



HUMAN RIGHTS OF LGBTIQ PEOPLE

What everyone should know about rights, equality, safety and non-discrimination

SAFE FRIENDLY SOCIETY (SFS)
“Pride, Solidarity & Prosperity”

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1. Why is it important to know your human rights?

Rights belong to everyone

Being a person is the foundation of your rights.

Equality

No one should be denied rights because of who they are or how they feel.

Safety and dignity

Everyone has the right to live safely, with dignity and without violence.

Human rights are the principles and rights every person has simply because they are human. They apply to everyone, regardless of sex, origin, religion, physical condition, language, health status, or relationship and romantic circumstances.

For people who are LGBTIQ, these human-rights protections do not change. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer does not take away a person's rights.

KEY QUESTION

“Does having rights in the law mean that discrimination or violence cannot happen?”

No. Laws and principles may provide rights, but people can still violate them or prevent others from accessing them. That is why knowing, documenting and reporting violations is important.

This booklet provides simple, practical information to help people understand their rights and take safety measures when their rights have been violated.

2. Human rights at the international level

International human-rights treaties and principles emphasize that all people must be respected and treated equally in their rights.

Equality and non-discrimination

Everyone has equal rights.

Life and safety

Everyone has the right to be protected from violence and acts that harm the body or life.

Privacy

Everyone has the right to privacy and to be protected from unjustified interference in their private life.

Freedom of expression

Everyone has the right to express ideas and to seek and share information in ways that respect the law.

Example: Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Article 2 emphasizes that rights apply without discrimination.

International treaties such as the ICCPR and ICESCR also support rights to life, safety, privacy, education, work, health and participation in public life.

REMEMBER

LGBTIQ rights are not “new rights” or a separate kind of rights. They are ordinary human rights that must be respected for everyone.

Key sources: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); Yogyakarta Principles — principles explaining the application of international law to sexual orientation and gender identity.

3. What does LGBTIQ mean?

These terms help describe people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. They do not describe one single way of living or behaving.

L Lesbian

A woman who is romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

G Gay

A person who is attracted to someone of the same sex; the word is often used for men, but can also be used more broadly.

B Bisexual

A person who may be attracted to people of different sexes.

T Transgender

A person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

I Intersex

A person born with reproductive or sex characteristics that do not fit neatly within typical definitions of male or female.

Q Queer

A term some people use to describe an identity that does not fit conventional categories of sexual orientation or gender identity.

NOTE

Having a particular sexual orientation or gender identity is not the same as committing a crime.

Also, using one of these terms does not mean that everyone who uses the same term has the same life or experiences.

4. Rights and laws in Rwanda

The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2023) contains important provisions on human rights. For example, Article 15 concerns equality before the law; Article 16 protection from discrimination; Article 20 the right to education; Article 21 the right to good health; Article 23 privacy; and Article 24 personal liberty and security.

Rwanda does not criminalize consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex. However, the law includes the offence of public indecency (Article 143 of the law determining offences and penalties in general), and the use of laws related to “improper conduct” or “public indecency” can affect people through stigma and other consequences.

WHAT THIS MEANS

The fact that consensual same-sex relations between adults are not a criminal offence in Rwanda does not mean that every case of discrimination or violence is easily resolved. A person may still face stigma, violence, harassment, loss of opportunities or mistreatment by individuals or institutions.

In employment, Rwanda’s labour law prohibits discrimination at work and provides for principles of equality and protection of workers. However, these laws should not be treated as if they solve every problem faced by LGBTIQ people.

5. What rights should an LGBTIQ person know?

Non-discrimination

No one should be denied rights because of who they are or how they feel.

Protection from violence

Violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity should be treated as a serious concern.

Privacy

Information about a person's private life, family and relationships should be protected.

Speaking up and seeking help

A person may seek information, support and advice, as long as this is done in a way that does not violate the rights of others.

These are examples of rights. In some situations, rights may have limits provided by law, but those limits must be based on law and applied in a way that respects human rights.

If you think your rights have been violated, you do not need to know the exact law or article that was broken before seeking help. What matters first is documenting what happened clearly and seeking trusted support.

6. What can discrimination and violence look like?

Discrimination or violence can be obvious or hidden. Examples may include:

- Being insulted, harassed, threatened or subjected to violence because a person is LGBTIQ;
- Being denied employment, services or opportunities because of who a person is;
- Sharing a person's private information without their permission;
- Being arrested or detained unlawfully;
- Being threatened or forced to hide one's identity because of fear of violence;
- Online violence, sharing private photos or messages, or harassment on social media.

IF THIS HAPPENS TO YOU

You do not have to tell everyone. First think about your safety. Choose a trusted person or organization, keep evidence safely, and seek appropriate support.

SFS conducts research and collects information about people's lives and challenges so that reliable information can support advocacy and solutions. SFS also has a way to receive reports of violence and other human-rights concerns.

7. How to document and safely keep information about violence

If it is safe for you, write down the following as soon as possible after the incident:

When and where it happened

Write the date, time and place. If the location could identify you, keep the information somewhere safe.

People involved

Write the names or descriptions of people or institutions involved, if you know them.

What happened

Record the words used and what happened as accurately as possible, without adding things you are not sure about.

Evidence

Keep messages, photos, audio, screenshots or documents — but do not put yourself in danger to obtain them.

SAFETY COMES FIRST

Do not confront someone who harmed you just to obtain evidence. Do not share private information with people you do not trust. If someone else may monitor your phone, think about the security of your accounts, passwords, notifications and files before storing or sending information.

When you want to report, you can choose whether to use your name or first ask how your information will be kept confidential. If there is an emergency that may put your life at risk, seek appropriate emergency help where you are.

8. REPORT VIOLENCE

How to report

Have you experienced violence or another human-rights concern? You can use SFS's reporting platform to share information.

REPORT VIOLENCE



[REPORT VIOLENCE](#)

Before reporting, think about your safety and what information you want to share. SFS may use information received to follow up cases, conduct research and strengthen advocacy; therefore, it is helpful to read the instructions on the form before submitting information.

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTE

No form or online platform can guarantee complete safety by itself. If reporting could put you at risk, first seek advice from a trusted person or organization.

Short name for the portal: REPORT VIOLENCE — short, clear and easy to use.

9. Common ideas and answers

“LGBTIQ rights are special rights.”

No. The rights to non-discrimination, safety, privacy, education, health and other human rights belong to everyone.

“If being gay is not a crime, there can be no human-rights problem.”

No. The absence of a specific criminal offence does not remove discrimination, violence, harassment or mistreatment that may occur in everyday life.

“Reporting a problem immediately solves it.”

No. Reporting is one step. It can help with documentation, advocacy, follow-up and finding solutions, but each case needs an appropriate response.

“A person must first say they are LGBTIQ in order to receive rights.”

No. Human rights do not require a person to disclose private information about themselves before their rights are respected.

10. Know, document, share and change

Reliable information is a tool for advocacy. When people know their rights, they can identify a problem, document it, seek help and contribute to changing harmful attitudes and practices.

SFS'S ROLE

SFS works to promote the rights, dignity and well-being of every person through research, advocacy, education and community support.

Research

Collecting and analysing information to understand problems and changes.

Advocacy

Using evidence and information to promote rights-respecting change.

Community support

Promoting knowledge, safety and the ability to stand up for oneself.

Website: www.safefriendlysociety.org

Email: info@safefriendlysociety.org

Kigali, Rwanda

This booklet provides general information. It does not replace advice from a lawyer or other professional services.

11. Key sources of information

Laws and official documents

- Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2023), especially Articles 15–24. Ministry of Justice / Official Gazette.
- Law N° 68/2018 determining offences and penalties in general, as amended, including Article 143 on public indecency.
- Law N° 66/2018 governing labour in Rwanda, and its amendments.

Information on LGBTIQ rights in Rwanda

- Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026 — Rwanda, section on “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity”.
- Safe Friendly Society (SFS) & International Human Rights Center, NGO Joint Parallel Report to the UN Human Rights Committee (2025).
- SFS, Understanding Our Experiences: report on the realities of LGBTQI people in Rwanda (2025).

International law and principles

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
- Yogyakarta Principles.

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Knowing your rights is the first step. Documenting them and sharing information with others can be the next step.

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