

# Pride Guide | Fiji



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 and region 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 Information sourced online can be outdated or inaccurate.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 Fiji in 2020. In 2013, Fiji became the first country in the Pacific to have constitutional protections from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and the HIV/AIDS Decree was also passed to prohibit discrimination based on gender orientation or sexual orientation. In 2018, Fiji became the first country in the Pacific to host an LGBTI Pride parade.

However, same-sex marriage and civil unions are not recognised by the state and an exclusionary national legal framework persists, denying the equal rights and protections of diverse SOGIESC communities.

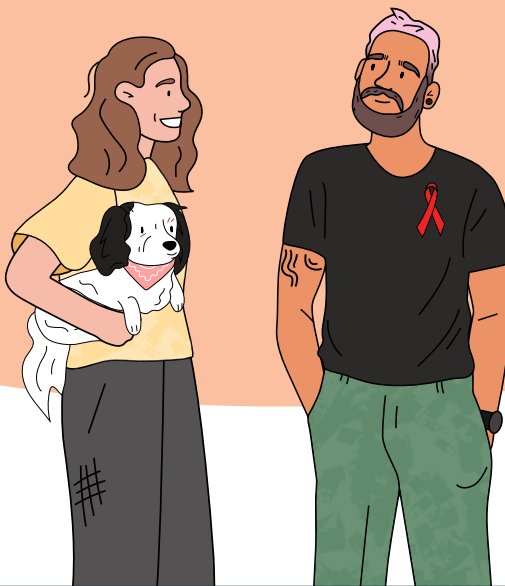
## Discrimination

National laws and constitutional protections exist for people with diverse SOGIESC in Fiji. Discrimination based on a person's personal characteristics, including gender and sexual orientation, is prohibited. It is also prohibited to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation in respect to recruitment, training, promotions, terms and conditions of employment and termination of employment. A person cannot be considered mentally ill on the basis that they express, refuse or fail to express a particular sexual preference or orientation.

In spite of these advances, legislation does not provide protections against hate crimes directed at people with diverse SOGIESC because of their identities, and only provides limited protection against incitement to hatred.

## Cultural and societal attitudes

Religion plays a significant role in the views and attitudes Fijians adopt toward people with diverse SOGIESC. In some instances, the church is used as a platform to try to 'convert' or 'cure' people with diverse SOGIESC to align with 'traditional' heteronormative values. This can be distressing for people with diverse SOGIESC, as a gay man from a religious family reflects:



*“My father is a pastor. I am spiritual, but don’t always go to church. Once a pastor raised the topic of gays and lesbians that they have to change. It’s really hard for us to hear that from someone up on the pulpit. I feel bad along with my friends sitting with me who are all gay. The church doesn’t have any respect for us.”*

Many Fijians with diverse SOGIESC feel they cannot challenge the violence perpetrated against them in public, fearing family, religious or workplace-related backlash.

Diverse gender identities are generally more accepted in Fiji than diverse sexual orientations. Vakasalewalewa are a cultural third gender group in Fiji, who are assigned male at birth but may take on a feminine gender expression and roles that are traditionally taken on by cisgender women. This identity can challenge western ideas of sex and gender. The vakasalewalewa can be valued for their ability to carry out traditionally male and female tasks.

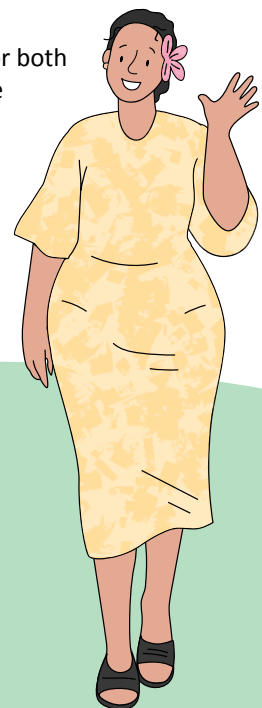
Traditional understandings of the nuclear family and the binary gender roles cisgender women and cisgender men play are prevalent in Fiji. It is common for people with diverse SOGIESC who do not meet these heteronormative expectations to experience rejection. In one study, 42% of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women said they did not feel accepted by their nuclear family, and 50% said they were not accepted by their extended family.

## Health and wellbeing

Fiji has a basic healthcare system provided by the state, however non-government organisations (NGOs) and CSOs also contribute as healthcare providers. Despite provisions by the Ministry of Health that every citizen has an equal right to access healthcare, people with diverse SOGIESC are met with barriers. Stigma and discrimination can lead to people with diverse SOGIESC in Fiji not seeking healthcare services. In addition, healthcare professionals who do not hold SOGIESC-specific expertise may discriminate against those with diverse SOGIESC.

## Media

The media has been criticised for both neglecting and excluding diverse SOGIESC people from reporting. When news stories about the diverse SOGIESC community are published, the media does not often recognise their diverse identities.



1 Edge Effect, Down By the River. Addressing the Rights, Needs and Strengths of Fijian Sexual and Gender Minorities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Response (Melbourne: Oxfam, 2018), [https://www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Down-By-The-River\\_Web.pdf](https://www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Down-By-The-River_Web.pdf), 27.

2 DIVA, Unjust, Unequal, Unstoppable: Fiji Lesbians, Bisexual Women, Transmen and Gender Non Conforming People Tipping the Scales Toward Justice (Laucala Beach Estate: DIVA, 2018).