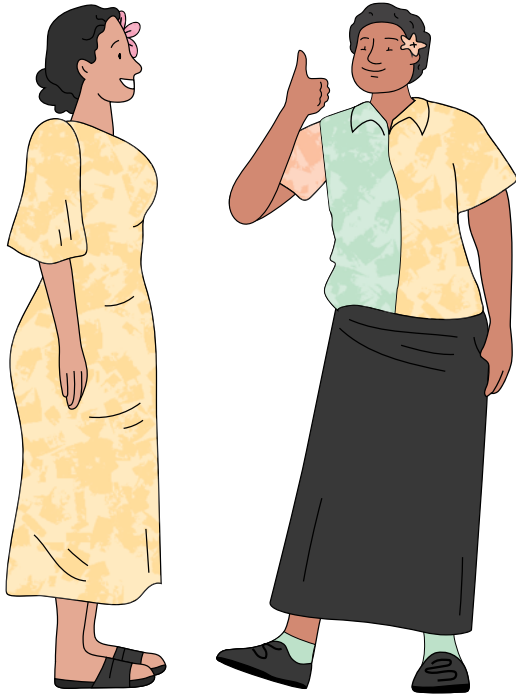


Pride Guide | Samoa



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 Information sourced online can be outdated or inaccurate.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 following terms are used to describe the cultural identity of gender diverse people in Samoa:

Fa'afafine - who are usually assigned male at birth and may take on feminine expression and gender roles.

Fa'atama - who are usually assigned female at birth and may take on masculine expressions and gender roles.

These terms relate to a person's identity, and not their sexual orientation. For example, a fa'atama may identify as being gay, straight, bisexual or lesbian. These identities challenge western ideas of sex and gender.

Legal and policy context

Same-sex sexual acts between men are criminalised in Samoa, with a maximum prison sentence of five years. The definition of "sexual connections" in this law specifies oral and anal sex, inferring that other sexual acts are permitted. Sex work is illegal and can result in three years in prison, while brothel management can lead to a 10-year prison sentence. In 2011, Samoa 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. The Samoa Fa'afafine Association (SFA) is a member of Samoa's advisory board to the National Human Rights Institute. In 2016, during the second Universal Periodic Review cycle, Samoa "noted" recommendations for decriminalising same-sex relations and creating further protections against diverse SOGIESC discrimination.

Lesbians, bisexual women, Fa'atama and intersex populations are not referenced in Samoan legal and policy frameworks.



Discrimination

In Samoa, there is a lack of constitutional protections and national laws that protect against SOGIESC discrimination and incitement to hatred on the basis of one's SOGIESC. However, there are some protections; A person must not directly or indirectly discriminate against an employee or applicant for employment on the basis of sexual orientation, sex, gender or real or perceived HIV status, amongst other grounds. Hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity are also criminalised.

Cultural and societal attitudes

The Fa'afafine Week launched in 2020 featured the support of Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Dr. Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, who attended the opening ceremony. He publicly voiced the achievements of the SFA, and commended their work throughout the years.¹ Civil society's attitudes toward the fa'afafine community remain overall positive and accepting.

Religion can play a role in perpetuating violence and institutionalised discrimination against communities with diverse SOGIESC. Despite these challenges, there are rural areas where fa'afafine and fa'atama are village matais, deacons at church, choir masters and farmers who lead prosperous lives free from discrimination.

Health and wellbeing

National healthcare is accessible to everyone in Samoa, however there is no national healthcare specifically oriented toward supporting people with diverse SOGIESC. There is limited capacity and expertise amongst medical professionals on diverse SOGIESC health needs, with funding and resources limited.

CSOs such as the Fa'afafine Association and The Rogers place an emphasis on psychosocial support services and wellbeing activities for their respective communities.

"Self-care is an important part of SFA work, when a member has a family funeral or experiences tough times, we all get together to provide support and show we care. Hospital visits to our community elders who are sick is important to us to show we support one another especially in these difficult times... Under the SFA umbrella we have 10 sister clubs and us The Rogers. These sister clubs are community led well being small groups who look out for each other, have social events to enjoy have fun and support each other. The clubs are all across Upolu and Savaii and they focus on the day to day well-being of members so that when we all gather together as SFA we go united."

Vanila Heather

HIV infection in Samoa is low, with only 24 cumulative cases between 1990 and 2017.² There is no sex education taught in schools. Fa'afafine and fa'atama youth face bullying and an inability to access suitable toilets at school, causing many to drop out and limit their job prospects. Diverse SOGIESC teachers may also face discrimination.

Media

SFA has created a media guide for reporters, journalists and bloggers as a resource for reporting fairly and non-discriminatorily about diverse SOGIESC Samoans. SFA and The Rogers have had positive media coverage, and use Facebook to reach out to their communities. In Samoa, Facebook is more popular than WhatsApp, Instagram or Twitter.

¹ Hyunsook Siutaia, "P.M. Tuilaepa launches Fa'afafine Week," Samoa Observer, published December 2, 2020, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/75376>.

² https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/WSM_2018_countryreport.pdf