

# Pride Guide | Papua New Guinea



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 Information sourced online can be outdated or inaccurate.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.

LGBTI, the initialism for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex, is the most common umbrella term used for sexual and gender identities in PNG.

## Legal and policy context

Same-sex sexual acts are criminalised in national law in PNG, with a maximum prison sentence of 14 years. In 2011, the PNG Government informed the United Nations that it would not decriminalise homosexuality. No convictions have occurred in recent years, however reporting of court cases is not mandatory. For the Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of PNG by Human Rights Watch in 2021, PNG noted recommendations to amend national legislation to include sexual orientation and gender as prohibited grounds for discrimination.

There is a culture of impunity and lawlessness in PNG, with a high level of abuse by authority figures. Crimes perpetrated by police and law enforcement against children have been recorded by Human Rights Watch,<sup>1</sup> including rape and torture. There is extreme violence against women, with more than two-thirds of women in PNG experiencing domestic violence. There is evident reporting of rape, assault and murder of gay men in PNG.

## Discrimination

No legal protections exist for people with diverse SOGIESC in PNG. This includes a lack of constitutional protection and national laws that protect against SOGIESC discrimination, laws that protect against SOGIESC discrimination in employment, and laws that protect against hate crimes, incitement to hatred, hate crimes or discrimination based on one's SOGIESC. Cultural and societal attitudes

Patriarchy, a culture of violence and the fact that PNG is a post-conflict state contribute to a cultural belief that LGBTIQ+ people are "both pathological and perverse". However, opinions differ significantly between provinces, and when comparing attitudes in rural and urban areas. Religion also contributes to negative attitudes towards people with diverse SOGIESC in PNG.

<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Papua New Guinea (New York: HRW, 2021), 7.

*“... we face a lot of stigma and discrimination in the churches because of our identities as diverse SOGIESC. We are still discriminated in our religion places, because we come from a Christian background and [being] a transwoman, it’s not acceptable.”*

– Research participant.

In one study, gay or feminine-presenting men were more likely than other men to be victims of rape by men, which is performed to express heterosexual dominance. Violence by family members against people with diverse SOGIESC is also common in Papua New Guinea. Port Moresby is the most impacted place for people with diverse SOGIESC. Youth who leave home often move to nearby villages and communities, which are safer for people with diverse SOGIESC. However, even in these areas, police and civil society perpetrate crimes with a high degree of impunity.

## Health and wellbeing

Papua New Guinea’s healthcare system is underfunded, overwhelmed and lacks the resources to combat high levels of malaria, tuberculosis, diabetes and other diseases. Access to hospital services is difficult for the 80% of people who live outside urban centres.

Diverse SOGIESC health services are limited to HIV/AIDS programs, but the discrimination LGBTIQ+ people living with HIV face limits the effectiveness of campaigns to reduce its spread. Gay men and transgender women are often afraid to get tested out of fear that confidentiality will be breached. There is no access to mental health and psychosocial services, however some CSOs and community groups hold well-being services, which are attended by many people with diverse SOGIESC. Sexual education is not commonly taught in schools, and high levels of bullying have caused many diverse SOGIESC youth to leave school.



## Media

There is little broadcasting on diverse SOGIESC issues in PNG, and crimes against the diverse SOGIESC community go unreported. The reporting that has occurred focuses on the stories of gay men and transgender women. Facebook is the social media platform of choice for advocacy work and for connecting with community members.

1 Senthurun Raj, “What will happen to gay asylum seekers in Papua New Guinea?,” Guardian Opinion, published July 23, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jul/23/gay-asylum-seekers-papua-new-guinea>.  
2 Emma Fulu, Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV, 2013).