

# Pride Guide | Republic of Marshall Islands



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 Information sourced online can be outdated or inaccurate.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.

## Legal and policy context

Same-sex sexual acts were decriminalised in RMI in 2005. 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. There are stringent laws and penalties surrounding sex work due to RMI being both a source and destination country for the sex trafficking of women and girls. Sex workers face sentencing of up to two years and those running brothels face a maximum five-year prison sentence.

## Discrimination

Some legal protections exist for people with diverse SOGIESC in RMI. Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is prohibited for state, civil society and private sector actors. Gender equality is guaranteed in education, employment, health and social protection. It should be noted that 'sex' is defined as referring to the physical and biological traits that "distinguish females and males"; there is no mention of intersex rights. However, there are no constitutional protections for people with diverse SOGIESC, or protections against hate crimes or incitement to hatred.

## Cultural and societal attitudes

Diverse sexual orientations are taboo in RMI, and are not culturally accepted. The diverse SOGIESC community face discrimination, particularly if they are HIV-positive. In a small study, SOGIESC diverse interviewees described their feelings toward their sexuality as “ashamed” and holding “low self-esteem”. Where families know about the diverse sexuality of their child, they may apply pressure on them to adhere to heteronormative practices.

## Health and wellbeing

Many diverse SOGIESC people in RMI do not know how to access health services to meet their needs, such as HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and treatment. Mental health services are limited but are available through the CSO Youth to Youth, who offer counselling for young people with STIs or HIV/AIDS. Youth to Youth is also well-known for its promotion of sexual and reproductive rights through songs and other creative modes of teaching in schools.

