

Plan International position paper

The rights of people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC): a summary

Introduction

Around the world, Plan International advocates for the rights of children, especially girls, in all their diversity. We believe all children should be able to live a life free from discrimination, violence and stigma, including children with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

There is a long way to go to achieve this. Currently, there are 42 countries worldwide where freedom of expression for people of diverse SOGIESC is restricted by law.

Children and young people of diverse SOGIESC experience high levels of violence and abuse in education, in communities, and within their families. This exclusion and disempowerment has a profound impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, with one study finding that 12% of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC feel 'useful' daily, versus 30% of other children and young people.

The below paper provides Plan International's global position on the rights of people with diverse SOGIESC. The analysis and positions in this paper are based on global evidence, extensive consultation with children and young people of diverse SOGIESC, organisations working on SOGIESC inclusion across our operational regions and Plan International's gender transformative programme work.

We believe this position goes hand in hand with our work to advance gender equality – equality for girls means equality for all girls. We also acknowledge that discrimination, violence and exclusion is experienced by people of diverse SOGIESC of all genders, including non-binary children and boys, and that this is often compounded by intersecting inequalities, such as racism, imperialism and ableism.

Despite the many challenges they face, every day, children and young people with diverse SOGIESC show strength, agency, resistance and a humbling ability to survive and advocate for themselves, transforming their homes, communities and the world. Plan International is proud to stand with these children and young people, and we see this as a critical part of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDG) commitments to "leave no one behind".

NOTE: The phrasing 'people with diverse SOGIESC' is used in this position paper, rather than 'LGBTIQ+ people'. Plan International has made this choice as we believe this phrase can be more inclusive of people whose diversity of sexuality and/or gender is not reflected in the categories in the LGBTIQ+ acronym.

Our key positions

- All people of diverse SOGIESC should be able to live a life free from discrimination, coercion, violence and stigma, and fully realise their rights.
- Legal and policy reform has a critical role to play in ensuring children and young people of diverse SOGIESC can enjoy their fundamental human rights, live with dignity, and access support from civil society.
- Violence against people with diverse SOGIESC, and their exclusion from society, is often driven by harmful gender and social norms, attitudes, and behaviours. That's why it is critical to address harmful norms, which contribute to inequality and discrimination, and their root causes.
- Social, economic, and cultural rights and equality are essential aspects of the journey towards full respect of the human rights and dignity of persons with diverse SOGIESC. It is vital that we break cycles of poverty which can hold back children with diverse SOGIESC and their families.
- Gender equality and diverse SOGIESC inclusion go hand in hand. Gender equality and girl's rights are important frameworks for realising the rights of all children and young people. Children and young people with diverse SOGIESC often experience multiple intersecting inequalities. Equality for girls means equality for all girls.

Our commitments

- Plan International always operates within the legal framework of each country we work in. Nonetheless, everywhere we work, we are committed to upholding international human rights standards and our core organisational commitments. We use context analysis and risk mitigation to champion SOGIESC inclusion in as many contexts as possible.
- Plan International will always seek to work in genuine partnership with SOGIESC - focused civil society organisations and youth-led organisations, honouring the principle of "nothing about us without us". All children and youth are experts in their own lives and experiences. Our work with these organisations will respect their strengths and lived experience and support them to build further capacity.
- We will listen to children and young people with diverse SOGIESC and their allies and support their efforts to build a world that offers them dignity and opportunity.
- We will take an intersectional and rights-based approach in creating policies and programmes. As an integral part of our work, we aim to counter harmful gender and social norms that contribute to inequality, discrimination and exclusion, and address their root causes.
- We will contribute to building evidence on priority issues for children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in development and humanitarian contexts.
- We commit to taking a rights and values-based approach to addressing issues concerning people of diverse SOGIESC in challenging contexts.

Our work to promote SOGIESC inclusion

In Kalikot district, Nepal, Plan International's "Colours" project encourages open discussion of LGBTIQ+ rights. Working with parents and caregivers, communities, service providers, government officials, policy makers, law enforcement agencies and children and adolescents themselves, the project aims to challenge misconceptions, stereotypes and bias to promote empathy and acceptance for children and young people of diverse SOGIESC.

In the words of Nira, a Community Supervisor: “The open discussion and interaction regarding rights of the LGBTIQ+ community has enabled better understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues. Key stakeholders such as mayors have understood this agenda more closely and have committed to support non-binary people. I strongly believe this project will make a tangible impact in promoting community acceptance and respect for non-binary individuals. I am grateful to be a part of this project where I am able to contribute to promote equal rights of the most marginalised communities of Nepal.”

In Timor Leste, our programme *Towards inclusive and assured futures: Unlocking the full potential of Timorese people in all their diversity* reached 1,783 people between February 2023 and January 2024. The project supported by the European Union, aims to promote the rights of people with disabilities and young people of diverse SOGIESC. Key aims include increasing access to employment, improving laws and government policies in areas such as domestic violence and gender-based violence, and recognising and addressing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes.

Meanwhile in Latin America, Plan International runs a Regional Youth Programme in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia and Bolivia, working with 16 youth partner organisations to transform power relations across societies and cultures. Together with LGBTIQ+ focused youth partners such as Visibles (Guatemala), Coincidir (El Salvador), Metamorfosis (Bolivia) and Plataforma Boliviana de Adolescentes y Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Derechos Reproductivos (Bolivia), we have worked with ILGA Mundo to develop a support guide for teenagers and young activists to support advocacy for LGBTIQ+ rights.

Our key calls to action

- States should repeal all laws criminalizing or otherwise discriminating against individuals based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, and should adopt laws prohibiting discrimination on those grounds.
- States should ensure children and young people with diverse SOGIESC have access to justice if they experience any type of violence, abuse, or harassment because of who they are.
- States and other education sector stakeholders should implement programmes to make schools positive environments for learning about and celebrating difference, in ways that contribute to building inclusive societies.
- Healthcare providers should ensure sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and wider health services are non-discriminatory and diverse SOGIESC inclusive and responsive.
- State and non-state actors that produce media and shape public discourse should reinforce positive and respectful narratives about people with diverse SOGIESC.
- International development and humanitarian actors, including NGOs, should always consider how to prevent exclusion and discrimination based on SOGIESC when developing programmes.
- Funding partners should highlight the need for development and humanitarian actors to address diverse SOGIESC issues, and fund programmes that focus on inclusion of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC.

For further reading

The full position paper can be downloaded at this link: <https://plan-international.org/publications/sogiesc-policy-position/>

Definitions

Gender Transformative: Plan International uses this term to describe programmes and/or development approaches where there is an explicit intention to transform unequal power relations. The focus goes beyond improving the condition of diverse groups of women and girls and seeks to improve their social position, and how they are valued in society.

SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics): Plan International has used the phrase “diverse SOGIESC” in place of LGBTIQ+ as we believe it can be more inclusive of people whose diversity of sexuality and/or gender is not reflected in the categories in the LGBTIQ+ acronym. We recognise that people with diverse SOGIESC may have a range of terms in their own languages, may use other phrasing, or prefer a version of the LGBTIQ+ acronym. Plan International respects the language choices made by people with diverse SOGIESC, which can also reflect security concerns, and will adapt to use language in specific contexts that is preferred by local civil society organisations and individuals.