



RESOURCE
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Pocket Guide: Safeguarding LGBTQI+ individuals working in civil society organisations (CSO)

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Introduction

This Pocket Guide focuses on the safeguarding risks that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) staff face when working or collaborating with civil society organisations (CSOs) and how organisations can make their safeguarding policies and practices safe and inclusive for all LGBTQI+ staff.

The definition of safeguarding refers to preventing harm, including but not limited to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH), to people in the delivery of development and humanitarian assistance. For RSH, safeguarding explicitly includes harm that staff and associated staff may themselves experience in the workplace (RSH, [What is safeguarding?](#)). **In this Pocket Guide, the focus is specifically on protecting staff – including employees, volunteers, incentive workers, consultants or contractors – with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sexual characteristics** (SOGIESC – see the Glossary for further information). At the same time, many of the recommendations will contribute to safer programmes more broadly, and community members or programme participants with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sexual characteristics, as they address organisational systems and ways of working.

While very few resources exist on including and safeguarding LGBTQI+ programme participants, no resources to date have considered the specific safeguarding risks and barriers faced by LGBTQI+ staff and how safeguarding approaches might be adapted to be safe and inclusive. LGBTQI+ people are employed in all sectors, including in CSOs working in development and humanitarian contexts. Every organisation should assume some of their staff are LGBTQI+. Therefore this Pocket Guide is relevant to all CSOs regardless of the sector or whether they actively seek to engage LGBTQI+ populations in their programmes. CSOs should assume that LGBTQI+ individuals are amongst the participants of any programme as well.

LGBTQI+ staff are at high risk of being sexually, physically and verbally abused in their workplace and of experiencing various forms of discrimination, exploitation and harassment (ATPN 2019; Chowdhury 2021; Davis et al. 2017; Fey 2022). These risks include, but are not limited to SEAH (Helem 2021; Masurana and Donnelly 2017; TUC 2019). It is therefore essential that safeguarding policies and practices within CSOs are easily and safely accessible to LGBTQI+ staff without the fear of retaliation, retribution or blackmailing. Safeguarding measures must take into account the specific needs and vulnerabilities of LGBTQI+ staff. This Pocket Guide covers four main topics:



1. Key terms and definitions (outlined in the glossary below)
2. Overview of the risks of harm and abuse faced by LGBTQI+ persons when working in CSOs
3. Overview of the risks faced by LGBTQI+ persons when safeguarding approaches are not LGBTQI+ inclusive
4. Guidance on how to make safeguarding policies and practices LGBTQI+ inclusive.

The Pocket Guide was developed in consultations with LGBTQI+ organisations and activists in the Middle East, Africa and South and Southeast Asia. Resources from these and other regions, including Europe, the Caribbean, North and South America were also consulted and are listed in the References and Resources section of this guide.

We are a faith-based organisation, is this for us?

LGBTQI+ people belong to all faiths and some of them are likely to be drawn to the mission and values of your organisation. Therefore, all kinds of CSOs, including faith-based organisations, are likely to have LGBTQI+ staff. Most faiths promote treating others with love and care and protecting those who are oppressed and forgotten by society. Inclusive safeguarding practices enable all organisations, including faith-based ones, to achieve their goals of contributing to a fairer world. [Click here](#) for RSH resources on safeguarding in faith communities.

There are several examples of collaboration between LGBTQI+ and faith-based organisations which can provide a helpful model to strengthen your understanding of LGBTQI+ rights and religion. For instance:

- The Global Interfaith Network, advocates for safe spaces, policy inclusion and for the support and acceptance of all sexual and gender minorities who see faith is an important life-giving source. [Click here](#) to access their resources
- Talita Kum in Indonesia works with religious groups, leaders, and scholars to change norms about diverse sexual identities in religious communities (Saleh and Sood 2020)
- Rainbow Identity Association (RIA) in Botswana has helped parish priests to see LGBTI people as their pastoral responsibility (Gevisser 2016).

A note on language

Language to describe sexual and gender diversity is highly context-specific and changes over time. The key terms used in this Pocket Guide are listed in the Glossary. They were chosen due to their global recognition. However, we acknowledge that these terms might not be inclusive of how people describe themselves in different contexts and there might be more appropriate terms for you to use in your safeguarding work.

Some useful resources to expand your knowledge and terminology can be found online: for example, click [here](#) for a general overview; [here](#) for a South African perspective; and [here](#) for a Lebanese/Middle Eastern perspective.

Ultimately, we recommend you are guided by LGBTQI+ people and activists in your context in determining which terms and language is most appropriate and respectful.

Risks of harm and abuse faced by LGBTQI+ persons when working in civil society organisations

Data on the safeguarding risks faced by LGBTQI+ persons in the workplace is very scarce due to underreporting and the risks associated with disclosing one's SOGIESC. LGBTQI+ people are not a homogenous group and they are likely to experience different forms of harm and abuse depending on various factors, including intersectional characteristics, like their race, if they have a disability or their nationality, and local legal and cultural frameworks regarding gender and sexual diversity. Risks of harm, including SEAH, are driven by different forms of abuse of power and inequalities. "The more power a person has, the greater the opportunity to exploit, abuse and harass others. The less power a person has, the more they are likely to be targeted for exploitation, abuse and harassment. The degree of power someone has is closely linked to structural, hierarchical and situational factors" (RSH 2021, p. 2). Click [here](#) for a RSH resource on intersectionality.

LGBTQI+ people who are not "out" (e.g. whose sexual orientation or gender identity is not publicly known) might face the same kind of harms and abuse, including SEAH, faced by their non-LGBTQI+ colleagues, especially if they are also a woman, a person with a disability, a member of ethnically minoritised or racialised group or religious group or any group with less power within their context. Furthermore, their position in the organisational hierarchy might impact their exposure to harm and ability to respond if abuse happens. However, being LGBTQI+ might prevent staff from reporting SEAH forms of abuse for fear of attracting attention or being "outed" in retaliation for reporting. LGBTQI+ people, whose sexual orientation or gender identity is known by some or all colleagues within the workplace, are more likely to experience SEAH and other forms of abuse and discrimination directed at them specifically because of their SOGIESC (ATPN 2019; Chowdhury 2021; Davis et al. 2017; Fey 2022; Helem 2021; Masurana and Donnelly 2017; TUC 2019). This is particularly the case for LGBTQI+ people who are unable and/or unwilling to conceal their gender identity or sexual orientation, such as visibly trans women and men, non-binary people and all those whose gender expression diverges from gender



norms. On the other hand, members of the LGBTQI+ community who are less represented, such as intersex people, risk being wrongly perceived as transgender, gay or lesbian and being targeted by homophobic or transphobic abuse as well as having their specific needs ignored.

Talking about sexual harassment

“When I talk to white female colleagues about exposure to sexual harassment during overseas work, I find that I am often the only one who has had national male colleagues knock on their door at night, had handshakes that linger too long, had to get out of a hotel lift on the wrong floor so male colleagues, training participants, or organisational partners don’t know which room I am in. White, straight women laugh when I tell them about the marriage proposals. Is it because I am Black and so not a ‘proper’ foreigner, or because I have no husband or boyfriend? I wonder, if needed, could I run away, and how far, would my poor health allow me to get? Being a cis-gender Black Lesbian with financial security, a British passport, tertiary education and a senior professional position, I regularly navigate a complex array of power and privileges.”

When different risks were highlighted for specific groups (e.g. gay men, lesbian, bisexual, queer and trans women, intersex or non-binary individuals) during consultations or the desk review, these have been highlighted below. However, exposure to different forms of abuse depends greatly on the context, so we recommend being guided by LGBTQI+ rights organisations and reports in your country.

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

The misconception that LGBTQI+ identities are primarily linked to sex can expose LGBTQI+ staff to different forms of SEAH as they are perceived as “open” to all forms of sexual contact (TUC 2019). Lesbian, bisexual and queer women are at risk of sexual abuse intended to “cure” them or “convert” them to heterosexuality and femininity. Trans men can be wrongfully perceived as women by some and thus exposed to the same forms of abuse, including rape and other forms of sexual violence (Roth et al. 2021). Transgender women and men are one of most at risk groups of sexual violence worldwide (Ahlenback 2022). Gay, bisexual or queer men can also be targeted by Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment by colleagues, managers and programme participants (TUC 2019).

Sexual abuse and exploitation against LGBTQI+ people within their workplace can be accompanied by blackmail, with perpetrators threatening to “out” the victim to colleagues, supervisors, the authorities, or their families if they do not comply with their demands for sex (Mazurana and Donnelly 2017). Reporting such cases to the police or the judicial



system is considered nearly impossible by many victims as they fear being prosecuted themselves for engaging in illegal sexual acts.

“One time, one of them forced himself into the toilet and raped me. I can’t tell anybody about it because of the pictures that they have of me. Nobody will believe me and everyone will blame me because they think I don’t behave manly enough.” (6Rang 2020)

The lack of appropriate infrastructure and facilities in a workplace, such as gender-neutral bathrooms or private changing spaces, can increase the risk of SEAH, especially for staff members who are non-binary, transitioning or do not otherwise conform to binary gender stereotypes (Fey 2022; UN-Globe 2018; UN OHCHR 2017). Organisations should do all they can to protect all staff, including LGBTQI+ staff, from SEAH.

Blackmail

Blackmail of LGBTQI+ people can also happen outside the context of SEAH. For example, staff can be asked to perform duties outside of their responsibilities, including demeaning, degrading or illegal work, under the threat of personal information about their sexuality and gender identity being shared publicly or with the authorities in contexts where same-sex relationships are criminalised or stigmatised. LGBTQI+ staff can also be blackmailed for money (including by programme participants) or to accept inappropriate working conditions, lower salaries, or unfair contractual conditions.

“Homosexual staff are really vulnerable.” They brought this up to me. Maybe you have a man who is effeminate, maybe homosexual or heterosexual, but because of the fact they are effeminate they are a target for blackmail, blackmail will take place because they say, “I will out you unless you do what I want.” (Mazurana and Donnelly 2017).

If colleagues or programme participants gain access to private photos, online content or other personal information of LGBTQI+ staff, they might use these materials to blackmail (see also below for digital and online abuse), in exchange for favours, such as including someone on a distribution list to receive aid, or being selected as a programme participant or incentive worker.

Verbal and psychological abuse

LGBTQI+ staff can be exposed to verbal or psychological forms of abuse on a daily basis, especially when they work in highly homophobic or transphobic contexts. These forms of abuse can be targeted, such as being called derogatory names, asked intrusive and

inappropriate questions, forced to perform degrading duties, targeted with homophobic or transphobic messages (such as religious messages against homosexuality). Abuse can be indirect but equally harmful, for example by being exposed to homophobic or transphobic comments in the work environment, hearing other LGBTQI+ people insulted or ridiculed by colleagues, supervisors, and programme participants, or seeing offensive materials being circulated within the office. In a study on workplace discrimination in Sri Lanka, lesbian women (80%) and transgender persons (67%) were the categories of respondents most likely to report having experienced verbal harassment and abuse (Chowdhury et al. 2021). In Lebanon, lesbian women who present in a more masculine way are more likely to be the target of abuse and discrimination (Anonymous consultation). In Ghana, intersex people are the target of public shaming both within and outside of the workplace (Anonymous consultation).

All of these forms of abuse can cause profound harm for LGBTQI+ staff and make them feel unwelcomed and unsafe within their workplace. Exposure to constant homophobia and transphobia has been linked to poorer mental health outcomes amongst LGBTQI+ populations, as well as self-harming and suicidal behaviours (6Rang 2020; Alimi et al. 2017; Roth et al. 2021).

Digital and online abuse

LGBTQI+ staff can be at heightened risk of digital or online abuse by colleagues, programme participants or the general public. Perpetrators might gain personal and private information about LGBTQI+ staff via social media, dating apps or online forums and use this information to exploit, blackmail or sexually abuse them. Digital technologies have been used in certain contexts to expose someone's sexuality by pretending to be a potential romantic or sexual partner online (Roth et al. 2021).

“There’s a growing trend of gay men being baited by criminals on dating sites such as Tinder and Grindr and then being extorted and blackmailed”
(Anonymous consultation).

Sexual abusers have taken compromising photos of LGBTQI+ people without their consent and threatened to post them online if they report them or refuse to meet them again. This strategy has also been used against non-LGBTQI+ women and adolescent girls. LGBTQI+ staff can also be subjected to “cyber stalking”, e.g. the use of electronic communications to harass or frighten someone, for example by sending threatening emails or texts (RSH 2022). Further, they can be attacked on social media or other public online platforms with homophobic or transphobic comments and even organised campaigns, especially if they become publicly visible as LGBTQI+ (Deck, 2022; Strand & Svensson, 2022; Younes, 2021).



Even in cases when digital and online abuse is not being perpetrated by staff members of a CSO or programme participants, CSOs have a duty of care towards staff members who are being harassed online as these forms of abuse can have a direct impact on their ability to work with affected communities as a result of being 'outed' online.

Discrimination and exclusion

How to report homophobia?

"A former colleague recently changed their social media profile picture. The new profile picture was an image with the text, 'Non à l'homosexualité' / 'No to homosexuality'. He works for a well-respected INGO. I was shocked that I did not feel able to challenge him. I did not know if I could report this safely or even if the INGO would recognise this homophobia as wrong. Speaking up against homophobia feels harder than speaking out against sexism or racism."

Quote from cis-gendered Black Lesbian working in a global role in the UK

Workplace discrimination and exclusion can have a severely harmful impact on LGBTQI+ staff, thus falling under the category of safeguarding and requiring CSOs to commit to and work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination and exclusion against LGBTQI+ people in their workplace. They can also create an environment that tolerates abuse, including SEAH, against LGBTQI+ staff members.

Discrimination can take many forms, from differential behaviour towards colleagues who are LGBTQI+ to unfair dismissal. Examples cited in the literature and during consultations for this Pocket Guide include forced resignations, forcing LGBTQI+ staff to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity at work, policies and procedures based on strictly binary and heterosexual assumptions which exclude same-sex couples or non-binary staff from workplace benefits such as parental leave, and failure to hire or promote specific individuals due to their perceived gender identity or sexual orientation (6Rang 2020; ATPN 2019; Chowdhury et al. 2021; Fey 2022). Body language or clothing that is not in line with gendered expectations can be sufficient reason for someone to be fired by their employer or to be deemed "unprofessional."

"In the workplace, I was forced to resign after the theft and disclosure of my personal information about me and my partner. My employer also had to report us to law enforcement agencies, but due to mediation from some people around me they accepted not to do so." (6Rang 2020)

Trans people can face additional discrimination due to their gender identity not matching their legal ID, making it difficult for them to conceal their trans history when applying for a job.

Not outing myself

“When I travel to some countries for work, I know that for the duration of my overseas work I need to be ready to lie about my identity.

I have the indignity of having to use my mum as my next of kin, or emergency contact for employers and for immigration authorities. I use my mum, so I don't out myself, but my partner is who I would want in an emergency.

I need to be nimble to respond to questions about marriage, husbands and boyfriends. I try to find answers which don't deny my partner but don't “out” me. ‘No, I'm not married’, ‘No, I don't have children’, ‘Yes, having someone special is very important.’”

Quote from cis-gendered Black Lesbian working in a global role in the UK

CSOs and other humanitarian and development organisations often expect LGBTQI+ staff to be wholly responsible for understanding and managing the risks they might be exposed to due to their gender identity and sexual orientation. As a result, safety risk assessments for specific programme locations or activities do not include information about the risks faced by LGBTQI+ staff, nor do risk mitigation strategies and plans. For instance, a LGBTQI+ staff member might worry about being exposed to threats and abuse, including sexual and physical abuse, if staying overnight in a remote community with limited connectivity. Unless the risk assessment process is inclusive and explicitly considering the differential risks faced by staff members with different characteristics (gender, sexuality, disability status, etc.), LGBTQI+ staff may be reluctant to raise their concerns with their colleagues, supervisors or security and safeguarding focal points for fear of being deemed unable to perform their duties or being considered “too sensitive”. Discrimination against LGBTQI+ staff might also arise from programme participants who can treat them differently from their non-LGBTQI+ colleagues, for instance by being disrespectful, refusing to engage with them in activities, or complaining to the organisation's management for employing people with diverse SOGIESC. Community members or colleagues could also resort to using a CSO's complaint mechanism to “out” a LGBTQI+ staff to the organisation or accusing them of ‘being dangerous’ simply because of their perceived SOGIESC.

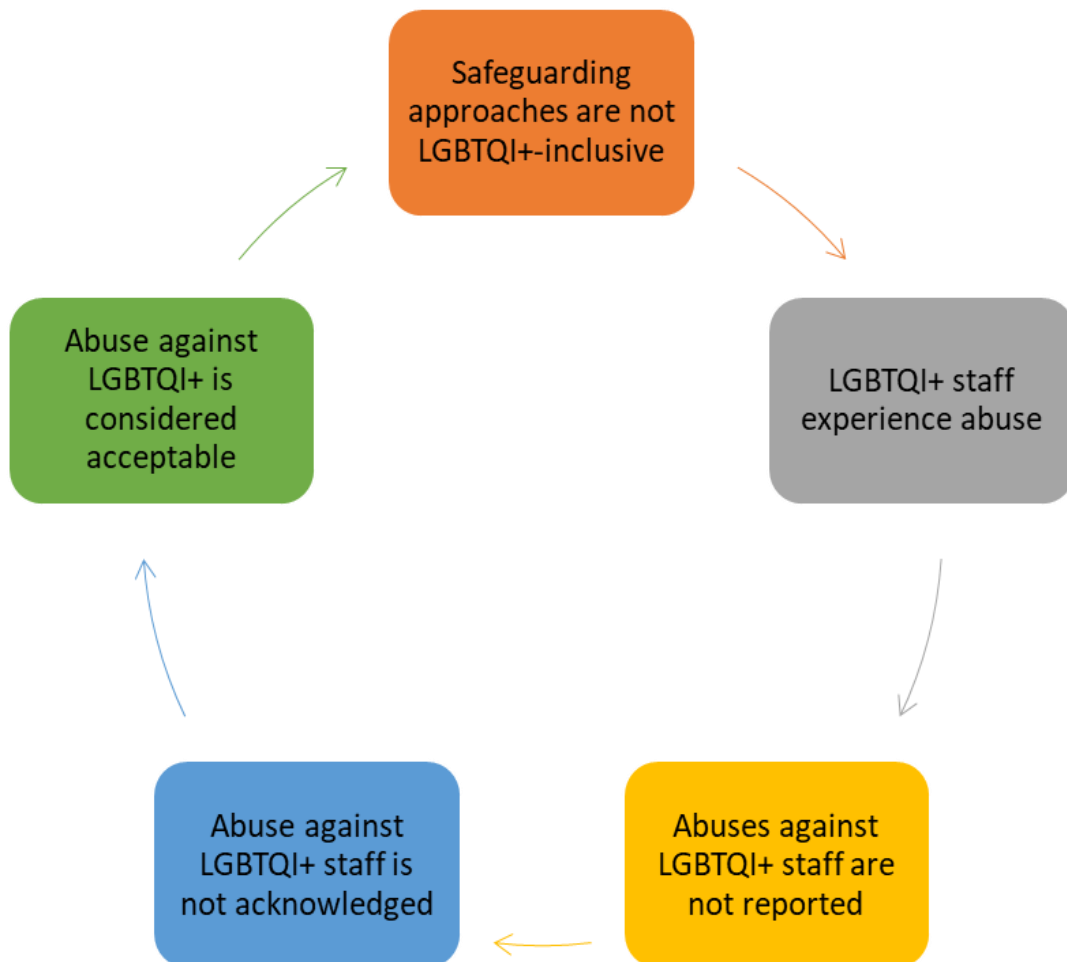
The constant need to hide or disguise one's identity and life can have a deep impact on LGBTQI+ staff's mental health and wellbeing as highlighted in this quote from a bisexual man in Nigeria: “I'm acting straight so people don't even suspect.... That's a whole lot of hard work, it's like fighting [a war] you have no idea of” (Alimi et al. 2017). It can also have



an impact on the CSO's capacity to fulfil their duty of care, safety and safeguarding responsibilities towards their staff.

Risks of safeguarding approaches that are not inclusive

Despite the high levels of risk faced by LGBTQI+ staff in their workplace, safeguarding approaches in CSOs are often not designed with the needs and concerns of LGBTQI+ individuals in mind. As a consequence, reporting of abuses against LGBTQI+ staff remains rare and perpetrators are not held accountable, which in turn reinforces the idea that discrimination and violence against LGBTQI+ people are acceptable within the workplace.



In countries where same-sex relationships or gender diversity are criminalised, formal avenues for complaint, such as reporting abuse to the police, are not available to LGBTQI+ staff due to the risk of being arrested or prosecuted themselves, instead of their abusers. Even in contexts where legal prosecution of LGBTQI+ is not a concern, homophobic and transphobic social norms and associated violence can dissuade LGBTQI+ staff from reporting through the judicial system for fear of not being believed, being ridiculed or stigmatised, or being outed to their family, community and workplace (Roth et al. 2021).

LGBTQI+ people tend to face increased economic vulnerability due to their marginalisation in society. As a result, LGBTQI+ staff might be extremely concerned about losing their employment or compromising opportunities for future employment as a consequence of reporting abuse.

The table below summarises some of the key risks that a non-LGBTQI+ inclusive safeguarding approach can pose to LGBTQI+ staff. These can result in significant harm.

Prevention

Non-inclusive approach to safeguarding	Risk it poses to LGBTQI+ staff	Possible consequences (not an exhaustive list)
Awareness sessions about SEAH and safeguarding do not explicitly mention abuse against LGBTQI+ staff (using contextually appropriate terms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQI+ staff are unclear if existing safeguarding policies apply to them • Potential abusers believe abuse of LGBTQI+ staff is acceptable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse against LGBTQI+ staff takes place and is not perceived as abuse • Perpetrators of abuse feel entitled to cause harm against LGBTQI+ staff • Harm caused is minimised or made invisible • LGBTQI+ staff feel they have no way to prevent or stop the abuse from happening • LGBTQI+ staff do not trust the formal organisational systems as they do not feel included • LGBTQI+ staff do not report when abuse happens



<p>Safeguarding policies and Code of Conduct do not explicitly mention or address abuse against LGBTQI+ staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQI+ staff are unclear if existing safeguarding policies apply to them • Potential abusers believe abuse of LGBTQI+ staff is acceptable 	<p>Same as above</p>
<p>Safeguarding or other policies, like Human Resources policies, do not explicitly include digital, verbal and emotional abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQI+ staff (and others) are unsure if what they are experiencing is abuse • Potential abusers believe abuse of LGBTQI+ staff is acceptable within the organisation • Digital sexual abuse is not acknowledged as a form of SEAH or a risk factor which might lead to SEAH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff do not report when abuse happens, nor do they recognise it as abuse and/or SEAH • If a report is made, safeguarding officers or focal points are unsure how to address digital, verbal or emotional abuse within their current policy/ies (even when they are linked to SEAH) • Digital, verbal and emotional abuse is dismissed as “less serious” or “not criminal” • Digital, verbal and emotional abuse is escalated to SEAH
<p>Risk assessment do not include specific risk factors for LGBTQI+ staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQI+ staff are exposed to safeguarding risks by their organisation during programme activities, official travel and other circumstances • Organisation’s risk mitigation strategies do not apply to LGBTQI+ staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff experience physical, sexual or emotional violence while performing their duties • Safeguarding and security focal points are unable to support LGBTQI+ staff in following appropriate risk mitigation measures • Staff believe they are entirely responsible for their own safety and do not communicate their concerns to experts and focal points within the organisation

- SEAH definition and policies are defined in gender-binary ways (e.g. as abuse of a woman by a man)
- Abuse against non-binary, intersex and trans staff is not recognised as a form of SEAH
 - Sexual abuse between people of the same gender is not recognised as a form of SEAH
 - Staff do not report when abuse happens, nor do they recognise it as abuse
 - If a report is made, safeguarding officers or focal points are unsure of how to address it

Reporting

Non-inclusive approach to safeguarding	Risk it poses to LGBTQI+ staff	Possible consequences (not an exhaustive list)
Anonymous reporting is not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQI+ staff cannot safely disclose details about their abuse, and the role their SOGIESC played in the abuse, without disclosing their SOGIESC • Reporting forces LGBTQI+ staff to “out” themselves and face the legal and social consequences of that disclosure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff chooses not to report abuse • Staff is subject to blackmail by abuser as they leverage the risks of reporting • Staff reports abuse but does not mention important information about abuse to keep their SOGIESC secret • Staff reports abuse and is subsequently “outed” by perpetrator in retaliation • Being “outed” causes further harm in their family, community, career options, etc. • Staff report abuse and is subsequently reported to the police and/or other authorities or community leaders for their SOGIESC
Reporting mechanisms and procedures require notification of legal authorities for all or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automatic or mandatory notification of abuse to the police alerts the authorities to the complainant SOGIESC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff chooses not to report abuse • Staff is subject to blackmail by abuser as they leverage the risks of reporting



some forms of
abuse against staff

These might be prosecutable
by law

- Staff reports abuse and is subsequently reported to the police for their LGBTQI+ identity
- Staff is prosecuted for their LGBTQI+ identity or behaviour
- Staff is imprisoned, fined, lose their job, face stigma, social exclusion, etc.

Reports against LGBTQI+ staff that are based exclusively on their sexual orientation and gender identity, not on abusive behaviour, are investigated as if they were genuine safeguarding concerns

- Reporting system used by homophobic/transphobic staff and programme participants to “out” or expose LGBTQI+ staff
- Safeguarding mechanisms, and organisational resources, are misused to persecute LGBTQI+ for their gender identity or sexual orientation
- LGBTQI+ staff are outed, exposed as potentially dangerous and stigmatised
- Procedure reinforces belief that there is something wrong with being LGBTQI+ and that LGBTQI+ people are dangerous
- LGBTQI+ staff loses their job, is reported to the police, faces community stigmatisation and violence



Response

Non-inclusive approach to safeguarding	Risk it poses to LGBTQI+ staff	Possible consequences (not an exhaustive list)
Organisational actors involved in receiving and handling reports are not trained in LGBTQI+ inclusion and/or not familiar with LGBTQI+ issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon reporting, LGBTQI+ staff are stigmatised, not believed or ridiculed by staff who are meant to support them. • Safeguarding staff/focal points might be uncomfortable or unsure how to act, thus LGBTQI+ staff become responsible for educating them about LGBTQI+ issue and finding their own “solution” (e.g. developing own safety plan, identifying appropriate services for support, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff chooses not to report abuse • Staff experiences further abuse or harm during the reporting process • Staff is put in charge of their own safeguarding and organisation neglects its safeguarding and duty of care responsibilities • Staff mental and physical health is impacted
Response strategies are standardised or not genuinely survivor-centred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations take decisions to safeguard LGBTQI+ staff without consulting them, listening to and prioritising their needs and wishes. For example, by moving them to a different team or accommodation, preventing them from travelling to field locations, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff chooses not to report abuse for fear of decisions about their work being made without their involvement • Staff’s work and career is impacted negatively by restrictions imposed on them in the name of safeguarding



But... it's illegal!

The criminalisation of a consensual same-sex act or, in a much smaller number of contexts, the presence of legal barriers to freedom of expression on sexual and gender diversity issues (ILGA World 2020) is widely cited as a barrier preventing civil society from protecting their LGBTQI+ staff. These legal provisions can have severe consequences on the everyday life of LGBTQI+ staff. However, they do not tolerate abuse against LGBTQI+ people and they do not relieve organisations from upholding human rights and exercising their duty of care towards all employees without discrimination. Sexual, physical or verbal abuse against LGBTQI+ staff remain a violation of their human rights and fall under the definition of safeguarding concerns that organisations must address to prevent harm.

A helpful way to think, and talk, about this is to focus on workplace values of respect, fairness and non-discrimination and how these apply to all staff and colleagues. Messages about respect for all staff regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation can be framed in broader discussions about safeguarding. "Do no harm", inclusion and non-discrimination can be promoted as key values within the organisation (Workplace Pride 2021).

"In my work on LGBTQI+ inclusion around the world I have sometimes been told by local leaders that we can't take that approach here because 'in our country it's illegal to be gay'. Well, that may be so, but I have yet to find any law which prohibits showing respect to our colleagues at work and in upholding their human rights." (Workplace Pride 2022)

How to make your safeguarding LGBTQI+ inclusive

"We must start from the recognition that LGBT people are everywhere. They are in programmes, they are our staff, they are our partners." (Anonymous consultation)

While many LGBTQI+ people might not want to share information about their sexual orientation or gender identity at work, having an LGBTQI+-inclusive safeguarding infrastructure will create a safer workplace and reduce the risk of harm for all.

Recommendations below focus on safeguarding LGBTQI+ staff. It is also worth noting that as safeguarding is about organisational measures, many of the points below will also contribute to creating safer programmes for LGBTQI+ populations. [Click here](#) for more information on safe programmes, and for an infographic on including intersectionality throughout the programme cycle, [click here](#).



Preventing SEAH and other forms of abuse

Policies

- Explicitly include people with diverse SOGIESC in your organisation's safeguarding, safety, HR and other relevant internal policies. The language and approach adopted to include LGBTQI+ people in policies will depend on several factors: in some contexts it might be useful to have a standalone LGBTQI+ safeguarding policy, in others it might be more effective to include LGBTQI+ specific concerns in broader non-discrimination, inclusion and equality policies. Involve LGBTQI+ staff members (when it is safe to do so), LGBTQI+ activists and organisations in deciding the best approach and in drafting/amending the policies
- Ensure that, regardless of the approach adopted, it is clear to everyone who reads or hears about the policy that abuse and discrimination of LGBTQI+ staff, amongst others, is not accepted within the organisation. Make it clear that perpetrators will be held accountable
- Explicitly mention harassment, abuse and discrimination of LGBTQI+ staff as unacceptable behaviour during dissemination and awareness raising of safeguarding policies, and other policies as relevant, e.g. HR policies. Ensure all staff members are aware that your organisation will not tolerate this form of abuse.

The role of leadership in safeguarding LGBTIQ+ employees

"In order to safeguard LGBTIQ+ employees in any organisation, it has to come from the top. What I've seen working is where there is buy-in from top leadership and the board. They have to believe in and create diversity and inclusion (D&I) policies and inculcate them into the culture of their organisation. They have to walk the talk. This then cascades down the management layers and at the employee level. When new employees are onboarded, diversity and inclusion policies have to be introduced to them.

I remember during Covid, a manager questioned a donation to a LGBTQI+ organisation, Q-Initiative, asking if it this donation would reflect badly on our organisation. The CFO referenced the D&I policy, and the organisation's commitment not to discrimination and that the donation should go ahead. As a senior member of the organisation's leadership team, the CFO demonstrated the organisation's values and brought the policy to life. As a result it is clear that LBGTQI+ organisations and communities are supported by our organisation. We have continued to support Pride events and there has been no push back".

David Njeri, Nigeria



Organisational culture and knowledge

- Share explicit statements of support and commitment to the safety and wellbeing of all staff regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression from senior leadership in the organisation and its management board
- Demonstrate high-level organisational commitment to LGBTQI+ inclusion by supporting trainings, infrastructures, policy change and resourcing efforts to strengthen inclusivity within the organisation

“Organisational culture is different from local culture, and whilst agencies may not be able to significantly change local cultural contexts, inclusive organisational culture forms an important factor in LGBTI worker’s feeling of safety and belonging in the work-place.” (EISF and RedR UK 2016, p. 17)

- Be open about your organisation’s inclusive culture during new staff recruitment and induction processes, specifically mentioning LGBTQI+ inclusion (in ways that are safe and appropriate)
- Include clear statements during induction processes clarifying that harassment, abuse or discrimination of LGBTQI+ colleagues are not tolerated. Ensure it is clear these abuses can be reported through the organisation’s safeguarding mechanisms
- Share information about existing LGBTQI+ networks or resources (in or outside your contexts) with all staff, regardless of their SOGIESC. If safe and possible, support the creation of an LGBTQI+ staff network within your organisation or the civil society sector more broadly
- Invest in regular training and awareness raising of all staff members (including senior leadership) about LGBTQI+ rights, safeguarding and programme-related issues. Partner with experienced LGBTQI+ activists and organisations to deliver such activities.
- Encourage allyship towards LGBTQI+ people and rights amongst all staff as an important value within the organisation. Demonstrate commitment to LGBTQI+ inclusion by celebrating key dates for LGBTQI+ rights (e.g. International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) on 17th May), including pronouns in signatures and staff profiles, or other locally recognised ways
- Create opportunities for mutual learning and exchange with LGBTQI+ organisations in your context (at local, national or regional level depending on their presence). Knowledge of and proximity to LGBTQI+ people is one of the best strategies to reduce abuse and discrimination.



Risk assessment and management

- Involve multiple and diverse members of the LGBTQI+ community in safeguarding risk assessment exercises, and update these regularly. Adopt an intersectional perspective which considers how multiple and overlapping individual characteristics might impact a staff member's risk profile. [Click here](#) for a note on intersectionality and safeguarding
- Involve LGBTQI+ organisations and/or activists in the risk assessment process as they may feel able to be more open about existing risks than LGBTQI+ staff in your own organisation. When this is not safe, consider consulting LGBTQI+ organisations from neighbouring or similar contexts and draw upon published literature. [Click here](#) for a non-exhaustive list of LGBTQI+ organisations worldwide
- Ensure your risk assessment is grounded in a clear understanding of relevant local legislation around gender identity and sexual orientation and of its implications. Most countries do not criminalise LGBTQI+ identities or relationships, but specific sexual acts. This means organisations cannot be prosecuted for simply employing or supporting LGBTQI+ individuals. [Click here](#) for an overview of legal frameworks across the world
- Ensure risk assessments for LGBTQI+ populations consider legal detail and go beyond the legal recognition or criminalisation of same-sex relationships. Similar legal frameworks might be applied with starkly different consequences in different contexts and social norms might be more relevant than legal frameworks on some occasions. [Click here](#) for a 2021 report on the implementation of laws against gender and sexual diversity in different contexts
- Think about all potential actors in your risk assessment, including risks and vulnerabilities of staff members, partners, volunteers, programme participants, community members and anonymous people in digital settings. This may be, for example, demands for favours, such as including someone on a distribution list for aid
- Consider specific risk mitigation strategies which might be required for LGBTQI+ staff, such as working remotely for certain periods, but ensure the concerned staff are involved in determining what is most appropriate for them.

Reporting SEAH and other forms of abuse

- In policies and awareness sessions, be clear about what can be reported and what SEAH and other forms of harm caused by CSOs includes and does not include, being explicit that SEAH or abuse of LGBTQI+ staff is unacceptable
- During awareness sessions and on awareness materials about safeguarding and reporting mechanisms, share how reports will be handled, who will be involved in their processing and response, how confidentiality will be maintained and whether any external actors (such as the police) might become involved



- Whenever possible and safe, consult LGBTQI+ organisations or activists during the design or adaptation of your safeguarding reporting mechanisms to ensure specific barriers faced by LGBTQI+ staff in your context are considered. Ensure different groups under the LGBTQI+ umbrella are included
- Do not require disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity during the reporting process
- Provide a variety of reporting options, including non-digital ones (e.g. telephone line, physical complaint box, organisational focal points, etc.) as survivors/victims of digital abuse might prefer using non-digital/offline options
- Consider partnering with a trusted local LGBTQI+ organisation to provide an additional reporting entry point. LGBTQI+ staff might feel more comfortable accessing support through a specialised actor
- Train all safeguarding focal points, members of HR and other staff members who might receive a complaint in LGBTQI+ rights and inclusion. When safe to do so, consider using widely recognised symbols (such as the rainbow flag) to signal to all staff that focal points have been trained and will deal sensitively with LGBTQI+ issues
- Do not make assumptions about who might report different kinds of abuse (e.g. by only placing a SEAH complaint box in the women's toilet). Anyone can be a victim of SEAH
- Ensure that reporting mechanisms for safeguarding concerns offer the option of reporting anonymously and that all staff members are aware of this option
- Ensure that no requirements to notify the police or other local authorities are embedded in the safeguarding reporting mechanism, even when the abuse is of a criminal nature. This may be particularly risky for LGBTQI+ people
- If a LGBTQI+ survivor wishes to report the matter to the authorities, support them in conducting a thorough risk assessment. If possible and available, LGBTQI+ staff can be invited to seek legal support from a dedicated LGBTQI+ organisation before reporting to the police
- Consider applying enhanced confidentiality measures for reports of safeguarding concerns that relate to LGBTQI+ individuals (as complainants or alleged perpetrator) or behaviours. For instance, restrict the number of staff members involved in receiving and processing the complaint; hold meetings outside the office; use additional data safety precautions; do not share any information via email or other digital platform, etc.
- Complaints or reports where LGBTQI+ staff are the alleged perpetrator should be taken seriously and responded to following organisational procedures. However, consider whether the complaint or report is malicious and/or motivated by homophobia and transphobia. Where complaints or reports are malicious, appropriate action should be taken against the person making the complaint. Remember, additional risks to the LGBTQI+ alleged perpetrator should be identified and mitigated.



Responding to SEAH and other forms of abuse

Report handling and investigations

- Adopt a survivor-centred approach which respects victims/survivors' wishes and involves them in decisions about every step of the case handling and investigation process. Update them about any steps and let them decide whether and how they wish to be involved
- Do not report cases to the police without the consent of the victim/survivor and an assessment of the potential risks of doing so, even when it is a criminal matter. Doing so might seriously endanger LGBTQI+ victims/survivors
- At the start of the report handling process, confirm if the report or complaint relates to SEAH, bullying and harassment, economic exploitation, violence or other abuse of children or adults. Ensure that the complaint is a genuine safeguarding concern and not motivated exclusively by someone's SOGIESC
- Apply enhanced confidentiality measures to ensure that no one is 'outed' or exposed as LGBTQI+ during the response to a report or a subsequent investigation
- Do not investigate a survivor/victim's or alleged perpetrator's sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual history, or behaviour. It is unlikely to be relevant in determining whether the abuse took place. Do not ask intimate, sensitive or judgemental questions that are unrelated to the case being handled
- Provide comprehensive training on LGBTQI+ rights and LGBTQI+-inclusive safeguarding to all personnel and external actors who might be involved in case handling and investigation. Be proactive, do not wait to have a report involving LGBTQI+ staff to provide training
- Consider partnering with local LGBTQI+ organisations to include one or more of their members into investigation panels regarding LGBTQI+ staff (as victims/survivors or alleged perpetrators) as independent advisors
- Partner with local LGBTQI+ organisations, when available and safe to do so, to train your team on safety, security and wellbeing of LGBTQI+ staff.

Services and support

- Do not make assumptions about what LGBTQI+ staff need following abuse or to prevent future abuse and do not make decisions about their work without consulting them. Like all victims/survivors, LGBTQI+ staff are best placed to determine what will keep them safe

- In line with a survivor-centred approach, provide victims/survivors with information about services available following the abuse, including whether each service is LGBTQI+-friendly or not, and let them decide which services to access and how
- Include LGBTQI+ specific services and organisations in your service mapping and develop referral pathways to these services. Make sure this information is shared with all victims/survivors, regardless of their perceived SOGIESC. Some services are only available to a sub-set of the LGBTQI+ community (e.g. gay men, trans women, lesbian women, etc.), ensure there are options for all groups within your referral pathway
- When a service is not LGBTQI+-specific, summarily assess their openness and capacity to provide services to LGBTQI+ staff (e.g. by asking 'Have you had any LGBTQI+ clients in the past?' or 'How would you react if one of your clients was gay/trans/non-binary?'). Include this information on your service mapping and referral pathway and in the information you share with victims/survivors, regardless of their perceived SOGIESC. [Click here](#) for a tool on service mapping.



Contributors

- Ilaria Michelis is a lesbian woman with 15 years of experience working in the humanitarian and development sectors. She is an LGBTQI+ inclusion, gender-based violence and SEAH expert
- Festus Kisa is a social worker with over 10 years' experience in advocating for LGBTQI+ inclusion, violence prevention and building LGBTQI+ communities / movements.

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Glossary

SOGIESC: An acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. (IOM 2020)

People with diverse SOGIESC: Umbrella term for all people whose sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and/or sex characteristics place them outside culturally mainstream categories. (IOM 2020)

LGBTQI+: An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex. The plus sign represents people with diverse SOGIESC who identify using other terms. In some contexts, LGB, LGBT or LGBTI are used to refer to particular populations. (IOM 2020)

Sexual orientation: Each person's enduring capacity for profound romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Encompasses hetero-, homo-, bi-, pan- and asexuality, as well as a wide range of other expressions of sexual orientation. This term is preferred over sexual preference, sexual behaviour, lifestyle and way of life when describing an individual's feelings for or attraction to other people. (IOM 2020)

Gender identity: Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experiences of gender which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society (IOM 2020). Gender identity can be binary (i.e. man or woman) or outside the binary (e.g. Non-Binary, Third Gender, Two-Spirit, Metis, etc.). [Click here](#) for a world map of cultures that recognise genders outside of the binary.

Gender expression: The external presentation of gender identity, expressed in many ways, including through clothing, haircut, voice, bodily movements and the ways one interacts with others. (Edge Effect 2021b)

Sex characteristics: Genetic, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics used by the medical system (and informed by social norms) to classify the sex of bodies. (Edge Effect 2021b)

Lesbian: A woman whose primary emotional, romantic or sexual attraction is to other women. (Edge Effect 2021b)

Gay/homosexual: A man whose primary emotional, romantic or sexual attraction is to other men. It is also used by people of other genders to describe their same-sex sexual orientation. (Edge Effect 2021b)

Bisexual: A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people from two or more genders. (Edge Effect 2021b)



Trans/transgender: Transgender is used to describe any person who has a gender identity that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g. on a birth certificate).

(Outright International, [Terminology Surrounding Gender Identity and Expression](#))

Non-binary: A person, people or community who do not identify with exclusively masculine or feminine genders; non-binary people identify within a spectrum of genders. ([42 Degrees Glossary and Lexicon](#))

Intersex: A person born with physical sex characteristics (see above) that do not align with medical definitions or societal expectations of male or female bodies. (Edge Effect 2021b)

Outing/outed: When an LGBTQI+ person's sexual orientation or gender identity is disclosed either with or without their consent. When someone reveals their sexual orientation or gender identity for the first time to a person or group of people, this is commonly referred to as "coming out."

Queer: Traditionally a negative term, queer has been reclaimed by some people and is considered inclusive of a wide range of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. Queer is used by many people who feel they do not conform to a given society's economic, social and political norms based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. (IOM 2020)

Homophobia: The fear or dislike of someone based on prejudice or negative attitudes, beliefs or views about LGBTQI+ people. ([Zanele Muholi Glossary](#))

Transphobia: The fear or dislike of someone based on the fact that they are transgender, including the denial/refusal to accept their gender identity. ([Zanele Muholi Glossary](#))

Safeguarding: Safeguarding broadly means preventing harm to people – and the environment – in the delivery of development and humanitarian assistance. It includes taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm from occurring; to protect people, especially vulnerable adults and children, from that harm; and to respond appropriately when harm does occur. (RSH, [What is Safeguarding?](#))

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH): One of the most common and most severe forms of harm under the definition of Safeguarding. For a detailed explanation of SEAH and for separate definitions of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and sexual harassment, please [click here](#).

References and resources

An extensive list of references and resources were used to inform this guide. [Click here](#) to access the separate document of references and resources.