

Pride Guide | South Africa



The Australian Volunteers Program strives to provide a safe, supportive and equitable environment for LGBTIQ+ volunteers, approved accompanying dependents, partner organisations and all program staff. The Australian Volunteers Program has supported volunteers with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in all program countries and has ongoing connections with community organisations in almost every country we work in.

Diverse SOGIESEC program participants must be aware of the country context before undertaking an assignment. This guide is designed to introduce some key issues related to people with diverse SOGIESEC and their participation in the program.

If you are a volunteer with diverse SOGIESEC, you will need to:

- Do your own research. You will be required to follow the local laws, even if you disagree with them.
- Understand what the local law says you can and can't do when in-country;
- Be aware of what the legal protections are for LGBTIQ+ people in your destinations;
- Consider whether or not you are comfortable living and working in a place where you may be discriminated against and unable to live as openly as you can in some parts of Australia.

Language

Terminology may differ across urban and rural contexts, and across provinces or ethnic and cultural groups. Information sourced online can be outdated or inaccurate. For current and accurate information, please confirm with an appropriate diverse SOGIESEC Civil Society Organisation (CSO) or ask your in-country team.

The initialism “LGBTIAQ+”, is most commonly used to describe the diverse SOGIESEC community members in South Africa. Another term used to describe the diverse SOGIESEC community is “queer bodies”.

Terms used in South African languages and dialects to refer to diverse SOGIESEC communities are often derogatory when used by those outside of the community. Using the initialism LGBTIAQ+ or being specific with ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’, ‘transgender’ or ‘intersex’ may be the most respectful and appropriate way to refer to an individual or affirm their sexual or gender identity.

Legal and policy context

Same-sex relations were decriminalised in South Africa in 1998. Recognition of same-sex marriage, civil unions, joint adoption and second parent adoption are all enshrined in national law. However, diverse SOGIESEC communities still face barriers as a result of legal and policy frameworks. Women and girls experience high levels of gender-based violence (GBV). Intimate partner violence amongst same-sex couples is underrepresented in research, yet the research that does exist shows that it occurs as frequently and severely¹ or even more often² than in heterosexual couples. Violence in same-sex partnerships is recognised under the definition of domestic violence, yet government policies on combatting GBV are often based on assumptions that a heterosexual female is the victim and a heterosexual male is the perpetrator.

Discrimination

South Africa holds a number of legal protections against the discrimination of people with diverse SOGIESC. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited in the workplace, in medical schemes, by landowners, by an individual or by the State.

The definition of hate crimes includes offences on the basis of gender or gender identity, HIV status, sex (including intersex) or sexual orientation. Despite these advances, murders and other forms of violence on the basis of diverse SOGIESC are still occurring in South Africa.

Cultural and societal attitudes

South African society is patriarchal and heteronormative, where individuals are expected to conform to the binary gender expression and identity prescribed to them. Those who do not conform to heteronormative ideas can face discrimination in the workplace, and when interviewing and applying for jobs.

There are some in South Africa who believe that because there are no language-specific terms to describe the diverse SOGIESC community, divergence from heteronormativity is a western concept. This delegitimises the experiences and identities of many diverse SOGIESC groups.

The level of acceptance of a family member's diverse SOGIESC is influenced by gender roles and traditionalist understandings of the nuclear family. Lesbian and bisexual women and trans men are vulnerable to corrective rape by family members to "correct" their sexual orientation. In some instances, diverse SOGIESC is tolerated, but not celebrated.

Health and wellbeing

The National Health Insurance in South Africa does not incorporate the needs of diverse SOGIESC groups. Some CSOs, like Triangle Project, have created health and wellbeing services specifically for people with diverse SOGIESC. Most research and support for diverse SOGIESC healthcare has targeted gay men, men who have sex with men (MSM) and people with HIV.

Diverse SOGIESC populations are prevented from accessing adequate healthcare due to the homophobia and transphobia of healthcare staff, insufficient knowledge among healthcare staff about SOGIESC-specific healthcare needs, and SOGIESC-specific healthcare needs not being recognised in policy and planning. Lesbians and bisexual women with HIV have not been included in HIV research, prevention programs and with healthcare providers.



Sexual and reproductive health is not a compulsory component of the South African school curriculum, and bullying towards those with diverse SOGIESC is prevalent in schools. CSO Triangle Project holds workshops at schools for students and teachers on gender, sexuality, orientation and identity, and stage interventions in instances of persistent bullying.

Media

The lives of people with diverse SOGIESC are receiving growing attention in media outlets, with their stories appearing on radio, and in documentaries and online magazines. However, these stories are not always presented accurately. CSOs such as Iranti amplify the voices of lesbians, gender non-conforming identities, transgender and intersex communities. Diverse SOGIESC communities use applications such as WhatsApp to communicate with one another, and Facebook is used by CSOs and others to share resources and connect members of the community.

¹ Ingrid Lynch and Nadia Sanger, *I'm Your Maker: Power, Heteronormativity and Violence in Women's Same-Sex Relationships* (Cape Town: Triangle Project, 2016), 20.

² The Prevention Collaborative, "Versions of Violence: Intimate Partner Violence in Gay Male Relationships in South Africa," Knowledge Platform, January 1, 2020, <https://prevention-collaborative.org/resource/versions-of-violence-intimate-partner-violence-in-gay-male-relationships-in-south-africa/>.