



INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY FOR MISSION SUPPORT (IDAMS)

USAID/TIMOR-LESTE LGBTQI+ INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

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ACRONYMS

ANAPMA	National Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Agency (of Timor-Leste)
CBRN	Community-Based Rehabilitation Network (of Timor-Leste)
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CODIVA	Coalition for Diversity and Action
CSO	Civil society organization
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DNAP	Disability National Action Plan
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
FONGTIL	Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations of Timor-Leste
GBV	Gender-based violence
GESI	Gender equity and social inclusion
GoTL	Government of Timor-Leste
ID	Inclusive development
IDA	Inclusive development analysis
IDAMS	Inclusive Development Activity for Mission Support
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementing Partner
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KII	Key informant interview
KOICA	Korean International Cooperation Agency
KP	Association of Progressive Communities
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those with other diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
MSSI	Ministry of Social and Solidarity and Inclusion
NAP	National Action Plan
OCA	Organizational capacity assessment
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PARTISIPA	Partnership to Strengthen Village Development and Municipal Administration
PHD	Partnership for Human Development
PNTL	Timor-Leste National Police

SASCAS	Serviço de Apoio a Sociedade Civil e Auditoria Social
SEII	Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAWC	Violence against women and children
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
VPU	Vulnerable Persons Unit

PURPOSE

This Inclusive Development Analysis (IDA) was conducted under the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Inclusive Development Activity for Mission Support (IDAMS). The IDA aims to support future designs across the USAID/Timor-Leste and address existing knowledge gaps on the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those with other diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (LGBTQI+).¹ The analysis explores the intersection of LGBTQI+ individuals and their economic opportunities, civic and political involvement, and factors affecting their well-being (such as health and exposure to violence). This includes both the organizations they trust and currently engage with and an assessment of the potential for trust among well-known organizations and current USAID implementing partners (IPs).

The IDA seeks to connect findings and recommendations with the realities of the Government of Timor-Leste's (GoTL's) investment in social capital that targets social inclusion, culture, education, health, and environment. Focusing on social inclusion and the cultural context in conjunction with USAID's investments will support recommendations for future programming—good practices for inclusion across economic growth opportunities, education opportunities, state-building and policy development processes, access to health care, response to and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV), and others. The main objectives of this analysis are to:

- Document (from an emic perspective) the needs of and opportunities for diverse LGBTQI+ populations in Timor-Leste
- Locate current and potential local partners that the LGBTQI+ communities trust
- Identify opportunities and develop concrete recommendations to adapt existing activities to strengthen inclusion in remaining periods of performance

METHODOLOGY

The following overarching research questions guided the IDA:

1. How have USAID and its IPs programmed for inclusive development (ID) across the USAID/Timor-Leste portfolio through stand-alone inclusion activities or ID integration into sectoral programs? How have they specifically integrated LGBTQI+ people's needs and issues they face into programming? What relationships have USAID and its IPs cultivated with LGBTQI+ organizations and key people?
2. How do LGBTQI+ individuals and organizations that represent them understand existing challenges, specific needs, opportunities, and capacities to advance LGBTQI+ people's rights and inclusion in relevant national social, economic, cultural, and political processes?
3. What are the GoTL and other donors/funders doing to encourage inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals in Timor-Leste?
4. How do local communities perceive and define inclusion? What behaviors and attitudes exist about marginalized populations and LGBTQI+ individuals in particular?
5. What good ID practices exist locally and regionally across civil society? What else is needed?
6. What improvements can be made across the Timor-Leste development community to strengthen ID efforts, especially as they affect LGBTQI+ people?

The IDA consisted of a thorough review of literature, including more than 40 documents such as government reports, USAID documents, civil society organizations' (CSOs') reports, and literature specific

¹ We use the term LGBTQI+ throughout this document while acknowledging that local communities in Timor-Leste use a wide array of terms to refer to themselves and Indigenous understandings of gender and sexual identities.

to the LGBTQI+ population. The IDA key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) took place over a 2-week period with travel to Baucau, Dili, Ermera, and Manatuto. *Table 1* provides a breakdown of interviews by municipality and category of representation.

Table 1. Number of participants engaged in data collection by location

LOCATION	DATA COLLECTION METHOD		
	KIIS	FGDS: GROUPS (# OF PARTICIPANTS)	TOTAL # OF PARTICIPANTS
Dili	15	1 (6)	21
Ermera	7	1 (4)	11
Dili	8	1 (4)	12
Baucau	10	0	10
Dili	6	1 (4)	10
Manatuto	1	0	1
TOTAL	47	4 (16)	65*

**Seven individuals participated in both KIIs and an FGD.*

The IDAMS Team Lead spent the first day in Dili training the data collection team on topics such as ethics and sensitivities of interviews focused on LGBTQI+ individuals (including a review of related terminology); confidentiality clauses; review of protocols; introduction to USAID and the IDAMS mechanism; tips for conducting KIIs and FGDs; a review of roles, responsibilities, and expectations; and related logistics.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

SELECTION BIAS. It was challenging for the team to access rurally based LGBTQI+ populations who do not already work or volunteer with LGBTQI+-focused organizations. This was partly due to the lack of local team members who associate themselves with the LGBTQI+ community, and partly due to LGBTQI+ people's lack of willingness to speak openly about their identity and the challenges they face. In addition, attitudes in rural areas are generally less supportive of LGBTQI+ people and policies, and rural states are significantly less likely to have local organizing. Consequently, the team interviewed many of the same LGBTQI+ individuals who had been part of previous studies. While these interviews were necessary and sufficient, having additional perspectives from rural populations and those less engaged in existing LGBTQI+ activities would have further supported this IDA. Before the IDA, the team suggested partnering with a local LGBTQI+ CSO; however, the Mission raised concerns over possible perceptions of favoritism, particularly with the anticipation of a future LGBTQI+-focused procurement.

REPRESENTATION. The team had a balance of men and women who were knowledgeable of health, democracy and governance, and education in Timor-Leste; however, the team lacked representation of LGBTQI+ identities. This inhibited the early establishment of trust, access to LGBTQI+ individuals in rural areas, and an intimate understanding of local dynamics LGBTQI+ individuals face, including psychological and physiological elements. The team reviewed more than 60 applicants for the three local positions and interviewed approximately 10 people who met the position criteria. The local team brought strong connections with LGBTQI+ community leaders to support beneficial access to LGBTQI+ counterparts and individuals.

SITE SELECTIONS. The team selected municipalities primarily based on USAID's engagement in these locations. The team discovered that more time was needed in Dili because many employed LGBTQI+ individuals tended to commute from their home municipality. The lack of available GoTL representatives in Bobonaro and the cancellation of LGBTQI+ FGD led the team to shift the 2-day visit back to Dili. Half of

the assessment team stopped in Manatuto to conduct an interview; the other half conducted six more interviews in Dili.

TIMOR-LESTE CONTEXT

Timor-Leste declared its independence following the Portuguese revolution and abandonment of its colony Timor in 1974. After the Portuguese abandonment, civil war broke out among political parties in August 1975, followed by an Indonesian military invasion in December. Timor-Leste's attempt to become an independent nation was met with resistance, and the island was annexed as the 27th province of Indonesia. Between 1975 and 1999, more than 100,000 lives (10 percent of the total population) were lost to killings and famine. At a referendum in 1999, most of the population voted in favor of independence. On May 20, 2002, Timor-Leste finally restored its independence and was officially recognized by the United Nations and the world. The country has sustained peace and stability since independence and continues to strive for the inclusion of its vulnerable people. The prospects for this young country are grand.

The island of Timor-Leste's estimated population is 1.4 million, with over a third of the population under the age of 14. Further, with 70 percent of the population under age 30, Timor-Leste is one of the youngest countries in the world.² Health metrics in Timor-Leste continue to be alarming. As of August 2022, one in two children under 5 is stunted, nearly 9 percent suffer from acute malnutrition, and 1:24 will die before their fifth birthday.³

According to the World Bank, as of 2022, the GDP per capita is \$2,358. In 2020, the [Human Capital Index](#) for Timor-Leste stood at 0.45, compared to the East Asia and Pacific's regional average of 0.59. A healthier and more skilled workforce is necessary to better meet future labor demands across the economy.⁴ To achieve a stronger workforce, education is key. The GoTL's vision is for all individuals to have access to quality education to participate in economic, social, and political development opportunities. Promoting inclusive education is one of the government's priorities, cited in [the National Education Strategic Plan 2011–2030](#). A crucial role of the Ministry of Education is to make sure the education system is inclusive and accessible to every citizen.

A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) partner, Transforming Education in Timor-Leste, reports net enrollment growth of 16 percent in the last 5 years. Yet, dropout and repetition rates remain high. While neither the national census nor the civil society capture specific figures for LGBTQI+ individuals, there is great concern for their fair treatment and equal access to educational opportunities.

In 2002, civil society was a key force behind Timor-Leste's independence from Portuguese colonization and Indonesian occupation. Civil society continues to play a crucial role in the country's development⁵ and in advancing LGBTQI+ individuals' rights and social integration.

TIMOR-LESTE LGBTQI+ CONTEXT

Researchers across the globe identify causal linkages between a country's history of armed conflict and high levels of domestic violence, sexual assault, and GBV. President Ramos Horta is proud of the country's recovery from years of conflict and transition to a peaceful society.⁶ Timor-Leste has sustained peace for more than 20 years and continues on a positive trajectory for a healthy future. However, the LGBTQI+ community remains affected by the years of trauma that have yet to heal. Decades of conflict and the subsequent militarized masculinity can normalize violence. Violent expressions of masculinity often result

² More information available [here](#).

³ UNICEF. May 2022 and August 2022. "Child Survival and Development."

⁴ More information available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/timor-leste/overview>

⁵ Abt Associates. 2023. *Civic Engagement Is Creating a More Equitable Health System in Timor-Leste*.

⁶ Channel News Asia, *Interview with Jose Ramos-Horta*, December 2022.

from unresolved trauma and further sanction violence in the home, especially GBV and intimate partner violence (IPV).

The island's struggle for autonomy over the years and the conservative Catholic church's influence further support the homogeneous culture of Timorese people, creating an even more binary perception of sex and heteronormativity. While Timor-Leste is a secular state, approximately 97 percent of the population identifies as Catholic.

The combination of a high population of youth and a normalization of violence and its association with masculinity creates the potential for ongoing GBV. A 2015 study by Nabilan, a GBV program funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and The Asia Foundation, found that "59% of men who perpetrated rape did so for the first time when they were teenagers." The study also reported that IPV in Timor-Leste is "driven by gender inequality, is upheld by the normalisation of violence, and is informed by a model of masculinity that promotes male dominance and sexual entitlement over women."⁷

REGIONAL LGBTQI+ CONTEXT

While globally, there has been significant progress in recognizing the rights of LGBTQI+ people due to rapidly changing societal attitudes and legal progress, in many states, an accompanying rise in widespread, religious, and political homophobia persists. These conflicting and frequently contradictory dynamics are particularly evident in Southeast Asia, where some great leaps forward in protecting the rights of LGBTQI+ people have occurred in parallel with recent substantial setbacks. Southeast Asia comprises 11 countries with wide religious, cultural, and historical diversity, translating into a dual pace on LGBTQI+ people's rights. Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia recently made international headlines for regressive political rhetoric and adverse legal developments regarding the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals. In 2019, Brunei famously became one of only three countries in Asia with death penalty legal provisions for consensual same-sex acts.⁸ Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar are also among the 68 remaining countries worldwide that criminalize same-sex relationships. A good illustration of this dance between progress and setbacks is the situation in Malaysia. In late 2014, a Malaysian Appeals Court ruled that a ban on cross-dressing was unconstitutional. Yet, in the summer of 2023, the Government of Malaysia criminalized a specific set of swatch watches because they bear a rainbow color scheme.

Many of these laws and regressive societal attitudes are linked to a legacy of British and Portuguese colonial rule. Sara Niner, an expert in the field of gender and international development with a particular interest in those issues in the post-conflict environment of Timor-Leste, claims that "customary society in Timor did include non-binary forms of gender expression, but this remains under-researched and undocumented." The United Kingdom wrote laws to criminalize homosexuality into the Indian Penal Code implemented in the 1860s. This legislation was then copied across the empire. Section 377, which criminalizes "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" and its variations continues to exist in many former British colonies more than 160 years later. In a landmark case, in 2018, India repealed it, following years of legal challenges. In Singapore, the equivalent legislation was eliminated in 2023.

While Timor-Leste is Southeast Asia's newest and poorest independent country, it is also one of the more accepting of LGBTQI+ inclusion—the *Franklin & Marshal Global Barometer* ratings on the Global Barometer of Gay Rights (GBGR) are 67 percent and the Global Barometer of Transgender Rights (GBTR) 59 percent. These ratings may seem low; yet, comparatively, they are very similar to those of the United States (74 and 59 percent, respectively) and a great improvement from its neighbor Indonesia (19 and 12

⁷ More information available at: https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/nabilan-main-report-screen-2017_06_08.pdf

⁸ The Brunei penal code imposes the death penalty (by stoning) for the so-called crimes of Zina, or sex between unmarried couples (articles 68 and 69), and liwat, or anal sex (article 82).

percent, respectively).⁹ In addition, Timor-Leste continues on an upward trajectory with increases of 35 percent (see *Table 2*).

Table 2. GBGR and GBTR Scores 2011 versus 2020

COUNTRY	GBGR SCORE 2011	GBGR SCORE 2020	DIFFERENCE	GBTR SCORE 2011	GBTR SCORE 2020	DIFFERENCE
Timor-Leste	44%	67%	23%	24%	59%	35%
Indonesia	15%	19%	4%	12%	12%	0%
Thailand	70%	74%	4%	53%	82%	29%

Timor-Leste does not criminalize same-sex sexual activity, and Article 59 of the 2009 Penal Code stipulates that any discrimination based on gender identity will be considered illegal. There are few other protective laws:¹⁰ hate crimes legislation includes sexual orientation but not gender identity; there are no hate speech protections; there is no recognition of relationships; there is no legal path for gender recognition; and gender-diverse persons are banned from serving in the military. Although the GoTL has not widely integrated LGBTQI+ equities across policies or the *Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste* (the Constitution), they do expressively support LGBTQI+ rights through the signing of the *UN Human Rights Council Joint Statement on Ending Acts of Violence Related to Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in 2011*.¹¹

Former prime minister of Timor-Leste, Rui Maria de Araújo (2015–2017), was the first leader in Southeast Asia to support LGBTQI+ rights publicly, condemning prejudice based on sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. The general public and specific church figures also openly supported the Pride Parade, which was held for the first time in 2017 and continued to occur in 2018 and 2019. In 2022, after a 2-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 5,000 people attended the march. Several political leaders also participated in the festivities, and the Pride Parade ended at the presidential palace, where President Ramos-Horta expressed support for LGBTQI+ people’s equality. The geopolitical impact of Timor-Leste’s leadership on these issues in the region is essential. Yet, the fundamental rights of LGBTQI+ people are far from being comprehensively protected in the country.

POLITICAL LGBTQI+ CONTEXT

In Timor-Leste, there is a lack of sex education in schools and reproductive health care, including the use of condoms as a protective measure to avoid pregnancy and disease. Research found that 18 percent of men who have sex with men and 43 percent of transgender persons were refused health services (2021).¹²

While Article 59 of the Timor-Leste penal code prohibits discrimination based on gender identity, there are no laws and regulations that explicitly forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression, or sex characteristics. In the exhaustive list of grounds upon which discrimination is prohibited

⁹ Franklin & Marshal. 2020. *Global Barometer Annual Report*. Available at: <https://www.fandmglobalbarometers.org/countries/timor-leste/>.

¹⁰ Article 52 of the Penal Code states “(i) General aggravating circumstances may include the following: (A) The crime motivated by racism, or any other discriminatory sentiment on grounds of gender, ideology, religion or beliefs, ethnicity, nationality, sex, sexual orientation, illness or physical disability of the victim.”

¹¹ UN Human Rights Council. 22 March 2011. *Joint Statement on Ending Acts of Violence Related Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. Available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4eb8f32e2.html>.

¹² *Health Systems Sustainability Activity, Timor-Leste GESI Action Plan, 2021*.

in Section 16.2 of the Constitution, there is no reference to gender identity and expression or sexual orientation as a basis of discrimination.

INTERSEX CONTEXT

Intersex people are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit the normative definitions for male or female bodies. For some intersex people, these are apparent at birth, while for others, they emerge later in life, often at puberty. Intersex persons may have any sexual orientation or gender identity.

The critical human rights and health issue for most intersex people is prohibiting genital surgery on intersex infants when it is not medically necessary. The World Health Organization, three former U.S. surgeons-general, Physicians for Human Rights, the AIS-DSD Support Group for intersex people and their families, Amnesty International, United Nations (UN) experts, Lambda Legal, the American Civil Liberties Union, two American pediatrics professional bodies, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and intersex-led organizations worldwide all condemn medically unnecessary surgery on intersex children.

Intersex people face significant stigma and bias; typically receive comparatively low-quality health care; lack access to medical records; and may lack necessary medical insurance coverage for specific, often lifesaving, hormonal treatments and other treatments related to mutilation surgery complications (i.e., dialyses).

Reference to sexual orientation was removed from the draft Constitution after a debate in the Constituent Assembly, mainly due to fears this would allow for same-sex marriage. Timor-Leste has no laws or policies allowing transgender persons to change their gender identity on their identity cards and documents. This results in the gender identity and expression of transgender people not aligning with their legal gender recorded on official documents. This study does not include the experiences of intersex LGBTQI+ people due to the unavailability of information in the context of Timor-Leste. However, some background on this issue is provided in the text box above. This was also the case in the *Free & Equal* study on discrimination and access to education.

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)

At the UPR of Timor-Leste in the Human Rights Council in 2016, the country accepted two recommendations on LGBTQI+ people's rights: (1) to strengthen the legal framework to secure gender equality and ban discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity; and (2) to develop and adopt legal and administrative measures to investigate and punish acts of discrimination, stigmatization, and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons. However, tangible legislative reforms are yet to be implemented, and government agencies require better resourcing and training to respond to discrimination effectively, one of the conclusions of this report.

Similar recommendations have been made to Timor-Leste during the UPR working group in January 2022. Once again, the country supported the recommendations, but a sign of true integration is lacking.

Beyond the legal framework, opportunities for LGBTQI+ people in different fields, such as education, employment, and health, are limited, and the COVID-19 pandemic and related regulations have only deepened these limitations. GBV against the gay community remains high.

KEY FINDINGS

PART I: GOTL, DONORS, AND IPS

The first section of Key Findings centers on how the GoTL, donors, LGBTQI+ individuals, and representative CSOs define inclusion and what is being done to encourage and integrate the inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals.

GOVERNMENT OF TIMOR-LESTE

The GoTL continues to show some level of openness, but there are no official documents that expressly target LGBTQI+ individuals in their policies, programming, or budget. Since the island's independence, the GoTL has embraced and used broadly the terms "inclusion" and "vulnerable groups." However, these terms consistently only refer to women, children, older people, and persons with disabilities.

The *New Action Plan for Gender-Based Violence 2022–2032* (NAP-GBV) is the only official document that minimally includes language focused on LGBTQI+ people. It uses the following definition: "The acronym LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex. It is an umbrella term which is used to refer to individuals who fall outside of heteronormative constructions of sexual orientation and gender identity." The nearly 50-page document has one other entry that states, "In Timor-Leste, women and girls are disproportionately affected [by GBV]; however, men and boys can also be victims of GBV and people within the LGBTI community are also frequently affected by GBV."

The GoTL has a maze of units focused on inclusion in a well-woven web. This newly independent state is quite supportive in its desire to secure overall equity and inclusion. When the new (and the first) government was stood up in 2002, gender- and inclusion-related work was directly under the Prime Minister's Office through the Advisory Unit for Promotion of Equality. The office supported the inclusion narrative into the 2002 Timor-Leste Constitution, which reads, "All citizens are equal before the law, shall exercise the same rights, and shall be subject to the same duties. No one shall be discriminated against on grounds of colour, race, marital status, gender, ethnical origin, language, social or economic status, political or ideological convictions, religion, education, and physical or mental condition." Any suggestions to amend this wording to include sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) were rejected.

In 2007, through decree-law No. 7/2007, the unit legally became the Secretary of State for Promotion and Equality.¹³ In 2012, the unit's name shifted to Secretary of State for Women and Economic Empowerment¹⁴ to promote improved socioeconomic conditions for women. The work around inclusion started to gain momentum within government institutions when, in 2017, the name of the Secretariat was again changed to Secretary of State for Gender and Social Inclusion¹⁵ and yet again to the Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion (SEII) in 2019.¹⁶ Finally, during the preparation of this report, SEII changed again under the new administration to SEI, removing inclusion from its acronym and passing responsibilities of inclusion to the Ministry of Social and Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI). For the purposes of this report, the acronym SEII will be used to align with the institution's name at the time this research was conducted.

The many shifts in title make it evident that the government continues to struggle to agree on how best to support and provide services to vulnerable populations and women and promote equality and inclusion. Using the word *inclusion* as part of the official name of a government institution is vital for Timor-Leste because it empowers local government entities, civil society, and the donor community that aim to align their efforts with GoTL's inclusion practices and policies. To date, GoTL does not include a specific focus

¹³ More information available at: https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2008/serie_1/serie1_no22.pdf

¹⁴ More information available at: https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2016/serie_1/SERIE_1_NO_17.pdf

¹⁵ More information available at: https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2008/serie_1/serie1_no22.pdf

¹⁶ More information available at: https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2019/serie_1/SERIE_1_NO_27_A.pdf

on LGBTQI+ individuals or a SOGIESC narrative in official GoTL documents. However, there are publications, speeches, and media outlets where government officials are outspoken about the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people. The latest examples were in support of the July 2023 Pride Parade and a recent news article talking about gender equality, where Maria Martins of SEII says: “This Integrated Approach to Gender Equality involves perspectives of all parties, including civil societies, people with disabilities, LGBTI groups and other vulnerable groups.”¹⁷

The most recent GoTL publications, released in January and July 2023, are the Legislative Plan and the 9th Constitutional Government’s Program, which summarizes public policies to be adopted during this term of office. The *Social Inclusion, Social Protection, and Social Solidarity* section in each document has four sub-areas of focus: women, children, older people, and vulnerable groups. There is no mention of LGBTQI+ individuals or SOGIESC. The vulnerable groups section focuses only on persons with disabilities.

The MSSI,¹⁸ previously known as the Ministry of Social Solidarity, is making great strides to promote inclusion, but still targets only persons with disabilities, women, and children—all classified as vulnerable groups. MSSI’s unit that oversees gender and women’s empowerment programs notes in their policy, “...including protection of women victims and vulnerable families, LGBTI, and people with disabilities.”

MSSI and DFAT, with Partnerships for Human Development (PHD) as the IP, supported the launch of the *Disability National Action Plan (DNAP) 2021–2030*, again with no mention of LGBTQI+ individuals. MSSI’s main role, according to decree law No. 09/2019, is to implement a social security system, promote humanitarian work, develop and provide social support and services to people in need, and protect and promote social reintegration of vulnerable groups. MSSI is also in charge of operationalizing the Referral Network (see *Figure 2*), which provides services to vulnerable populations, particularly those who are victims of GBV and domestic violence.¹⁹ This network, once again, is not inclusive of LGBTQI+-focused organizations. On the other hand, SEII’s role, according to the decree-law No. 17/2019, is to make sure gender equality is integrated into the law, public policies, and stated budget, to advocate for gender equality and inclusion, and to end violence against women and children (VAWC).

In interviews with GoTL members, they shared a variety of inclusion definitions, from “all services to all people, ordinary or disabled [sic] or LGBTI” to “treatment equally to all victims, no discrimination.”

Every citizen has a right to live free from discrimination and violence regardless of their sexual orientation. — SEII Respondent

Interviews with SEII revealed a great interest and practice to mainstream inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in Timor-Leste. Since 2016, four women serve as heads of national directorates of Financing, Gender and Inclusion, Gender Policy and Development, and Women’s Empowerment on Economic Growth. The Director General in charge of inspection and audit is also led by a woman. The SEII department is therefore “60 percent female and 40 percent male,” states an SEII interviewee. SEII works with several stakeholders in the inclusion space—the Spotlight Initiative (European Union [EU]–UN), Together for Equality (Korean International Cooperation Agency [KOICA]), UN Women, and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)—offering LGBTQI+ training sessions for SEII and other counterparts.

In addition, lateral cooperation with DFAT on GBV through The Asia Foundation has been in place since 2014. SEII has been a front-runner in adapting its documents and grants to ensure inclusion. In 2018, they revised policy and organizational law to focus on girls, LGBTQI+ people, and persons with disabilities.

¹⁷ More information available at: <https://en.tatoli.tl/2022/07/29/seii-integrated-approach-to-gender-equality-is-important-to-address-gender-inequality-in-tl/18/>

¹⁸ More information available at: https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2019/serie_1/SERIE_1_NO_19.pdf

¹⁹ Brown, Emily B. 2020. “USAID/Timor-Leste NGO Advocacy for Good Governance Activity Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis.” Prepared by Counterpart International.

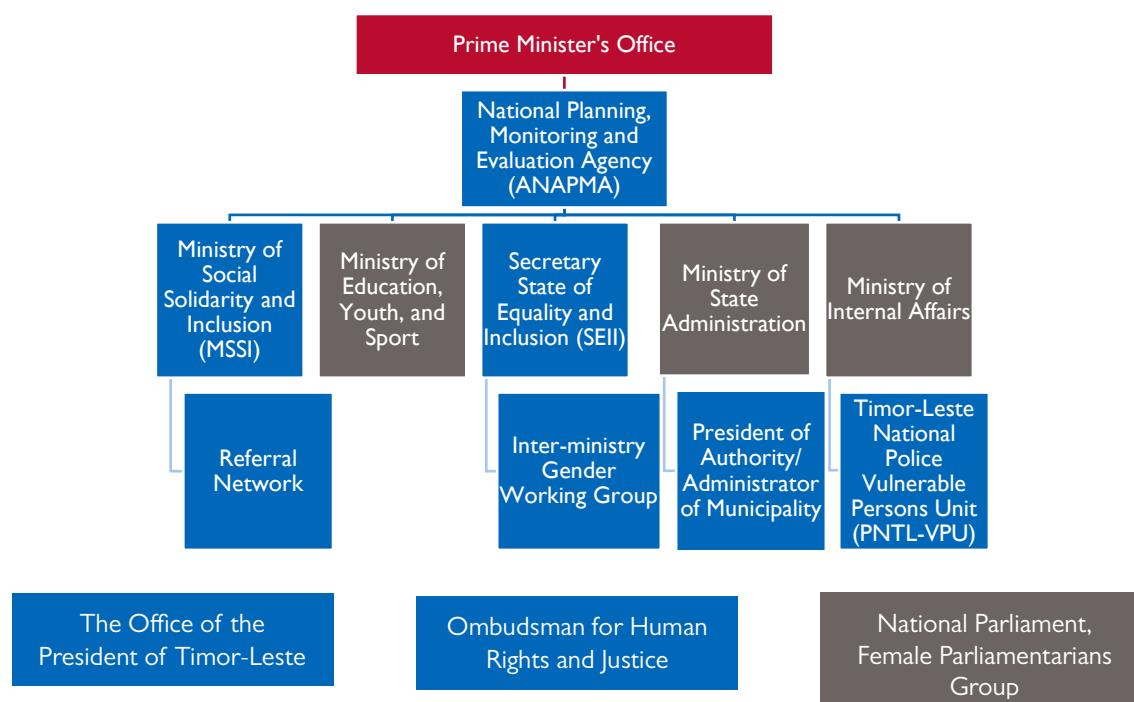
While this shows advancement, one SEII respondent noted that there remained taboo topics, such as same-sex marriage. While SEII at the central level is quite advanced in its thinking and policies, it is much more challenging to roll out policies at the local municipal and village levels because this requires community participation and buy-in. Finally, an SEII member noted that they had four grant streams: (1) gender mainstreaming, (2) GBV, (3) economic empowerment, and (4) human political decision-making, and they were yet to receive a grant application from an LGBTQI+ organization. The CSOs with whom this was raised were not aware of this opportunity and noted this was likely due to a lack of marketing or encouragement for LGBTQI+ organizations to apply.

Timor-Leste’s government is committed to making sure inclusion is integrated into its work not only at a central government level, but also at the municipality and administrative post level. We learned that the central government is in the process of further decentralizing responsibilities to municipal levels, allowing them more flexibility in their focus and budget. Two GoTL units in Baucau noted their enthusiasm for more decentralization, even if it meant more responsibility.

While there is little focus on LGBTQI+ people across any official GoTL units, there are specific ministries and government units that could serve as key entry points, as shown in *Figure 1*. The team met with individuals within almost every unit listed.

GOTL ENTRY POINTS

Figure 1. State institutions working on inclusion-related issues



At both the national and municipality levels, government institutions work directly to address social inclusion-related issues across MSSI, SEII, Ministry of State Administration, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Prime Minister’s Office, and the Office of Ombudsman for Human Rights and Justice. The National Agency for Planning, Motorization, and Evaluation (ANAPMA),²⁰ is an independent institution (both financially and administratively). At the time of this research, ANAMPMA was under the direction of the Prime Minister’s Office; however, they are now under the Ministry of Finance. Their main responsibility is to provide technical support and make sure the GoTL’s annual plan is in alignment with the country’s development

²⁰ More information available at: https://www.mj.gov.tl/jornal/public/docs/2021/serie_1/SERIE_1_NO_46.pdf

plan and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. SEII is also responsible for organizing the Inter-Ministry Gender Working Group, which involves all ministries and secretaries of state. This platform is used to regularly share ideas and address programmatic learning and challenges related to gender equality and social inclusion. Each line ministry has a gender focal point whose main responsibility is gender equality integration across program design and activities. Finally, at the national level, the Timor-Leste Female Parliamentarian Group's mandate is to advocate for and support legislation around gender equality and social inclusion. The team was unable to meet with anyone from this group. However, they appear to be a particular strategic entry point to amend the definition of inclusion to include LGBTQI+ individuals.

LGBTQI+ TRAINING FOR GOTL

The Ministry of Internal Affairs oversees the Timor-Leste National Police (PNTL), which includes the Vulnerable Police Unit (VPU). The PNTL-VPU functions at the municipality level and responds to reports of domestic and gender-based violence. Both MSSI and VPUs across the 13 municipalities have had some level of introductory training on LGBTQI+ issues. The study found that these training sessions were integrated, rather than single-topic training sessions. For example, a training on trauma-sensitive approaches offered by the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative²¹ brings in the Coalition for Diversity and Action (CODIVA) for a 2-hour session on LGBTQI+-sensitive approaches. Other human rights and health care training is said to offer GoTL units 1- to 2-hour sessions on LGBTQI+ people's rights. However, the UPR of Timor-Leste in 2022 stated that the Timor-Leste government had failed to comprehensively implement laws, policies, and practices, including awareness training to improve non-discrimination based on SOGIESC.²² GoTL respondents across three municipalities noted ad-hoc training sessions and that more was needed to better understand sensitivities in working with and supporting LGBTQI+ persons' rights and inclusion. VPUs in each municipality specifically asked for support to train all VPU officers. Only a handful of VPU officers attended or were offered to attend LGBTQI+-focused training sessions and it was up to those few to relay information and learning to their peers. VPU in Dili noted there was a budget issue, and while they were eager to integrate good practices into existing structures, they simply could not afford it.

THE REFERRAL NETWORK

A well-established example of collaboration among a network of CSOs and local government units is the Referral Network of Services for survivors of GBV and domestic violence, shown in *Figure 2*. Since 2006, UNFPA has supported local CSOs to provide key services, including psychosocial support and trauma counseling, shelter and accompaniment options, and legal advice. The systemic chain appears to work well in Baucau and Ermera but begs for further inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals. The team met with multiple points of contact across the network in each location. Both sets of interviews included people from VPU, MSSI, SEII, and local CSOs, some of whom had been in their positions since the Referral Network Services began. These seasoned professionals quickly noted their desire to be inclusive of LGBTQI+ individuals, acknowledging their understanding of the fears they faced and the type of violence they often endured. In each locality, respondents noted training, as referenced above, as a key turning point in their own personal understanding of how LGBTQI+ people struggled to accept themselves and to be accepted by their families. Opening the Referral Network to be inclusive of LGBTQI+ individuals, as at-risk or vulnerable identities, is an easy way to secure their safety with minimal additional costs. Cis-normative and heteronormative assumptions subjugate any opportunities for those identifying as a woman or girl, but not assigned female at birth, to receive services through the Referral Network.

²¹ The Initiative is led by the UN Resident Coordinator in Timor-Leste and is implemented jointly by UN Women, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, UNFPA, and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

²² Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Timor-Leste (A/HRC/34/11), para 89.76 and 89.77, available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g16/442/42/pdf/g1644242.pdf?token=EtMPGIVOUkVpEPLko4&fe=true>

LGBTQI+ individuals are not currently beneficiaries of this network, and the need is prevalent. Interviews with various organizations and GoTL units across the graphic in *Figure 2* noted they could only respond to GBV and domestic violence calls from women and their girl children (in gender binary terms). Reliance on CSOs is essential to the implementation of the NAP-GBV and to providing essential services to VAWC. Nabilan has been a sound counterpart for the network, particularly in providing a certified social services course. While practices focused on LGBTQI+ citizens are not apparent, their Phase 2 program takes a rights- and power-based approach in the course that is said to, “enable students to analyze their own ideas on gender, disability, sexual orientation and other attributes.”

Figure 2. Collaboration at the municipality level



Progressive CSOs (e.g., CODIVA and Arcoiris) and volunteer youth groups (e.g., Hatutan) complement the GoTL’s effort to promote inclusion and equality in the country. Out of the country’s 250 CSOs belonging to the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations of Timor-Leste (FONGTIL), five specifically focus on LGBTQI+ people’s concerns. While there are other NGOs that may include LGBTQI+ individuals, there remains a need, particularly at local levels, for increased establishment of locally registered LGBTQI+ support organizations. At the national level, there is a dedicated CSO and “religious denominations” budget under the Prime Minister’s Office called SASCAS (*Serviço de Apoio a Sociedade Civil e Auditoria Social*). The 2023 budget announced in January decreased from \$10 million to \$8.5 million. This study did not look at criteria for accessing these funds, but it may be an outlet for donor/CSO collaboration of in-kind funding.

The Government allocated \$1,650,239 million for funding the activities of the resistance organizations, \$2.9 million for the activities of non-Catholic religious denominations, \$1.4 million for the construction of the statue of Francisco Xavier,

\$99,900 for the coordination of the service of Support to Civil Society, \$170,000 for the activities of social audit organizations, and \$1,500 for activities of organizations, specifically of civil society. — Executive Director of SASCAS

The Catholic church is another sophisticated, patriarchal institution. As a Catholic country, with more than 90-percent adherence, the church wields enormous social, political, and spiritual power²³ that guides daily life, behaviors, and attitudes. Although Timor-Leste is a contemporary country, the religious conservative impact on gender roles and relationships, sex, reproduction, and homosexuality is abundant. A Timorese woman activist explained that Catholic priests would not accept “modern” ideas about gender equality or address sexual abuse and violence: “[...] they are more inclined to men’s perspectives and [...] the patriarchal mentality” (Richards 2017).²⁴ At the same time, there were three respondents who noted how their local priests welcomed their involvement and participation in the church. Perhaps recent public declaration from the Pope that the Catholic Church has the duty to accompany the gay community on their personal path of spirituality will further sway Timorese priests to support the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people.²⁵

FINDINGS OF NOTE FROM ERMERA. Government respondents in the municipality of Ermera appeared to be open to inclusion activities focusing on LGBTQI+ people. They were well aware of the work that has to be done to integrate LGBTQI+ people into the community and treat them fairly. MSSl and SEll representatives were outspoken about the weaknesses of their Referral Network and support of LGBTQI+ individuals. One interviewee noted that many were still unfamiliar with the term LGBTQI+ and government officials often did not understand what LGBTQI+ truly refers to.

[There is a] strong need to share this information widely to community members and families who may have a relative that identifies as LGBT... many community leaders still do not understand what LGBT means... — Local Government Unit Representative

We need a policy that forces our leaders to involve LGBTI [people] in their activities. We need laws to protect LGBTI people and guarantee their existence in the society similar to others. — Local Government Official

This conversation continued to describe the local Public Transparency Fund (Fundus Transparensia Publika), which aims to support economic opportunities for families. It is a fund LGBTQI+ groups can access by submitting proposals to MSSl. At the time of the interview, the respondent was unaware of any LGBTQI+ group applications or awards.

According to a 2016 health survey on IPV, the rate of violence against women and girls (VAWG) was 58 percent and 94 percent of women in Ermera believed their husbands were justified to hit them for menial reasons (e.g., burnt dinner or perceived as not caring for the children). Unfortunately, there are no statistics on IPV or VAWG for LGBTQI+ people, but they are likely similar if not higher.

²³ Niner, Sara. 2022. “Gender Relations and the Establishment of the LGBT Movement in Timor-Leste.” Women’s Studies International Forum 93, *Science Direct*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Pulella, Phillip. “Pope says church open to everyone, including LGBT people but has rules.” *Reuters*, 7 August 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-says-church-open-everyone-including-lgbt-people-has-rules-2023-08-06/> .

Many people still think being LGBTI is a choice. In school, at home, and in the society in general, LGBTI have always been discriminated against. People do not value them. [...] Social norm dictates us to be what men or women should be like. Anyone who does not fit in those roles, they tend to be discriminated. This social norm does not give space to marginalized people like LGBTI people to live freely. — Local Resident who worked in both local government and for a donor IP

There is agreement across CSOs and local government that advocacy efforts are needed to secure knowledge and acceptance of LGBTQI+ individuals, but funding is nil. Across a few interviews in Ermera, Belun was recognized for inviting LGBTQI+ people to share their experiences of violence and bullying with community members in various organized conversations. CARE International and HAMNASA were also noted as inclusive of LGBTQI+ individuals, but respondents could not provide specifics as to how they were included in activities. Arcoiris planned a pride march in Ermera in 2022, in close coordination with the local government. Several media outlets noted how well the march was organized with the support of UN Women as part of the Spotlight Initiative program and the Community-based Rehabilitation Network Timor-Leste (CBRN TL). Flags, signs, and extensive advocacy for LGBTQI+ individuals and persons with disabilities were posted all over the city; even church representatives attended and supported the parade.

FINDINGS OF NOTE FROM BAUCAU. Government respondents in the municipality of Baucau defined inclusion in both traditional and more modern views. One interviewee said inclusion was “the involvement of all parties, male and female, especially those who are disabled [sic].” Further probing on the binary response of male/female and whether LGBTQI+ people were part of their definition/efforts preceded a paradoxical response using the term *bermanek* and the phrase *no one left behind*. *Bermanek* is generally used to describe the perception of a female acting or dressing like a male. The assessment team perceived this response merely as a lack of understanding about the LGBTQI+ terminology rather than an intentional use of what is perceived as a derogatory term among LGBTQI+ people and supporters. This person described their desire for more LGBTQI+ activity in Baucau and openness to further dialogue across the community, particularly among family units. However, more progressive responses came from two other officials in Baucau, who immediately named LGBTQI+ people as a core vulnerable group in their community, with one responding, “the law is clearly written, and everyone is to be equally treated.” The Pride Parade of 2022 was highly recognized as a positive awareness-building activity that Baucau President of Authority supported, among others.

At one point, last year, a billboard on inclusion and LGBTQI+ pride stood prominently as you entered Baucau. The Baucau President of Authority noted his desire for those who identified as LGBTQI+ to become a registered NGO to be eligible for funding and other types of official support in his municipality, particularly as oversight of local budgets and programming become further decentralized. Leaders in Baucau and Ermera noted their eagerness to further support LGBTQI+ persons’ rights and protection in their municipality. An official in Baucau mentioned the option of including LGBTQI+ concerns in the municipality-level Gender Working Group. However, it was also noted that the limited funding of \$3,000 for the working group cannot support the implementation of any rigorous activities.

Male clients cannot use earrings on ears and noses because this shows that you are not normal, therefore, we will not treat you. And we will not attend those who have long hairs. — Local Health Official (comment on the Baucau Regional Hospital Facebook group in 2020)

Another program functioning in all four IDA-focused locations is DFAT’s Partnership to Strengthen Village Development and Municipal Administration (PARTISIPA) that supports basic infrastructure services to create stability and economic growth at the municipal and *suku* (village) levels. Each PARTISIPA program has a gender equality, disability, and social inclusion specialist to engage in the planning and delivery of

services. One respondent with PARTISIPA acknowledged that they had not worked directly with LGBTQI+ individuals.

[Advocacy in rural areas is especially needed] to target local leaders, parents, and young people, as well as schools. If we can work with these groups and change the way they think about LGBTQI people, we will have a society that is more inclusive.
— PARTISIPA Respondent

That said, PARTISIPA and its gender equality, disability, and social inclusion specialists are uniquely placed to work with municipal-level governing structures, including the gender working group, to establish a new norm of LGBTQI+ inclusion. In Baucau, for example, there is already tight coordination between the office of the President of Authority and the local PARTISIPA program.

NON-LGBTQI+ CSOs

CSO respondents not working directly in the LGBTQI+ space defined inclusion as being mindful of respect for the identities of all marginalized and vulnerable individuals—those with disabilities, LGBTQI+, those acutely impoverished, those lacking education, and victims and survivors of domestic violence and GBV. Other terms used were *leaving no one behind* and *everyone being equally considered*. A DFAT IP noted that community perceptions were still quite patriarchal and that if their family was not directly affected, they avoided the topic and pretended that *those people* did not exist or need any special treatment. More than half of the respondents alluded to the idea that inclusion was generally misunderstood and mainly focused on women, children, and persons with disabilities.

If those in the high-level positions do not understand what inclusion means, and if there's no internal policy that mandates them to integrate inclusion [as an] aspect in their everyday work, I am afraid they will not prioritize this issue. — CSO Respondent

DONORS' ENGAGEMENT IN LGBTQI+ INCLUSION

Timor-Leste receives aid support from various international donors, including DFAT, USAID, KOICA, EU, UN, and the World Bank.²⁶ Many of these donors have continuously supported activities in the country that promote gender equality and social inclusion. USAID and the donor community use several different phrases and titles to encourage inclusion efforts. These include social inclusion, gender and social inclusion, gender equality and disability inclusion, diversity and inclusion, and gender equity and social inclusion (GESI). In some cases, these terms are used interchangeably.

While most donors have a publicly accessible LGBTQI+ or SOGIEC strategy or guidance, there is less documentation on how these are actualized in programming efforts. GESI and vulnerable groups are readily noted in IP reporting; however, there is little to no mention of the LGBTQI+ population. Two donor IP interviewees noted that this was due to a need for local community's readiness to openly discuss or focus on LGBTQI+ populations, rather than donor's willingness. Much room remains for improvement to integrate LGBTQI+-specific inclusion across official documents, reporting, and most importantly, into implementation practices, as noted in the recommendations section.

USAID/Timor-Leste, in its Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), highlights inclusion as a major theme and supports their IPs to integrate inclusion across all sectoral portfolios.²⁷ USAID's goal

²⁶ More information available at: <https://aidtransparency.gov.tl/portal/>

²⁷ USAID. 2020. "Timor Leste CDCS Gender Analysis."

statement for their 2020–2025 strategy is: “An inclusive, prosperous, and healthy Timor-Leste that is more self-reliant.” These three themes tie in well with key contextual issues and concerns for the island’s future. USAID’s CDCS states, “inclusiveness as an objective, a result and a means.” USAID views inclusive development as “the only sustainable way to development.” While donors and their IPs say they are slowly integrating LGBTQI+ across their portfolios, USAID appears to be the most outspoken bilateral donor on these issues and is keen to take the lead in the donor space. USAID/Timor-Leste is eager to align LGBTQI+ integration and stand-alone programming with the recently released USAID [LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy](#).

The Mission’s dedicated LGBTQI+ working group of five mission staff is highly knowledgeable and engaged in LGBTQI+ issues. There is a real desire to abate violence against LGBTQI+ people and enforce the new policy. In an interview with the working group, the members noted the challenge of psychological and physical abuse as often occurring in private spaces and going underreported. USAID wants to support training activities and engage in the co-creation of activities to secure a focus on LGBTQI+ people and adherence to the new policy.

The working group hosts informal events and gatherings, inviting members of civil society, other donors, and counterparts working on or interested in LGBTQI+ concerns. These gatherings have begun to cultivate relations across the wider development community and could serve as a regular opportunity for networking, sharing, and learning. Several interviewees (four from GoTL, one from LGBTQI+ CSOs, and one LGBTQI+ KII) stated their welcoming of USAID to lead LGBTQI+ initiatives. One donor noted that it would be nice for USAID to take a “lead coordination role” given the LGBTQI+ policy. Two interviewees recalled how outspoken a former U.S. Ambassador was on LGBTQI+ rights and suggested that USAID continue these efforts with the Embassy.

One USAID program that stands out for including LGBTQI+ individuals is the Health System Sustainability program. With IPs Abt Associates, Banyan Global, and others, the program’s ultimate goal is to promote access to universal health coverage and improve health and well-being. Specific activities with LGBTQI+ persons include: (1) improving the competencies of health care professionals to treat patients with disabilities and LGBTQI+ persons with respect and provide high-quality services, and (2) providing outreach services together with CSOs to increase women’s access to reproductive health services and the ability of LGBTQI+ people and persons with disabilities to access health care.²⁸

USAID’s monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) efforts are mostly focused on disaggregation of age, sex, and urban vs. rural. While there is a custom indicator for LGBTQI+ people, a USAID respondent reported that it was highly challenging to track that information. USAID “strongly encourages” its IPs to ensure the inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals. However, two IPs noted they did not explicitly target or monitor activities for LGBTQI+ inclusion due to local community’s resistance. Another USAID respondent stated: “LGBTQI+ is still thought of as a foreign concept.”

The World Bank uses the term social inclusion to mean: “the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged based on their identity.”²⁹ In 2015, the World Bank established a sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) task force and in 2016, they appointed a dedicated global SOGI advisor. Their focus is almost exclusively on analytical work and data collection. While great strides have been made in several World Bank-focused countries, their SOGI programming in Timor-Leste is just beginning. They have recently onboarded a local social inclusion advisor in their Dili office, who is keen to integrate LGBTQI+ concerns across their programming. In June 2023, the World Bank SOGI lead from New York headquarters briefly visited Timor-Leste and held informal meetings with members of the LGBTQI+ community. The World Bank hopes to create a local SOGI strategy to guide their work and support conversations with their GoTL government counterparts.

²⁸ *Health Systems Sustainability Activity. 2021. “Timor-Leste GESI Action Plan.”*

²⁹ The World Bank’s website: www.worldbank.org/topic/social-inclusion

In a March 2023 address, **Australian** Prime Minister, Penny Wong, noted a commitment of \$3.5 million for a new Inclusion and Equality Fund to support LGBTQI+ CSOs, human rights defenders, and international partnerships and networks. In addition, DFAT will develop its first human rights engagement strategy for LGBTQI+ people's equality and inclusion. Currently, DFAT supports several government and civil society programs in Timor-Leste, focusing on VAWC, government decentralization, local government capacity strengthening, education, and more. While a few current programs in Timor-Leste highlight GESI, there is little mention of support for or inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals. DFAT provided significant assistance to meet basic human needs during the severe economic decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic and continued assistance for VAWC and malnutrition, and support to the Timor-Leste Ministry of Health overall, but fell short in reaching LGBTQI+ populations. DFAT is the largest supporter of development in Timor-Leste and works across multiple sectors; yet, there is no mention of LGBTQI+ individuals in their latest progress report. Half of DFAT's funding is focused on support to the government. Therefore, they have strong ties and influence over possible integration of LGBTQI+ people's inclusion across key documents and policies.

The **UN** is making great strides to support LGBTQI+ people's rights. The UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continually flag the need for LGBTQI+ protection efforts. The UN has a pronounced focus on LGBTQI+ inclusion and programming across its units.

One program funded by multiple UN arms, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and KOICA, is Together for Equality, launched in late 2020.³⁰ The program is focused on Baucau, Covalima, Dili, and the Special Administrative Region Authority of Oecusse. It works closely with SEII and local authorities to secure the implementation of NAP GBV.

The UN's OHCHR launched the Free & Equal³¹ campaign to promote equal rights and fair treatment of LGBTQI+ people in more than 40 countries worldwide, including Cambodia, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam in South Asia. Efforts to end discrimination against LGBTQI+ students in Timor-Leste have been a critical area of focus for Free & Equal campaigns since 2021. The team initiated the first-ever research project to gather information about discrimination and access to education among students between the ages of 13 and 25 in three districts in the country: Bobonaro, Dili, and Liquiça.

[The final report](#) was launched on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in 2022. Its findings indicate that students hide their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression to fit into prevailing gender norms. About 44 percent of the students interviewed reported harassment or bullying, including physical violence, within the previous year. Levels of reporting to teachers, other school or university staff, or the police were extremely low. As a result, many LGBTQI+ students in Timor-Leste dropped out of school. This, in turn, deepened their social exclusion, affected their mental and physical health, and constrained future employment opportunities. The research initiative allowed the UN team in Timor-Leste to strengthen their relationship with public institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, and CSOs working on youth rights, such as Hatutan. Participants at the launch event included representatives from various government ministries, the diplomatic community, CSOs, teachers, and students. The event was publicized on the Minister of Education's social media channels. At the event, the UN team distributed printed materials in English and Tetun. The Minister of Education, Youth, and Sports committed to addressing some of the report's recommendations, while emphasizing teacher and staff training. Similarly, the Director General from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Culture expressed willingness to support initiatives to raise universities' awareness on the issue.

Another national campaign priority was to continue distributing information about the COVID-19 prevention measures and available support to the country's LGBTQI+ populations. The national campaign

³⁰ More information available at: <https://timor-leste.unfpa.org/en/news/un-agencies-through-koica-funding-commit-usd-77-million-support-implementation-timor-leste>.

³¹ More information available at: <https://www.unfe.org/>.

team worked with five local radio stations to air four spots with messages of love and acceptance, COVID-19 prevention measures, mental health awareness, and access to justice for victims of homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic violence. The spots were aired at least 1,600 times in 10 districts, including many remote areas. Community members reported that they appreciated the information conveyed, which was otherwise not easily accessible.

After the launch of the previously mentioned education report and throughout the year, the UN team collaborated closely with the Ministry of Higher Education and multiple higher education institutions to explore practical strategies for implementing the report's recommendations and pursuing positive change. As part of the report's impact strategy, in collaboration with LGBTQI+ CSOs Arcoiris and CODIVA, the Free & Equal team organized a 1-day workshop on LGBTQI+ people's inclusion for representatives from 12 of the 15 universities and institutes in Timor-Leste. In 2023, a few participating institutions started activities, such as training staff.

PART 2: LGBTQI+ INDIVIDUALS AND CSOS

This second section of key findings highlights perspectives from LGBTQI+ individuals, advocates, and CSOs, as well as their experiences, challenges, and needs to advance LGBTQI+ people's rights and inclusion in Timor-Leste.

INCLUSION DEFINED: LGBTQI+ COMMUNITY

The enigma of traditional belief systems, heteronormative notions of masculinity and femininity, and pervasive patriarchal gender relations supported by a conservative Catholic church is a complex challenge for LGBTQI+ individuals and activists. As one of the respondents noted, "the way people understand inclusion is that it is only about heterosexual people."

Many of the challenges acknowledged in prominent Timor-Leste LGBTQI+ reports from 2017 to 2019 remain. These reports continue to provide foundational knowledge and experiences from LGBTQI+ authors and other noteworthy sources (see text box).

- ✓ ASEAN SOGIE Caucus/Rede Feto: *A Research Report on the Lives of Lesbian and Bisexual Women and Transgender Men in Timor-Leste* (November 2017)
- ✓ New Naratif: *Behind Timor-Leste's Pride* (June 2018)
- ✓ Vice News: *Asia's Newest Nation of Timor-Leste Is Fighting for LGBTQ Rights* (May 2019)
- ✓ JSMP: *Members of the LGBTI community in Liquica Municipality feel that they are subjected to discrimination in the family and in society* (September 18, 2019)

Research commissioned by the women's organization Rede Feto on the lives of lesbian and bisexual women and transgender men in Bobonaro and Dili reported widespread "corrective rape, physical and psychological abuse, ostracism, discrimination, and marginalization" that 86 percent of the lesbian, bisexual, and transgender respondents experienced, resulting in many living in hiding due to shame and fear of abuse.³² Prominent local LGBTQI+ leaders, Bella Galhos and Iram Saeed, provide detailed accounts of such sufferings and challenges of LGBTQI+ individuals in the report.

Incidents of forced marriage and impregnation, sexual violence, and rape to change sexual orientation or gender identity forcibly, regular beatings, discrimination, and marginalization from services continue. Family members sometimes hire men to commit rape or other forms of sexual assault to "convert their daughter." In Baucau, we heard of several unreported incidents of LGBTQI+ beatings. Forced impregnation and rape committed against trans men, lesbians, or queer women is of great concern across

³² Rede Feto (2017)

municipalities. These, too, are underreported—sometimes due to a desire to protect a family member who perpetrated the incident (typically fathers, brothers, and uncles); other times, the survivor feels shame about their sexual orientation and is brainwashed to believe they deserve such abuse. Yet another reason is the lack of trust in the justice system—if their abuser is acquitted, then they are subject to further, likely worse, abuse. In Baucau and Ermera, respondents said that local police were perceived to take the side of the perpetrator in an LGBTQI+ report, and with no access to the referral network, incidents often went unreported. One respondent noted that they and their shop were consistently antagonized and threatened. In this case, the local police force was called on more than one occasion, but they took no action. Police were said to either pretend like it was a non-issue or take the side of the perpetrator. Psychological violence is equally disturbing and leads to deep depression, shame, and fear to engage in society.

ACCEPTANCE OF LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

Individuals and CSOs that support LGBTQI+ people's rights linked inclusion to a sense of belonging and being accepted as simply human. Many of the self-identified members of the LGBTQI+ community noted that they felt less vulnerable as their journey of self-acceptance and confidence rose. Acknowledging one's existence does not equate to acceptance or inclusion; acknowledgment is just the first step. The Prime Minister and the President show recognition of LGBTQI+ people's inclusion through public discourse. Local, familial acknowledgment that they are still a human in their community, still a child to their parents, is another deep-seated desire for acceptance.

In addition to self-acceptance, 75 percent of all respondents and 94 percent of LGBTQI+ respondents reported the challenge of family acceptance.

We are not wanted at home when they find out that we act and love different[ly]
... we get beaten up regularly. — FGD Respondent

It is evident from the interviews that family acceptance comes with certain conditions, mostly when one can provide financial support to the family and other relatives. The majority (80 percent) of respondents raised sentiments around acceptance based on financial security.

[Inclusion means] turning around family and community perceptions that those who identify as LGBTQI+ cannot be successful humans. — LGBTQI+ Organization Representative

A similar sentiment was found in a critique of the education system that many respondents still attested to. The U.S. Department of State's Timor-Leste [Human Rights report](#) of 2017 states, "Access to education was limited for some LGBTQI persons who were removed from the family home or who feared abuse at school. Transgender students were more likely to experience bullying and drop out of school at the secondary level."³³ The aforementioned UN Free & Equal report notes similar findings. All LGBTQI+ respondents noted at least two of the following areas of marginalization in their interview: marginalized from equal and fair access to health services, education, and professional (and government) positions. Moreover, at least 80 percent of respondents noted LGBTQI+ individuals' lack of protection from violence and any GBV programming.

Several CSOs, the GoTL, and donors support the NAP-GBV, as well as VAWC and IPV activities across the four municipalities of focus for this IDA and beyond. Every respondent questioned about LGBTQI+

³³ U.S. Department of State. 2017. "Timor-Leste 2017 Human Rights Report."

marginalization in the Referral Network noted these citizens were remiss from their program and any protection.

Joker da Silva is an advocate for LGBTQI+ rights and inclusion and an interviewee of this study. Joker's story corroborates these findings. See the text box below from UNFPA's website.

I hated to look at myself in the mirror because I was a pretty girl, but I had a male attitude. Then, I decided to devote myself to the church to change. I asked a pastor, "Have I committed a sin in behaving as a man?" He said, "No, it's because of the chromosome." Then, I went to ask a doctor in a clinic and he told me the same answer. Then, I stopped blaming myself.

Before, my eldest brother kept threatening to lock me in my room and let a man come violate me. Dad also begged me to bring home a man after high school. If not, he said he would treat me like an animal. I never felt secure at home. No one liked me, except my mom.

I left the house in 2010 to join friends who also had run away from the same situation, and we survived together. I found a job at a restaurant, but they forced me to wear a skirt and I rejected it. Then I was accepted for a security job, after 3 months of being away from home.

I never blamed my family. I knew things would get better in time. When I had my first months' salary, I brought home food. Seeing me become economically independent, my parents finally accepted me. They started to love me more than ever. Since then, my dad would protect me from my older brother and anybody who questioned my sexual orientation. In 2015, when he passed away, I felt a big loss. Luckily, by then, my family had accepted me.

Now, I hope to see everyone respect and treat each other the same way. No one should be left behind in their own family and in society.

—Joker de Silva, Story captured by Helio Miguel of UN Women

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2019/07/fwis-joker-da-silva>

This story corroborates the lack of understanding of families/local communities, the fears and experiences of GBV toward LGBTQI+ individuals, and the importance placed on livelihoods and economic stability. Without the latter, reconciliation may not have been possible. Economic stability gains respect and, at least in some cases, trumps SOGIESC concerns. From our interviews, this seems to be rooted in the assumption and fear that if one identifies as LGBTQI+, they will not have equal access to livelihood opportunities and will thus, bring shame to their family and/or community.

Besides Kantina Matak café (described on the next page), there was no awareness of specific businesses or non-LGBTQI+ organizations that included LGBTQI+ individuals in their hiring practices or marketing of higher educational opportunities. Many LGBTQI+ people work in ad-hoc positions with inconsistent pay, while others make a living as sex workers. Yet, some simply stay home because they do not feel comfortable working in public given their fear of discrimination and/or violence or feelings of shame.

Bella Galhos openly describes her experience of being turned away from a government position due to her sexuality in 2018. She notes that it was due to "moral values" and believes it was also pressure from the Catholic church. This story has been repeated in several fora and likely dissuades other LGBTQI+ individuals from applying to such positions. In interviews with two central GoTL staff, they said anyone can apply for these jobs. But when asked whether they had ever knowingly interviewed someone known or self-identified as LGBTQI+, the answer was no ... "but because they didn't apply."

LGBTQI+ TERMINOLOGY

One of the study's unique findings is the use of LGBT as a single identity. More than 90 percent of LGBTQI+ respondents referred to the LGBT community or themselves or other persons as LGBT, rather than a specific identity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. It provides a sense of homogeneity for those feeling marginalized or not ready to share their identity openly. In two interviews, one respondent self-identified as queer male and the other as trans-male; they both referred to others as LGBT. There are LGBT micro-groups at the village level that share a sense of belonging.

...not feeling like you belong is like being invited to a party but not allowed to dance. — LGBTQI+ Respondent

In many cases, these groups meet secretly for fear of repercussions from their family. In other cases, they have run away from their families to build their community in a separate village. Some of these groups are known to the LGBTQI+ CSOs, but even with their assistance, the groups or individuals from these groups were not willing to meet with the assessment team. They did not feel safe or perhaps ready to discuss such issues with someone outside their close circle. LGBTQI+ is a globally used yet foreign term for those with lower education levels or lack of access to social media or the Internet.

Taking into consideration local culture and terminology is key. There are many heteronormative Timorese terms such as *mane ho feto kompleta malu* (men and women complete each other) or the greeting *Maun (m) and Mana (f)*, which is meant to be an endearing polite greeting using the terms *brother* or *sister*, yet they are another set of binary terms. These binary terms are not inclusive of agender, gender fluid, or other identities, whereby one does not identify as a single sex. In 2018, a list of local *Tetun* terms for homosexuality collected on a Facebook page (*Feminista iha Timor-Leste* 2018) demonstrated the overwhelmingly negative and derogatory attitudes to homosexuality. The terms used interchangeably for gay men, gay women, and trans people mainly described them as being broken or having something missing.³⁴ Furthermore, local derogatory terms such as *bermanek* and *buifeto* in Tetun, or *tufu-tufu* in Makasae (a dialect spoken in Baucau and Viqueque) are used. *Bermanek* is often used to describe the perception of a female acting or dressing like a male. On the translation site, Tetun.org, *bermanek* is defined as “tomboy,” mannish, or lesbian, and *Buifeto* as effeminate male, but when used in a derogatory manner, it means sissy. *Tufu-tufu* refers to effeminate men who dress as women or assume women's roles. Another term, *panleru*, is used to describe a male with feminine traits. Across interviews with CSOs, government, and LGBTQI+ people, these terms were deemed offensive and discriminatory. However, there were two LGBTQI+ individuals who succumbed to the use of some of these terms, noting that often, users were simply uninformed and oblivious to the possible impact of these words. They also recognized there was a staunch loyalty to the Tetun language due to the historical occupation of Portugal and Indonesia and the requirements to use those languages. There is no Tetun term for LGBTQI+ and several interviews raised the use of foreign terms as inconsiderate of local culture. This also results in blaming Western culture for the perceived rise in the LGBTQI+ population in Timor-Leste.

LGBTQI+ CSOs



Arcoiris was established in 2016 with the mission to address human rights issues LGBTQI+ individuals encounter. They have worked with government and non-governmental entities across Timor-Leste and

³⁴ "Gender relations and the establishment of the LGBT movement in Timor-Leste" ScienceDirect.

continue to provide training in partnership with health and education IPs and donors. One of their most significant accomplishments is the creation of an all-LGBTQI+-employed and -managed café/restaurant called Kantina Matak that sits squarely behind the Presidential Palace. Arcoiris received seed funding from President Ramos-Horta to start the initiative. Bella Galhos, Director of Arcoiris, runs the café and has gained much attention since its opening—reservations are recommended. Another aspect of its schematic is giving back to the neighborhood—the Kantina provides daily meals to local impoverished children and families. The President himself is often seen at the Kantina.



Photo 1. Kantina Matak staff and IDA team

Besides partnerships and activities, they also provide a drop-in center and shelter on the Arcoiris compound for LGBTQI+ individuals who have suffered from violence in their homes. Arcoiris takes it one step further and reaches out to the survivor’s family to listen to their concerns and builds understanding about their child or family member’s LGBTQI+ identity. Bella notes their success and while it occurs on a small scale and ad-hoc basis, she knows her offering is making a great difference. The assessment team met with one person who is a success of these efforts and continues their work in advocacy for LGBTQI+ people’s rights and inclusion.

Finally, Arcoiris maintains a presence via social media. A post from March 2023 provides conclusions from a recent legal review of Timor-Leste laws. These include guidance on the use of LGBTQI+ symbols together with the Timor-Leste flag (in preparation for the Pride Parade) and reminds its followers that, “Timor-Leste criminal law does not determine discrimination based on sexual orientation (i.e., homophobic hate) a crime, and notes that any individual or organization that is targeted by discriminatory or homophobic declarations by private individuals has the right to their personal integrity and to access civil law procedures to demand accountability for the violation.”



CODIVA is the longest-running LGBTQI+ CSO. It aims to reduce stigma and discrimination and promote human rights of LGBTQI+ citizens. CODIVA has served as a grantee or partner to several international NGOs, donors, and government units in the health and justice space. One of their initial partnerships was

with ISEAN Hivos, where they provided capacity-strengthening training to LGBTQI+ individuals to enhance their support system.³⁵ Following this effort, CODIVA branched out into an independent office. Since 2016, CODIVA has worked closely with the Ombudsmen’s Office of Human Rights and Justice to integrate LGBTQI+ people’s rights through community outreach sessions and with government officials.³⁶ Currently, CODIVA provides training for SEII and PNTL-VPU on LGBTQI+ sensitivities in Dili and several other municipalities. They also work with the Ministry of Health and its partners to integrate LGBTQI+ people’s rights and access to HIV prevention services. Their work is widespread across the country, and they are recognized as the go-to CSO for advocacy and training activities. At one time, CODIVA began a gay men and transgender women’s choir group that performs in and around churches in Dili.

CODIVA is considered forward-leaning. Their work with Catholic nuns influenced their attendance in the 2018 Pride Parade, causing controversy within the church. Social media’s capture of nuns at the parade led the Bishop of Dili to make its first public statement on LGBTQI+ issues.



Another advocate known to social media is Natalino Guterres, the Director of **Hatutan Youth Council**. Hatutan’s mission is to advocate for social inclusion in the country, with a focus on LGBTQI+ people’s inclusion and rights. Hatutan has been recognized as one of the pioneers of LGBTQI+ inclusion work in Timor-Leste and for leading the charge in organizing various discussion events on LGBTQI+ persons’ rights. Natalino Guterres receives much public attention, particularly regarding his documentary, *The Road to Acceptance*. He transcends his passion for LGBTQI+ concerns to capture the journeys of LGBTQI+ advocates and reach key speakers, including the Prime Minister, Dr. Rui Maria de Araujo. While Hatutan primarily focuses on awareness-raising activities, they also seek to influence government programs and policy. Natalino, Hatutan volunteers, and other CSO partners brought the idea of a Pride Parade to Timor-Leste with their first pride gathering in 2017.

Since 2017, Pride Parades have played a major role in building bridges across Timor-Leste communities. Continuing his support for LGBTQI+ equality, Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo, made public statements for the Pride Parade, highlighting the need to accept people’s differences and stop discrimination and abuse against LGBTQI+ individuals.³⁷ This encouragement along with that of President Ramos-Horta jumpstarted a chain of support for LGBTQI+-focused programming and the continuation of Pride Parades. President Ramos-Horta, a former Nobel Peace Prize awardee for the peaceful resolution of conflict in East Timor in 1996, is a legacy in LGBTQI+ circles. He is continuously quoted for his support of equal recognition and non-discrimination of LGBTQI+ people, causing a fundamental shift in LGBTQI+ acceptance in Timor-Leste.

Arcoiris, CODIVA, Hatutan, and other CSOs with support from international organizations, and in close coordination with central and local government units, have led and supported six Pride Parades to date. These include five Pride Parades in Dili with upwards of 3,000 attendees and local Pride Parades in the municipalities of Ermera (mainly supported by the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative) and Oecusse in 2022. Pride Parades were noted in nearly every interview with GoTL, donors, CSOs, and LGBTQI+ individuals as a

³⁵ More information available at: <https://hsi.foundation/program/promoting-diversity-for-a-more-inclusive-timor-leste/>

³⁶ More information available at: <http://pdhj.tl/pdhj-no-coalition-for-diversity-and-action-codiva-asina-akordu-servisu-hamutuk/>.

³⁷ More information available at: <https://www.easttimorlawandjusticebulletin.com/2017/07/timor-leste-pm-comes-out-supporting.html>.

triumphant means to building awareness and advocacy around LGBTQI+ sensitivities and needs. Pride Parades provide an uninhibited opportunity to support LGBTQI+ individuals and serve as a means for LGBTQI+ people to gain broader acceptance in their communities. More than 90 percent of all interviewees for this IDA mentioned Pride Parades as a leading force for knowledge and acceptance of LGBTQI+ people. Over 80 percent of GoTL interviewees, half of whom are in key supervisory positions, noted their participation in and/or support of LGBTQI+ parades and other LGBTQI+ activities. In Ermera, a key official disclosed that two families with teens who identified as LGBTQI+ attended the local Pride Parade—this was the first time they were seen in public as a family unit. Further, six out of seven KII respondents in Ermera referenced the Pride Parade as a turning point for openness to LGBTQI+ people's acceptance in their community.

The latest Pride Parade, in July 2023, was no different. Support for the parade cascaded from local restaurants and cafes, numerous CSOs, international donors with prominent messaging and attendance, as well as leaders from civil society and the GoTL. Messaging streamed across the Pride Parade Facebook page and newsworthy media outlets. Natalino, from Hatutan, was questioned in an interview about what else was needed to further acceptance and rights of LGBTQI+ individuals. His response echoed many of those interviewed in this IDA: focus on policies, education, and economic empowerment of LGBTQI+ people.

Other organizations providing direct support to LGBTQI+ individuals include **Estrela+** and **Asosiasaun Komunitade Progresivu (Association of Progressive Community or KP)**, both of which focus on HIV and AIDS. Estrela+, established in 2009, is a non-profit membership association advocating for improved quality of life for those living with HIV and AIDS. They provide public HIV services, including LGBTQI+ patients. KP, established in 2019, has a similar mandate but exclusively targets LGBTQI+ individuals and high-risk populations who need HIV-related services.³⁸

All interviews conducted had a line of questioning around the specific needs of LGBTQI+ individuals and communities. Those with more than five responses are provided in *Table 3*.

³⁸ More information available at: <https://timor-leste.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-pilots-introduction-prep-among-key-populations-timor-leste>.

Table 3. Specific needs and opportunities for LGBTQI+ Inclusive ID

	LGBTQI+ PEOPLE (22)	LGBTQI+ CSOS (3)	CSO/1 P REPS (12)	DONOR REPS (8)	GOTL REPS (12)	TOTAL PEOPLE (57)
Provide counseling and psychosocial support for LGBTQI+ individuals to be more accepting of themselves, increase self-confidence, and help them advocate for their community	7	3	4		3	17
Work with families and rural communities to understand and accept LGBTQI+ people	16	3	3	2	5	29
Work with the church to be more accepting and inviting of LGBTQI+ individuals	3	2	1	2	1	9
Include equal access of LGBTQI+ individuals into the educational system and the curriculum	18	3	4		5	30
Conduct advocacy and outreach using social media and other platforms to convey and advocate for LGBTQI+ people's understanding and education	9	2	2	1	6	20
Work with the government to integrate LGBTQI+-specific wording in public documents and policies	4	2	4	1	5	16
Ensure access to jobs and employment across all sectors, including government positions	18	3	3	1	4	29
Secure equal access of LGBTQI+ people to health care services and fair treatment	7	3	5	2	2	19
Strengthen public institutions' understanding and integration of LGBTQI+ people at local levels through training and practical coordination among local government entities (VPU, MSSl, and SEll)	3	3	3	2	8	19
Agree on appropriate LGBTQI+ terminology across civil society and government and address negative labeling	10	3	1	1	5	20
Increase safe means for reporting abuse or violence toward LGBTQI+ individuals/ groups	8	3	1		4	16
Issue public decrees against bullying and discrimination of vulnerable and LGBTQI+ populations, especially in rural areas	4	3	1	1	4	13
Ensure consistency and sustainability of GESI and LGBTQI+ organizations and their activities	4	3	2	2	4	15

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section is organized by recommendations specifically for USAID and general recommendations for donors, civil society, and the GoTL.

USAID-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Facilitate the drafting of a GoTL National Action Plan for LGBTQI+ to inform systemic advocacy.** In coordination with the donor and CSO community, provide leadership in drafting key considerations for the NAP. Three representatives from the GoTL specifically requested that USAID support this effort, given the release of the *USAID LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy*.
2. **Expand the USAID LGBTQI+ working group to include non-USAID stakeholders.** Given the desire from other donors to be more inclusive of LGBTQI+ rights and needs, expand the USAID working group to include representatives from donors and CSOs alike to share ideas about further collaboration and integration of LGBTQI+ citizens across their portfolios. In addition, it is recommended that USAID continue hosting, in coordination with DFAT, UN, and other like-minded partners, pride-related gatherings and/or invite other donors to host. This is an excellent opportunity to strengthen networks among LGBTQI+ members and allies, and a safe space for informal discussions, learning, and sharing of practices and challenges.
3. **Strengthen grant application skills for informal groups and their organizational capacity to become registered LGBTQI+ NGOs.** Using the NGO Advocacy for Good Governance mechanism, conduct an organizational capacity assessment (OCA) of all LGBTQI+-focused NGOs to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each. The findings of the OCA will, ideally, be formed into a dedicated training and support plan to prepare local NGOs to become legally registered with FONGTIL. This will allow NGOs to apply for government funding and become a formal partner for donor and GoTL programs. A do-no-harm approach to understanding sensitivities and risks for such groups becoming more vocal will be necessary. With at least two government entities requesting that LGBTQI+ NGOs submit applications, there seems to be a growing opportunity for government and donor funding to support local CSOs.
4. **Initiate faith dialogues at local and central levels.** Findings show that there are mixed emotions and actions as to how well the Catholic church supports LGBTQI+ inclusion. The church is not merely a monolith; however, there are openings for coordination. Identifying key actors in the church to host, or at a minimum attend, dialogues with LGBTQI+ groups may be the impetus for further LGBTQI+ acceptance.

USAID AND/OR OTHER DONOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Capture SOGIESC/LGBTQI+ data and evidence.** Few data specific to LGBTQI+ persons are currently collected across donors, their IPs, and local CSOs. This is mainly due to the perceived risks to LGBTQI+ individuals, particularly in rural areas. There is space for existing CSOs and IPs to further their monitoring and data collection efforts to disaggregate by SOGIESC. A better understanding of the size of the LGBTQI+ population, its socioeconomic outcomes, even if illustrative, identifying as LGBTQI+, as well as data that keep track of incidents of discrimination, violence, and bullying will likely increase investments in inclusion activities and bring further awareness to the significance of issues LGBTQI+ individuals face. It is recommended that donors require IPs and CSOs to find alternate or even informal ways of collecting such data. Adding *other* or *prefer not to say* to surveys and forms that currently require a male/female response is a first step.

2. **Comprehensive LGBTQI+ program on awareness and acceptance.** The following two components came up several times across the LGBTQI+ community, both in KIIs and FGDs, and are top-ranking opportunities noted in *Table 3*. Depending on funding levels, any one of these can be integrated into existing programming and treated as a separate activity with existing CSOs working in this space.
 - a. *Awareness campaigns of LGBTQI+ inclusion.* With an exceedingly large youth population, it is recommended that such campaigns align with health, education, and advocacy programs across universities, high schools, and local community sites. Incorporating prevention and response to the highly prevalent sexual and physical violence against LGBTQI+ individuals and promoting comprehensive, inclusive sex education would further expound learning among heterosexual populations. Ideally, this effort would be aligned with the UN Free & Equal recommendations and expand on their Timor-Leste campaign strategy (four spots on five local radio stations—see *Donors' Engagement in LGBTQI+ Inclusion* section for full campaign narrative). This effort could have ripple effects across other donor and CSO programming with the Ministry of Education (e.g., policy reforms). A scientific approach to messaging that builds on the specificities of the Timor-Leste context is necessary. This could include focus groups, surveys on attitudes and behavior, and monitoring of evaluation of the efficacy of campaigns.
 - b. *Acceptance of LGBTQI+ individuals in families and schools.* This is an offspring of the awareness efforts above—to further build family understanding and acceptance of their LGBTQI+ children or family members, and teachers and staff in schools. Family acceptance or rejection is a crucial contributing factor to the overall LGBTQI+ adolescents' well-being—to work through psychosocial challenges and questions one inevitably faces following years of discrimination, bullying, and other forms of psychological and physical abuse. Building on the local knowledge of organizations and learning from evidence-based findings, guides, and training international organizations around the globe have already developed. Formalizing family interventions to enhance acceptance of SOGIESC among LGBTQI+ individuals will create a healthier environment for all.

In alignment with USAID's *LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy* and localization priorities, all LGBTQI+ programs should include a substantial grantmaking component to local LGBTQI+-led groups and organizations that are best positioned to design, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of activities.

3. **Develop a South-South LGBTQI+ exchange program.** Using South-South cooperation and experience exchange is crucial to mitigate the criticism that LGBTQI+ inclusion is a “Western agenda” and make sure technical assistance is relevant to the Timor-Leste context. This can be achieved by getting international trainers to visit Timor-Leste and sending IP staff abroad. Best practices in the country include a collaboration fostered by UNFPA between Timor-Leste and Thailand for midwifery education to reduce maternal mortality. Another example is a UNDP-organized 2018 regional roundtable discussion focused on developing targeted solutions to advance protective laws, policies, and programs on legal gender recognition in South Asia. The Portuguese connection could also be used through exchanges with Brazil, a country with some of the most robust LGBTQ+ legal protections in the world, which has addressed common issues in Timor-Leste, such as intra-family violence or discrimination in the education sector.
4. **Create a comprehensive training program.** Work with local government units, the referral network, IPs, and civil society groups to provide comprehensive training opportunities that reach and affect each municipality. Findings show strong praise and appreciation for LGBTQI+ training sessions offered across the health, governance, and education sectors. However, there is criticism

for the length and depth of these short, ad-hoc training sessions. The team recommends the creation of an LGBTQI+ training hub that would scale existing LGBTQI+ modules and learning.

- a. *Curriculum development.* The vision is for curriculum/content creation and revisions to continue to be led by a network of local LGBTQI+ CSO representatives. Currently, all three major LGBTQI+ CSOs provide training in some capacity. Together, their best practices and lessons learned would inform and advance the curriculum. Their unique knowledge and experiences working with different sectors, IPs, and GoTL units would effectively form quality tools and materials for in-person and online training suites, and the conformity of messaging would align with new policies and guidance developed along the way.
 - b. *Training-of-trainers.* A suggestion that aligns with point a. *above* is to convene key representatives from each facet of the Referral Network (see *Figure 1*) and development/humanitarian sector in every municipality to form a training-of-trainers group. These representatives will serve as strategic LGBTQI+ advocates, both in their sector and across the communities they work and live in. The potential reach of such a program is endless.
5. **Increase access to economic opportunities for LGBTQI+ individuals.** There are a number of recommended entry points for the GoTL, donors, and the private sector.
- a. *Support LGBTQI+ organizations to further develop websites, Facebook pages, and other forms of social media for job listings, internships, entrepreneurial training, and other opportunities.* Working with donors, GoTL, and LGBTQI+ CSOs can create a safe space for marketing public positions, training, vocational education, scholarships, and other opportunities. Links to key resources, applications, and resources on GESI, SOGIESC, and LGBTQI+ considerations would be welcomed components, as would educational materials including, short videos/links on foundational principles of what LGBTQI+ means and how to respect SOGIESC and the human rights of all individuals.
 - b. *Identify opportunities for LGBTQI+ inclusion across existing donor/IP youth employment programs.* Programs such as the KOICA's Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Skills in collaboration with UNDP and the Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry is an ideal program for LGBTQI+ integration. With employment readiness, job counseling, and internship programs as part of its core activities, this program has high potential across youth identities to foster collaboration and inclusion of those most marginalized, bullied, and harmed.
 - c. *Create entrepreneurial opportunities that are inclusive of LGBTQI+ individuals.* Using Kantina Matak as an exemplary model, support open applications for entrepreneurial opportunities for LGBTQI+ individuals and other marginalized groups.
 - d. *Cooperate with the GoTL to increase focus on LGBTQI+ people's access to public programs.* For example, units working with vulnerable groups and inclusion, such as VPU and MSSJ, should have LGBTQI+ individuals employed as officers within their Referral Network system. Municipal-level gender working groups must welcome LGBTQI+ individuals to join their meetings and activities. The President of Authority in each municipality can invite local LGBTQI+ groups to apply for local grants. Finally, GoTL policies need to revise binary language to show meaningful openness to LGBTQI+ job applicants.
 - e. *Support the rollout of the World Bank's SOGIE principles across their programming.* Given the World Bank's deep connections across central government, they are a key entry point to expand access (or requirements) for the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in

government positions and human resource guidance. With upcoming World Bank SOGIE principals rolling out across their Timor-Leste programs, it is a timely opportunity to require GoTL to move beyond their GESI requirements and further integrate and monitor for LGBTQI+ inclusion across ministry and other GoTL unit employment processes.

- f. *Develop collaborative and inclusive communications with the private sector and the international community.* Work with the local UN Global Compact Network to make sure leading companies lead by example in committing to and implementing the recommendations of the *United Nations LGBTI Corporate Standards of Conduct*.
6. **Integrate clear LGBTQ+ objectives across portfolios.** For instance, DFAT works with various levels of government—from village to municipality to central government. This shows their power to influence change in attitudes in rural communities, as well as policy reforms connected to the whole-of-government strategy. DFAT programs create jobs that are made explicitly available to LGBTQI+ audiences. See recommendation 4 *above* about advertising explicitly with organizations focused on the LGBTQI+ population. Other options include opening internships or vocational training opportunities within programs that specifically target LGBTQI+ youth.
7. **Address concerns about LGBTQI+ terminology.** There is a need for a multipronged approach to address the use of derogatory and discriminatory language towards LGBTQI+ citizens. The LGBTQI+ CSOs seemed best placed to host a series of dialogues to (1) further understand locally used terms, (2) discuss perceptions of the term LGBTQI+ (as a foreign term), and (3) gain consensus on which terms are deemed the most appropriate and respectful. A next step would be for LGBTQI+ CSOs to share these conclusions to gain broader acceptance across civil society and government units. Agreed-upon language across government communications and civil society would be engrained throughout the training curriculum to market respectful language further. Another entry point for such discussions is within the LGBTQI+ working group hosted by USAID.
8. **Inclusive education.** Donors and CSOs working within the education space can build on UN Free & Equal recommendations to foster appropriate language across the Ministry of Education policies and guidance to address bullying and discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals. This includes addressing guidance on uniforms, terminology, and equal access. Equal access to schools, universities, and vocational education opportunities is key to addressing high dropout rates of LGBTQI+ students. It is also recommended that a curriculum review be conducted to provide specific recommendations on how to integrate learning about the foundational principles of SOGIE. Finally, USAID and other IP counterparts recommended considering a general education (GED-equivalent) program for those who still need to complete secondary school to obtain their high school diploma/certification.

CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATION

1. **Integrate LGBTQI+ rights and inclusion practices across all domestic violence and GBV programs.** Perhaps one of the greatest opportunities for LGBTQI+ inclusion is across health, domestic violence, and GBV programs. Several donors, IPs, and CSOs working in this space reportedly need more integration of and sensitivity to LGBTQI+ people and their concerns. The GoTL heavily invests in these sectors and is a key entry point. While training is one element recommended for this sector (see above), there is also a need for systematic integration of LGBTQI+ people's rights and needs across programmatic structures. For example, broadening the narrative around women and children to include LGBTQI+ women and girls is one change of minimal cost and effort. It is recommended that donors and their IPs revisit their target audiences and monitor efforts to make sure LGBTQI+ individuals are explicitly included (see MEL recommendation for further input). Donors and/or their IPs should consider conducting

LGBTQI+ assessments of their programs to identify specific entry points for their programs. As referenced in 1a. *below*, the Referral Network is a key interlocutor for this recommendation.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. **Address underreporting of violence, discrimination, and marginalization of LGBTQI+ individuals.** This effort requires working with local VPU, MSS, SEI, and LGBTQI+ groups in each municipality to review coordination efforts, reporting chains, and existing donor efforts in the community. Conduct an in-depth assessment of the process and how it can better respond to LGBTQI+-reported incidents, as well as entry points within the referral network and local government units to make sure LGBTQI+ people are included in their offerings to vulnerable people.
 - a. *Target the Referral Network for integration of services to LGBTQI+ people.* There is a great opportunity to work closely with PNTL-VPU to make sure services are gender sensitive and timely when handling violence-related cases against vulnerable groups, including LGBTQI+ individuals. Some donors already work with and invest in PNTL-VPU to ensure better services to women and children who are victims of violence in their homes; however, there is no direct support to or inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals who experience violence.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the regression of LGBTQI+ advancement in neighboring countries, Timor-Leste has sustained and, in some ways, progressed its efforts to expand the understanding of gender, rights, and inclusion. While LGBTQI+ people continue to face considerable violence, discrimination, and exclusion because they do not conform to perceived norms of gender as binary and fixed, receptivity remains across the GoTL to improve their understanding of LGBTQI+ dynamics. The GoTL is fully aware of donors' interests in this space and is open to continued programming to decrease violence and advance the inclusion of LGBTQI+ citizens across core development sectors of health, education, and economic growth.

Identifying as LGBTQI+ is legal, yet under-protected in Timor-Leste. USAID's interest in applying core principles of their new *LGBTQI+ Inclusive Development Policy* to the Timor-Leste context is timely. Key actors across the donor, CSO, and GoTL clusters are ripe for capacity strengthening and implementation of LGBTQI+ rights and inclusion efforts. USAID's leadership can develop the needed synergies to push the pendulum.

The GoTL's goal to become a middle-income country by 2030 begs for improved social dynamics that are inclusive of one of the most vulnerable populations, LGBTQI+ individuals.