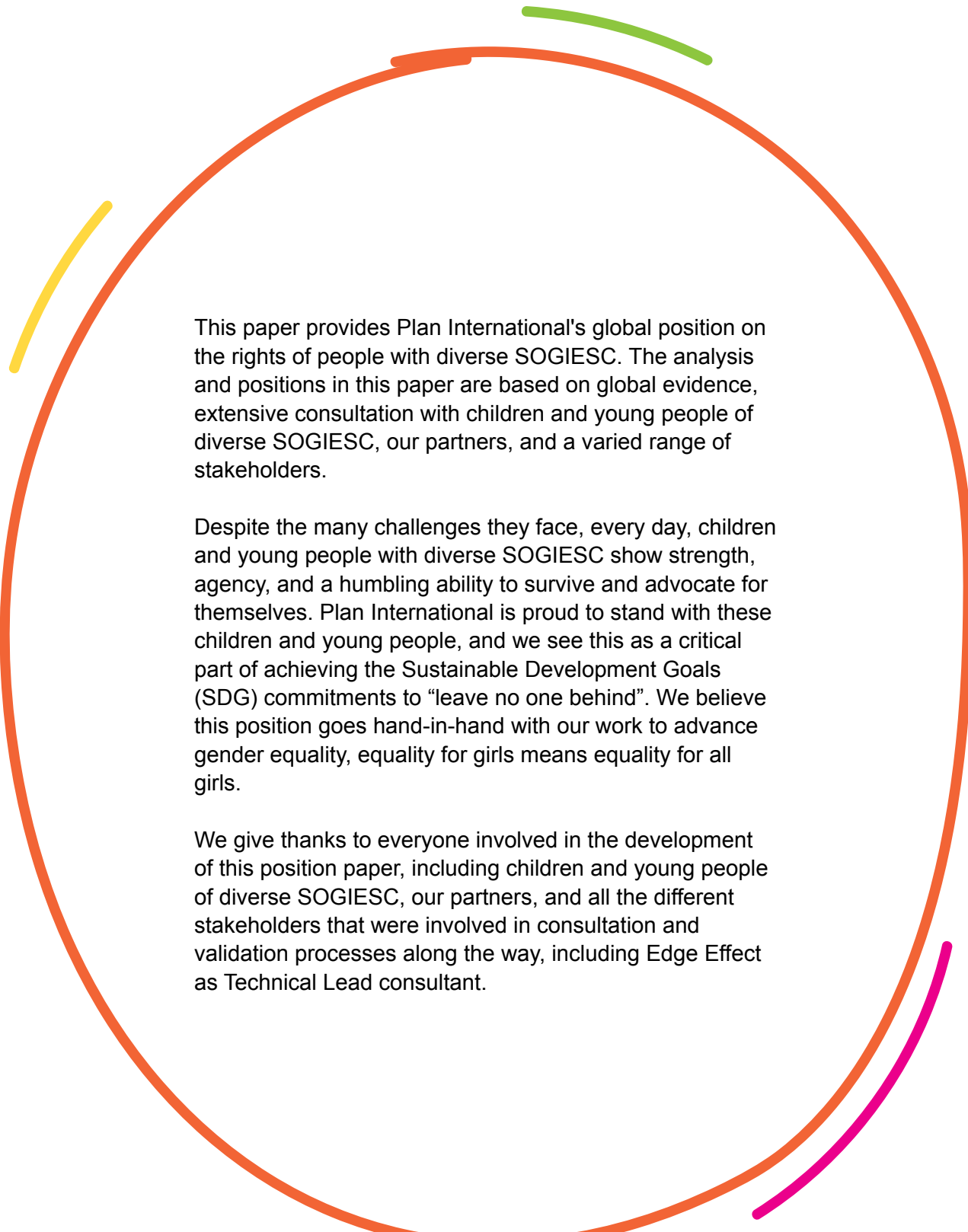


**Plan International's Position Paper on
People with diverse Sexual Orientation,
Gender Identity and Expression and
Sex Characteristics
(SOGIESC)**



This 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, our partners, and a varied range of stakeholders.

Despite the many challenges they face, every day, children and young people with diverse SOGIESC show strength, agency, and a humbling ability to survive and advocate for themselves. 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”. We believe this position goes hand-in-hand with our work to advance gender equality, equality for girls means equality for all girls.

We give thanks to everyone involved in the development of this position paper, including children and young people of diverse SOGIESC, our partners, and all the different stakeholders that were involved in consultation and validation processes along the way, including Edge Effect as Technical Lead consultant.

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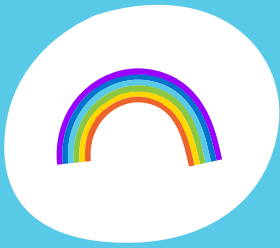
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Introduction





Introduction

Plan International believes that all children and young people should have the opportunity to live full and dignified lives, free from coercion, discrimination, violence and abuse, and enabled through access to services such as healthcare, education, and through forums for participation and leadership. Plan International recognises that inclusion of children and youth with diverse **Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC)** is part of our core work, and an essential part of implementing our strategies on gender transformation and tackling exclusion.

This is a position paper for Plan International, Inc. ('PII'). It presents our position on a rights-based approach to inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC. often used in reference to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTIQ+) people*.

This position paper includes an analysis of the current global situation, legal and political frameworks, and specific issues of importance for children and young people with diverse SOGIESC. It reflects Plan International's focus on women and girls, recognising that many

women and girls are also people with diverse SOGIESC and, therefore, a diverse SOGIESC lens is needed across Plan International's work on gender, especially referred to women and girls' rights and equality. It also acknowledges that discrimination, violence and exclusion are experienced by people with diverse SOGIESC of all genders, including non-binary people, and men and boys. This position paper also integrates an intersectional analysis framework in which SOGIESC is recognised as one of many aspects of children's and young people's lives, and that marginalisation across those aspects may combine and compound each other.

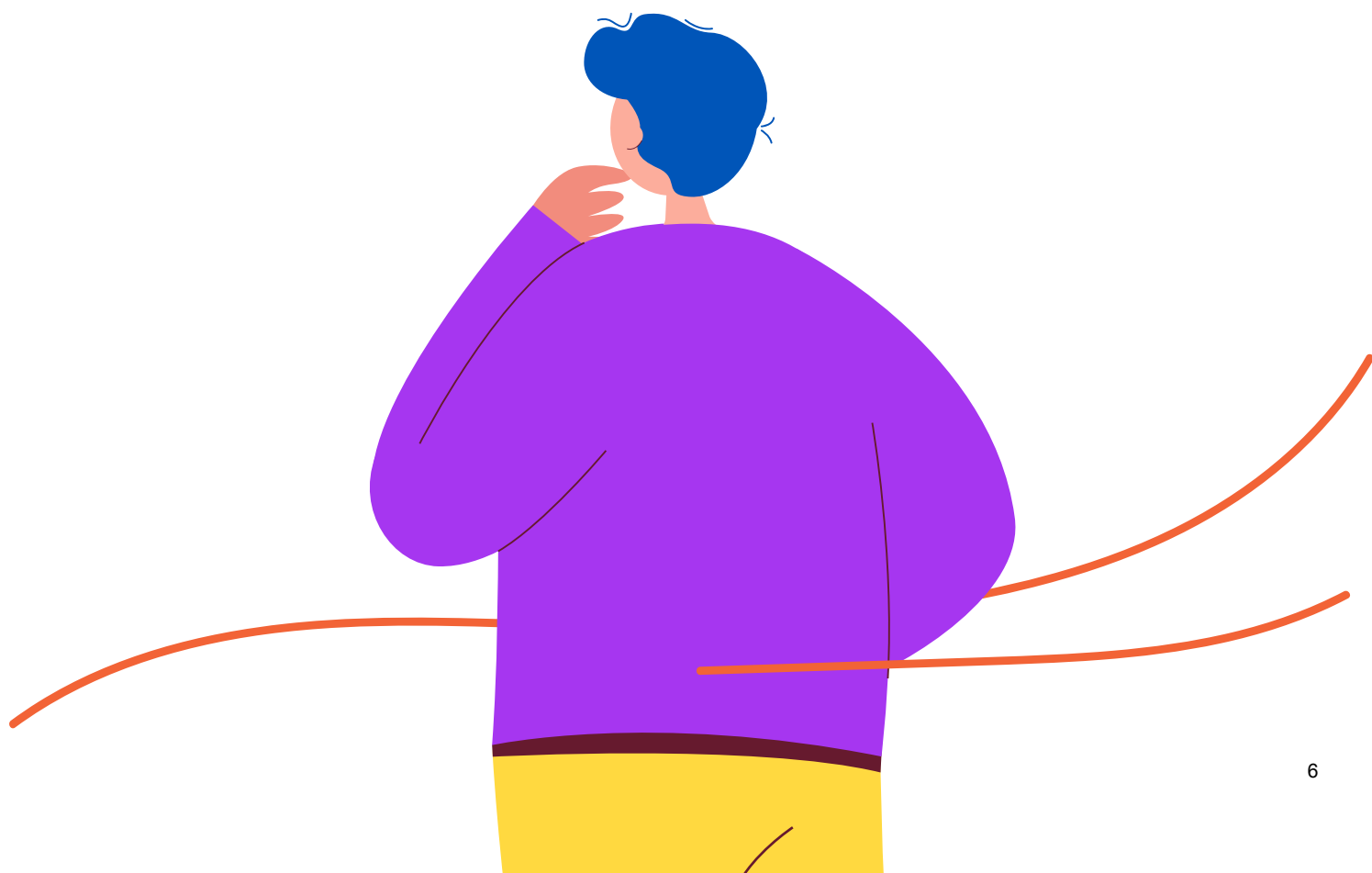
This position paper is consistent with Plan International's Global Policy on Gender Equality and Inclusion (2023 revision) and the Global Strategy **All Girls Standing Strong**, but goes further in providing guidance on integration of diversity of SOGIESC in priority areas identified in those documents such as gender equality and inclusion, youth leadership, and the realisation of children and young people's rights more generally. The analysis and positions are grounded in Plan International's organisational values and commitments to international human

(*) The phrasing 'people with diverse SOGIESC' is used in this position paper, rather than LGBTIQ+ people. Plan International has made this choice as diversity of SOGIESC is in some ways more inclusive of people whose diversity of sexuality and/or gender is not reflected in or reducible to the categories in the LGBTIQ+ acronym. Plan International recognises that people with diverse SOGIESC may have a range of terms in their own languages or may use other phrasing or may prefer a version of the LGBTIQ+ acronym. Plan International respects the language choices made by people with diverse SOGIESC (which may also reflect security concerns) and will adapt to use language in specific contexts that is preferred by local civil society organisations and individuals.

rights, children's rights, and gender equality standards. The analysis and positions were developed through careful consideration of global evidence, Plan International's existing programmes and advocacy, and four regional consultations with young people in the Americas, West and Central Africa, Southern and East Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. This Position paper has passed through multiple rounds of staff consultation and was reviewed and validated by staff, civil society actors, and young people in a workshop in the Philippines in 2022.

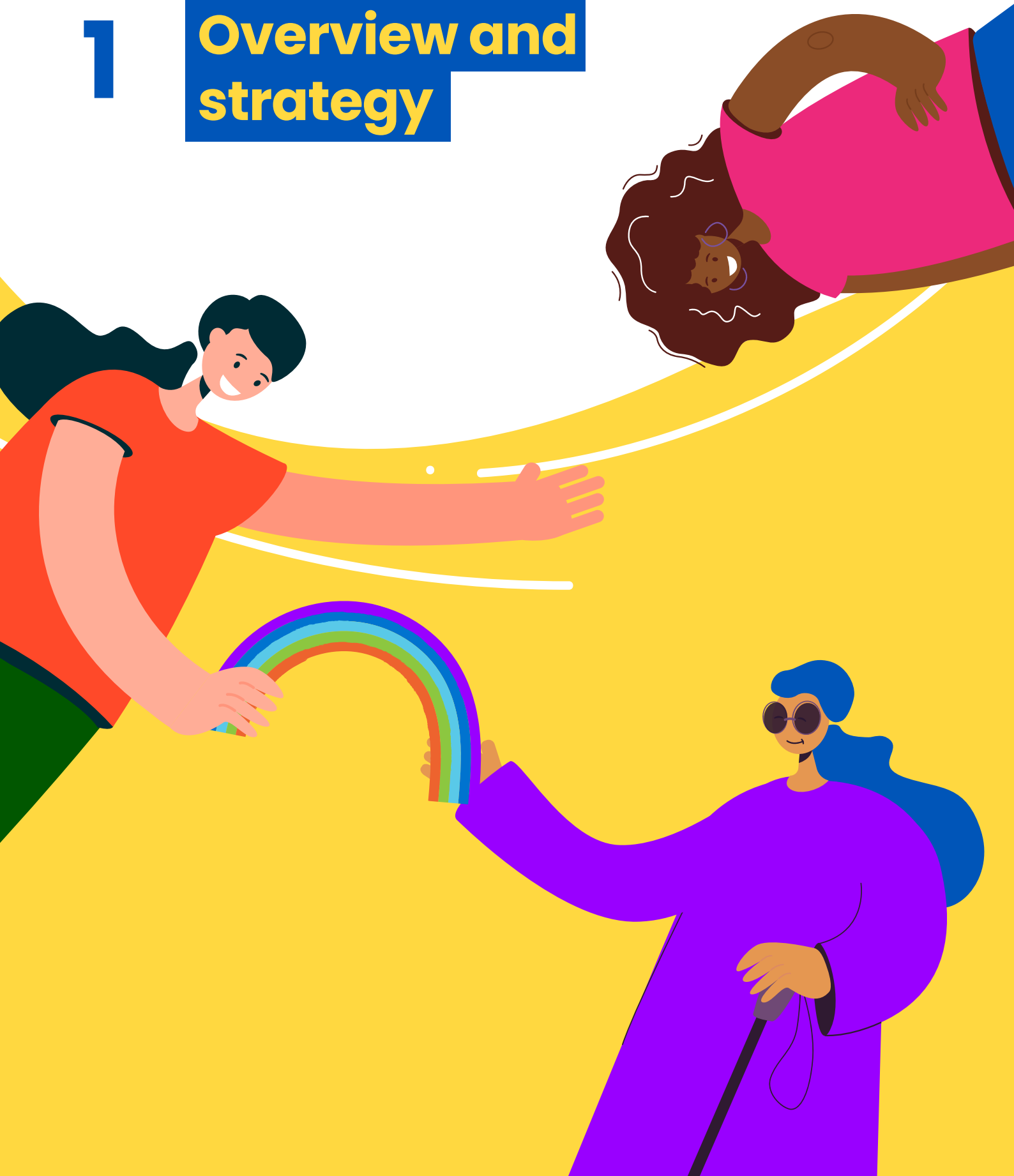
Plan International's country, regional, and liaison offices (including our 'field country national organisations') will be expected to put the position statement into practice

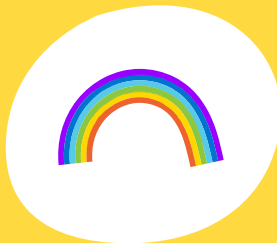
using their judgement and analysis of the key issues in their specific context. Plan International works in many varied contexts globally, including contexts in which people with diverse SOGIESC are subject to legal discrimination and societal stigma. This position paper supports Plan International to extend the contexts in which it works on diverse SOGIESC inclusion, recognising that children and young people with diverse SOGIESC are part of all societies in which Plan International works. Our ambition sits alongside a commitment to do no harm. This will require careful risk assessments consistent with Plan International's existing approaches to safeguarding, risk assessment and global assurance, and meaningful engagement with diverse SOGIESC civil society and communities that honours the principle of **nothing about us without us.**



1

Overview and strategy





Overview and strategy

Plan International's Position:

- Plan International believes that people of diverse SOGIESC should be able to fully realise their rights, free from discrimination, coercion, violence and stigma. We recognise the importance of legal and policy reform in areas of fundamental human rights for creating enabling environments in which people with diverse SOGIESC can live in dignity and civil society actors and services supporting children and young people with diverse SOGIESC can operate with autonomy and support.
- Plan International recognises that harmful gender and social norms, attitudes, and behaviours drive violence against and exclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC, particularly children and young people. To effectively tackle harmful gender and social norms affecting children and young people, especially girls and young women, we must address norms related to SOGIESC diversities as an integral part of this work.
- 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, creating disadvantage across their life-course and sometimes across generations.
- Levels of human rights abuses, criminalisation, and repression, of people with diverse SOGIESC vary greatly around the world. This affects the programming, influencing, and communications work Plan International can do in different contexts. At the same time, everywhere we work, we are committed to upholding international human rights standards and our core organisational commitments. We will use context analysis and risk mitigation to extend diverse SOGIESC inclusion to as many contexts as possible; while a small number of country contexts may be too hostile for safe work on SOGIESC, there are many contexts where we can do much more.
- Plan International recognises that to enable change, we must promote it within our organisation. We must be intentional across Plan International to guarantee the highest level of safety, security, and wellbeing of staff and partners with diverse SOGIESC, and create a professional environment where they can thrive.
- Our work towards gender equality and diverse SOGIESC inclusion are mutually compatible and reinforcing, moving us forward in our gender transformative change journey. We recognise that gender equality and girl's rights are important frameworks for realising the rights of all children and young people, including those with diverse SOGIESC. Working with children and young people with diverse SOGIESC who also experience multiple, intersecting, and structural inequalities – including racism, imperialism, and ableism – will help Plan International to achieve the SDG commitments to leave no-one behind and to reach the furthest behind first.
- Plan International recognises that working in genuine partnership with SOGIESC-focused CSOs and youth-led organisations will be critical to the success of our work on diverse SOGIESC inclusion.
- Plan International recognises that civil society actors focused on SOGIESC diversities, including those with a children and young person focus, are often severely under-funded and marginalised. Our work with these organisations needs to respect their existing strengths and support them to build further capacity. We will avoid placing unnecessary burdens on these organisations. We will work with our other partners to support the work of SOGIESC-focused CSOs.
- Plan International will contribute to building evidence on priority issues for children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in development and humanitarian contexts. Research will address intersecting inequalities, and include our Areas of Global Distinctiveness in SOYEE, Pfv, ECD, IQE, SRHR, LEAD and humanitarian response.



Recommendations:


- States should repeal all laws criminalising or otherwise discriminating against individuals based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status, and should adopt laws at all levels prohibiting discrimination on those grounds. States should further revise laws and policies to make them more inclusive and responsive to the needs of people with diverse SOGIESC.
- International development and humanitarian systems and actors, should further integrate an awareness of exclusion and discrimination based on SOGIESC in general development programming including poverty reduction, education, healthcare, decent work, gender equality, shelter, protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene.
- Funding partners should highlight the need for development and humanitarian actors to address SOGIESC, and fund mainstream and specific programmes that pursue inclusion of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC.

Our Global Approach

Children and young people with diverse SOGIESC often grow up without the family and societal support enjoyed by other children and young people, with compromised access to services, and in contexts of repressive laws and policies, and harmful social norms, attitudes and behaviors. They may experience violence, harassment, exploitation, and abuse at significantly higher levels than other children and young people, violations which themselves may be tolerated, excused or endorsed². Within the context of family, personal relationships and peer networks these experiences may have devastating impact on trust, self-esteem and mental wellbeing³. Violence, discrimination and exclusion in the context of education and healthcare and access to other services, may be the cause of life-long disadvantage and struggles⁴. In such settings violence, discrimination and exclusion may reflect institutional, policy and legal positions, as well as individual and group attitudes and behaviors. Legal and justice systems in some countries enable violence, discrimination and exclusion, actively targeting people with diverse SOGIESC through criminalising aspects of their lives or selective over-policing or failing to provide access to legal means for living dignified lives reflecting their SOGIESC. Despite these and other challenges, people with diverse SOGIESC demonstrate strengths, some joining organisations advocating for the rights of young people.

Plan International’s global approach to programming and influencing recognises the importance of the environment in which children and young people live, and how this enables them to realise their rights. It seeks to trigger change in three dimensions that shape

that environment: **“by influencing social norms – particularly harmful gender norms – and related attitudes and behaviors”, “by strengthening people’s personal, social and economic assets and safety nets”, and “by contributing to better policies, legislation, budgets and government services at various levels that affect children’s and particularly girls’ lives”.**

Further, [Plan International’s Global Safeguarding Policy](#)  on the indisputable rights of all with regards to protection and inclusion states that Plan International is fully committed to creating a safe and inclusive culture that allows children, programme participants, staff, associates and visitors to thrive and feel secure while engaging with Plan International; and supports people to understand, exercise their rights and report any concerns.

Specifically, **Plan International respects and upholds the rights of all children and programme participants irrespective of any identities they may hold including their: age, sex, gender, gender identity, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, race, language, religious or political beliefs, marital status, disability, physical or mental health, family, socio-economic or cultural background, class, any history of conflict with the law or any other aspect of their background or identity.**

Inequality, exclusion, and discrimination will be challenged and will not be tolerated.

Harmful gender and social norms

Violence, discrimination and exclusion experienced by children and young people with diverse SOGIESC is underpinned by four norms specific to SOGIESC diversity that also intersect with other gender and social norms. Understanding, identifying and challenging these harmful norms is essential for a rights-based, intersectional and transformative approach to the inclusion of all children, including children and young people with diverse SOGIESC.

Heteronormativity, the expectation or assumption of heterosexuality in a world in which only two genders are recognised, shapes attitudes about what is an ‘acceptable’ family or ‘acceptable’ intimate relationships, attitudes that may also find expression in law and policy. **Cisnormativity**, the expectation or assumption that everyone’s gender -aligns with the one they were assigned at birth, shapes attitudes toward the ‘acceptability’ of trans and gender diverse people. **Gender binarism**, the expectation or assumption that there are only two possible gender identities, has the effect of excluding people whose gender identity and expression falls in-between, or is fluid or unique, for example cultural gender groups*. **Endosexism**, the expectation or assumption that everyone’s

sex characteristics align with medical and social categorisation of bodies into two options of female and male, excludes intersex people. The existence of people with diverse SOGIESC conflicts with these harmful gender and social norms and exposes those norms as attempts to enforce conformity and to render those who fail to conform as unacceptable or invisible. These four harmful norms shape attitudes and behaviours toward people with diverse SOGIESC and may be reproduced through social formations such families, institutions such as schools, policies that guide healthcare or the laws of societies that enshrine punishment or corrective forms of violence⁶. Media and other forms of culture also reproduce and ‘normalise’ violence, discrimination and exclusion.

Plan International recognises that norms specific to SOGIESC need to be integrated within intersectional analysis. For example, a woman who is a lesbian or bisexual may be affected by harmful gender norms because she is a woman and by heteronormativity because of her sexuality. Other harmful norms regarding race or disability or class or coloniality may also be relevant and create compounded or unique forms of oppression.

Laws and policies

Plan International is committed to contributing to better policies, legislation, budgets and government services that affect children’s and particularly girls’ lives and recognises that this requires specific consideration of laws and policies that target and restrict the lives of people with diverse SOGIESC. In general, laws relevant to people with diverse SOGIESC have become significantly more inclusive and less repressive over the past half century.

However, this progress has occurred unevenly globally, and regression in some contexts shows that progressive change is reversible.

Discrimination, unequal treatment, violence, and other human rights violations remain embedded in the laws of many countries.

(*) These groups exist in many cultures such as **khawaja sira** in Pakistan or **transpuan/waria** in Indonesia.

For example:

- Just six countries expressly prohibit non-consensual, non-vital, and harmful surgeries on intersex children, as of November 2022⁷.
- Sex between consenting adults of the same sex is criminalised in 64 countries⁸, including in approximately one quarter of the 83 countries in which Plan International works⁹. More positively, the number of countries that criminalise sex between consenting adults of the same sex has fallen from more than 110 in 1990. However, in six countries worldwide same-sex sexual acts are punishable by the death penalty with a further five countries having unclear positions on the death penalty¹⁰. In 2023, one country has signed an anti LGBTQI law¹¹.
- In 42 countries freedom of expression for LGBTIQ+ people is restricted by laws to some extent¹² and 51 countries place at least some restrictions on the free operation of CSOs working on sexual and gender diversity¹³.
- Just 14 countries provide for trans and gender diverse people to access legal gender recognition on a self-determination model, and many more have no processes for changing gender markers or have significant procedural hurdles that effectively stop trans and gender diverse people from obtaining correct identification¹⁴.

Additionally, the laws and policies of many countries embody heteronormativity, cisnormativity, gender binarism and endosexism in ways that do not protect or recognise equality of people with diverse SOGIESC. For example, laws may not allow surrogacy or may not permit marriage for same-sex couples. More detailed and annual updated data is available online from ILGA¹⁵.

Many laws that negatively affect people with diverse SOGIESC persist from penal codes imposed under colonial rule and reflect colonial notions of gender and sexual norms that erased or suppressed culturally-specific indigenous gender and sexual diversity (see also Movements for Change, below). The enforcement of some laws, such as those restricting loitering, impersonation and pornography may result in inadvertent impact on or intentional harassment of people with diverse SOGIESC. Laws can

also play a chilling role even if those laws are not enforced by the state. For example, research from multiple countries^{16, 17, 18} shows repressive laws can trigger widespread anti-LGBTIQ+ violence, including battery and assault, extortion, blackmail, sexual assault, and forceful eviction¹⁹. In various Eastern European and Central Asian countries 'anti-propaganda' and 'foreign agents' laws have created generations of young people socialised to consider discussions of LGBTIQ+ issues as taboo and criminal²⁰. Legal criminalisation also supports social criminalisation whereby people with diverse SOGIESC are seen as criminal, subversive, or dangerous, and deserving of exposure, monitoring, judgement, and punishment. This can also lead children and young people with diverse SOGIESC to internalise feelings of blame, worthlessness, and shame, leading to further distress, trauma, and mental ill-health.

Social and economic exclusion

Plan International also seeks to trigger positive change by strengthening personal, social and economic assets and safety nets that support children and young people. People with diverse SOGIESC often endure poor social and economic outcomes, as the UN's SOGI Independent Expert has explained:



'The combination of social prejudice and criminalisation has the effect of marginalising lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender non-conforming persons and excluding them from essential services, including health, education, employment, housing, and access to justice. The spiral of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion may start within the family, extend to the community, and have a life-long effect on socioeconomic inclusion. Through this process, stigmatisation and exclusion intersect with poverty to the extent that, in many countries, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender non-conforming persons are disproportionately affected by poverty, homelessness and food insecurity.'

Discrimination based on SOGIESC can combine with other forms of marginalisation to reinforce poverty and its impact²¹. This was apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when histories of limited access to education and formal sector jobs meant that many people with diverse SOGIESC relied heavily on informal sector income, which vanished

when informal economies were closed down by movement and health restrictions. Limited savings and limited access to social protection systems compounded income loss, leaving people with diverse SOGIESC struggling to buy food and pay rent, sometimes resulting in return to family homes that had been contexts for violence and discrimination²². Research also shows that LGBTIQ+ people living in poverty as adults, were more likely to have lived in poverty as children²³. Conversely, ensuring equal access to education, employment, housing, and healthcare for all children and young people, such as through addressing discriminatory practices, will help lift generations of young people further out of poverty.

Beyond day-to-day conditions, social and economic exclusion results from and reinforces low values placed on the lives of people with diverse SOGIESC. For example, the exclusion of culturally gender-diverse **hijra** and trans women from access to water-points in some areas of South Asia is not merely an issue of access to clean drinking water: it is an expression of power and underpinned by harmful gender and social norms. Addressing social and economic exclusion will require transformative approaches that address underlying causes of discrimination, violence and exclusion, drawing on Plan International's Tackling Exclusion Framework, building on partnerships with diverse SOGIESC CSOs, and supporting children and young people with diverse SOGIESC to be agents of change.

International human rights standards and commitments

The non-discrimination principle **“without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”** is common to all major international human rights instruments (such as the CRC and CEDAW), with both the terms **“sex”** and **“other status”** increasingly being interpreted by committees mandated to administer the core international human rights instruments to include aspects of diverse SOGIESC^{25,26}. Plan International recognises that any rights-based approach must be consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in its first article that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. As emphasised by the former UN Secretary General when speaking about people with diverse SOGIESC in 2012, this means **“All human beings – not some, not most, but all. No one gets to decide who is entitled to human rights and who is not.”²⁷**

Since 2011 specific UN Human Rights Council Resolutions and other core legal instruments have also affirmed the need for States to respect and protect the human rights of people with diverse SOGIESC. In 2016, the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE SOGI) was created by the UN Human Rights Council, leading to authoritative reports²⁸. Recommendations on the rights and lives and people with diverse SOGIESC are also a regular feature of the Universal Periodic Review of UN member states, and the process also attracts many shadow submissions by national civil society organisations. The Yogyakarta Principles (2007) and Yogyakarta Principles +10 (2017) are an authoritative mapping of fundamental human rights law and standards as they relate to SOGIESC and an essential tool for States, international institutions, civil society organisations to gauge their work²⁹.

Plan International’s Global Strategy 2022–2027 affirms its commitments to programmes and influencing that uphold the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the UN Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW), and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³⁰.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Child has clarified in General Recommendations that ‘other status’ within the non-discrimination clause of the CRC (clause 2) should be interpreted to include sexual orientation and gender identity³¹. The CRC also affirms the rights of all children to freedom of expression, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of association, freedom from violence and abuse of all kinds, and to health and education - Articles 13, 14, 15, 19, 24 and 25 - all of which have been applied inclusively to diverse SOGIESC by the Committee. Whilst the CRC does not provide a general right to self-determination, fundamental, overlapping, and interdependent aspects of the child’s right to self-determination are provided for under rights to Identity (Article 8); to be Heard (Article 12); and to Privacy (Article 16)³². The Committee has also affirmed that laws that criminalise people with diverse SOGIESC should be repealed.

Beginning in 2010 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women mentioned issues of SOGIESC in Concerns and Recommendations that States should take effective measures to combat violence against lesbians, and bisexual and trans women; address discrimination based on SOGI, as a means of tackling discrimination against all women; enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation including on grounds of SOGI; and decriminalise same-sex sexual relationships³³. In a ruling in February 2022, CEDAW ruled that criminalisation of same-sex sexual relationships is a violation of women’s rights, and that States Parties (in this instance Sri Lanka) should therefore repeal such laws³⁴.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promise to leave no one behind and provide Plan International with clear rationale for diverse SOGIESC inclusion in human development³⁵. Plan International recognises that the use of inclusive language in the framing of the SDGs - such as ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (SDG 4) - necessarily includes children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in “for all”. The shared UN System Framework

on leave no one behind expressly affirms that discrimination based on SOGI is a form of inequality and a threat to sustainable development³⁶. The SDGs have also provided an important framework for programming by UN agencies and INGOs, and advocacy by civil society organisations³⁷. A growing range of UN agencies have delivered LGBTIQ+ inclusive development programming alongside SDG frameworks, including UNAIDS, UNHCR, UN Women, UNDP, and UNICEF.³⁸

Movements for change

Plan International’s global approach to programming and influencing also recognises the importance of working with other actors, organisations and institutions to create change, especially organisations led by or working with children and young people. Since the 1990s LGBTIQ+ communities and organisations have built a network that range from the subnational to the global, and much of this work is accomplished by young people working as human right advocates and community development workers in formal and less formal organisations. Much attention has been focused on movements and change in global North countries. However, much change has also come from the global South, with movements in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, playing critical roles in driving change. Plan International will work alongside these organisations to learn from them and to strengthen their work.

These global South organisations and advocates are sometimes falsely accused of complicity in a global North led human rights movement in which diversity of SOGIESC is being imposed upon the other parts of the world. Using such arguments, States have

called for exemptions from human rights law and standards, often claiming that respect for ‘culture’ and ‘traditional values’ are more important than upholding human rights. Plan International recognises that people with diverse SOGIESC have been part of societies around the world for as long as they have existed. This diversity has been increasingly acknowledged by indigenous, anti-racist, and decolonial campaigners; movements for SOGIESC inclusion and rights, especially in the global South; anthropologists and historians; and human rights experts³⁹. These insights have led to an important emphasis on pluralism and open-ended conceptions of identity and expression.

There has also been an increased focus on the role of imperialism and colonialism in violently imposing limiting and harmful norms around gender, sexuality, and culture. For example, through laws, educational practices, and religious practices designed to strengthen conformity with colonial customs and language, and to punish diversity, or so-called ‘deviant’ or ‘uncivilised’ ways of living. Laws imposed under British colonial rule which criminalized same-sex sexual acts

in many countries, are one of the most well-known examples of this pattern⁴⁰. Elsewhere, as in much of Latin America, affirmation of gender and sexual diversity, and successful efforts to remove colonial laws, have been important aspects of decolonial movements in the nineteenth and twentieth Centuries⁴¹.

More recently, anti-gender movements have sought to derail diverse SOGIESC and gender equality movements internationally⁴². Anti-gender movements represent a challenge to Plan International commitments to gender transformative approaches in areas such as SRHR, and the rights for all children and young people to have control of their lives and bodies, and make decisions about their sexuality, free from discrimination, coercion

or violence. Aligned with coalitions broadly opposed to progressive recognition of human rights standards, these movements have mobilised with scale and speed across many national contexts (often with overt or covert ideological, advocacy and financial support from movements active in the global north)⁴³. In particular, anti-gender movements have mobilised support against legal and policy reform on issues such as same-sex partnerships, inclusive education, abortion rights, and trans rights. They have forged space for anti-gender actors and objectives within state institutions, policy, law and, in some cases, national human rights institutions, shaping agendas about whose rights matter and whose, they argue, do not⁴⁴.

Working across diverse contexts

This position paper recognises that Plan International works in many different country contexts, with varying levels of societal support or hostility toward people with diverse SOGIESC, and varying levels of legal, institutional and policy support or discrimination. Contextual factors do not change Plan International's commitment to change that supports all children and young people – including those with diverse SOGIESC – to realise their rights. However, these factors do change how Plan International works to achieve that outcome.

In designing programming and influencing strategies Plan International can take a nuanced approach that responds to local context and to the priorities of people with diverse SOGIESC and CSOs working within their communities. There are some countries in which active work on diversity of SOGIESC may be counter-productive, unsafe for people with diverse SOGIESC and Plan International staff and partners, and not advised by diverse SOGIESC CSOs – if they exist at all. However, Plan International will not allow the existence of these contexts to create a more generalised sense that work

on diversity of SOGIESC is too difficult. There is a conducive environment for different kinds of programming and influencing in approximately 70% of countries in which Plan International works. Previous studies for Plan International have demonstrated one group of these countries has a sufficiently supportive environment in that it would be regrettable if Plan International chose to not work on diversity of SOGIESC. This group of countries has relatively positive legal environments, sufficient levels of societal acceptance for work to occur openly, and SOGIESC focused CSOs that are active and could be partners for Plan International. A wide range of other countries have enough elements of this supportive environment to justify at least some Plan International programming and influencing activities, or partnership strengthening with diverse SOGIESC CSOs, or capacity strengthening of its own organisation and partners. In countries where programming and influencing activities or open partnership strengthening with diverse SOGIESC CSOs carries risk that cannot be mitigated, options may still exist for ongoing situational analysis: only in a small group of countries is there justification

for disengagement. Guidance such as Plan International's **Strategies for SRHR influencing in restrictive contexts may be useful**⁴⁵.

To implement this strategy Plan International offices and staff will have the resources, training, local partnerships and organisational support to undertake assessments and design mitigation strategies. This work will

allow genuine decisions about what elements of Plan International programming and influencing can be implemented safely and with impact for the children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in those places. The position paper is accompanied by a Security Risk Assessment Tool consistent with consistent with Plan International's existing approaches to safeguarding, and risk assessment.

Intersectionality

Plan International recognises that children and young people with diverse SOGIESC are not a homogenous group. Their lives, challenges, and opportunities may vary widely depending on other aspects of their identities, such as race, class, disability, indigeneity, rurality or many other factors. For some children and young people their SOGIESC may be a central aspect of their identity, and for others it may be one amongst many. The concept of intersectionality assists us to understand how different aspects of lives can overlap and interact, often generating complex challenges or opportunities. People affected by intersectional discrimination generally belong to the groups most at risk of being left behind⁴⁶. Intersectional analysis is therefore a helpful tool for promoting inclusion, a human rights-based approach, and sustainable development outcomes⁴⁷.

For example, inequalities based on conventional gender norms about what girls should or should not do can intersect with inequalities based on norms about sexual orientation or relationships. LBQ youth and trans and gender diverse youth in this situation are more likely to experience violence, including SGBV, than other women or other people with diverse SOGIESC. Add another factor – 'race' – and violence compounds further. LGBTIQ+ people of colour, particularly trans women, are at significantly elevated risk of violence and SGBV throughout the Americas, as the Inter-American Commission

for Human Rights (IACHR) has documented. One study found that 80-90% of LGBTIQ+ people subject to lethal violence were people of colour, and 50-67% of all LGBTIQ+ cases were trans women of colour⁴⁹. Add another factor – age – and analysis sharpens again, with 80% of trans women killed in the Americas also being under the age of 35⁵⁰. To summarise, the combination of being a woman, and being an LBQ or trans person, and being a person of colour and being young results in levels of violence which may go beyond cumulative effects and reflect a unique experience of the world at the intersection of all of those factors. Other factors can also be important, for example children and young people with diverse SOGIESC who are also people with disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing certain kinds of violence, such as family and intimate partner violence (IPV). Research also suggests people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people are less likely to access healthcare, and other state services or institutions, such as education, housing, and employment support, for fear of discrimination⁵¹.

Intersectional effects can become institutionalised, for example through the ways that law enforcement officers may interact with people at the intersection of multiple factors on inequality, such as young black trans women meeting in public. Service provision, such as healthcare, is another context where judgements may be made, for example

about why a young black trans woman may be seeking healthcare. People who live at those intersections can also internalise their experiences, and come to expect, or even feel that they deserve, that discrimination.

Gender Transformative Approach

Across all our work, Plan International is committed to creating a world in which gender equality and girl's rights are a reality. Plan International's **Gender Transformative Approach** is our roadmap for achieving this. It calls on staff to recognise that girls and young women are unfairly affected by gender inequality and to contribute to processes of change within societies, including through:

- Tackling root causes, reshaping unequal power relations, and removing barriers that drive inequality.
- Helping to strengthen girls' and young women's agency.
- Fostering enabling environments in which all children and young people can contribute to gender equality.

Plan International's Global Strategy 2022-2027 **All Girls Standing Strong** strives for social, gender, economic and climate justice. The Strategy emphasises a need to focus on those who are most left behind, and to break down barriers that cause discrimination and exclusion. Our ambition is that all children and young people, especially girls and young women will:



Learn: so, they are educated and have the skills for work and life.



Lead: by acting on issues that matter to them.



Decide: and have control over their lives and bodies.



Thrive: by growing up cared for and free from violence and fear.

In doing so we recognise that gender programming and programming focused on women and girls can also address SOGIESC issues. For example, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer women and girls are women and girls, and their interests can be addressed through inclusion in mainstream programme as well as separate programmes. Inclusion, as well as gender and age, is a cross-cutting standard within our Gender Transformative Approach: when designing and implementing programming and influencing work, staff should consider children and young people in all their diversity⁵². We will also work with men and boys with diverse SOGIESC who experience discrimination, violence and exclusion because of their SOGIESC, often at the hands of other men and boys.

To achieve gender transformation, Plan International also needs to work with children, young people and others with other relevant

intersecting characteristics as well as diversity of SOGIESC.

This is reinforced in Plan International's **Tackling Exclusion Framework** which recognises that gender equality and inclusion, including on grounds of SOGIESC, are mutually beneficial and supportive projects, rather than competing agendas. This is also consistent with a human rights-based approach, which emphasises that human rights are indivisible, inalienable, and universal; rights should not be framed as in conflict with one another, as cancelling one another out, or as otherwise impossible to fully realise⁵³. This is also consistent with an intersectional feminist approaches which emphasise how different groups of girls, young women, and people may be left behind, due to multiple, intersecting, and structural inequalities, such as those based on gender identity, nation, race and ethnicity.

Partnerships

Plan International's Global Strategy **All Girls Standing Strong** emphasises the importance of working in partnership and of being child and youth-centered. It commits Plan International to co-create all our programming and influencing work with children and young people, and to engage them and their organisations meaningfully in all decision-making. Additionally, Plan International's **Building Better Partnerships Framework** also recognises that partnerships⁵⁴:

1. Are essential to achieving global sustainable development outcomes including the SDGs.
2. Need to look different in different contexts, whilst always reflecting our purpose and values.
3. Are diverse; requiring us to be flexible, adaptive, and take a nuanced approach to risk.
4. Reflect who we are and how we work, in all aspects of our work.

The importance of partnerships with formal and less formal diverse SOGIESC groups is a consistent theme of this Position paper. Plan International may form different kinds of partnership for different reasons. Some may be strategic and transformational partnerships that transcend specific projects, others may be technical partnerships focused on the safe and effective implementation of projects, and others may be consultative – including in countries where Plan International is yet to start work on SOGIESC and where Plan International needs to understand local context and the priorities of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in those places.

In developing this position paper, Plan International staff and partners recommended steps toward respectful and genuine partnerships with diverse SOGIESC groups, including:

1. **Not being extractive:** Plan International should respect the knowledge, networks and experience with diverse SOGIESC groups, and avoid research and engagement that marginalises community members. This is reflected in other Plan International guidance such as the Strategies for **SRHR influencing in restrictive contexts which includes strategies** for working in partnerships and for conducting research in collaboration with others⁵⁵.
2. **Respecting capacity:** Plan International should reduce burdens for proposals and reporting, should avoid unnecessarily detailed due diligence checks, and provide resources and capacity strengthening.
3. **Share responsibility:** Plan International should look at diverse SOGIESC CSOs as partners in a collaborative process rather than just a way of outsourcing work and risk.
4. **Raise the bar:** Plan International should stand by diverse SOGIESC groups when they are at risk and ensure that its other partners respect diverse SOGIESC groups.

BOX: Including diversity of SOGIESC within these Plan International Approaches, Strategies and Frameworks can be achieved by:

1. **Becoming aware** of discrimination and exclusion faced by children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in all their diversity, including the root cause issues that drive key challenges. This involves increasing our knowledge so we can **acknowledge the ways we may be causing harm to children and young people with diverse SOGIESC within our existing work, because we may be perpetuating root causes and/or their exclusionary effects***.
2. **Addressing discrimination and exclusion** faced by children and young people with diverse SOGIESC within our programming and influencing work, and that of our partners, including reducing risk of harm or resolving any harm we may be causing. This involves **addressing root cause issues as well as key challenges where we can.**
3. **Working in partnership with others**, including diverse SOGIESC CSOs, to collaborate to address root cause issues and key challenges facing children and young people with diverse SOGIESC because this is in line with our purpose, even though aspects of it may fall outside our current capacity as an organisation.

(*) Failure to become aware and act in this way is a form of indirect discrimination. For example, a hypothetical PVV programme aims to increase support for victims/survivors of SGBV especially girls and young women, through increased funding for support services and campaigning to support norm and attitudinal change. The programme design neglects to consider that girls and young women with diverse SOGIESC are at increased risk for SGBV. The programme therefore does not explicitly include them. Nor do implementing partners who lack experience delivering SOGIESC inclusive work. Therefore, whilst the programme aimed to tackle root causes of gender inequality and violence, as it did so, it perpetuated exclusion and harm against excluded groups of girls and young women.

2 How **diversity of SOGIESC** aligns with Programmes and Influencing





How **diversity of SOGIESC** aligns with Programmes and Influencing

Plan International's six Areas of Global Distinctiveness (AoGDs) are its most important areas of work, in which it invests in and builds coherent and gender transformative programming aligned with Plan International's Global Strategy. Plan International's work in each AoGD will only be complete when discrimination and marginalisation faced by people with diverse SOGIESC is recognised and addressed. Each of the three parts of

Plan International's Theory of Change – social norms, law and policy reform and social and economic safety nets – plays a role in Plan International's work with people with diverse SOGIESC. The evidence, positions and recommendations in this section cover many relevant issues but do not limit Plan International from developing other initiatives in these or other thematic areas.

Areas of Global Distinctiveness



Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (SOYEE)

Plan International's Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (SOYEE) AoGD "focuses on ensuring that vulnerable and excluded young people, especially young women, are resilient and are actively engaged in decent work of their choosing, be it waged or self-employed." Each component of Plan International's theory of change provides opportunities for diverse SOGIESC inclusion in SOYEE:

- Harmful gender and social norms, stigma, and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within family, community, education and training contexts hinder opportunities to build skills and to access

to decent work for youth with diverse SOGIESC⁵⁶. This shapes perceptions of what work people with diverse SOGIESC are suitable for, hindering job seeking, job retention and promotion.

- Laws and policies undermine people with diverse SOGIESC as they seek work and create contexts for discrimination and harassment in workplaces. Laws and policies also often fail to protect people with diverse SOGIESC in employment.
- Challenges accessing decent work create reliance on poorly paid, insecure and unsafe informal sector work. Official social protection systems often provide limited support for people with diverse SOGIESC⁵⁷. Discrimination based on SOGIESC can combine with ableism, racism and other forms of discrimination to compound life challenges and exposure to poverty⁵⁸.

Plan International's Position

- Plan International affirms that all people, including people with diverse SOGIESC, have the right to training, pathways to wage and self-employment and decent and gender responsive workplaces, as a means to live productive and dignified lives.
- Plan International recognises that children and young people with diverse SOGIESC face greater challenges in accessing education, training and decent work. While all parts of the diverse SOGIESC community may be affected, these challenges are felt especially keenly by trans and gender diverse people.
- Plan International will address the drivers of discrimination and marginalisation faced by people with diverse SOGIESC in the world of work. We will take steps across its programme cycles to ensure full participation of people with diverse SOGIESC in work-related programmes and services. We will promote inclusive and equal opportunities through family, community, education and training initiatives, and will work in partnership with states and with civil society organisations, including diverse SOGIESC organisations to address these issues.
- Plan International will ensure that its hiring practices ensure equal treatment for people with diverse SOGIESC, and that its own workplaces are free from discrimination and provide opportunities for people with diverse SOGIESC to bring their whole selves to work.

Recommendations for other actors:

- States should take all necessary legislative, policy and administrative measures to eliminate discrimination based on SOGIESC in public and private employment, including in relation to vocational training, recruitment, promotion, dismissal, conditions of employment and remuneration.
- States and other relevant actors should ensure that social protection systems are inclusive of people with diverse SOGIESC.

Key Issues

People with diverse SOGIESC are **over-represented in poorly-paid, insecure, informal, and unsafe work**⁵⁹. For example, studies on the impact of COVID-19 on people with diverse SOGIESC highlighted their vulnerability to shocks due to high-levels of informal sector work⁶⁰ and limited savings⁶¹. A 2022 ILO study of low-wage migrant workers with diverse SOGIESC in Southeast Asia identified discrimination in families, schools and workplaces as key drivers of

labour migration, in which further forms of discrimination may then be experienced⁶². 2019 data from 11 OECD countries shows people with diverse SOGIESC face higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of promotion than other people⁶³. A study of social protection systems (globally, and with case studies from Bangladesh, Indonesia and Fiji) highlighted invisibility with diverse SOGIESC within social protection policy and design challenges in areas including targeting, delivery mechanisms, conditionalities that limit access for people with diverse SOGIESC⁶⁴.

People with diverse SOGIESC are also likely to experience **workplace discrimination, harassment, and bullying**. SOGIESC is often not mentioned as protected characteristics in the general non-discrimination provisions of constitutions or laws of many countries and 58% of states globally (112 states) have no specific laws to protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment⁶⁵. In one study, 21% of respondents in China, 30% in the Philippines, and 23% in Thailand reported being discriminated against, harassed, or bullied at work because of their SOGIESC⁶⁶. Other research shows evidence of job loss because of diversity of SOGIESC^{67,68}.

Many people with diverse SOGIESC – especially trans and gender diverse people – experience employer pressure to downplay their SOGIESC or **may feel a need to conceal their SOGIESC in the workplace**⁶⁹. These forms of shaming or

rendering of people with diverse SOGIESC as invisible can further reinforce stigma and mental health issues, and can also lead to anxiety about their SOGIESC being discovered⁷⁰. Within the aid sector itself, research by the EISF revealed that “79% of aid workers surveyed who identified as LGBTQI reported concealing this aspect of their profile because they feared being discriminated against when it came to international deployment opportunities”⁷¹.

However, workplaces that treat workers with diverse SOGIESC with dignity may be more innovative and successful. One study explored links between employees feeling able to bring their whole selves into the workplace, and **enhanced productivity, creativity, and innovation**⁷². Other studies have suggested links between creating diverse SOGIESC inclusive work environments and the fostering of economic growth and more open societies⁷³.



Protection from violence (PFV)

Plan International’s Protection from Violence AoGD has the goal of “ensuring that children, adolescents and youth – particularly girls and young women – are protected from all forms of violence, and the gender dynamics that drive these”. Each component of Plan International’s theory of change provides opportunities for diverse SOGIESC⁷⁴ inclusion in Protection from Violence programming and influencing:

- Harmful norms play a significant role in driving violence, discrimination, and neglect of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC. They feed myths and stereotypes that depict people with diverse SOGIESC as abnormal, unnatural, sick, immoral, or criminal, and that may create false enabling environments for punishment, correction and treatment⁷⁵.
- In many contexts, law and policy discriminate against people with diverse SOGIESC by criminalising same-sex

acts, and through the absence of both anti-discrimination provisions and laws enabling processes such as gender marker changes. This legal and policy discrimination can contribute to an enabling environment for violence, perceptions of impunity amongst perpetrators and reluctance to report amongst victim/survivors.

- Violence and discrimination can fuel further complex challenges, including homelessness, social isolation, lack of access to education, exposure to unsafe environments, poor mental health outcomes, and other aspects of precarity and poverty. This may be compounded by violence from other sources: for example, poor, socially excluded, and racially marginalised people with diverse SOGIESC – especially trans and gender diverse people and people engaged in selling or exchanging sex - are also more likely to be targeted by laws, policies, law enforcers, and wider state actors.

Plan International's Position

- Plan International affirms that all children and young people, regardless of their SOGIESC, have the right to live a life free from violence, discrimination, exploitation, and harassment in all areas of their lives. This includes in homes, schools, healthcare, social welfare, state institutions, and community and public spaces, both online and offline, amongst other settings.
- Plan International condemns practices of SOGIE change efforts, or so-called 'conversion therapy', that purport to change people's SOGIE. Such abusive practices are degrading, cruel and inhuman, and can amount to torture. Plan International recognises that such practices primarily affect children and young people of diverse SOGIE and constitute an assault on their physical and psychological integrity.
- Plan International recognises that children and young people with diverse SOGIESC are particularly at risk of being subjected to GBV in all its forms, including rape and sexual assault, so-called 'corrective rape', CEFMU, and sexual violence within intimate partnerships. We also acknowledge that, age, gender, SOGIESC, race and ethnicity, and disability are strong factors in driving vulnerability to GBV, and exclusion from GBV responses. These patterns are compounded when aspects of SOGIESC are criminalised and in contexts with extensive stigma towards people with diverse SOGIESC. To adequately address GBV globally, we will take a gender transformative and intersectional approach.
- Plan International condemns practices of non-consensual, unnecessary, and harmful medical interventions on intersex children and recognises a need for legal reform to protect intersex children. Diversity of sex characteristics is not a disorder that needs to be fixed and healthcare systems should offer specific and general services that respect this diversity.
- Plan International staff delivering GBV related programming and influencing work should address needs of people with diverse SOGIESC across Plan International's programme cycle wherever possible and critically assess whether their operating models exclude or do further harm to people with diverse SOGIESC.
- Plan will advocate for donors, governments, civil society actors, and its partners to increase the relevance, effectiveness, safety and dignity of services for people with diverse SOGIESC. Wherever possible Plan International's work in strengthening external GBV service providers and referral pathways should include measures to increase diverse SOGIESC-responsive, inclusive, safe, and confidential service options.
- Plan international is deeply concerned with denial of victim/survivor support services to children and young people with diverse SOGIESC. We firmly believe that all children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of violence, including those with diverse SOGIESC, should have access to quality, accessible, and affordable services that meet their needs and should be included in decision-making.
- Plan is committed to building stronger and more diverse partnerships with diverse SOGIESC, feminist and other organisations adopting transformative approaches to addressing violence, including SGBV, that includes all people with diverse SOGIESC.

Recommendations for other actors:

- States should take effective action to protect all lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex children and young people from all forms of violence and discrimination, including by: enacting, implementing, and monitoring legislation to prohibit, prevent and respond to all types of violence against all children and young people, including those with diverse SOGIESC; and including considerations for diverse SOGIESC in legal frameworks related to violence and national action plans to end gender-based violence and violence against children.
- States should ensure children and young people with diverse SOGIESC have access to justice following experiences of any type of violence, abuse, or harassment based on their SOGIESC. Reporting mechanisms, justice systems and **health, protection and social welfare services should be SOGIESC-responsive, inclusive, safe and confidential**. These services must be equipped to meet the unique needs of People with diverse SOGIESC and should not put them at any further risk of violence or abuse.
- States and other actors should eliminate practices of so-called ‘conversion therapy’, and commit to further developing future programmes, influencing and/or partnership work in the area of SOGIESC change efforts.

Key Issues

Children and young people with diverse SOGIESC experience **high levels of violence and abuse** in education, in communities, and within their families⁷⁶. Trans and gender diverse children and young people are particularly vulnerable to violence across their social environments⁷⁷. Harmful social norms and the violence that they can engender can result in acute mental health issues and other health challenges.

Violence in families, including physical, psychological, and sexual violence and neglect toward children and young people with diverse SOGIESC is prevalent in many countries^{78, 79}. Children and young people are vulnerable to punitive forms of violence and control and abuse is often enacted primarily by people they trust, such as parents, families, caregivers, teachers, and neighbours⁸⁰.

Family abandonment may fuel further cycles of socio-economic deprivation^{81, 82} may

result in foster care, juvenile detention, or life on the streets⁸³.

‘Conversion therapy’ - sometimes called **SOGIE change efforts** - are abusive practices aimed at effecting a change in a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Children and young people are especially vulnerable to these forms of violence and abuse: a survey of almost 500 people with diverse SOGIESC from 80 countries, found that 22% had experienced SOGIE change efforts, of which 37% reported incidents while they were under 18 and 45% when they were between 18-24 years old⁸⁴. Premised on the idea that diversities of SOGIESC are disorders, conversion therapy has been recognised as degrading, inhuman, and cruel by the UN Independent Expert for SOGI⁸⁵ (amounting to a form of torture⁸⁶) and a violation of Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁸⁷. The UN CRC and human rights groups have also condemned imposition of SOGIE change efforts^{88, 89}.

People with diverse SOGIESC experience very high rates of **Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)**^{90,91}. Where comparative data is available, they are three times more likely than heterosexual people to be sexually assaulted⁹², and up to 2.8 times more likely than women in general to be sexually assaulted⁹³. In a study across nine countries in Southern and East Africa, 19% of people with diverse SOGIESC aged 18-24, and 30% of trans women, had experienced sexual violence in the previous year⁹⁴. **So-called ‘corrective rape’** may be used to target LBQ women and girls⁹⁵, and transgender people, particularly communities of colour⁹⁶.

Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Union (CEFMU) are contexts for violence against people with diverse SOGIESC, as well as forms of violence themselves⁹⁷. Research in various countries including Cameroon and Sri Lanka⁹⁸; Bangladesh, India, and Nepal⁹⁹; Equatorial Guinea¹⁰⁰; and Kyrgyzstan¹⁰¹ suggests that LBQ and trans women and girls are particularly vulnerable to CEFMU¹⁰².

Where comparative data is available, it shows people with diverse SOGIESC experience **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)** at rates as high or higher than the general population. LBQ and trans communities are particularly at risk¹⁰³.

Intersex infants and children have specific protection needs in early childhood, due to non-consensual, unnecessary, and harmful surgeries to ‘correct’ non-normative sex characteristics, sometimes termed **Intersex Genital Mutilation (IGM)**. UN OHCHR has collated reports of violence based on sex characteristics and disability against intersex adolescents in multiple countries¹⁰⁴.

Issues of **exclusion from services** which prevent and respond to violence, including safe spaces, for children and young people with diverse SOGIESC who have been abandoned, neglected, or abused are widely documented. This may include child protection, social welfare, GBV and other services. Diverse SOGIESC focused CSOs and community groups often face a lack of sustainable funding for services, and mainstream providers are often poorly equipped to bring a SOGIESC lens to their work¹⁰⁵.

People with diverse SOGIESC also experience **harassment online, providing a context for harmful social and gender norms to be reproduced**. Plan International’s 2020 **Free To Be Online** report highlights that being a person with diverse SOGIESC is a factor that increases prevalence of online harassment: “42 per cent of the girls who identified themselves as LGBTIQ+ and had experienced harassment, said that they get harassed because of it”.





Inclusive and Quality Education (IQE)

Plan International’s Inclusive Quality Education AoGD has as its goal that “all vulnerable and excluded children – particularly girls – access and complete inclusive quality education from pre-primary to secondary level.” Each component of Plan International’s theory of change provides opportunities for diverse SOGIESC inclusive IQE:

- Harmful norms and associated attitudes and behaviours can profoundly undermine the educational attainment of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC, their experience of being a young person and their mental health¹⁰⁶. However, diverse SOGIESC inclusive formal education can change mindsets at school, within the

wider community and across generations as young people share ideas within families and normalise greater levels of inclusion¹⁰⁷.

- Many countries globally lack laws and policies to ensure inclusive and safe educational environments for all and other laws may enable discrimination. Where anti-gender movements are prominent, education is often a key battleground for SOGIESC rights.
- These challenges can lead to lower educational access and attainment, higher drop-out rates, and mental health issues with potential long-term impact on the life courses of people with diverse SOGIESC and increase need for social and economic support. Other students who do not receive a comprehensive and inclusive education may also be disadvantaged in life.

Plan International’s Position

- Plan International affirms that everyone has the right to inclusive quality and gender transformative education, without discrimination based on SOGIESC and respecting diversity of SOGIESC.
- Plan International recognises that denial of the right to education - including through bullying, discrimination, and violence in schools - can result in profound harm, including mental health and wellbeing challenges, and long-term socio-economic disadvantage for people with diverse SOGIESC. Plan International also recognises that trans, gender diverse, and intersex children and young people are at particular disadvantage of these consequences.
- Plan International will prioritise diverse SOGIESC inclusion in its education programmes and influencing. This includes in areas of Inclusive and Quality Education, Education in Emergencies, and Child Protection and Safeguarding, Comprehensive Sexuality Education, as well as its Gender Transformative Education work; each of which provide important entry points for creating safer and more inclusive schools for all children and young people. Creating whole school environments that are safe, inclusive and cater for learner’s needs involves collaborative work and capacity strengthening with teachers, parents, schools, communities, and government partners to advance diverse SOGIESC inclusion, in areas of school policies, guidance, curricula, and training.
- Plan International is committed to exploring collaborative partnerships and programming with CSOs focused on diverse SOGIESC inclusion and education following consultation with those CSOs and where spaces to act are identified.



Recommendations for other actors:

- All actors – including students, teachers, parents, school staff, governors, and government policymakers – should help create inclusive and safe whole of school environments to address violence and bullying and the profound barriers to education facing children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in education.
- 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 cohesive and inclusive future societies. This can be achieved through gender transformative education, curricula and pedagogy that is diverse SOGIESC inclusive, training for teachers and other staff, and work with school management and governance structures to ensure that systemic barriers to participation in education are removed.
- States should (a) ensure laws and policies provide adequate protection for students, staff, and teachers who are people with diverse SOGIESC against all forms of violence, discrimination, and exclusion in school environments; (b) include attention to diverse SOGIESC inclusion in decisions around education budgets; (c) gather, collate and invest in improved data on diverse SOGIESC inclusion and rights issues, for example, through national education data systems (EMIS systems) and improved tracking concerning access to and experiences in education; and (d) invest in inclusive mental health support services that are inclusive of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC.



Key Issues

Plan International's **Gender Transformative Education** policy brief notes that "children and young people who do not identify themselves within the confines of traditional gender and sexual orientation norms face the difficult and sometimes distressing task of fitting in." Children and young people with diverse SOGIESC experience very high rates of **violence, threats, and bullying**¹⁰⁸. A 2016 UNESCO study reported research by Plan International that 55% of students with diverse SOGIESC in Thailand experienced physical, psychological, or sexual violence in the month prior to the study. The same UNESCO study found that 45% of trans students in Argentina dropped out of school either due to transphobic bullying or to being excluded from school. A 2019 survey of 17,000 people aged 13-24 from across Europe¹⁰⁹ found that bullying based on gender identity was experienced by 90% of trans women and girls, 59% of trans men and boys, and 45% of non-binary and gender diverse people. Additionally, 40% of intersex respondents experienced bullying based on their sex characteristics. Violence and bullying may be enacted by teachers, administrators and parents, as well as other students.

School activities, practices and spaces organised around the gender binary - such as sports, playgrounds, changing rooms, bathrooms, and uniforms - can exclude or marginalise children and young people with diverse SOGIESC¹¹⁰. **Trans and gender diverse children and young people face particular barriers in these environments**. For example, a 2019 study in South Africa found that more than three-quarters of trans and gender diverse adolescents choose not to use school bathrooms outside of emergencies and 70% do not play sports¹¹¹. **School curricula often omit diversity of SOGIESC**¹¹². Inclusion of diverse SOGIESC may be contested by teachers, parents, administrators, school

management and wider communities and some reactionary social movements exist to limit the teaching of diversity of SOGIESC¹¹³. However diverse SOGIESC inclusive and gender transformative curricula may be a significant component of an inclusive and respectful school environment, such as increased student feelings of safety in schools¹¹⁴. It is also recognised that for some children with diverse SOGIESC, homes may not be a safe and accepting place and schools can be a space where they will feel comfortable to be themselves.

Children and young people with diverse SOGIESC are more likely to feel unsafe at school, to avoid school activities or miss classes or drop out of school entirely. By seeking to avoid violence or discrimination they may lose opportunities for academic under-achievement^{115,116} which can fuel further cycles of poverty¹¹⁷. Adverse effects on young people's mental and psychological health may include increased risk of anxiety, loss of confidence, low self-esteem, loneliness, self-harm, trauma, depression and suicide¹¹⁸. Studies also show **negative effects on heterosexual and cisgender children and young people**, who also witness or experience bullying of a friend or classmate and harassment that may go unaddressed^{119,120}.

Children and young people with diverse SOGIESC also at risk of bullying and violence outside of school settings and in online learning environments, including through **cyberbullying**. Plan International's 2020 **Free To Be Online** report highlights that being a person with diverse SOGIESC increases prevalence of online harassment.

Other research suggests that children and young people with diverse SOGIESC experience and normalise high rates of cyberbullying^{121,122} less likely to report and access support and more likely than their peers to experience negative outcomes from cyberbullying^{123,124}.



Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

The goal of Plan International’s SRHR AoGD is for children, adolescents and young people in all their diversity to have control of their lives and bodies, and make decisions about their sexuality, free from discrimination, coercion or violence. Each component of Plan International’s theory of change provides opportunities for diverse SOGIESC inclusive SRHR:

- Harmful norms relating to SOGIESC are at the core of SRHR challenges faced by

people with diverse SOGIESC, creating an enabling environment for discrimination, coercion, shaming and other forms of violence and control¹²⁵. Other norms around ‘natural’ or ‘proper’ sexual and gender conduct, and the perceived rights of family members to police sexualities, bodies, and choices are common drivers for human rights violations against LBQ girls and young women.

- Lack of bodily autonomy and integrity, and denial of personhood and decision-making power is often embedded in laws and policies.
- Healthcare systems often fail to meet specific needs of people with diverse SOGIESC, and general health services may also be discriminatory. This can have lifelong consequences, depriving people with diverse SOGIESC of the right to live healthy and dignified lives.



Plan International's Position

- Plan International strongly affirms the importance of a rights-based, non-discriminatory, evidence-based, and inclusive approach for SRHR. SRHR (and other health services) should be available and accessible to everyone. This means they need to be SOGIESC-responsive, as well as gender and age responsive. Plan International will support diverse SOGIESC inclusion through policy change, increased resourcing and training amongst providers, and capacity strengthening for our staff and our partners.
- Plan International believes that SRHR services are an integral part of universal health coverage and essential to realising the right to health. Sexual and reproductive health and rights services should be age- and gender-responsive, rights-based, inclusive, and available to all adolescents and young people, including adolescents and young people of diverse SOGIESC, including in emergency contexts and humanitarian settings.
- Plan International endorses a sex-positive approach to SRHR, including CSE, in which sexual rights, sexual pleasure and sexual health are positively interrelated.
- Plan International commits to enhance diverse SOGIESC inclusion in areas including values clarification and attitudes training (VCAT); -gender responsive SRHR services; data gathering, MEL systems and programme development related to SRHR; and SRHR in emergencies programming.
- Plan International believes that all children and young people are entitled to CSE which is accessible, non-discriminatory and SOGIESC-responsive. CSE can help children and young people in all their diversity to gain and develop knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to make healthy choices about relationships, sexuality and their bodies, and to develop gender equitable attitudes and a positive sense of their own gender identity and that of others. It can also be a critical intervention to help children to understand that gender and sexuality are fluid, and that every individual has a right to define their own gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. Working with parents on CSE is also essential to achieving these outcomes. We will champion inclusive approaches and invest in knowledge generation and capacity strengthening with education partners to support diverse SOGIESC inclusive CSE.
- Plan International recognises the importance of inclusive and affirming environments that protect young people with diverse SOGIESC, including trans and non-binary children and young people, from discrimination, denial of care, and exclusion in healthcare service provision. We affirm the need for psychosocial and social support for children and youth with diverse SOGIESC and appropriate, consensual, and evidence-based healthcare.
- Plan International recognises the right to bodily autonomy of children, adolescents and young people of diverse SOGIESC. Children, adolescents and young people's agency must be supported to make their own decisions affecting their own bodily integrity, physical autonomy, and self-determination.
- Plan International will work in partnership with diverse SOGIESC CSOs (including trans-led and youth-led organisations) to strengthen their capacity and impact in areas of legal reform, healthcare, and education.
- Plan International believes that all people, including people with diverse SOGIESC, have the right to live without experiencing Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Plan International will ensure that its SGBV programming and influencing addresses the drivers and prevalence for people with diverse SOGIESC, especially in the case of co-called 'corrective rape'.
- Plan International believes that the practice of CEFMU is grounded in harmful gender norms, including the control of female sexuality, and recognises that CEFMU may be used specifically to control LBQ and trans women. For CEFMU to be eliminated, it is crucial to challenge these harmful social and gender norms to ensure that girls and young women have autonomy over their bodies and their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Recommendations for other actors:

- Healthcare providers should ensure SRHR and broader health services and programmes are non-discriminatory and diverse SOGIESC inclusive and responsive, whilst also considering underlying health inequalities, rights and strengths.
- Healthcare providers should commit to championing approaches, including sex positive approaches, which dispel stigma and are mindful of underlying health inequalities of people with diverse SOGIESC.
- CSE providers, whether in schools and outside of the school systems, including in humanitarian contexts, should develop and implement sex-positive CSE programmes which are non-discriminatory towards and inclusive of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC. Parents should be supported to achieve these outcomes.
- States should improve legal and policy frameworks to protect the rights and health of intersex, trans and gender diverse children and young people (including in areas of legal gender recognition and access to SOGIESC-responsive and inclusive healthcare).

Key Issues

Key challenges in accessing general healthcare include stigma, lack of awareness and training, and heteronormative, cisnormative, gender binary and endosexist assumptions¹²⁶. Many people with diverse SOGIESC do not disclose their SOGIESC to healthcare providers, including when it is relevant, due to fears of discrimination¹²⁷.

Research suggests that **lesbian and bisexual women have limited access to relevant health information**, and may avoid healthcare settings due to lack of training of medical staff, discriminatory attitudes in treatment, or staff insistence on administering tests that assume sexual activity with male partners. In more challenging legal and social environments, fears may also include not being treated at all, or being reported to the police^{128,129}.

Diverse SOGIESC CSO and advocates may be excluded in health knowledge production, and policymaking that can also support

SOGIESC, age and gender responsive SRH services including as part of universal health coverage¹³⁰.

Plan International has endorsed the Pleasure Principles¹³¹ that support a sexual rights and pleasure-based approach as a good in itself and as a pathway to better sexual health outcomes¹³². A sex positive approach to diversity of SOGIESC provides an important reframing away from harmful stereotypes of people with diverse SOGIESC as irresponsible, inherently risky or as health problem to be solved. **Researchers have also argued that sexuality is a development issue even if that is rarely acknowledged¹³³**. This approach also takes discussion of sexuality outside of medicalised and risk discourse¹³⁴. Other researchers and donors have also established linkages between sexuality and poverty reduction¹³⁵.

That sex-positive framing can coexist with the reality that young people with diverse

SOGIESC are at increased risk for contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and need improved access to sexual health testing, treatment, prevention, and support¹³⁶. Some people with diverse SOGIESC may be at higher risk, including gay and bisexual men, trans women, and those with intersectional characteristics including being people who use drugs, people who sell or exchange sex, people with low incomes, Black people and people of colour, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and people living in countries with poor healthcare coverage.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) offers an important entry point for discussing issues of diversity, consent, pleasure, and wellbeing, and dispelling myths and stigma around gender and sexuality with children and young people. However, discussions around CSE are often politically contested, and subject to misconceptions, misinformation and prejudice¹³⁷. Anti-gender narratives may focus on apparent concerns for the protection of children and the family and frame diverse SOGIESC inclusive CSE as a violation of children’s or even parental rights¹³⁸. However the health benefits of CSE are well-established¹³⁹ and studies have demonstrated that CSE can promote gender equality and girls’ rights¹⁴⁰.

SOGIESC, age- and gender-responsive SRHR service provision must include clinical management of sexual violence that is inclusive and nonjudgmental towards LGBTIQ+ people.

Trans and gender diverse children experiencing distress or in need of support related to their gender identity and expression face significant barriers in accessing inclusive and affirming transition care and psychosocial support. This includes laws about consensual

sexual acts, but also laws and policies which force or coerce trans and gender diverse people to undergo sterilisation, or obtain a mental health diagnosis, in order to access legal rights¹⁴¹. **Research shows that trans children and adolescents who grow up in inclusive and affirming environments are more likely to be happy and healthy**¹⁴². Trans and gender diverse children and young people may find themselves excluded from mainstream discussions about sexual health and rights, on topics such as menstruation, contraception, pregnancy, and access to abortion.

Communities with diverse SOGIESC have faced historic exclusion within movements for **reproductive rights** and choice, for example, views that people with diverse SOGIESC are non-reproductive, and therefore cannot get pregnant, and do not require access to contraception or abortion. Key reproductive justice issues for youth with diverse SOGIESC include: (a) ensuring access to safe abortion services and programmemes; (b) legal and policy reform to address forced and coerced sterilisation of trans, gender diverse, and intersex communities and (c) ensuring equal access to inclusive, age and gender-responsive CSE and sexual health information that supports informed choice.

There is growing awareness of human rights violations experienced by intersex people and the often-lifelong consequences. A 2019 OHCHR background note highlights “forced and coercive medical interventions violate rights to the security of person, right to bodily and mental integrity, freedom from torture and ill-treatment, and freedom from violence” for intersex people. It also highlights the stigma and discrimination that intersex people may experience in general healthcare settings¹⁴³.



Children and Young People as Active Drivers of Change (LEAD)

The goal of Plan International’s LEAD AoGD is for “adolescents and youth take collective action for systemic social and political change. In particular, we will support girls and young women to engage politically to shape how decisions are taken; change perceptions on what they are capable of; and together with boys and young men, advance gender equality and young people’s rights.” Each component of Plan International’s theory of change provides opportunities for diverse SOGIESC inclusive LEAD programmes:

- Harmful norms regarding SOGIESC may limit their participation in public decision-making forums, perpetuate stereotypes of people with diverse SOGIESC as not deserving space, force them to conceal their SOGIESC identities in public, or create unsafe situations.
- Young people are also often excluded from development of laws and policies. A 2018 study supported by UNESCO found nine in ten (91%) young people with diverse SOGIESC globally said their needs are ‘never’ or ‘almost never’ considered in policymaking¹⁴⁴.
- Social exclusion born of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours can be internalised by people with diverse SOGIESC and create lifelong feelings of shame or mental health challenges that undermine their sense of themselves agents of change¹⁴⁵. This may also limit social mobility.

Plan International’s Position

- Plan International recognises the profound damage caused by exclusion, violence, and devaluing of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC, including potentially deep and longstanding disempowerment, poor access to life opportunities, and negative mental health and wellbeing outcomes. We believe in the importance of: (a) tackling barriers to civic and political participation for children and young people with diverse SOGIESC (b) helping to build their confidence, self-esteem, leadership and agency through our programming, influencing and partnerships work (c) creating safe, supportive and inclusive spaces for learning and collaboration and mapping of safe emergency and support services, and (d) working with key actors – including schools, policymakers, parents, CSOs and young people themselves – to help create enabling environments.
- Plan International will strengthen its curricula on empowerment of children and young people, teacher training, government training, and engagement with parents (amongst others) to ensure all curricula addresses the rights, needs and strengths of all children with diverse SOGIESC. This will help to create an enabling environment that supports the rights and empowerment of gender diverse people.
- Plan International will become part of the global movement of organisations and activists working together at the intersections of SOGIESC rights and child and youth empowerment. This will include support for self-organisation by youth with diverse SOGIESC. It will involve building well-funded, high value and sustainable partnerships with leading SOGIESC focused and child and youth-focused CSOs globally, to support programming and influencing outcomes at national, regional, and international levels. Plan International will also work more closely with youth advisory councils, ensuring that they are reflective of children and young people in all their diversity.

Recommendations for other actors:

- States should commit to removing barriers to full civic and political participation by people with diverse SOGIESC. This includes through implementing laws and policies that prevent violence and discrimination against children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in families, education, healthcare, and employment. States should also meaningfully involve civil society actors working on issues affecting children and young people with diverse SOGIESC into public policy consultations affecting their lives.
- Government and multilateral donors, grant-making organisations, and partnering INGOs/NGOs, should increase resources and capacity development efforts directed towards youth-led organisations and services focused on SOGIESC, particularly those which are primarily focused on SOGIESC issues and are diverse SOGIESC-led. They should also look to provide flexible funding and programming support, trust-based core funding, funding for services as well as strategic change work, and accessible funding criteria and amounts for smaller organisations and services.

Key Issues

Children and young people with diverse SOGIESC face various forms of **disempowerment**. Such exclusion and disempowerment can also result in **poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes** related to self-esteem, being heard, and feeling included. For example, one study found that 12% of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC feel ‘useful’ daily, versus 30% of other children and young people. The study also found that just 9% of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC say their family ‘completely’ understands the things that are important to them, versus 25% for other children and young people^{146, 147}. Additionally, often the **priorities of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC are invisible** and poorly integrated into policies, curricula, education, training, and programming by NGOs and state actors¹⁴⁸. Most children and young people with diverse SOGIESC globally (59%) feel their needs are ‘never’ addressed by education or school policies¹⁴⁹. Students in Latin America and the Caribbean report the highest level of exclusion; 71% said their needs are ‘never’ considered in educational policies.

Youth with diverse SOGIESC are often **under-represented in leadership positions** within mainstream youth movements. As the African Queer Youth Initiative summarises: ‘Young LGBTIQ+ people’s participation is hampered by stigmatisation, discrimination, violence, bullying, unemployment, lack of inclusion in youth representation, lack of resources in terms of funding and youth-friendly structures, lack of personal development opportunities, substance abuse issues, lack of support networks, and inaccessibility to services.’¹⁵⁰ Youth-focused organisations that provide support services or programmes for children and young people with diverse SOGIESC often rely on volunteers and small budgets. Even in contexts with many community-based services, young people may travel long distances to access services¹⁵¹. Research also shows **youth-led diverse SOGIESC organisations are underfunded** compared with diverse SOGIESC organisations in general¹⁵². Amounts of money going to youth-focused programming is also comparatively very small globally¹⁵³. Groups representing LBQ, trans, and intersex

communities, are particularly likely to be underfunded¹⁵⁴.

At the same time, research and consultation also shows the **positive role of youth-led movements**, who are often the strongest champions for diverse SOGIESC inclusion. Young people have clearly called for strengthened action from Plan International

on SOGIESC rights issues¹⁵⁵. Specific groups, such as intersex youth, are increasingly calling for greater support and attention to the needs of youth within social movements¹⁵⁶. Country case studies show youth with diverse SOGIESC play a critical role in broader social change efforts and would benefit from strengthened support from development actors¹⁵⁷.



Early Childhood Development (ECD)

The goal of Plan International's ECD AoGD is to ensure "in development and humanitarian settings, children of all genders from vulnerable and excluded groups receive the care, supports and services they need to survive, grow up healthy and develop to their full potential, free from gendered norms and attitudes that are discriminatory and limiting". Each component of Plan International's theory of change provides opportunities for diverse SOGIESC inclusive ECD:

- Parents, caregivers, families, and communities hold tremendous power and responsibility to shape the ways in which children learn and communicate about gender. Gender socialisation processes begin from birth - children are taught and learn the beliefs of their community about how they should be and behave, and their value, potential and future role, based on their gender. As children begin to develop and express their gender identity, they learn what is perceived to be for girls or for boys, and what is considered 'normal'. Gender-diverse children who affirm their gender identity during their early childhood years in a way that differs from the gender label that was assigned to them at birth, may be subjected to discrimination and rejection. Intersex infants are likely to

be affected by social norms and medical systems early in life. Harmful social and gender norms may also delegitimise families with parents who are people with diverse SOGIESC, along with children within those families.

- Laws and policies may constrain who can marry, be in partnerships and families, and be involved in the care and education of children¹⁵⁸. An increasing number of countries have more progressive laws that allow for partnerships and parenting rights for people with diverse SOGIESC. However, many do not, and there has been a resurgence in restrictive laws, particularly in contexts with stronger anti-gender politics¹⁵⁹.
- Negative social and economic consequences may exist for young children who express their gender identity differently from what is considered the norm earlier in life, resulting from discrimination within families such as de-prioritisation for schooling. Intersex people who undergo harmful 'corrective' surgeries and other interventions may have ongoing mental health and life challenges. Consequences may also exist for families undermined because of attitudes toward same-sex parents and partnerships.

Plan International's Position

- Plan International affirms that all children have the right to ECD, including early childhood care and education (ECCE), without discrimination on the basis of, and whilst also respecting, their SOGIESC. Denial of the right to ECD and ECCE to children of diverse SOGIESC limits the opportunity for them to reach their full potential, recognising that the early childhood years lay the foundations for health, development and wellbeing throughout the life-course.
- Plan International recognises the agency of all children, and that during early childhood, they should be able to explore their gender identity and express themselves in ways that are meaningful to them. Failure to do so can negatively impact their development and mental health.
- Plan International affirms the need for parenting/caregiving programmes in ECD to be inclusive of parents/caregivers in all their diversity, including diverse SOGIESC. This includes the need to consider how parenting/caregiving programmes can be adapted to be inclusive of, and welcoming to, parents/caregivers of diverse SOGIESC and diverse family and caregiving structures.
- Plan International affirms that everyone has the right to be part of a family, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. Families exist in diverse forms and Plan International will advocate for law and policy reform and that extends the same options and services to all families. No family should be subjected to discrimination based on the SOGIESC of any of its members.
- Plan International programming and influencing in ECD, including work with partners and other stakeholders, will address challenges experienced by children based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics across the programme cycle. This will include tackling harmful social and gender norms and promoting positive parenting.
- Plan International supports reform of laws, child protection mechanisms, and medical protocols to respect the human rights of intersex children. We believe that intersex children must be empowered to make their own decisions affecting their own bodily integrity, physical autonomy, and self-determination in age responsive ways. Plan International will engage with intersex rights organisations and activists in different regions to ensure our policy, programming and advocacy is collaborative and responsive to intersex people and organisations.

Recommendations for other actors:

- States should take all necessary legislative, administrative and other measures to ensure the right to exist as a family, including through equal access to adoption, surrogacy and parental rights, and equal and non-discriminatory access to assisted reproduction, and equal and non-discriminatory access to state and social assistance (such as tax credits and childcare).
- The World Health Organisation, States, and relevant professional bodies should take urgent steps to de-pathologise variations in sex characteristics in medical guidelines, protocols, and classifications. States should take all necessary legislative, administrative and other measures to ensure that no child's body is irreversibly altered by medical procedures in an attempt to impose a gender identity without the full, free and informed consent of the child, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child and guided by the principle that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. States should also establish child protection mechanisms whereby no child is at risk of, or subjected to, medical abuse.
- State and non-state actors that produce media and shape public discourse should reinforce positive and respectful narratives about people with diverse SOGIESC and their families.

Key Issues

Intersex infants and children are frequently subject to **non-consensual, harmful, and unnecessary 'normalising' treatments** such as genital surgeries, as well as psychological and other medical interventions, some of which can involve non-consensual sterilisation. Intersex communities are also affected by exclusionary approaches to preimplantation genetic diagnosis, pre-natal screening, and treatment, and selective abortion of intersex fetuses.¹⁶¹

In many countries and regions, there have been reports of abandonment, mutilation, infanticide, and other forms of **violence against intersex children**.¹⁶²

Parenting approaches can often reinforce binary, heteronormative, cisnormative and fixed – as well as hierarchical – ideas about gender, including in early childhood. When this is accompanied by norms around parenting that endorse and normalise violence,

punishment and/or neglect, children that are, or are perceived to be, intersex, trans or gender diverse are placed at real risk. There is therefore a need to make parenting interventions more inclusive and diverse.

Parents with diverse SOGIESC face lack of legal recognition, exclusion, and stigma in many countries. Couples and single parents may face assumptions that adults with diverse SOGIESC are non-reproductive, exist outside of 'normal' families, and cannot or should not conceive, carry, adopt, or access fertility treatments to have children. Deeply offensive myths persist that people with diverse SOGIESC are more likely to abuse, harm, or neglect children, or are less capable of raising happy and healthy children. Trans and gender diverse people going through pregnancy and pre- and post-natal healthcare, also face lack of health provider knowledge, stigma, misgendering, and other aspects of exclusion and mistreatment.¹⁶³



Humanitarian Responses

Plan International's work in humanitarian crises recognises that in times of major crisis, when social structures, support networks and services break down, communities and States may not be in a position to protect and care for children and young people. Specific attention is needed for the rights, needs and strengths of children and young people with diverse SOGIESC in emergencies.

People with diverse SOGIESC often face profound exclusion in humanitarian response. Harmful social norms, legal discrimination, and social and economic factors that exist before a humanitarian crisis contribute to

precarity which can undermine the resilience of people with diverse SOGIESC. Those factors continue to prevail once a crisis occurs and relief efforts begin, and they also pervade recovery, further entrenching disadvantage for people with diverse SOGIESC.

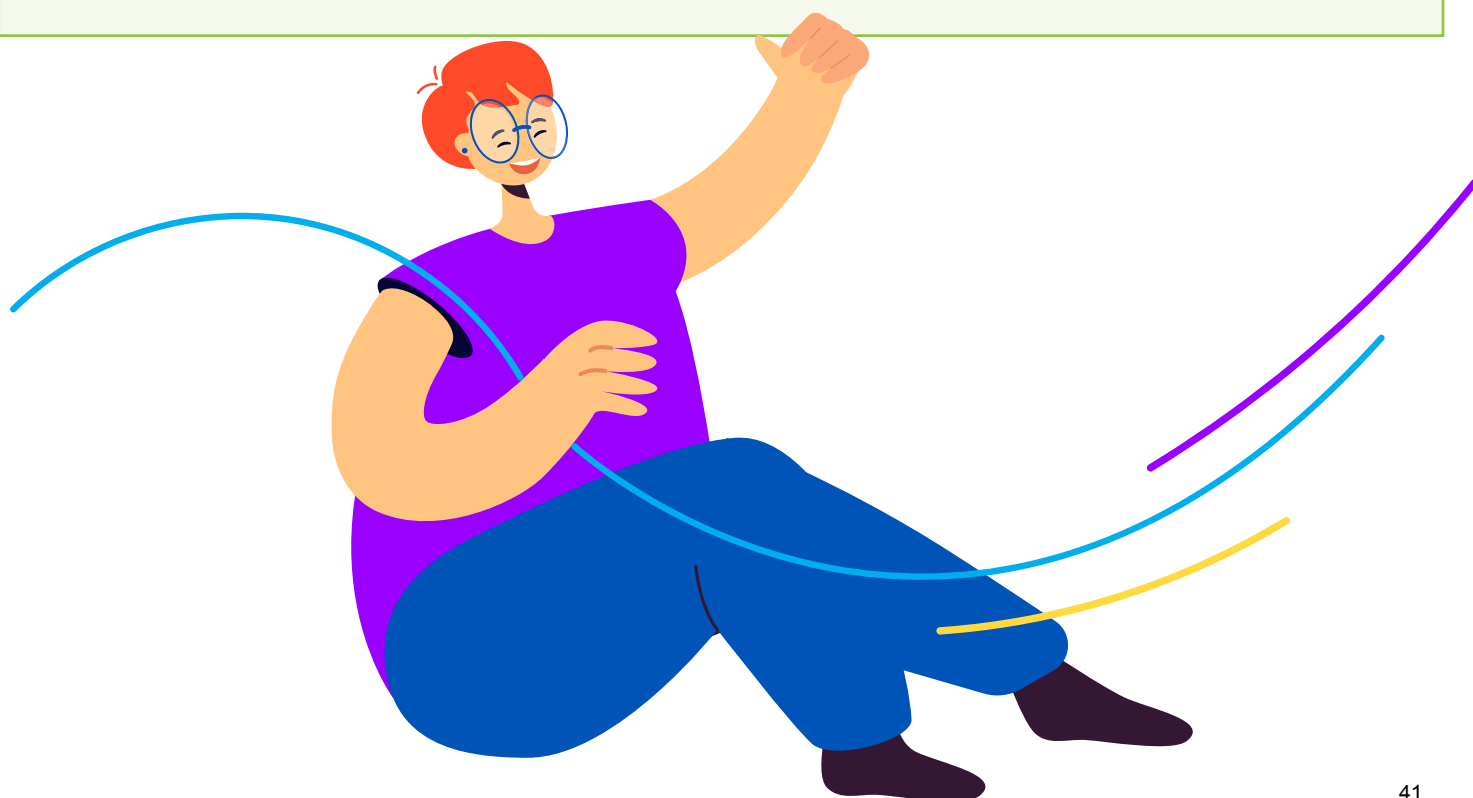
However humanitarian needs assessments, programme designs, and funding appeals often overlook people with diverse SOGIESC. Even as sector-wide humanitarian standards and principles mandate non-discriminatory and rights-based approaches, hostile legal and social contexts can restrict the extent to which these are applied in practice. Specific policy and guidance for inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC in Protection and in thematic areas of humanitarian response is often limited or non-existent.

Plan International's Position

- Plan International recognises that people with diverse SOGIESC have acute and specific needs in crises (especially because of gender-based violence) including disasters, conflicts, and complex emergencies that compound the complexities that they experience pre-disaster, conflict or emergency, and discrimination in relief and recovery efforts.
- Plan International strongly affirms that meeting the needs of people with diverse SOGIESC in humanitarian crises is consistent with the humanitarian principle of humanity and the obligation under the impartiality principle to meet needs wherever they exist, and that this does not constitute special treatment.
- Plan International will strengthen its capacity to address the rights, needs and strengths of people with diverse SOGIESC in crises, will strengthen and fund partnerships with diverse SOGIESC CSOs as humanitarian actors, and will support community-based response where it is safe to do so.
- Plan International will contribute to the development of evidence generation and policy and practice development to guide inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC in humanitarian responses.

Recommendations for other actors:

- State and non-state humanitarian actors with responsibility for funding, coordinating, delivering aid and upholding standards in humanitarian response should commit to significantly strengthen their work on diverse SOGIESC inclusion in humanitarian preparedness, relief and recovery.
- State and non-state humanitarian actors should ensure that their staff are trained in diverse SOGIESC inclusion in humanitarian crises. They should review systems and processes to ensure that harmful SOGIESC norms and practices are not replicated through their own work or that of their partners. Organisations that develop specific capacities to work with diverse SOGIESC CSOs and communities are more likely to deliver relevant and dignified assistance and to mitigate risk in ways that still allow as much humanitarian aid to reach people with diverse SOGIESC as possible.
- Organisations that conduct needs assessments should recognise the needs of people with diverse SOGIESC and take into account needs emerging from pre-emergency marginalisation as well as ongoing discrimination, violence and exclusion during humanitarian crises. Recognising and addressing such needs are consistent with a principled approach and do not constitute special treatment.
- State and non-state humanitarian actors should engage and fund diverse SOGIESC CSOs as local actors consistent with sector commitments to localisation, accountability to affected people and participation. This includes participation in design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian assistance. When diverse SOGIESC CSOs and other organised groups provide humanitarian aid within their communities they should be recognised and supported as humanitarian actors.





Key Issues

People with diverse SOGIESC face significant **pre-emergency marginalisation** – as outlined in the above discussion of SOYEE, SRHR, PfV, IQE, LEAD and ECD, which places them at risk of experiencing the worst effects of humanitarian crises. For example, people with diverse SOGIESC are more likely to live in poverty, be isolated from family and social support networks, and to face discrimination in service provision¹⁶⁴.

Criminalisation and other forms of legal discrimination that isolate and marginalise people with diverse SOGIESC and their community organisations also contribute to pre-emergency marginalisation and may exclude people with diverse SOGIESC from disaster risk reduction and other preparedness opportunities.

Sexual and gender-based violence generally increases during humanitarian crises and emergencies, particularly those involving conflict and complex emergencies¹⁶⁵.

Violence against people based on their actual or perceived SOGIESC and based on harmful gender norms also increases¹⁶⁶. These issues have also been examined by the UN IE SOGI who noted that:¹⁶⁷ ‘LGBT persons are subjected to different forms of violence during armed conflict that range from systematic threats to the imposition of gendered and sexualised norms of conduct aimed at regulating “normal” or “acceptable individuals” in conflict-affected areas. This violence also entails rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as torture, unlawful killings, persecution, and other attacks to LGBT persons’ physical and mental integrity.’

People with diverse SOGIESC may face **direct discrimination, violence, and mistreatment in the delivery of aid**, from UN workers, international and national NGOs, faith and state actors, and broader communities¹⁶⁸. People with diverse SOGIESC also commonly face **indirect discrimination**, such as:¹⁶⁹

- Being excluded in practice from needs assessments that use heteronormative families or households as the main unit of analysis, without considering that people with diverse SOGIESC are commonly excluded from and within households, and sometimes form chosen families.
- People with diverse SOGIESC may not be considered in programme design. For example, in the case of WASH or protection programmes that do not consider how prejudice and stigma shape trans community access to (and exclusion from) public spaces, such as public toilets and taps, camps, and food and medicine distribution.
- People with diverse SOGIESC may exclude themselves from receiving aid if they perceive distribution systems to be unsafe or the provision of services to lack relevance for their lives. For example, if response is managed by religious or state actors with histories of hostility or indifference to people with diverse SOGIESC.
- People with diverse SOGIESC are sometimes blamed for causing disasters, for example as divine punishment for their supposed sins. Rumours during crises may also implicate people with diverse SOGIESC as the cause of problems experienced by other people.
- Views amongst some humanitarian actors that addressing the needs of people with diverse SOGIESC entails special treatment at odds with the humanitarian principle of impartiality.

One effect is that communities of people with diverse SOGIEC often need to organise and secure resources themselves to meet the humanitarian needs of communities¹⁷⁰. Such **community-led response efforts** can be effective but may be managed without support from the formal humanitarian community, putting create strain on community organisations and individuals also impacted by crisis. While diverse SOGIESC CSOs may be able to redirect funds and capacity to humanitarian response these CSOs may have limited technical capacity in humanitarian response, may be marginalised by the humanitarian coordination system, and may have other competing priorities.

Annex 1: Glossary and acronyms

SOGIESC Glossary

Bi/Bisexual	A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender identity. Amongst people with diverse sexual orientations are also pansexual people (attraction to all gender identities), polysexual people (attraction to many but not all gender identities) and other identities.
Cis/cisgender	A person whose gender identity corresponds with their sex assigned at birth.
Cisnormativity	The assumption or expectation that all people are or should be cisgender, which is often inscribed in laws, institutions, and social practices.
Endosexism	The assumption or expectation that all people's physical sex characteristics align with medical or societal expectations of male or female bodies (see intersex and sex characteristics).
Gay	A person whose primary emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction is to people of the same gender. This term is most often used by gay men but is also used by other people with diverse sexualities.
Gender Binarism	The assumption or expectation that the gender of all people is either woman or man.
Gender Diverse	A person whose gender does not fit within the binary or other normative expectations of gender identity or gender expression, including notions that gender is fixed. There are many ways in which gender diverse people may identify, including gender fluid, gender non-binary, gender queer, agender and a wide range of cultural gender groups that blend diversity of gender and sexuality.
Gender Expression	Each person's presentation of the person's gender through physical appearance – including dress, hairstyles, accessories, cosmetics – and mannerisms, speech, behavioural patterns, names and personal references, and noting further that gender expression may or may not conform to a person's gender identity ^A .
Gender Identity	Refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body and other expressions of gender.
Heteronormativity	The assumption or expectation that all people are or should be heterosexual in their sexual orientation, which is often inscribed in law, institutions, and social practices.
Heterosexual	A person who is romantically and sexually attracted to people from the opposite gender (in a system in which it is assumed there are only two genders).
Intersex People	Intersex people have innate sex characteristics that don't fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies, and that create risks or experiences of stigma, discrimination and harm ^B .

Lesbian	A woman whose primary emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction is to another woman. Gender diverse people may also identify as lesbians.
LBQ	Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer women/communities
LBT	Lesbian, Bisexual, and Trans women/communities
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, and Queer/Questioning (the “+” is used to signify an inclusive approach to all people with diverse SOGIESC). These are cultural identity categories, that may or may not be relevant in all countries and cultural contexts. Note: being intersex is a physical condition and intersex people may or may not describe themselves as identifying as intersex.
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
Sex Assigned at Birth	The sex that a newborn is believed to be at birth, based on genitalia and other sex characteristics, and often recorded on the birth certificate.
Sex Characteristics	Physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, genitals, gonads, hormones, and other reproductive anatomy, and secondary features that emerge from puberty ^C .
Sexual Orientation	Refers to each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
SOGIESC and diverse SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics. SOGIESC is language drawn from human rights discourse and a protected characteristic. All people have SOGIESC and diverse SOGIESC is used to refer to forms of SOGIESC of LGBTIQ+ people which are currently non-normative in many countries and cultures ^D .
Trans/transgender	A person whose gender is different from the gender usually associated with their sex assigned at birth. This may involve - if chosen freely - modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms ^E .

Note: These terms and phrases in English may or may not translate easily to other languages. Other languages and cultures may have their own terms or may not have separate terms for gender or sex, or other terms commonly used in English-language discourse about diversity of SOGIESC. When working in other languages ensure that the terms used are respectful and accurate, as there are many slang terms that should be avoided. Consult with local diverse SOGIESC community members of CSOs to understand terms and phrases used in the place where you are working.

(A) See Yogyakarta Principles +10.

(B) Intersex Human Rights Australia 2021 What Is Intersex? (<https://ihra.org.au/18106/what-is-intersex/>). Accessed July 2023.

(C) Intersex Human Rights Australia 2021 What Is Intersex? (<https://ihra.org.au/18106/what-is-intersex/>). Accessed July 2023.

(D) Diversity of SOGIESC is in some ways more inclusive of people whose diversity of sexuality and/or gender is not reflected in or reducible to the categories in the LGBTIQ+ acronym. Plan International recognises that people with diverse SOGIESC may have a range of terms in their own languages or may use other phrasing or may prefer a version of the LGBTIQ+ acronym. Plan International respects the language choices made by people with diverse SOGIESC (which may also reflect security concerns) and will adapt to use language in specific contexts that is preferred by local civil society organisations and individuals.

(E) See Yogyakarta Principles +10.

Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CEFMU	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Unions
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECD	Early Childhood Development
IE SOGI	UN Independent Expert on Protection from Violence and Discrimination based on SOGI
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IQE	Inclusive and Quality Education
LEAD	Girls, Boys and Youth as Active Drivers of Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PfV	Protection from Violence
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SOYEE	Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

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6. For example, the UN Special Rapporteur for Health has noted: violence targeting people with diverse SOGIESC is “rooted in the desire to punish people whose identities, expressions and bodies do not conform to the heteronormative, man/woman binary system”. She further notes that violence has major health consequences including, in the case of LGBTIQ+ youth, “higher levels of mental health disorders, with suicide attempts 3–7 times more likely for LGBTIQ+ youth compared with heterosexual youth”.
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23. Institute for Research on Poverty (2021) [The Complexity of LGBT Poverty in The United States](#). Policy Brief No. 53-2021, June 2021.
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27. HRW (2012) [UN: Ban Ki-Moon Condemns Homophobic Laws](#).
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37. OHCHR (2015) [Twelve UN agencies issue unprecedented joint statement on rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender & intersex people](#).
38. See for example: UN Free and Equal (2014) <https://www.unfe.org/sexual-orientation-gender-identity-nothing-new/>
39. Human Rights Watch (2008) [This Alien Legacy: The Origins of “Sodomy” Laws in British Colonialism](#)
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104. Data from one US study shows bisexual women are more likely than heterosexual women to report IPV, and more likely than heterosexual women to report Intimate Partner Sexual Assault (IPSA). Age, race and ethnicity, disability, and gender identity are also strong factors for experiencing IPV and IPSA 9 (See Brown, Taylor N.T. and Herman, Jody L. (2015) *Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People: A Review of Existing Research*. Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. See also Waters, Emily (2016) [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence](#) in 2015. New York, NY: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programmes (NCAVP). One study of South Africa noted that lesbians may form heterosexual partnerships to avoid scrutiny of their sexual orientation and that in these relationships they may experience IPV from men (see Mampane, Johannes N. (2020). *Susceptible Lives: Gender-based Violence, Young Lesbian Women and HIV Risk in a Rural Community in South Africa*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(6), 249-264). One comparative study of MSM and IPV across six countries including South Africa and Brazil found "universality of violence reporting" regarding IPV (see Finneran C, Chard A, Sineath C, Sullivan P, Stephenson R. *Intimate Partner Violence and Social Pressure among Gay Men in Six Countries*. *West J Emerg Med*. 2012 Aug;13(3):260-71. doi: 10.5811/westjem.2012.3.11779.).
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 172. LGBTIQ+ staff at Plan International do not feel as able to bring the best of themselves to work, compared with non-LGBTIQ+ colleagues. This is particularly the case for LGBTIQ+ staff experiencing multiple inequalities. Whilst 75% of staff who are heterosexual men say they are supported to 'bring the best of myself to work', this figure is just 52% for LGBTIQ+ women and gender minorities. Source: Plan International (2020) *ibid*.
 173. Edge Effect (2020) *ibid*, p.56
 174. Edge Effect (2020) *ibid*; Plan International (2021) *Getting it Right on SOGIESC*.
 175. Feinstein International Center (2017) *Stop the Sexual Assault Against Development and Humanitarian Aid Workers*.
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 177. For example, Plan International's (2021) *Global Safeguarding Survey Results* show that 58% of staff have concerns in relation to discrimination of programme participants, and the most common discrimination concerns were around gender/gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, and race.
 178. Plan International's (2021) *Global Safeguarding Survey Results* show programme participants who identify as lesbian or gay, and those with disabilities, had the lowest confidence in all areas of safeguarding reporting. Additionally, between an estimated 4% and 8% of programme participants in various countries/regions would be reluctant to make a report due to negative attitudes towards people of diverse SOGIESC.



About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

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