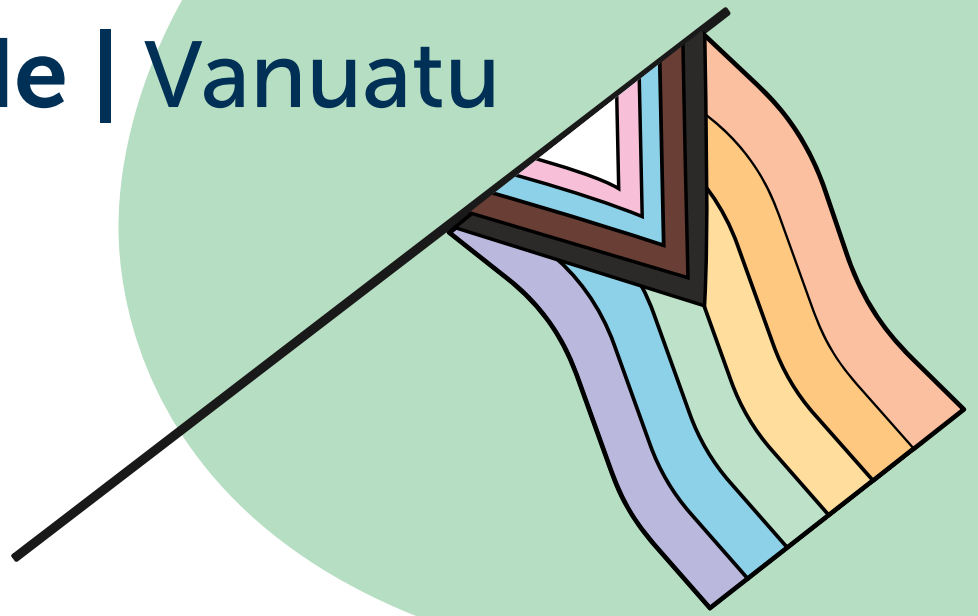


Pride Guide | Vanuatu



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 SOGIESC 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 SOGIESC and their participation in the program.

If you are a volunteer with diverse SOGIESC, 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 Information sourced online can be outdated or inaccurate.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 SOGIESC Civil Society Organisation (CSO) or ask your in-country team

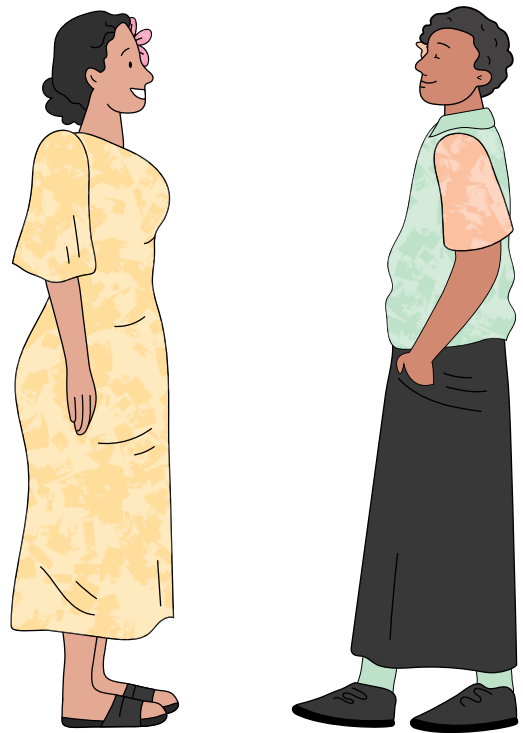
The most common terms to describe the diverse SOGIESC community in Vanuatu are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (trans man or trans women). Terms in local languages and dialects to refer to diverse SOGIESC communities are slurs when used by those outside of the community. Using the initialism LGBTIQ+ or being specific with 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', 'transgender' or 'intersex' is the most respectful way to refer to an individual or affirm their sexual or gender identity.

Legal and policy context

Same-sex sexual acts have never been criminalised in Vanuatu. However, an exclusionary national legal framework denies the equal rights and protections of diverse SOGIESC communities. Same-sex marriage and civil unions are not recognised by the State.

In 2011, Vanuatu became a signatory of the United Nation's Joint Statement on Ending Acts of Violence and Related Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. In 2013, Vanuatu released its National Gender Equality Policy framework, which has been criticised for failing to include diverse issues. In the same year, the Minister for International Affairs, Patrick Crowby, made a statement discouraging Christian pastors from presiding over same-sex marriages because they "go against the constitution of Vanuatu".¹

¹ Pacific Islands Report, "Vanuatu pastors told not to preside over gay marriages," Top stories, published October 15, 2013, <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2013/10/15/vanuatu-pastors-told-not-preside-over-gay-marriages>.



Discrimination

No legal protections exist for people with diverse SOGIESC in Vanuatu. This includes a lack of constitutional protections and national laws that protect against SOGIESC discrimination, laws that protect against SOGIESC discrimination in employment (overall), and laws that protect against hate crimes, incitement to hatred, violence or discrimination based on one's SOGIESC. However, teachers and other school staff have some degree of protection, as their employers must not discriminate on the basis of gender or sexual preference.

There is no legal avenue for persons to change their gender markers on their official documents. This presents barriers for transgender individuals in using their identification to access employment and healthcare.

Cultural and societal attitudes

Religion, patriarchal values and traditional binary gender roles foster negative attitudes toward people with diverse SOGIESC in Vanuatu. Social acceptance of people with diverse SOGIESC differs across the nation. Communities on some islands, including Efafe and Espiritu Santo, are more accepting of people with diverse SOGIESC than those on smaller islands.

However, verbal and physical discrimination is still rife in urban settings. People with diverse SOGIESC can experience a lack of support and even violence from their family.

In 2018, a civil society coalition comprising of religious groups, local chiefs, women's and youth groups formed to create a petition against marriage equality after rumours that lawmakers planned to introduce a bill on the issue. VPride is the only diverse SOGIESC CSO in Vanuatu, focusing on the cultural gender diverse identities of those assigned male at birth.

Health and wellbeing

The Asia Pacific Trans Health Blueprint training package was created and disseminated to government in 2018, to provide information and a resource for healthcare professionals, policymakers and community advocates on the specific health and wellbeing needs of trans communities. No reports demonstrate if or how the package is being used in Vanuatu.

“As a transgender or gay person, it is very hard to get proper care. Many of us hide our identities because discrimination in health services. We only get medical help when we have to.”

– Research participant.

CSO VPride holds outreach programs for transgender and men who have sex with men (MSM) groups on sexual and reproductive health rights. They also provide sensitisation training for non-government organisations, CSOs and government agencies.

Media

Media coverage of the diverse SOGIESC community in Vanuatu is usually aimed at vilifying the community. VPride has been contributing positive stories, however there is more traction with the international media than the national media. Within diverse SOGIESC communities and networks, people tend to use Facebook to communicate with each other.

² ILGA World, State-Sponsored Homophobia. (Geneva: ILGA, 2019), 167.