

Introducing SOGIESC Information into Pre-Departure Orientation Curricula

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When introducing information related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) into orientation curricula, try to use the “infusion” approach. This approach introduces small amounts of SOGIESC-related information throughout the curriculum, rather than suggesting a separate SOGIESC or LGBTIQ+ session. The infusion method is useful because there are SOGIESC-related aspects to almost every orientation topic. People with diverse SOGIESC need to know their rights and responsibilities in their new countries. People who do not have diverse SOGIESC need to be educated about their new country’s approach to diversity. They should also be prepared to interact positively with LGBTIQ+ friends, neighbors, teachers and community members. The infusion method satisfies all of these requirements and normalizes diverse SOGIESC issues by making them a routine part of each topic covered.

DEFINING TERMS

For the benefit of both the instructor and students, you may wish to define SOGIESC-related terms in the curriculum. These can be shared by the instructor in instances in which the terms are unfamiliar to learners, or referenced as needed as the instructor is preparing to give the lessons. Following are IOM and UNHCR’s basic terms and definitions. Please see the Resources tab on the IOM intranet page “Diversity and Inclusion in IOM Programming” under About IOM for the full IOM SOGIESC glossary.

SOGIESC

An acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

PEOPLE WITH DIVERSE SOGIESC

Umbrella term for all people whose sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and/or sex characteristics place them outside culturally mainstream categories.

LGBTIQ+

An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer. The plus sign represents people with diverse SOGIESC who identify using other terms. In some contexts, LGB, LGBT or LGBTI are used to refer to particular populations. Additional characters may be added, such as A for asexual, agender or ally, 2S for Two-Spirit or P for pansexual. In many locations, the letter order varies, e.g., LGBTQI+ or GBLTQI+. SOGIESC-related acronyms are not static and continue to evolve over time. To ensure inclusivity and accuracy, they should be applied with careful consideration to the individuals or populations being referenced.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Each person's enduring capacity for profound romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Encompasses hetero-, homo-, bi-, pan- and asexuality, as well as a wide range of other expressions of sexual orientation. This term is preferred over sexual preference, sexual behavior, lifestyle and way of life when describing an individual's feelings for or attraction to other people.

GAY

Men whose enduring romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction is to men; also, women who are attracted to other women.

LESBIAN

A woman whose enduring romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction is to women.

BI/BISEXUAL

A person who has the capacity for romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction to people of more than one gender. Bisexual+ and Bi+ are sometimes also used as umbrella terms for non-monosexual identities.

QUEER

Traditionally a negative term, queer has been reclaimed by some people and is considered inclusive of a wide range of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. It may be used as an umbrella term for people with diverse SOGIESC, or as an alternative to the phrase "people with diverse SOGIESC" or the acronym LGBT. Queer is used by many people who feel they do not conform to a given society's economic, social and political norms based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

GENDER IDENTITY

Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society. It includes the personal sense of the body, which may or may not involve a desire for modification of appearance or function of the body by medical, surgical or other means.

TRANS/TRANSGENDER

Terms used by some people whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans, transgender and non-binary are "umbrella terms" representing a variety of words that describe an internal sense of gender that differs from the sex assigned at birth and the gender attributed to the individual by society, whether that individual identifies as a man, a woman, simply "trans" or "transgender," with another gender or with no gender.

GENDER EXPRESSION

Individuals use a range of cues, such as names, pronouns, behaviour, clothing, voice, mannerisms and/or bodily characteristics, to interpret other individuals' genders. Gender expression is not necessarily an accurate reflection of gender identity. People with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics do not necessarily have a diverse gender expression. Likewise, people who do not have a diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics may have a diverse gender expression.

TRANSITION

The process of changing one's external gender presentation to be more in line with one's gender identity. Transition typically occurs over a long period of time and may include telling one's family, friends and co-workers, using a different name, pronoun and/or title, dressing differently, changing one's name and/or



sex on legal documents, and undergoing hormone therapy and/or other treatment. In some countries, surgery is a requirement for legal gender recognition, which is a violation of UN human rights norms.

SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Each person's physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, genitals and secondary physical features emerging from puberty.

INTERSEX

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that don't fit typical definitions of male and female bodies. Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. Some of these variations may be apparent before or at birth, while others are not apparent until after puberty or later, or may not be physically apparent at all. There are more than 40 intersex variations; experts estimate between .5% and 1.7% of the population is born with intersex traits.

Intersex people use many different terms, and sometimes use different terms with different people to avoid stigma, misconceptions, discrimination and violence. Common language includes "being" intersex, "having" an intersex variation, difference or trait, clinical diagnostic terms, "differences of sex development," and innate "variations of sex characteristics." The outdated and stigmatizing term "hermaphrodite" is generally rejected by intersex people today, however some have chosen to reclaim it. Intersex people may have any sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

[INSERT COUNTRY] OVERVIEW

It is useful to establish an overall approach to SOGIESC issues in the country. This can be used in an introductory discussion about diversity or on diversity-related handouts. For example:

Canada is a land of diversity, including people who have different sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics than your own. You should not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, or because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or identify in another way (LGBTIQ+).

THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DIVERSE SOGIESC IN [INSERT COUNTRY]

The section on rights should include a detailed description of the rights of people with diverse SOGIESC in that country, including in relation to freedom of expression. For example:

Refugees and migrants with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, or LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants, have the same rights in the U.S. as all other American citizens. As person with diverse SOGIESC in America, you have the right to be open about your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, and to live free of

discrimination and harassment. You also have the right to have a partner or spouse of the same gender and to form a family together.

Freedom of expression is a basic right that is afforded to people residing in the U.S. The U.S. government is one of the most tolerant governments in the world. An individual's actions or ideas must be respected as long as they do not impinge upon other people's rights.

The right to express views and opinions is valued to such a degree in the U.S that individuals and groups have the right to protest against the government if they so choose. People living in the U.S. must be tolerant of different ideas and actions, whether or not they agree with all the viewpoints or behaviors they encounter.

They must also be tolerant of people from a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicities and religions, as well as people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. Note that having a diverse SOGIESC is seen in the U.S. as private matter.

You may encounter many people in your daily life who openly identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or in another way that is unlike your own sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity. You may also encounter people who are intersex and have sex characteristics unlike your own. You may meet families that look different from your own, whether they include same-gender parents or single parents. This diversity is accepted and respected in America.

LAW

When discussing law, the instructor should outline laws, or any lack of laws, relevant to daily life for people with diverse SOGIESC. These include laws related to criminalization, official identification (including birth certificates and passports), discrimination (including employment, health and housing discrimination), sexual harassment, transition, domestic partnerships, marriage, foster parenting, surrogacy and adoption. The instructor may need to specify whether the law is applicable to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. For example:

U.S. law does not criminalize diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. It is legal to marry your same-gender partner in all 50 states. There are a number of lawmakers with diverse SOGIESC in the U.S., including mayors, state and federal representatives. This includes individuals who are openly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.

It is legal to have gender affirming surgery in the U.S., if you wish to do so. You should consult your medical professional for more information.

Sexual harassment can occur between persons of the same gender. If someone of the same gender harasses you, it is just as serious as being harassed by someone of a different gender. There may be legal steps you can take if anyone harasses or discriminates against you on the basis of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. If this occurs, you should speak to your resettlement agency.

Regardless of your personal beliefs, it is not acceptable for you to harass or harm anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. If you do so, you could be breaking U.S. law and face penalties.

TRAVEL

If the curriculum includes a travel section, the instructor should mention any assistance offered specifically to people with diverse SOGIESC. For persons traveling with IOM, the instructor may note the following:

IOM will assist transgender people through the immigration process if needed. Generally, assistance is required when an individual's appearance does not match their legal documentation. For instance, a transgender woman may have the gender expression of female but documentation listing their sex as male. IOM will also ensure transgender people are accommodated in shelter in accordance with their housing preference. Additionally, IOM will assist people with diverse SOGIESC in travel and transit if they need accommodation as a same-gender couple or accommodation that takes into account security concerns.

RECEIVING AGENCIES

The instructor can explain how the agencies receiving the individuals in their new country will work with them if they have a diverse SOGIESC. For example:

Your Resettlement Agency is the first and most reliable source of information for you in the U.S. All Resettlement Agency staff will support refugees if they have a diverse SOGIESC. Feel free to share any concerns or challenges you have with them so that they can best support you. They may bridge you to outside organizations who can provide special services.

EDUCATION

The instructor should include a comprehensive overview of diversity and non-discrimination in education for both students and parents. For example:

There is no bar in education just for having diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, or for being LGBTIQ+.

In some schools, there is gay-straight alliance that supports students. In some universities, one can take courses related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics and gender, such as women's studies, queer studies, and sexuality and gender studies.

You and/or your children and other family members can expect to have teachers, school administrators and classmates who openly identify with a diverse SOGIESC, including those who are in same-gender relationships or who are transgender and identify with a gender identity that is different than the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender students should seek assistance from school administrators in ensuring they have safe access to gender-segregated facilities, such as restrooms and school locker rooms.

In America, public schools respect diversity. Children and adults alike should not be discriminated against for having a diverse SOGIESC. However, bullying of students with a diverse SOGIESC is a widespread problem throughout the country. If your child is facing bullying at school, speak to school administrators. If you as a student are facing bullying, speak to a trusted teacher or parent and ask for help.

EMPLOYMENT

Information related to employment discrimination, harassment, pay and benefits should be provided. It is also useful to remind participants that in the country they are moving to, they can expect to have colleagues, supervisors and staff in the workplace who are open about their diverse SOGIESC. For example:

If you are discriminated against in the workplace because of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, you should speak to your resettlement agency. There may be legal steps you can take. If you have a diverse SOGIESC, you should receive the same wages and benefits as everyone else.

Everyone can expect to have colleagues, supervisors and staff members in the workplace who are open about their diverse SOGIESC. These individuals should be respected in the same way that you respect all your co-workers

HOUSING

Information related to housing discrimination and rights should be provided. If there is a situation in which an individual or family might expect to be in housing that is specifically intended for people with diverse SOGIESC, or LGBTIQ+ persons, that should be noted. It is also helpful to remind all participants that they may have landlords and/or neighbors with diverse SOGIESC. For example:

Your resettlement agency is responsible for identifying safe and affordable housing for refugees in the U.S., including refugees with special needs, like refugees with disabilities and refugees with diverse SOGIESC. Your landlord and fellow tenants should not discriminate against you because of your diverse SOGIESC. If you experience housing discrimination, speak to your resettlement agency.

HEALTH

When discussing health, it is useful to note non-discrimination laws or policies related to health care and insurance and to share specific information related to intersex and transgender healthcare. For example:

Medical health professionals should not discriminate against you on the basis of your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. They should also keep this information confidential, if you request they do so.

If you are intersex or have an intersex child (note: intersex is sometimes called differences in sex development), you have the right to dignified health care.

According to the UN and other organizations, such as the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, surgery on intersex children and infants is generally considered to pose a human rights violation and should be avoided if possible. You have the right to full information about the health care being offered, including medicines and other interventions. You have the right to refuse corrective surgeries that are not lifesaving. You have the right to seek a second opinion. If you are concerned about the care being offered to you or your child, please consult your resettlement agency for a referral to an intersex-friendly health provider. Everyone can expect that they may encounter medical professionals – including doctors, nurses, and counselors – who openly identify as having a diverse SOGIESC.



COMMUNITY SERVICES

Individuals moving to a new country often want to know what local resources there are in the community, whether this is related to having a diverse SOGIESC or to another aspect of their identity, such as their nationality or cultural background. If the curriculum has a section on community services, it is useful to share information about LGBTIQ+ or diverse SOGIESC organizations. If there is no section on community services, you may elect to add a section on who to contact for support and add it there, alongside information for persons who are elderly, have disabilities, and so on. For example:

Many American towns and cities have a LGBTIQ+ Community Center or group. These centers and groups can be useful for meeting other people with diverse SOGIESC, finding out about LGBTIQ+-friendly services, providers and employers, attending LGBTIQ+-related events and accessing services such as counseling or information about SOGIESC-related concerns. To find out about an LGBTIQ+ Community Center or group in your location, ask your resettlement agency or conduct an online search.