privilege based on legal frameworks, social factors e.g., gender (assigned at birth, expression, identity), sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability and displacement. Often, gender-diverse and trans persons are more vulnerable to violence,¹⁵ and LGBTIQ people with disabilities are vulnerable to aggravated forms of violations.¹⁶ LGBTIQ persons who are also racial, ethnic, and religious minorities may also experience heightened forms of violence.

3.1 Discrimination, Stigma, and Violence.

The experience of multiple discrimination leads to stigma, and violence occurring on interpersonal, community, and state levels for LGBTIQ people, often with impunity. This includes, for example, sexual violence (e.g. rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and forced sterilization), physical violence (e.g. beatings, homicide, arbitrary arrests, online violence (e.g. blackmail, extortion, harassment), psychological violence (e.g. minority stress, discrimination, marginalization, verbal abuse), denial of rights and resources (e.g. including access to children, access to education or housing), restrictions of movement, and economic violence (e.g. workplace discrimination, , exploitation). Violence is perpetrated by intimate partners, family and community members, and state actors, including the police, amongst others¹⁷. Women and girls who are lesbian, or perceived to be lesbian can be subject to so called 'corrective rapes', including gang rapes by men and forced heterosexual marriages. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial-, summary or arbitrary executions has regularly drawn attention to persons killed because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and particularly lifts transgender persons as a group in a situation of particular vulnerability.¹⁸

3.2 Health disparities

While recognizing the diversity of LGBTIQ persons, the health system is not appropriately adjusted to and encompass LGBTIQ persons and their special needs. LGBTIQ persons therefore experience negative health outcomes due to ignorance, stigma and violence, often leading to physical and mental health disparities. In addition, discrimination from health care workers, lack of transportation, and a lack of funds create extreme barriers to health services. SRHR programs often

exclude LGBTIQ persons,¹⁹ and lack appropriate gender affirming services for gender diverse persons. In many contexts, there is a lack of resources for trans persons to safely medically transition.²⁰ While non-consensual surgeries on intersex infants and children have been banned in some countries,²¹ they are common in many contexts, and create long-term health problems for intersex adults.²² Despite experiencing minority stress, mental health care is often scarce for LGBTIQ persons, while conversion therapy is commonly provided to alter a person's 'sexual orientation'.²³ Faith-based interventions are also common, including beatings, deprivation or sometimes exorcism.²⁴ In addition, a growing body of research has shown that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are also at greater risk of dying by suicide, of cardiovascular disease and of some cancers.²⁵

3.3 Participation and Empowerment

Many countries criminalize LGBTIQ individuals, and they receive little or no representation in policy-making processes. The establishment of protective legislation for LGBTIQ persons often depend on the strategic and consistent advocacy work of LGBTIQ organisations over a sustained period.²⁶ The presence of LGBTIQ organisations has led to successful wins for persons of diverse SOGIESC, and where LGBTIQ organisations cannot operate or register freely, there are often widespread human rights violations against them.²⁷

3.4 Access to Employment

Due to discrimination, LGBTIQ persons experience high rates of unemployment, underemployment, lower paid positions, and positions with limited or no benefits and often in the informal sector with poor working conditions.²⁸ Access to decent employment is particularly limited for gender diverse and transgender persons, and they commonly experience harassment at the workplace.²⁹ Research shows that legal and social inclusion of LGBTIQ persons help overall economic growth and leads to stronger human capital outcomes and stronger economic output.³⁰

15 UN IE SOGI. The struggle of trans and gender-diverse persons. [Weblink.](#)

16 ILGA World (2023) LGBTI people with disabilities are an integral part of our movement let's break barriers together. [Weblink.](#)

17 OHCHR. United Nations entities call on states to act urgently to end violence and discrimination against LGBTI adults, adolescents and children, September 2015 [Weblink.](#)

18 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-executions>

19 Dialog för förändring Ett material till stöd för policydialog om sexuell och reproduktiv hälsa och rättigheter (SRHR) Regeringskansliet

20 Ibid.

21 Centre for Human Rights. Report on Current Practices in Conversion Therapy, Emerging Technology, and the Protection of LGBTIQ+ Rights in Africa. SOGIESC Unit of the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria. [Weblink.](#)

22 OHCHR. [Intersex People. OHCHR and the human rights of LGBTI people. Weblink.](#)

23 UN (2020) 'Conversion therapy' can amount to torture and should be banned says UN Expert. [Weblink.](#)

24 UN IESOGI. Report on Conversion Therapy. [Weblink.](#)

25 Claire Gillespie, 7 Major Health Disparities Affecting the LGBTQ+ Community, August 2024

26 F&M Global Barometers (2024) Measuring the Impact of LGBT Advocacy on LGBT Protection 2011-2020. [Weblink.](#)

27 Outright International (2023) The Global State of LGBT Organizing. [Weblink.](#)

28 Open for Business (2021) The Economic Case for LGBT+ Inclusion in the Caribbean. [Weblink.](#)

29 UN IE SOGI. The struggle of trans and gender-diverse persons. [Weblink.](#)

30 Ibid.

4. SIDA'S WORK FOR STRENGTHENING LGBTIQ PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

Sida has supported the rights of LGBTIQ persons around the globe for decades. Over time, the support has developed from a focus on HIV/AIDS and SRHR, to include a human rights-based approach (HRBA), becoming one of the largest funders of LGBTIQ rights in the world.³¹ Sida's HRBA includes integrating human rights and contributing to democratic development in Sida's development cooperation.³² This approach is among others based on international human rights commitments and focuses on empowerment and capacity development of the most marginalised and discriminated.³³

In general, Sida's HRBA work has increased political commitment to LGBTIQ rights.³⁴ This has included capacity building of LGBTIQ organisations and movements, support for local ownership, and cross-movement building with health, gender equality and/or democracy and human rights work. Sida's work has also achieved greater protection of LGBTIQ activists, strengthened LGBTIQ organisations through support for more effective and sustainable processes.³⁵ While advocating for LGBTIQ rights globally, it is crucial to ensure that the advancement of LGBTIQ rights does not inadvertently undermine the progress and funding for women's and girls' human rights and gender equality. The conflation of gender, women/girls and LGBTIQ rights as one may risk that each group, vulnerable in distinct ways, does not receive the specific support and resources needed. Such conflation may unfortunately lead more repressive states to reduce support and funding also for women's rights, risking setbacks in vital areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), shelters, or women's rights organisations.

It is also important to note that the LGBTIQ movement itself consists of different groups with distinct challenges and needs that may vary greatly and require distinct support. Like society at large, the LGBTIQ movement can exhibit a patriarchal, hierarchical structure where not all groups feel equally safe and included, particularly the lesbian and trans communities, that may require specific support. Efforts to

advance the rights of all groups must be balanced and mutually supportive to optimise outcomes and inclusivity for each specific vulnerable group.^{36 37 38 39 40}

5. SIDA'S GLOBAL COLLABORATION

Sida collaborates with four global projects directly targeted to protect the rights of LGBTIQ persons, two of the partnerships have funding opportunities. LGBTIQ rights are also included through several thematic, regional, and bilateral strategies.

ILGA World. Sida has provided core support to ILGA (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), since 2012. ILGA is the largest global advocacy organisation for LGBTIQ rights, and is also a worldwide federation with more than 1900 member organisations in all regions, including ILGA Pan Africa, ILGA Europe, ILGA LAC etc. ILGA World's advocacy work includes an ECOSOC consultative status at the UN, with focused advocacy. Once every second year a large World Conference is organized (hybrid), and it is possible to apply for scholarships to attend.

RFSL. Sida has provided programmatic support to RFSL (Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights) since 2011. RFSL is a Swedish civil society organisation established in 1950 to strengthen LGBTIQ organisation. RFSL provides capacity training and advocacy work to contribute to changes in the international framework for human rights and sustainable development (SDGs).

Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) People around the world is a Public Private Partnership (PPP) together with USAID that leverages financial and technical support for grant-making to local LGBTIQ led organisations; global research on the realities of LGBTIQ persons; social and behaviour change communications capacity building; and emergency response. Implementing partners are Astraea lesbian Foundation for Justice⁴¹ and OutRight International.⁴²

31 Global Philanthropy Project (2021) Diving Deeper Series: Under the surface of LGBTI funding data. [Weblink.](#)

32 Sida. Human Rights Based Approach. [Weblink.](#)

33 Ibid.

34 Indevlop (2013) Study on Sida's work on human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. [Weblink.](#)

35 Ibid.

36 UN Women. (2022). *LGBTIQ+ equality and rights: Internal resource guide.* [Weblink.](#)

37 Baer, M. B. (2021). *The interconnection between women's rights and LGBTQ rights.* Psychology Today. [Weblink.](#)

38 Pew Research Center. (2013, June 13). *Chapter 5: Identity and Community.* [Weblink.](#)

39 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022). *Guidance note on intersectionality.* [Weblink.](#)

40 LGBTQ+ Victory Institute. (2018 + 2023). *Out for America.* [Weblink 2018.](#) [Weblink 2023.](#)

41 Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. (n.d.). *Home - Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice.* Retrieved May 27, 2024, [Weblink.](#)

42 Outright International. (n.d.). *Home | Outright International.* Retrieved May 27, 2024, [Weblink.](#)

Sida also supports the Rapid Response with the Sustainable Inclusive Development for Equity (SIDE) through USAID, which will have funding opportunities starting in 2024/2025.

The Global Equality Fund (GEF). Sida has a Public Private Partnership (PPP) with the GEF, a U.S. State Department program. Since 2013, GEF is the largest global fund supporting LGBTIQ rights in the world, reaching 100 countries. The aim of the GEF is to advance the human rights of LGBTIQ individuals. There are three funding opportunities available in GEF:

1) Requests for Proposals for Technical Assistance and Capacity Building supported by the GEF. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) conducts open competitions for proposals based on the bureau's program areas and target countries and regions. Weblink.

2) The Dignity for All LGBTIQ+ Assistance Program is led by the U.S. based organisation, Freedom House, and is a consortium of six leading human rights and LGBTIQ organisations which provide emergency assistance, advocacy funding and security support to Human Rights Defenders (HRD) and civil society organisations under threat or attack due to their work for LGBTIQ rights. To qualify for emergency assistance, applicants must be under attack because of their LGBTIQ work. Application inquiries should include information describing why emergency assistance is needed. *Security, Opportunity, Advocacy, Rapid response (SOAR)* grants are also available to organisations for short-term initiatives to counteract urgent threats or respond to opportunities such as proposed or recently passed legislation, sudden government crackdowns, increased levels of violence, other emergent dangers/trends, or time-bound advocacy opportunities. Contact: info@dignitylgbti.org

Each partner has its own selection criteria and may also be contacted directly:

Akāhatā: akahata@akahataorg.org

Freedom House: info@dignitylgbti.org

ILGA-Europe: dignity@ilga-europe.org

OutRight Action International: hello@outrightinternational.org

Synergía: contact@synergiaihr.org

UHAI: grants@team@uhai-eashri.org

3) Equal Rights in Action Fund (ERA). Each year the GEF also invites partner governments to share an invitation with local posts/embassies in selected countries. Embassies can nominate up to three local civil society organisations (per eligible country) working to advance the human rights of LGBTIQ persons for an Equal Rights in Action Fund (the ERA Fund) small grant. Nominations are requested from different countries each year. Sida's global desk-officer for LGBTIQ issues at the Unit for Democracy and Human Rights (DEMO) is responsible for annually sending out invitations to the relevant Swedish embassies.

For further funding opportunities for Human Rights Defenders (HRD) at risk, please see another brief on the Intranet called "Supporting physical, organisational and digital security mechanisms and organisations supporting human rights defenders at risk." Other global actors working on human rights defenders at risk are among others Urgent action fund and Men engage alliance.

TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS⁴³

Bisexual: a person who has a romantic and/or sexual attraction to another person regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Cis normativity: the assumption that all people identify with the sex they were assigned at birth and that this is the norm.

Cis person: a person whose gender identity and expression aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gay: gay can be used for both men and women and is a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality – some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.⁴⁴

Gender: the social constructs that assign roles, behaviours, forms of expression, activities, and attributes according to the meaning given to biological sex characteristics.

Gender binary: the dominant social system and classification of all people based on their sex assigned at birth and their gender into two oppositional forms (masculine and feminine).

Gender diverse: persons whose gender identity/expression is at odds with what is perceived as being the gender norm, including those outside the male/female binary (For example: gender-non-conforming, non-binary, queer).

Gender expression: a range of cues, such as names, pronouns, behaviour, clothing, to express a person's gender. It can be the same or different from an individual's gender identity.

Gender identity: each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society.

Gender Non-Conforming (GNC): persons whose gender expression or identity is beyond the gender binary, and neither male nor female.

Gender equality: Gender Equality is achieved when women and men, girls and boys and the non-binary, have equal rights, life prospects and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society.

Heteronormativity: the assumption that heterosexual relationships are the norm, which often leads to the marginalization of other sexual orientations and gender identities.

Heterosexuality: a romantic and/or sexual attraction to someone of a sex other than one's own.

Homophobia: an ideology rooted in the negative view of same sex practices/desires and sexual and gender minorities. Homophobia and transphobia tend to overlap.

Homosexuality: a romantic and/or sexual attraction to persons of the same sex.

Intersex: persons born with/developing a reproductive or sexual anatomy that is not considered within the gender binary and may identify as any gender identity/expression or sexual orientation.

Lesbian: persons who identify as cis-gender women and have romantic and/or sexual attractions to other cis-gender women.

LGBTIQ: an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer persons. The plus is to include any other identities.

Non-binary: persons whose gendered expression/identity is not experienced within a gender binary and who may self-identify as between, beyond, both, or neither woman/man.

Queer: a term based upon a critical view of dominant social ideas about what is normal regarding gender and sexuality. Derived from North American activism, it may be considered derogatory.

SOGIESC: an acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. It groups these distinct but related terms together for ease of use, to describe the factors that make some people different from others (diverse).

Sex: the classification of a person as having female, male and/or intersex sex characteristics.

Sex characteristics: each person's physical features relating to sex, including genitalia and other sexual/reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, hormones, and secondary physical features.

Sexual and gender minorities (SGM): persons whose sexual orientation/desire and/or gender expression/identity is diverse.

Sexual Orientation: a person's capacity for romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Includes hetero, homo, pan, and asexuality, as well as a wide range of other expression of sexual orientation.

Transgender (Trans): persons whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transphobia: an ideology or attitude rooted in a negative view of transgender or gender-diverse people. Transphobia and homophobia tend to overlap.

⁴³ Sources: RFSL, [weblink](#); ILGA Europe, [weblink](#); Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs; UN Women [Weblink](#). UN IE SOGI [Weblink](#).

⁴⁴ Stonewall. [n.d.]. *List of LGBTQ+ terms*. Retrieved May 27, 2024, [Weblink](#).