



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

LGBTQI+

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICY



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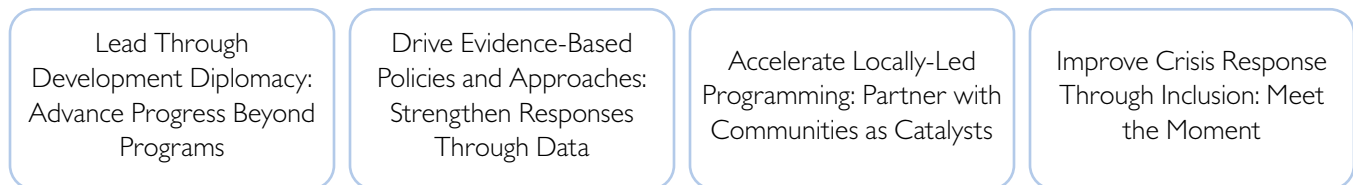
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

USAID affirms and celebrates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people and all people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) as integral parts of every society. Diversity of SOGIESC exists in all societies, historical and contemporary, and all populations in every country. LGBTQI+ people are colleagues, partners, role models, leaders, neighbors, friends, and family members. Through the USAID LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy (LGBTQI+ Policy), USAID recommits to its staff, local partners, the international community, other development agencies, and program participants around the world that LGBTQI+ individuals are a vital force in the work we do and that, by embracing an inclusive development approach, we will help our work serve all segments of society.

As an update to the 2014 LGBT Vision for Action, this policy reiterates, guides, and reinforces USAID’s commitment to championing LGBTQI+ inclusive development and the human rights of LGBTQI+ people as part of a coordinated, whole-of-U.S. government effort with our partners on the ground. The USAID LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy is informed by extensive consultations and dialogue with civil society, activists, private-sector networks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), multilateral organizations, development practitioners, and USAID staff from around the world, as well as a Policy Implementation Assessment of the 2014 LGBT Vision for Action.

Goals of the USAID LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy:



Principles for achieving these goals:

- Be Proactive While Upholding the Principle of “Do No Harm”
- Follow the Lead of Local LGBTQI+ Activists and Groups and Act with Humility and in Allyship
- See the Full Person and Work to Meet Diverse Needs
- Understand the Landscape, History, Stakeholders, and What Has Worked
- Recognize the Need for Targeting, Tailoring, and Differentiating LGBTQI+ Programs and that One Size Does Not Fit All

The “+” in LGBTQI+ represents additional sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) that do not fit within the “LGBTQI” identity labels. Sometimes variations on this acronym (e.g., LGB, LGBT) are used depending on the referenced subpopulations. USAID recognizes that language is dynamic and evolves, that terminology differs across languages and cultures, and that it is always best to ask individuals from local LGBTQI+ communities about preferred terminology. Regardless of the acronym used, USAID’s intention is to be inclusive of the full diversity of all sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and variations in sex characteristics. USAID recognizes that all LGBTQI+ individuals have diverse SOGIESC, but not all individuals with diverse SOGIESC necessarily identify as LGBTQI+. This document uses both “LGBTQI+” and “SOGIESC” to address the various ways communities inside and outside the United States refer to these communities.



INTRODUCTION

USAID's Role

USAID supports the enactment of robust protections, inclusion, and human rights for all LGBTQI+ individuals through “inclusive development,” an equitable development approach built on the understanding that every individual and community, of all diverse identities and experiences, is instrumental in the transformation of their own societies. Their engagement throughout the development process leads to better outcomes. These outcomes include a world in which LGBTQI+ persons can live with dignity and free from all forms of violence, discrimination, stigma, and criminalization. In this world, LGBTQI+ persons are able to participate fully in civic and democratic processes; they have equal access to sustainable livelihoods, economic assets, and resources; they have full access to education, health, mental health, and other services that are essential for personal well-being and growth (including sexual and reproductive health and rights and comprehensive sexuality education); and, importantly, they are supported in times of emergency.

Working across USAID, the LGBTQI+ portfolio within USAID's Inclusive Development Hub will lead implementation of the LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy. It is aligned with U.S. government law and a number of U.S. policies, and strategies, including the U.S. Department of State and USAID Joint Strategic Plan (2022–26);¹ U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (2022);² U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality (2021);³ U.S. Strategy on Global Women's Economic Security (2022);⁴ USAID Policy Framework (2023),⁵ as well as USAID strategies and policies,⁶ including the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (2023); the USAID Equity Action Plan (2022); Rule of Law Policy (2023); Anti-Corruption Policy (2022); Youth in Development Policy (2022); Local Capacity Strengthening Policy (2022); and Private Sector Engagement Policy (2021).

Sociocultural Dynamics and Historical Legacies

Everyone, everywhere, has a sexual orientation, a gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Diversity in SOGIESC has generally been recognized as part of humanity itself and, in many contexts, embraced. Despite LGBTQI+ individuals existing in every society, every culture, and every country around the world throughout history, anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment has proliferated⁷ in the past few centuries in the form of discriminatory laws, organized countermovements, and stigmatization. This was accompanied by prevailing norms and beliefs that everyone is inherently cisgender and heterosexual.

Today, prejudice affects the lives and livelihoods of millions of LGBTQI+ people and movements around the world, manifesting in violence, discrimination, stigma, social marginalization, and exclusion, as well as anti-LGBTQI+ laws, policies, and regulations. The LGBTI Global Acceptance Index⁸ finds that while the average global level of LGBTQI+ acceptance has risen since 1980, it has decreased in 57 countries, and 62 countries have experienced no change.

Powerful Movements

LGBTQI+ movements are driven by brave, smart, strategic, passionate, innovative, and resilient leaders in every region of the world. These movements are comprised of individual activists, community-based organizations, civil-society networks, businesses, entrepreneurs, public officials, and multi-stakeholder coalitions that work to advance the human rights, livelihoods, and dignity of all people with diverse SOGIESC. It is due to their efforts that meaningful change is possible and strong progress has been made in countering the systematic marginalization of LGBTQI+ individuals.

Intersecting Identities

Many aspects of a person's identity affect how they experience the world. It is crucial that we intentionally recognize the complex, cumulative ways in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination and oppression combine, overlap, or intersect to affect LGBTQI+ individuals' lives and livelihoods. This is particularly relevant for individuals who experience overlapping marginalized identities. These include, but are not limited to, women; gender-diverse persons; youth; children in adversity and their families; older persons; persons with disabilities; displaced persons and refugees; migrants; Indigenous Peoples and communities; non-dominant religious, racial, and ethnic groups; people of castes traditionally considered lower; people of lower socioeconomic status; persons living with HIV or AIDS; victims and survivors of violence and conflict; and persons with met and unmet mental health needs. For example, gender-based violence (GBV) disproportionately affects women and girls worldwide, with even higher rates documented among specific groups, such as lesbian or transgender women and women and girls with disabilities.

Building on Meaningful Progress

Over the past decade alone, 16 countries have decriminalized consensual same-sex relations between adults. Multilateral bodies such as the United Nations (UN), Organization of American States, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Council of Europe, and international financial institutions have also recognized the need to combat SOGIESC-driven violence and discrimination. Additionally, awareness of the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ populations has increased. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, a global development framework agreed to by all UN member states with a commitment to "leave no one behind," also present a key entry point to advancing LGBTQI+ inclusive development.⁹

Despite this trajectory, new challenges have emerged around the globe—including the continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the anti-gender movement, anti-democratic actors, the politicization of LGBTQI+ identities, and compounding humanitarian crises and conflict—that threaten backsliding on hard-fought gains. USAID also recognizes the ongoing legal battles and gaps in protections for LGBTQI+ individuals in the United States and is taking actions to make the Agency a workplace where all LGBTQI+ staff can thrive as their authentic selves.¹⁰

PROGRESS IN FOCUS

LGBTQI+ Community Shapes National Discussion in the Dominican Republic

In the Dominican Republic, LGBTQI+ community members organized a second National Dialogue with representatives from 150 civil-society organizations, government departments, and development cooperation partners. Activists focused the dialogue on issues of security, access to justice, and health, in the context of leaving no one behind. This helped to set a broad national agenda for the LGBTQI+ community to engage their government and with donors to make gains in equality.

— USAID-supported "Being LGBTI in the Caribbean Initiative," November 2022



BACKGROUND

Social Marginalization, Stigmatization, and Exclusion

Facing broad-based discrimination—including violence, social marginalization, stigma, and exclusion—LGBTQI+ people are often denied access to social benefits such as health care and education, as well as opportunities for political participation and economic empowerment. This section highlights some of the leading manifestations of the discrimination, violence, and marginalization that LGBTQI+ communities face in a wide range of country contexts.

Positive legal frameworks are essential to protect LGBTQI+ people from discrimination, recognize LGBTQI+ relationships and families, provide accurate legal identity documents, and promote dignified livelihoods. While recent momentum in some countries toward repealing and reforming laws that criminalize same-sex conduct—including many anti-LGBTQI+ laws inherited from colonial powers¹—is cause for cautious optimism, some countries have experienced significant backsliding. Globally, serious gaps in fundamental legal protections for LGBTQI+ individuals remain:

- Sixty-four countries criminalize consensual same-sex relations between adults; of those, more than forty countries explicitly criminalize same-sex relations between women. Penalties include fines, incarceration, and, in eleven jurisdictions, the death penalty.
- Thirteen countries explicitly criminalize transgender and gender-diverse individuals; many more de facto criminalize transgender people under vague “morality” or “public nuisance” laws. Additionally, authorities in nearly all countries that criminalize same-sex relations routinely make no distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity. The effect is that transgender and gender-diverse individuals often face prosecution or extralegal discrimination for being “gay,” regardless of their actual sexual orientation.
- An overwhelming majority of countries lack legal gender recognition or clear legal processes for transgender and gender-diverse persons to change their legal documentation and identity papers to match their gender identity. A lack of correct identity documents can expose transgender and gender-diverse individuals to harassment; violence; denial of social, public, and humanitarian assistance services; corruption and extortion; and exclusion from civic and democratic processes such as voting.
- Only ten countries currently prohibit harmful, medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex infants and children, which often result in long-lasting trauma, medical complications, and mistrust of medical services.

Gender-Based Violence Affecting Transgender and Other Gender-Diverse Individuals

Transgender and gender-diverse individuals, particularly transgender women from historically persecuted racial and ethnic backgrounds, face extremely high rates of violence and extrajudicial killings. According to the [Trans Murder Monitoring project](#),¹² more than 325 transgender individuals were murdered globally from October 2021–September 2022—a likely conservative figure due to underreporting. Transgender individuals, along with lesbians, are also [targets](#)¹³ of punitive rape (or so-called corrective rape), which might be instigated by their families. Widespread discrimination results in the disproportionate representation of transgender individuals in the informal economy, increasing their vulnerability to various forms of GBV.

LGBTQI+ individuals, as well as any person perceived to be LGBTQI+ or gender nonconforming, experience disproportionately high levels of GBV. This can include, but is not limited to, extrajudicial killings, state-sanctioned attacks, familial abuse, gang violence, abductions, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, technology-facilitated GBV (e.g., targeting via social media), nonconsensual intersex genital surgeries, so-called conversion therapy practices (CTP), and hate crimes. The 2022 U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally¹⁴ notes that GBV's impacts on LGBTQI+ individuals can include “familial estrangement, exclusion from educational and economic opportunities, legal and political disenfranchisement, and poor physical and mental health and psychosocial outcomes.” Anti-LGBTQI+ gang violence,¹⁵ coupled with impunity, also creates secondary risks for LGBTQI+ individuals such as forced migration and internal displacement. Moreover, fewer than 20 countries have enacted legislation or regulations banning forms of CTP. LGBTQI+ individuals using shared, public, or communal toilets and sanitation facilities risk violence, humiliation, exclusion, and even arrest as evidenced in a USAID technical brief.¹⁶

Health care service providers and public health systems can be ill-equipped to serve LGBTQI+ persons or overtly hostile and discriminatory. Criminalization, other anti-LGBTQI+ laws, and social taboos also hinder access¹⁷ to services or deter LGBTQI+ people from seeking care. For example, a lack of training or awareness can lead medical practitioners to overlook¹⁸ the unique and diverse sexual and reproductive health needs within the LGBTQI+ community. In multiple countries, HIV and other health programming for LGBTQI+ populations are either unfunded or resisted, despite epidemiological evidence of elevated need.¹⁹ Persistent stigma and discrimination within health care facilities may also lead to breaches in LGBTQI+ patient confidentiality, or even cases of health care workers refusing to treat LGBTQI+ patients. Comprehensive and vital health services and psychosocial support for transgender persons may be prohibitively expensive, unavailable, and/or illegal, forcing reliance²⁰ on illicit and unsafe markets. According to data²¹ submitted to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), anti-transgender stigma and discrimination undermines HIV testing efforts, resulting in a range of 47 to 73 percent of transgender people avoiding seeking HIV testing. Medical practitioners also commonly pursue unnecessary, harmful, and traumatic medical interventions with the aim of “normalizing”²² the anatomy of intersex individuals. These procedures not only further social stigmatization of intersex individuals but can also lead to long-lasting medical complications and mental health impacts.

PROGRESS IN FOCUS

Localization Efforts in India

In India, USAID supported the launch of the first-ever clinics run by and for transgender individuals in the nation. These clinics initially opened to provide access to safe and authorized comprehensive services for the transgender community. All of the staff, including doctors, counselors, and outreach workers, are transgender persons. According to one implementer, “The most important part of this entire model was to constantly check with the community.”

— USAID-supported “ACCELERATE” program, 2021

LGBTQI+ youth who do not conform to dominant gender norms or who are affected by prevailing expectations of masculinity, femininity, and/or the gender binary can face a wide spectrum of bullying, rejection, and even so-called conversion therapy practices from their peers, families, educators, and others in the community. According to a global study²³ from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), “The education sector as a whole can also produce ‘implicit’ homophobic and transphobic violence, also referred to as ‘symbolic’ or ‘institutional’ violence.” The USAID sectoral guidance report “Integrating LGBTQI+ Considerations into Education Programming” notes, “Anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination in education settings can result in LGBTQI+ students having higher absentee and dropout rates, attaining lower learning outcomes, experiencing mental and physical health problems, and underinvesting in their own education.” A European Union–focused survey also found²⁴ that two-thirds of youth “always” or “often” heard or witnessed “negative comments or conduct at school because a classmate was perceived to be LGBT.” Additionally, a global survey²⁵ found that more than 10 percent of LGBTQI+ students—including a third of transgender girl or women respondents—“are considering” or “have considered” leaving school as a result of anti-LGBTQI+ stigma and discrimination. Together, such stigma and discrimination can have devastating mental-health consequences,²⁶ including suicidal ideation.²⁷

Crosscutting marginalization, stigma, and exclusion in education mean that LGBTQI+ individuals face disparities in wage and household income, are disproportionately represented in informal economies, and experience higher rates of poverty and lower access to social benefits and protections—a phenomenon documented²⁸ by the group **Open for Business**. Not only does this curtail career trajectories and livelihoods, but it also increases the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ individuals during crises and economic downturns. LGBTQI+ people may lack legal protection from discrimination and harassment, which may prevent them from living openly as their full selves, cause mental and physical distress, and inhibit economic productivity. Strikingly, according to one estimate,²⁹ only about 40 percent of countries worldwide have workplace protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation; even fewer have protections from discrimination based on gender identity. Multiple studies³⁰ also indicate a relationship between LGBTQI+ economic exclusion and decreased national economic growth.



The Impact of LGBTQI+ Economic Discrimination on Growth

Many studies point to the impact of LGBTQI+ workplace discrimination on individuals, businesses, communities, and ultimately whole economies.

- A 2019 study³¹ from the University of Massachusetts, Leiden University, and Rutgers University found that an increase in LGBTQI+ persons' legal rights is associated with an increase in real gross domestic product per capita of approximately \$2,000.
- According to the findings of a joint 2018 report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), "LGBTI People and Employment: Discrimination Based on SOGIESC in China, the Philippines and Thailand,"³² 60 percent of respondents reported that they had seen a job advertisement specifically exclude candidates of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- A 2022 Open for Business study³³ found a positive correlation across the world between "LGBTQ+ inclusion," including employment discrimination protections, and economic resilience. Similarly, Open for Business³⁴ has found that "businesses thrive in tolerant societies and that the spread of anti-LGBT+ policies runs counter to the interests of business and economic development."

Anti-LGBTQI+ stigma, discrimination, and exclusion permeate all aspects of political and civic life. LGBTQI+ people are vastly underrepresented in many political parties and among elected officials. Among these already low numbers around the world, there is a far greater proportion³⁵ of openly gay and bisexual men in parliaments than "out" lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender individuals. Personal identification information in official voter registration records may also not match an individual's gender identity, raising bureaucratic barriers for transgender individuals to vote and increasing the likelihood of them facing violence at the polls. Amid cross-cutting threats to and shrinking of civic space globally, LGBTQI+ civil-society organizations often face hurdles to assemble and organize. According to an Outright International³⁶ analysis, only slightly more than half of UN member states permit LGBTQI+ organizations to legally register.

LGBTQI+ people also have been among the first³⁷ populations targeted by authoritarian actors seeking to exploit social wedge issues. While anti-LGBTQI+ organizing is not a new occurrence, well-funded coalitions of anti-democratic, anti-rights actors have increasingly pursued³⁸ targeted, divisive anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns that are a cover for wider repression of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. By creating artificial divisions among LGBTQI+ people, allies, women's rights advocates, and others, these anti-democratic nationalist and authoritarian anti-rights movements³⁹ increase the risks of anti-LGBTQI+ GBV and persecution and the shrinking of civil-society space. In many contexts, this includes promulgating disinformation and misinformation⁴⁰ about LGBTQI+ individuals, backing radical legislation that specifically targets the LGBTQI+ community (and transgender persons, in particular) at national and subnational levels, promulgating oppressive norms, and blocking protections for LGBTQI+ individuals in domestic laws and policies as well as in international agreements. A study⁴¹ from Franklin & Marshall College indicates a positive correlation between democracies' strength and LGBTQI+ legal protections. Similarly, according to the 2023 USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy, "Global threats to democracy contribute to backsliding on gender equality as anti-democratic nationalist and authoritarian movements foment anti-gender sentiment to mobilize public support."

Gaps in legal protections, social protection systems, and other social support networks mean LGBTQI+ people can be especially susceptible to the adverse impacts of shocks and stressors. Such events—including health emergencies, acute conflict, and climate change-driven catastrophes—create additional layers of risk and danger for LGBTQI+ individuals, activists, and organizations. In a report titled “Vulnerability Amplified: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTQI+ People,”⁴² Outright International found that the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ people as a result of COVID-19 and related containment measures are specific and amplified—including food and shelter insecurity as well as job losses—compared with those faced by the broader population. The UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity underscores⁴³ that “LGBT and gender-diverse persons are often in well-founded fear of persecution in the context of armed conflicts, and they are often marginalized or excluded from many established evacuation and emergency response services and processes.” The Independent Expert has also emphasized that the exclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals from meaningful participation in peace processes can lead to “disastrous” human rights consequences. LGBTQI+ individuals are also uniquely affected⁴⁴ by the effects of climate change, as they may be more dependent on employment in the informal sector, lack housing or land, and be unable to access aid programs.⁴⁵

Development, Crisis, and Humanitarian Landscapes

Traditionally, a main entry point for development assistance to reach LGBTQI+ people has been through HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment, as well as through the protection and promotion of human rights more broadly. Despite the important progress resulting from these efforts, estimates show that development assistance for LGBTQI+ issues is far below demand and need. According to an analysis conducted by the Global Philanthropy Project⁴⁶ in 2019–2020, “Global LGBTI funding from donor governments again accounted for just four cents out of every \$100 of international development efforts and official development assistance.” A groundbreaking Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and Mama Cash study⁴⁷ of more than 300 lesbian, bisexual, and queer groups also found that a majority of them are critically underfunded and overwhelmingly compelled to rely on volunteer staff.

Development practitioners and technical experts frequently lack awareness on LGBTQI+ issues and may not have an established track record of meaningful partnerships with LGBTQI+ groups, communities, or networks. Key decision-makers, funders, and implementers may also view LGBTQI+ engagement and programming as too inherently complicated, sensitive, or risky. This unfortunately means that the principle of “Do No Harm” is often misinterpreted to mean “do nothing.” USAID’s LGBTQI+ Policy seeks to build on growing momentum for a multisectoral and integrated approach to ensure that LGBTQI+ individuals are not left behind. This blueprint for integrating LGBTQI+ individuals in policy and programming recognizes that civil and political rights are indivisible from economic, social, and cultural rights. It also recognizes the urgency of combining the prioritization of locally led development with advancing the socioeconomic inclusion and human dignity of LGBTQI+ individuals everywhere.

The risks encountered by LGBTQI+ persons in times of stability are significantly amplified during humanitarian crises. LGBTQI+ persons are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises and exposed to multiple protection risks ranging from barriers to accessing rights and services to threats, discrimination, prejudice, abuse, bullying, neglect, displacement, criminalization, violence, exploitation, and death. However, a 2021 landscape analysis⁴⁸ notes that “humanitarian and [disaster risk reduction] systems often fail to acknowledge or address the discrimination, violence, and exclusion experienced by people with diverse SOGIESC. At the very least this leaves people with diverse SOGIESC to find their own solutions; at worst, it reinforces violations of human rights.”

USAID seeks to address these challenges by promoting inclusive approaches to humanitarian and development assistance that promote the participation, needs, and capacities of LGBTQI+ individuals in these settings. USAID also supports and advocates for programming that addresses LGBTQI+ individuals' specific needs, including social services and protective spaces that provide safe, compassionate care in response to harm.

Although LGBTQI+ people often participate in and have repeatedly led political movements, many are also rarely included in broader peace and security conversations or programs. For USAID, ensuring the LGBTQI+ community's participation in peacebuilding efforts helps not only promote the needs and capacities of the LGBTQI+ community in these settings, but also address the structural factors that often give rise to conflict. Colombia's historic peace accord is an important case study for the value of political inclusion of LGBTQI+ communities. The peace accord not only recognized the impact of the conflict on LGBTQI+ persons, but also acknowledged how inclusion in political processes strengthens democracy.



GOALS

The following are key priorities for USAID's LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy.

1 Lead Through Development Diplomacy: Advance Progress Beyond Programs

In addition to its foreign assistance programs, USAID plays a crucial role in agenda setting, promulgating norms and precedents, and encouraging multi-sectoral investments that support LGBTQI+ inclusive development globally. The Agency should continue to be a leader, active voice, and thoughtful convener through its development diplomacy and keep pace with dynamic, vibrant, and growing international LGBTQI+ movements and change agents.

USAID should cultivate and advance its engagement and relationships on LGBTQI+ inclusive development with think tanks, LGBTQI+ civil-society groups along with community-based organizations and networks, the private sector, other bilateral development agencies, philanthropies, multilateral institutions, regional organizations, international financial institutions, and host-country governments, and across the U.S. interagency. From its headquarters to its presence around the world, and always in concert with local LGBTQI+ networks, USAID should seek openings and international moments to join allies and partners in recognizing and honoring the inherent dignity, livelihoods, and contributions of LGBTQI+ individuals to their communities. This can also include meaningful engagement of LGBTQI+ leaders, communities, and youth as well as allies in key development forums and in cross-cutting programmatic priorities. Topics can include stemming the tide of authoritarianism, countering corruption, fighting digital repression and disinformation, combating climate change, improving food security, and spurring democratic renewal.

2 Drive Evidence-Based Policies and Approaches: Strengthen Responses Through Data

USAID policies and programs designed to advance LGBTQI+ inclusive development should be informed by evidence and data, including community-led, participatory research that presents the most accurate representation of the communities being engaged. Locally led research and data also creates trust and buy-in from those communities to accept, promote, and uphold studies' results. In alignment with existing USAID policy and guidance on data security and ethics, USAID should employ new funding opportunities to expand the evidence base that can help further align programs and policies with the lived experiences, realities, and articulated priorities of LGBTQI+ individuals, particularly those who have been historically marginalized within the LGBTQI+ community, such as transgender and intersex individuals and LGBTQI+ youth.

3 Accelerate Locally-Led Programming: Partner with Communities as Catalysts

USAID has prioritized the localization⁴⁹ of its programming in recognition of the fact that individuals and local, regional, and national organizations on the ground are the best-positioned and most knowledgeable stakeholders for effective and sustainable development. USAID should align its programs to account for the needs of local LGBTQI+ communities, activists, and organizations, and provide flexible funding opportunities for nascent organizations and new partners. USAID also recognizes that locally led development detached from inclusive development can have unintended negative consequences, including potentially reinforcing discrimination and unequal power structures within local contexts, especially in nonpermissive environments. This is why USAID's locally led development efforts must systematically support the voices of local, historically marginalized groups, including LGBTQI+ people.⁵⁰

4 Improve Crisis Response Through Inclusion: Meet the Moment

Crises resulting from pandemics, conflict, natural disasters, climate change, gross human rights violations, democratic backsliding, and other threats to safety and security have demonstrated the importance of responsive support targeted to LGBTQI+ individuals' most urgent needs. USAID will continue promoting and supporting mechanisms to meaningfully engage and involve crisis-affected people in decisions about the emergency assistance they receive, and we will work to ensure that LGBTQI+ people have equal access to and use of these mechanisms. Direct consultations with LGBTQI+ organizations that understand and have built trust with local LGBTQI+ communities are vitally important to map services and community support, identify barriers to accessing assistance, and facilitate referrals to services. USAID also supports and advocates for humanitarian programming that addresses LGBTQI+ individuals' specific needs through the provision of social services and protective spaces and provides safe, compassionate care in response to harm.

PROGRESS IN FOCUS

Sharing Stories of Identities and Building Bridges in Sub-Saharan Africa

An African LBQ (lesbian, bisexual, queer) group produced a 13-episode web series that highlights nuanced stories of LGBTQI+ people who are navigating how they engage with and contribute to society, as well as how they navigate their own identities and lives. These stories have the potential to reach diverse audiences and reduce stigma and discrimination.

— USAID-supported Multi-Donor LGBTI Global Human Rights Initiative, 2023



PRINCIPLES

Human rights, human dignity, inclusion, and equity are instrumental to effective development and humanitarian responses. A world free of discrimination will generate substantial economic gains benefiting all and bolster social and political stability. For USAID, this approach is foundational to inclusive development.

1 Be Proactive While Continuing to Uphold the Principle of “Do No Harm”

When development programs exclude LGBTQI+ people, they widen development disparities that LGBTQI+ persons already face, further eroding socioeconomic status and increasing marginalization. Since 2016, USAID has required a clause or standard provision in all acquisition and assistance awards to prevent discrimination against beneficiaries on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, among other statuses such as race, religion, and disability.⁵¹ Nondiscrimination is the baseline that is necessary but insufficient to abide by the principle of “Do No Harm.”

In tandem, USAID should proactively take measures to ensure that we are accountable to program participants by offering channels for complaints and timely recourse. It is important to ensure program participants know they can make complaints without fearing for their safety or breach of their privacy and that corrective action will be taken. This includes ensuring that participants of USAID programs are aware of the nondiscrimination protections guaranteed to them under USAID acquisition and assistance awards as well as providing access to an Accountability Mechanism, currently in development as recommended in USAID’s Equity Action Plan.⁵² USAID also recognizes that care must be taken to protect the privacy and identities of program participants, USAID staff, and implementing partners.

Paramount to all LGBTQI+ inclusive development programs is the safety and security of persons and organizations. Importantly, “Do No Harm” should not be employed as an excuse to do nothing or to short-circuit or avoid programmatic engagement on LGBTQI+ inclusive development. Instead, USAID staff should be proactive and implement intentional efforts to reach and include LGBTQI+ individuals in programming. When assessing potential program activities’ risks, LGBTQI+ people themselves are often best equipped to identify real threats and suggest mitigation and avoidance measures, as local LGBTQI+ communities have incorporated such assessments into their daily lives. Failing to facilitate LGBTQI+ inclusive programming, even in sensitive contexts, will exacerbate risks to LGBTQI+ individuals, entrench restrictive social and gender norms, and raise the risk of social instability and even conflict.

In fact, according to the August 2022 USAID Risk Appetite Statement, which provides guidance on the level and type of risk the Agency is willing to accept to achieve its mission and objectives and notes USAID's high-risk appetite with regard to inclusive development, "The greatest risks of all are often the byproduct of inaction or inadequate action."⁵³

2 Follow the Lead of Local LGBTQI+ Activists and Groups and Act with Humility and in Allyship

A central tenet of LGBTQI+ inclusion is "Nothing About Us Without Us." This recognizes the imperative for meaningful involvement from and genuine engagement and consultation with local LGBTQI+-led organizations, individuals, and communities throughout the Program Cycle—from conception and design to implementation and evaluation. Perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and issues facing LGBTQI+ individuals are incomplete without the input, interpretation, and buy-in of those with lived experience.

USAID and its staff must approach LGBTQI+ inclusive development, and all programming, with humility and in allyship. Engagement with local LGBTQI+-led organizations must come from a place of deference to and respect and gratitude for their willingness to share information, best practices, and recommendations for USAID's work, as well as respect for their wishes if they choose not to engage.⁵⁴

It is critical that when designing activities to reach LGBTQI+ people, USAID and implementing partner staff recognize that LGBTQI+-led organizations are most likely to be successful. This principle aligns with the Agency's broader localization and inclusive development agendas and will further enable stronger, longer-term movements to be carried forward by resilient LGBTQI+ organizations that will advance their own priorities. For example, the 2022 USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy⁵⁵ underscores "a commitment to partnerships based on mutual respect and reciprocity and through which local actors from all backgrounds, identities, and cultures have their voices heard, exercise their unique capabilities, and lead their country's development."

3 See the Full Person and Work to Meet Diverse Needs

SOGIESC is only one component of an individual's identity, and effective analysis, engagement, programming, and policy will recognize that people's identities are never solely confined to their SOGIESC. Because of this diversity, LGBTQI+ individuals and organizations may have widely divergent views about key objectives and advocacy approaches. For example, gender-conforming, cisgender LGBQ individuals with stable employment and income, while still stigmatized, may also live a very different reality than gender-nonconforming, intersex, and/or transgender individuals. Moreover, bisexual individuals have reported⁵⁶ feeling "invisibilized" by both LGTQI+ and non-LGTQI+ individuals. Additional manifestations of discrimination may result from, for instance, socioeconomic status, age, disability, or ethnicity, among other factors.

Adopting an intersectional lens can help USAID better address the context-specific root causes of such inequalities. For example, USAID prioritizes using an "ages and stages"⁵⁷ approach in youth programming. During these crucial periods, young people may need varying levels of support during self-identification of their SOGIESC, as youth may encounter numerous challenges, from bullying and violence at school to losing family support at home.

LGBTQI+ Persons with Disabilities

LGBTQI+ persons with disabilities face multiple, intersecting layers of discrimination and stigma and even greater barriers to societal inclusion. Research⁵⁸ from Transgender Europe, for example, underscores that transgender individuals with disabilities and who are deaf “are likely to be treated by practitioners who have little or no understanding of at least one aspect of their identities.” In the absence of community support, LGBTQI+ persons with disabilities may have to rely heavily on their families for support, and their sexuality—especially that of women and girls—is often considered taboo. While there are serious ongoing research gaps related to LGBTQI+ individuals with disabilities, one study⁵⁹ has also found that LGBTQI+ individuals are more likely to have a disability than non-LGBTQI+ individuals.

Information and materials should be accessible to LGBTQI+ individuals with disabilities (e.g., braille; sign language; accessible online formats; easy-read, captioned, and audio-described videos) so that LGBTQI+ persons with disabilities are not unintentionally excluded from program design processes, consultations, and resources. The organizations of persons with disabilities Down Syndrome International and Inclusion International also developed “Listen, Include, Respect” guidelines⁶⁰ so that groups can ensure the full and effective participation of persons with intellectual disabilities.

4 Understand the Landscape, History, Stakeholders, and What Has Worked

To contribute responsibly to local LGBTQI+ organizations’ efforts, USAID and its partners must understand the historical landscape of existing institutions and stakeholders; previous and ongoing efforts to support the community; and the historical legacies, laws, policies, practices, and norms that shape an LGBTQI+ person’s experience. Beyond preliminary landscape analyses and desk research, continual learning and adapting is standard practice for all programs. Language and issues evolve, and a learning mentality is key to ensure that development interventions are relevant and effective.

USAID recognizes the importance of strong movements that are able to mobilize multiple stakeholders, allies, and champions for collective advocacy and encourages supporting local efforts to build and foster relationships among LGBTQI+ groups and other organizations and movements that are suffering similar forms of oppression.

5 Recognize the Need for Targeting, Tailoring, and Differentiating LGBTQI+ Programs and that One Size Does Not Fit All

A common question when considering how to best meet LGBTQI+ persons’ needs is whether to do this by integrating LGBTQI+ individuals into mainstream development programming or by developing standalone activities and programs specifically focused on LGBTQI+ advocacy, service delivery, or organizational development.

The answer is that both integrated and standalone approaches are necessary. LGBTQI+ people have many of the same needs as the general population in areas including employment/livelihoods, political participation, and access to education, health care, and justice, as well as housing, land, and property. Yet, stigma and discrimination also create particular barriers for LGBTQI+ people. USAID and its partners should carefully analyze these barriers while also developing targeted programs that ensure LGBTQI+ people have the opportunity to make valuable contributions to society and be recognized for those contributions. A key aim for the new LGBTQI+ Policy is pursuing LGBTQI+ integration in USAID policies and programming.



LEARNING

Evidence and learning must play a central role in USAID's decision-making with regard to strategic approaches and effective programming to advance LGBTQI+ inclusive development. There are a number of outstanding resources on the global and national realities for LGBTQI+ people already in existence, including:



Franklin & Marshall College's Global Barometers,⁶¹ which rank 204 countries and regions on a series of indicators pertaining to the legal environment for and social inclusion of LGBT people;



The Williams Institute's Global LGBTI Acceptance Index,⁶² which scores 175 countries based on a composite of existing public opinion surveys over time; and,



The U.S. Department of State's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,⁶³ which contain valuable information pertaining to LGBTQI+ individuals' human rights.

LGBTQI+ activists and development practitioners have consistently requested more granular data regarding the human development needs of LGBTQI+ people to better inform effective programming. Data gaps remain at the local, country, regional, and global levels for a variety of person-level indicators. Disaggregation of data based on SOGIESC and other factors, on an intersectional basis, remains a challenge. USAID also recognizes the underlying ethical and security- and safety-related considerations in collecting and storing demographic data related to SOGIESC.

To track progress and better understand the degree to which development programs are meeting the needs of LGBTQI+ communities, the World Bank, UNDP, and civil-society organizations developed the LGBTI Inclusion Index,⁶⁴ which provides 51 indicators to track progress across five development dimensions: health, security, civic engagement, education, and employment. Additionally, numerous toolkits and resources have been created to demonstrate the connection between the Sustainable Development Goals and data collection.⁶⁵

The Global Equality Fund (GEF)⁶⁶ is a public-private partnership managed by the U.S. Department of State that pools resources from like-minded governments, businesses, and foundations for the protection of LGBTQI+ human rights

in more than 100 countries since December 2011. Through a consultative and collaborative process with partners, the GEF developed a set of standard indicators for all programs. Standardizing the collection of data and indicators not only supports the development of an evidence base for donors, but also eases the burden on LGBTQI+ civil society to report on donor funding.

All data and information generated from program monitoring and evaluation should be designed to support accountability, learning, and decision-making for adaptive management. Given finite resources and time, it is important to clearly define what learning can contribute most to inclusive development outcomes and what data will be needed to support that effort. Across all monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts, USAID will ensure meaningful participation of LGBTQI+ persons and groups in activities, beginning with the planning phase of learning activities. These analyses, data, and learnings from USAID-supported programs will help the Agency continually improve programs.



POLICY INTO PRACTICE

The LGBTQI+ Policy’s principles and objectives constitute a shared Agency responsibility that depends on proactive Agency leadership and the contributions and collective commitment of the entire workforce. Delivering on these commitments means:

Pursuing LGBTQI+ Integration in Mission Programs and Procedures

Requirements

- **Adopt localized approaches that “lean in” while upholding “Do No Harm”:** Conducting intentional, inclusive LGBTQI+ stakeholder consultations; evidence gathering; and data collection is crucial for gathering information about local realities and priorities and for strategic development and activity design. When engaging LGBTQI+ individuals and groups about their needs, priorities, and desired interaction with and support from USAID, USAID staff must follow the principle of “Do No Harm,”⁶⁷ the USAID Risk Appetite Statement,⁶⁸ and USAID’s guidance for safety/security-sensitive and trauma-informed stakeholder consultations with members of marginalized groups.⁶⁹ This is especially important when developing programs, projects, and activities in which LGBTQI+ individuals are intended to be the primary program participants; in many cases, these consultations may be done as part of a broader Inclusive Development Analysis⁷⁰ or Gender Analysis.
- **Report on progress and impact:** Missions and Operating Units (OUs) that support LGBTQI+ individuals and communities must pursue regular, evidence-based, and high-quality reporting on USAID programs. This includes reporting about LGBTQI+ activities and programs via the “LGBTQI+ Inclusion” Key Issue Qualitative Narrative in Performance Planning and Reporting, and articulating how the Mission or OU will support LGBTQI+ inclusive development in operational plans and congressional budget justifications as well as in other planning, budgeting, and reporting processes. This reporting should be in line with existing reporting systems and requirements as well as Agency efforts to reduce burdens and streamline efficiencies.

Recommendations

- **Increase Alignment:** To prevent institutional siloing or isolation of LGBTQI+ equities and support institutional continuity, USAID should accelerate and support the integration of LGBTQI+ inclusive development priorities across its policies, strategies, programming, and guidance documents and in other learning and knowledge platforms.
- **Integrate LGBTQI+ Considerations into the Program Cycle:** In the development of their Country Development Cooperation Strategies and/or Regional Development Cooperation Strategies, Missions should identify the needs, challenges, social dynamics, and structural barriers faced by LGBTQI+ people. Those considerations and ongoing stakeholder consultations should be integrated into all stages of the Program Cycle, including strategic planning, design, procurement, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
- **Disaggregate Data:** Across USAID, activities managed by Missions, including many President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) programs implemented by USAID around the world, collect gender identity data beyond man and woman, notably (but not only) in countries where there are more than two legally recognized genders.⁷¹ The collection of disaggregated data meets the needs of Missions and OUs by providing greater accuracy in identifying who the Agency's programs are reaching. Where it is safe and feasible to do so and contributes to programmatic objectives, USAID should utilize existing datasets related to LGBTQI+ communities or support the collection of disaggregated data to tailor programmatic approaches.⁷² Through engagement with the interagency, partners, and technical communities of practice, USAID should develop further guidance to safely disaggregate person-level data by gender identity and, where possible, by additional SOGIESC dimensions.
- **Conduct SOGIESC-Inclusive Gender and Inclusive Development Analyses:** USAID is encouraged to explicitly integrate LGBTQI+ considerations into Gender Analyses (required by law) and Inclusive Development Analyses.
- **Develop Sectoral Guidances:** The Inclusive Development Hub LGBTQI+ Portfolio is developing more sectoral guidance documents on effectively integrating LGBTQI+ considerations in specific programmatic areas.⁷³ The guidance documents, including case studies from USAID and external stakeholders, should be shared with implementing partners, LGBTQI+ technical experts, other development agencies, and USAID staff.

Building Operational Capacity for LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development

Requirements

- **Designate LGBTQI+ Focal Points:** Each USAID Mission and Washington-based OU must identify at least one staff member (ideally one Foreign Service National and one Foreign Service Officer) to serve as an LGBTQI+ Focal Point; this may be the Gender Advisor, the Inclusive Development Advisor, and/or other staff. The Focal Point serves as the Mission/OU's point person on LGBTQI+ issues and helps the Mission/OU advance LGBTQI+ protection and inclusion; sits on and advises interagency diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) councils and inclusive development working groups; and cultivates relationships with local LGBTQI+-led organizations. USAID's LGBTQI+ Focal Points community of practice will support efforts across the Agency to advance LGBTQI+ inclusive development through standalone and integrated programming, as well as ensure ongoing consultation and relationship building with local LGBTQI+ organizations. Since 2014, Focal Points have reduced burdens and continue to strengthen the Agency's work in this space.

- **All members of USAID’s workforce, including all staffing mechanisms, complete an e-module on LGBTQI+ inclusive development.** This will reduce burdens by preventing the need to belatedly amend programming that is not properly responsive to groups in vulnerable situations. It also builds on the updated “LGBTQI+ 101: LGBTQI+ Inclusion in USAID’s Workplace” e-module, which became mandatory for USAID supervisors and managers beginning in 2022.

Recommendations

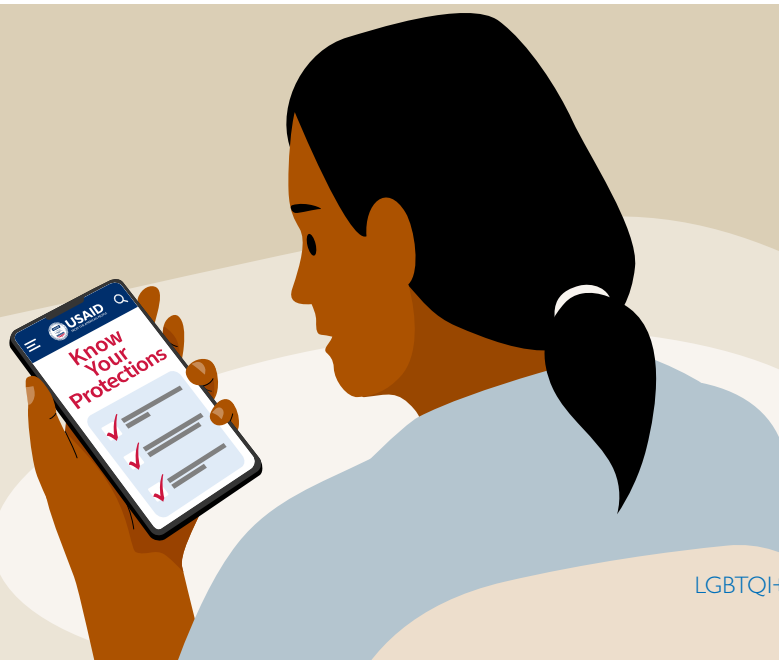
- **Engage in Continual Learning and Awareness Building:** The Inclusive Development Hub LGBTQI+ Portfolio is periodically updating LGBTQI+ training and collaborate with the Office of Civil Rights; the Office of Chief Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Officer; and employee resource groups such as the Gender and Sexual Minorities at USAID in developing, executing, and publicizing LGBTQI+ training and resources that are readily available and accessible to all staff, including potential courses on marginalized populations within the LGBTQI+ community.

CONCLUSION

As an update to the 2014 LGBT Vision for Action, this LGBTQI+ Policy reiterates, guides, and reinforces USAID’s steadfast commitment to championing LGBTQI+ inclusive development and the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons as part of a coordinated, whole-of-government effort with our partners on the ground. Overall, it outlines how USAID can respond effectively to current challenges affecting LGBTQI+ persons globally, suggests best practices in LGBTQI+ inclusive development and humanitarian response, and institutionalizes USAID’s leadership in this space.

Concerted action—across sectors, age groups, and stakeholders—is crucial for success. This policy is intended to serve as a catalyst for ensuring that the work of other development and humanitarian partners also centralizes the protection, inclusion, and human rights of LGBTQI+ people everywhere.

As Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” No person anywhere should face criminalization, violence, discrimination, marginalization, stigmatization, or exclusion because of who they are or whom they love.



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