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**Topic suggestions for events  
about LGBTQI+ issues**

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## Introduction

In the last 50 years, the situation for LGBTQI+ people has improved in many regions and countries globally. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is now prohibited in many countries. Laws against hate crime have become somewhat more common, as have same-sex partnership and marriage laws. Movements for trans persons rights have won legal battles and LGBTQI+ people have mobilised and strengthened their organisations all over the world. Issues that are connected to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression can more often be discussed publicly.

But there are many countries where the situation for LGBTQI+ people is very worrisome. Same-sex relations are still criminalised in 70 countries and in eight countries such relations can lead to the death penalty. People are faced with discrimination and violence all over the world, and progress that had been made around these issues is now threatened in several places.<sup>1</sup>

While Sweden has made progress regarding LGBTQI+ rights, it has not come easy or fast. For example, homosexuality was considered a mental illness until 1979, and until 2013 trans persons were forced to undergo sterilisation to be able to receive gender affirmative treatment. Battles for equal rights are still ongoing, both globally and in Sweden.

The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (Article 1), is one starting point for work for LGBTQI+ rights. This can also be connected to the Yogyakarta Principles – a set of principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. These principles affirm binding international legal standards that all states must comply with.<sup>2</sup> Adding to this, the Swedish government has produced a national strategy for LGBT rights, 'HBT-strategin' (2014). It

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<sup>1</sup>"A world for all. Working globally with sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression & sex characteristics", <https://www.rfsl.se/en/organisation/international/a-world-for-all/>, RFSL 2018

<sup>2</sup> <http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles-en/>

comprises different strategies to promote equal opportunities and rights for LGBTQI+ people in Sweden, which should be implemented in various areas of society.<sup>3</sup>

### *Safety and security*

When organising events and seminars on LGBTQI+ topics, it is vital to consider issues of safety and security. This can mean different things in practice, depending on the context in which the event is to take place. You should analyse potential risks, and prepare safety measures for embassy staff, external lecturers, local organisations and activists who might partake in panels or be in the audience. It is advisable that organisers of this kind of event have an insight into the overall (risk) situation for LGBTQI+ people in the country where an event is to take place, as well as take safety precautions.

### *Local partners*

As a general suggestion, you should conduct research into their respective context, always get in contact with local LGBTQI+ activists (or other human rights organisations) and experts to receive information and experience about working with issues that may cause negative reactions, and learn what precautions might be advisable to take. Safety precautions should include planned measures before, during and after the actual event.

### *The terms and their definitions*

LGBTQI+ ("HBTQI+" in Swedish) is an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex people. The L (lesbian), G (gay) and B (bisexual) refer to sexual orientation – who a person feels romantically and/or sexually attracted to. The T (trans) refers to gender identity and expression. Q (queer) can be about sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, but it can also represent a critical view of existing norms around gender and sexuality. The I stands for intersex and refers to physical variations in a person's biological body and sex characteristics, making it difficult to categorise the person as 'female' or 'male' according to societal norms about how such bodies 'are' or 'should look'. Intersex is not the same as being 'trans', as it refers to a bodily state (for example genitalia and/or chromosomes) rather than gender identity or expression. The + indicates an inclusion of identities, practices and expressions that defies norms on sexual orientation and gender, but might not be adequately defined or represented under previous abbreviations.

It is important to note that these terms are not necessarily used globally, and that different cultures use different terms and words and have different understandings of sexual practices, sexual identities, bodies, gender identities etc. When organising seminars on these topics, sensitivity about local distinctions, phrasings and definitions is vital.

### *Experts*

Names of experts and guest speakers can be obtained from the Swedish Institute. The contact person is found at the toolkit's website at [www.sharingsweden.se](http://www.sharingsweden.se), as well as information about financial support.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2014/01/en-strategi-for-lika-rattigheter-och-mojligheter-oavsett-sexuell-lagning-konsidentitet-eller-konstuttryck/>, the strategy described in English: <https://www.government.se/articles/2015/05/a-strategy-for-equal-rights-and-opportunities-regardless-of-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-or-gender-expression/> (former note) - see also Swedish governmental description on LGBTQI+ in Sweden <https://www.government.se/4a0326/contentassets/b9aa1c9ecc4d4cc6899409d75bcb1a70/equal-rights-and-opportunities-for-lgbt-persons-in-sweden.pdf>

## Three general contexts

When arranging events and seminars about LGBTQI+ issues, it is essential to consider the local context to get an idea of what is relevant and possible. Every country has a specific history concerning LGBTQI+ rights and movements, which means that there are different contexts surrounding these issues. There are countries where being LGBTQI+ is criminalised, penalised brutally, even by death. In such contexts, we do not consider it possible to arrange any public conversations about these issues. It is not realistic or recommended to explicitly talk about matters of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression in extremely repressive environments.

While there are many different contexts, there are also similarities between different countries around the globe. Below are three general contexts, broadly outlined. Note that contexts are complex and ever-changing. These outlines are not comprehensive in any sense, but serve to make you reflect upon what the general situation for LGBTQI+ people is in the country or city where your upcoming event is planned. This is to assess what kind of arrangement and topics could be relevant or possible to arrange a seminar around.

### Context 1

There is an ongoing and open conversation about LGBTQI+ issues, both in the public and political sphere.

### Context 2

There is an LGBTQI+ movement that is organised and able to arrange events and meeting points, despite general negative attitudes and ideas about LGBTQI+ people in society and the establishment. There is little or no protection regarding LGBTQI+ issues in a legal sense.

### Context 3

There are some LGBTQI+ organisations, but they are working under difficult conditions where the public conversation about LGBTQI+ issues is repressive. The public generally has a limited understanding of LGBTQI+ people and matters, and the media as well as religious leaders propagate hatred and prejudices.

## Suggested seminar topics

Each general context has been matched with a few possible seminar topics. These topics should be seen as suggestions, not absolute recommendations. They may not be the most relevant issues in every country in a general context, but can be used as guidelines for what *might* be an appropriate topic in relation to the political and social climate of a specific place.

A topic suggested for one context (for example the seminar topics under Context 3) could also be relevant in a context that is similar to Sweden (Context 1). Each foreign mission must (preferably in consultation with local experts) assess what could be the most interesting or rewarding subject to bring to the fore. Questions like ‘why do we want to do this?’, ‘what do we want to achieve with the seminar/what is the outcome?’, ‘who is our target group, and who will be in the audience?’ should be discussed before assembling the outlines of the seminar.

What is possible, relevant and pressing in specific countries varies, and such differences must be taken into account when arranging seminars about LGBTQI+ issues. The embassy should contact local LGBTQI+ organisations and activists for further input on relevant topics that would be beneficial for the ongoing political and social conversation in each specific place. The arrangements of an event should also be discussed in collaboration with local activists or other experts close to the field, for example if and how a panel discussion or workshop with several representatives can or should be held. The kind of seminar (lecture, workshop, panel discussion etc.) that should be held ought to be considered in relation to each specific place.

In some of the suggested topics, the Swedish context is mentioned. It can be of interest to include information about Swedish history and current matters when forming a seminar. There might, for example, be similarities between current legal debates in the Swedish context and the area where a seminar is planned to be held, and an exchange of knowledge and information can then be of interest, or have a positive influence on the audience. A focus on Swedish legislation on LGBTQI+ issues might not always be relevant or desired, though. Knowledge and sensitivity about differences in context is strongly advised when pinpointing the focus of a seminar.

## **Context 1**

### **1. Discrimination and harassment in the workplace and everyday life**

Studies have shown that LGBTQI+ people experience discrimination in different parts of their everyday lives, particularly in the workplace and in the field of education. A survey from the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA, 2014) showed that almost half (47 per cent) of the LGBTQI+ respondents had experienced discrimination during the past year. Many had additional experiences of violence and harassment in public places. Despite this, people often choose not to report incidents to authorities or police, due to a lack of trust in those institutions.

While the study displayed that respondents living in Sweden had, in general, a slightly lower experience of discrimination and harassment than the average European LGBTQI+ citizen, other research has shown that 50 per cent of trans persons in Sweden have experienced discrimination and harassment during the past year, and a large number of LGBTQI+ people choose not to be open with their identity at the workplace.

#### *Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- What is discrimination and how does it affect LGBTQI+ people?
- How can protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexuality, gender identity and gender expression be implemented in legal systems? (Sweden as an example)
- Possibilities of being open in the workplace – active measures for equality

### **2. Gender-affirmative care and forced sterilisation**

Up until 2013, trans persons in Sweden had to be sterilised to receive legal gender recognition. Through advocacy and activist action, the law that required forced sterilisation was changed, because it was ruled to violate bodily integrity. In 2018, Sweden became the first country to pay damages to

the victims of forced sterilisation as a requirement to attain legal gender recognition. The global trans movement has followed the Swedish process and there is hope that the progress in Sweden can lead the way for other countries to pay damages to trans persons who have been forcibly sterilised. According to Transgender Europe, the countries (within the TGEU geographical mandate) that require sterilisation are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine.

#### *Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- How and why did sterilisation of people in transition come to be?
- The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that forcible sterilisation of trans persons is a ‘violation of human rights’. What is happening now?
- State reparations, Sweden as an example

### **3. LGBTQI+ and family life**

While families in reality look vastly different, there are strong ideas and norms in society about what a ‘family’ is or should be. Reproductive technologies, adoption and marriage laws have made it possible for LGBTQI+ people in some places to form families in a legal sense. Since 2003, same-sex couples can be considered for adoption in Sweden (although there has been only one international adoption involving a same-sex Swedish couple since then). Still, LGBTQI+ parenting and partnership constellations are questioned in different ways. This includes anything from opinions like ‘all children deserve a mother and a father’, to differences in processes when it comes to insemination for same-sex and heterosexual couples, and legal and reproductive obstacles that people who undergo gender affirmation treatment are facing. Surrogacy (commercial and altruistic) has become popular among both same-sex and heterosexual couples, but it has also caused political debates regarding ethical dilemmas.

#### *Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- Consequences of heteronormativity for LGBTQI+ families
- Same-sex partnership and marriage, history and current battles
- Reproductive technologies – possibilities and obstacles for LGBTQI+ people
- Adoption and surrogacy, ways to parenthood and ethical dilemmas

## **Context 2**

### **4. LGBTQI+ people’s health**

As a consequence of breaking norms around sexuality and gender, LGBTQI+ people are at risk of being faced with social, economic and legal costs. This exposure has damaging effects on LGBTQI+ people’s health. While not all LGBTQI+ people experience poor health, statistics show that LGBTQI+ people’s general physical and mental health is worse than that of people who do not identify with this group. Especially within the trans people group and young LGBTQI+ people, depression and anxiety, as well as suicide thoughts and attempts are alarmingly prevalent and should be considered a public health issue.

What are the reasons for LGBTQI+ people's health problems? How is the risk of violence and other types of aggression related to health?

*Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- Violence, micro aggressions and minority stress
- Suicide prevention
- Ways towards equal health regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity/expression

### **5. Gender affirmative treatment and legal gender recognition**

Trans is an umbrella term for people who in some way deviate from the norm that one should identify with and/or express the gender one was assigned by birth. Some trans people want and need to undergo gender affirmative care, which can include surgery and/or hormone treatment, while others do not. Another aspect of such a process is legal gender recognition. In Sweden there are currently two legal genders (man and woman), but this differs from country to country. Some countries have more than two, for example India, Nepal, Australia and Germany.

The requirements for gender affirmative care and legal gender recognition also vary, but in general such processes need to be improved and made accessible to more people.

*Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- What can a process of gender affirmative treatment look like?
- A third legal gender or abolish legal gender altogether? Current status and outlooks for a better future
- Young trans people's possibilities for gender affirmative treatment and legal gender recognition
- What is intersex and how does it relate to LGBTQI+ issues?

### **6. Queer visibility in culture and media**

Same-sex love and relationships, as well as gender identities and expression that break societal norms are at risk of being underrepresented or obscured in popular culture and media. Misrepresentation or stereotyping of LGBTQI+ narratives and characters is another common trait in film production and other forms of media, often portraying same-sex characters as miserable and trans as a problem or connected to mental illness. Despite this, there has been an increase over time in diverse queer representations in film, literature and other forms of media that challenge mainstream notions of sexual orientation and gender.

In what ways are LGBTQI+ narratives visible in cultural media and what meaning do they bring? How can we work for a wider range of representation in cultural imagery?

### *Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- The importance of representation and counteracting damaging stereotypes
- History of LGBTQI+ in media, literature and film
- An intersectional analysis of queer representation in current popular culture

## **Context 3**

### **7. HIV prevention and sexual health**

The HIV epidemic erupted in the 1980s, causing devastation to the LGBTQI+ community (among others), mainly among men who have sex with men. Individuals were personally affected, but it also made it more difficult for LGBTQI+ activists to organise and demand rights. In Sweden, where just a few years earlier reforms meant that homosexuality was no longer seen as a mental illness, HIV caused a great backlash for the battles for equality and legal recognition. As little knowledge existed concerning HIV, hypotheses and scare tactics were spread through media, stigmatising groups highly affected by the virus. While HIV is still a major concern and a global health issue (not only affecting LGBTQI+ people), treatment is available and efficient in many places around the world, often making the viral infection in the blood so low that HIV cannot be transferred to another person.

While medical progress has been made, the stigma and prejudice attached to HIV still prevail, causing negative attitudes toward same-sex practices and an unwillingness to test for the virus.

### *Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- HIV – stigma, myths and facts
- Sexual health awareness and sexual positivity
- HIV and legislation

### **8. LGBTQI+ rights – international conventions**

The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and respect' (Article 1), and should apply to all humans without reservation. Despite this, such rights are constantly violated because of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and gender characteristics. Battles for LGBTQI+ rights are being fought all over the world, and can look vastly different, depending on the context.

While rights for LGBTQI+ people vary in reality from country to country, international agreements regarding human rights have been formulated in international (and national) documents and conventions, explicitly and implicitly involving the rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

### *Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- In what ways are LGBTQI+ rights covered in international conventions?
- What does the UN's Agenda 2030 mean for LGBTQI+ people and the struggle for equality?

- What challenges can be identified when it comes to implementing international conventions for human rights in specific contexts?

### **9. Sexuality and gender – cultural norms**

There is a common misconception that gender and sexual orientation are something given, simple or certain – something that has ‘always been that way’. When examined closer, the issues of sexual orientation and gender are complex, changing, and comprising various aspects, as well as connected to specific contexts.

What do ideas about sexual orientation and gender have to do with aspects of power? Why are some sexual practices considered ‘good’ or ‘proper’ while others ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’? Is gender something we ‘are’ or something we ‘do’?

#### *Suggestions for seminar orientations*

- What is gender? What is sexual orientation?
- How do societal norms around gender and sexual orientation affect the way different people’s identities and sexual practices are viewed?