



LGBTI EQUALITY: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does LGBTI mean?

LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex. While these terms have increasing global resonance, in different cultures other terms are often used to refer to people who are attracted to people of the same gender, people with gender identities that differ from the sex assigned at birth, people with non-binary identities and people whose sex characteristics do not fit typical definitions of male and female (such as hijra, meti, lala, skesana, motsoalle, mithli, kuchu, kawein, travesty, muxé, fa'afafine, fakaleiti, hamjensgara and Two-Spirit). In a human rights context, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face both common and distinct challenges. Intersex people (those born with atypical sex characteristics) suffer some of the same kinds of human rights violations as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, people, as indicated below.

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation refers to a person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards other people. Everyone has a sexual orientation, which is integral to a person's identity. Gay men and lesbian women are attracted to individuals of the same sex as themselves. Heterosexual people (sometimes known as "straight") are attracted to individuals of a different sex from themselves. Bisexual people may be attracted to individuals of the same or different sex. Sexual orientation is not related to gender identity.

What is gender identity?

Gender identity reflects a deeply felt and experienced sense of one's own gender. A person's gender identity is often aligned with the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender people have a gender identity that is different from the sex that they were assigned at birth.

What does transgender mean?

Transgender (sometimes shortened to "trans") is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of identities—including transsexual people, cross-dressers (sometimes referred to as "transvestites"), people who identify as third gender or other non-binary terms, and others whose appearance and characteristics are perceived as gender atypical. Transwomen identify as women but were classified as male when they were born. Transmen identify as men but were classified female when they were born. Some transgender people seek surgery or take hormones to bring their body into alignment with their gender identity; others do not.

What is intersex?

An intersex person is born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormone and/or chromosome patterns that do not fit the typical definition of male or female. This may be apparent at birth or become so later in life. An intersex person may identify as male, female, both, neither or something else. Intersex people can have any sexual orientation and gender identity.

What are homophobia, biphobia and transphobia?

Homophobia is an irrational fear of, hatred or aversion towards lesbian and gay people; biphobia is an irrational fear of, hatred or aversion towards bisexual people; transphobia denotes an irrational fear, hatred or aversion towards transgender people. The term homophobia is sometimes used to refer to fear, hatred and aversion towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in general.





What kind of human rights violations are LGBTI people exposed to?

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of all ages and in all regions of the world suffer from violations of their human rights. They are physically attacked, kidnapped, raped and murdered. In more than a third of the world's countries, people may be arrested and jailed (and in at least five countries executed) for engaging in private, consensual, same-sex relationships. Transgender people are often denied identity papers that reflect their preferred gender, without which they cannot work, travel, open a bank account or access services. Intersex children may be subjected to violence based on their appearance, including harmful practices such as medically unnecessary surgical and other interventions without their informed consent, and as adults are also vulnerable to violence and discrimination. LGBTI children and adolescents face bullying and discrimination in school. Young people may also be thrown out of their homes by their parents, forced into psychiatric institutions or forced to marry based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. States often fail to adequately protect LGBTI people from discriminatory treatment in the private sphere, including in the workplace, housing, education and healthcare.

Is there any reason to criminalize same-sex relationships and transgender people?

No. Criminalizing private sexual relationships between consenting adults, whether the relationships are same-

sex or different-sex, is a violation of the right to privacy. Laws criminalizing consensual same-sex relationships are also discriminatory, and where enforced, violate rights to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention. More than 70 countries have laws in effect that criminalize private, consensual same-sex relationships, and in at least five countries conviction may carry the death penalty. Criminalizing transgender people on the basis of such laws or other laws that specifically ban "cross-dressing" also violates fundamental rights to non-discrimination, freedom of expression and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention. In addition to violating basic rights, these discriminatory laws lead to and exacerbate hostile attitudes towards gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, feeding violence and discrimination. They also hamper efforts to halt the spread of HIV by deterring people from coming forward for testing and treatment for fear of stigma, discrimination and abuse.

Is same-sex attraction or being transgender a Western phenomenon?

No. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people exist everywhere, in all countries, among all ethnic groups, at all socioeconomic levels and in all communities. Claims that same-sex attraction and transgender identity are Western are false. However, many of the criminal laws used today to punish lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are Western in origin. In most cases, they were imposed on the countries concerned in the 19th Century by the colonial powers of the day.

LESBIAN, GAY & BI

Sexual orientation refers to a person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards other people.

TRANSGENDER

Transgender people have a gender identity that is different from the sex that they were assigned at birth.

INTERSEX

An intersex person is born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormone and/or chromosome patterns that do not fit the typical definition of male or female.





Have LGBTI people always existed?

Yes. People attracted to others of the same sex, people with gender identities and expressions that are different from the sex assigned at birth and intersex people have always been a part of our communities. There are examples from every locality and time-period, from prehistoric rock paintings in South Africa to drawings in Egyptian tombs, ancient Indian medical texts and early Ottoman literature. Many societies have traditionally been open towards LGBTI people, including several Asian societies that have traditionally recognized a third gender.

Is it possible to change a person's sexual orientation and gender identity?

No. Attempts to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity often involve human rights violations and can cause severe trauma. Examples include forced psychiatric therapies intended to "cure" (sic) individuals of their same-sex attraction or transgender identity, as well as the so-called "corrective" rape of lesbians perpetrated with the declared aim of "turning them straight." What must change are the negative social attitudes that stigmatize lesbian, gay, bi and trans people and contribute to violence and discrimination against them.

Does having access to information about LGBTI people endanger the wellbeing of children?

No. Learning about or spending time with people who are LGBTI does not influence the sexual orientation or gender identity of minors nor can it harm their wellbeing. Rather, it is vital that all youth have access to age-appropriate sexuality education to ensure that they have healthy, respectful physical relationships and can protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections. Denial of this kind of information contributes to stigma and can cause young LGBTI people to feel isolated, depressed, forcing some to drop out of school and contributing to higher rates of suicide.

Are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people dangerous to children?

No. There is no link of any kind between same-sex attraction or transgender identity and child abuse. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people all over the world can be good parents, teachers and role models for young people. Portraying them as "paedophiles" or dangerous to children is wholly inaccurate, offensive and a distraction from the need to for serious and appropriate measures to protect all children, including those coming to terms with their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Does international human rights law apply to LGBTI people?

Yes, it applies to every person. International human rights law establishes legal obligations on States to make sure that everyone, without distinction, can enjoy their human rights. A person's sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics is a status, like race, sex, colour or religion. United Nations human rights experts have confirmed that international law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

Can depriving LGBTI people of their human rights be justified on grounds of religion, culture or tradition?

No. Human rights are universal: every human being is entitled to the same rights, no matter who they are or where they live. While history, culture and religion are contextually important, all States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, have a legal duty to promote and protect the human rights of all persons without discrimination.