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# Global Affairs Canada: Feminist Foreign Policy Dialogue

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## Please indicate if you are submitting this contribution:

- ☐ As an individual
- ☒ On behalf of an organization
- ☐ On behalf of a group of organizations or individuals

## Please indicate the areas covered in your contribution:

- ☒ Overarching considerations
- ☐ Enhanced diplomatic engagement
- ☐ Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
- ☒ Responding to evolving vulnerabilities
- ☐ Inclusive digital transformation
- ☐ Other: please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Introduction

In February, Minister of Foreign Affairs François-Philippe Champagne announced his intention to strengthen the foundations of Canada's feminist foreign policy (FFP) by working with civil society on a white paper, making sure to include Indigenous communities. In response, Rainbow Railroad welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this dialogue.

Our mission as an organization is to help LGBTQI+ people globally flee persecution and find safety. Since 2006, we have helped over 1,000 persons in partnership with LGBTQI+ human rights defenders and collectives on the ground. In many cases, we've helped build their capacities so that they are able to help individuals stay in their country, as well as ensure that they have support in emergency cases where relocation is necessary. Annually, Rainbow Railroad receives approximately 3,000 requests from over 100 countries from individuals facing persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

Rainbow Railroad is part of various international fora: nationally, it is an active member of both the Dignity Network<sup>1</sup>, and the Rainbow Coalition for Refuge<sup>2</sup> – national coalitions representing close to 100 LGBTQI+ civil society organizations (CSOs) interested in this important area of work.

Overall, our view is that Canada must mainstream considerations of LGBTQI+ needs into every aspect of a critical, intentional, and fully realized FFP while working closely with LGBTQI+ CSOs. With that in mind, this brief will focus specifically on LGBTQI+ inclusion in Canada's FFP by addressing two areas and questions outlined in the scene-setter:

- 1) Overarching considerations:** How should we design, implement, monitor, and evaluate a FFP? Specifically, what lessons can we draw from existing policies (e.g., Feminist International Assistance Policy or Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security) to improve the application of Canada's overall feminist approach internationally?
- 2) Responding to evolving vulnerabilities:** Where should Canada be focusing its efforts in terms of a feminist approach to migration and refugee issues?

To ensure Canada's FFP strategy effectively reaches and supports LGBTQI+ individuals globally, this submission emphasizes the value of partnerships with international and domestic LGBTQI+ CSOs, including Rainbow Railroad.

# 1. Overarching considerations: Canada must design, implement, monitor, and evaluate a FFP that explicitly considers LGBTQI+ populations and experiences.

## Drawing on lessons from the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) to improve the application of Canada's overall feminist approach internationally

Canada's FIAP was the first overarching Canadian international aid policy to mention sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>3</sup> This was an important first step, and one Canada's FFP used as a stepping stone. However, the FIAP has yet to critically engage with the way SOGIESC equality is intrinsically linked to gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

The only mention of sexual orientation and gender identity in the FIAP is in a list detailing other facets of identity and sources of potential marginalization. Even in this limited capacity, there is no mention of how SOGIESC intersects with the marginalization faced by women and girls to specifically harm lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming women.<sup>5</sup> Beyond being another potential source of marginalization—similar to how the intersections of identity, such as age, race, or ethnicity, might be—“gender does not just intersect with sexual orientation and gender identity; SOGI(ESC) is inextricably linked to gender.”<sup>6</sup> LGBTQI+ individuals are specifically marginalized because of gender inequality, and therefore their needs must be considered as an inherent feature of approaching foreign policy from a feminist lens.

The Scene-Setter for the FFP is promising because it appears to recognize the special role of LGBTQI+ equality under a feminist framework—and even the particular vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQI+ communities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>7</sup> That said, this document also notes that “men and boys have an equal role to play as stakeholders and partners in eliminating harmful social norms, promoting gender equality and defining positive masculine identities.”<sup>8</sup> While this is true, it is also the only explicit reference to the way men and boys experience gender inequality. This framing minimizes the impact that gender inequality has in terms of specifically punishing gay, bisexual, queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming men. And this is to say nothing of the experiences of intersex people. Acknowledging these lived realities will help form a more critical, comprehensive, and feminist foreign policy framework. The FFP therefore has an opportunity to go beyond the FIAP and recognize the inherent links between gender equality and SOGIESC rights. Rainbow Railroad is hopeful the government will mainstream SOGIESC issues through Canada's FFP strategy.

## FIAP and LGBTQI+ international development assistance

A lesson to be learned from FIAP is how it fully integrates LGBTQI+ human rights. It's a key aspect in facilitating resilience-building and locally grown advocacy to advance SOGIESC rights in partner countries. A Canadian FFP that communicates Canadian values of equality while also remaining effective in practice must do so in a way that bolsters existing in-country grassroots human rights advocacy. This also aligns with initial descriptions of the FFP, wherein “Canada's feminist agenda recognizes the role of civil society in advancing, promoting and protecting human rights.”<sup>9</sup>

Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) recent announcement of \$30 million in Official Development Assistance<sup>10</sup> (ODA) designed to meet the needs of LGBTQI+ people internationally offers valuable lessons on how to improve Canada's overall feminist approach internationally.

### i) Partnering with civil society

The \$30 million LGBTQ2 International Assistance Program will form a key aspect of Canada's diplomatic engagement strategy on global SOGIESC rights advancement. Overall, while we are in alignment with key aspects of the LGBTQ2 International Development Assistance Program, we believe that, in order to truly commit to guiding criteria, the proposed approach must include more consultation with Canadian LGBTQI+ civil society (beyond the \$10 million for Canadian CSOs engaged in international development activities, like the Act Together for Inclusion Fund). This is useful in order to understand how to fully integrate LGBTQI+ inclusion within FIAP and further build its FFP.

More than half of this funding will be allocated for local grassroots organizations in developing countries through the Geographic Partnerships Window, as well as through working with bilateral organizations. The working assumption is that GAC plans to manage this fund solely through its geographic branches and administer funding through Canadian diplomatic offices—presumably through a program like the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI). If this assumption is correct, there are clear benefits to distributing ODA through the CFLI due to its focus on projects implemented by small scale, local CSOs.<sup>11</sup>

Rainbow Railroad similarly operates through our vast partnership network to fund local activists and organizations advancing SOGIESC human rights. However, while Canadian organizations are specifically focused on SOGIESC, the CFLI's current project focus areas are “gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, human rights, democracy and governance, peace and security, climate action, economic growth.”<sup>12</sup> The CFLI currently serves LGBTQI+ organizations and populations, but it is not clear if SOGIESC-based inclusion and rights advancement is a priority. While Rainbow Railroad commends the government for taking steps to make SOGIESC human rights an emerging priority in the execution of the FFP, this is a new addition to the CFLI's public-facing mandate.

Further, though SOGIESC rights are fundamentally linked to gender equality initiatives, connecting with local LGBTQI+ CSOs takes a significant investment of time and trust building. More often than not, these organizations are informal networks or loose collectives that operate underground and must stay that way in order to survive. Canadian international LGBTQI+ CSOs like Rainbow Railroad perform our work by liaising discreetly with local groups, which, by virtue of circumstance, cannot operate in an official capacity. This is a key area where using organizations as an additional intermediary to recommend and refer local projects for funding would be vital. Canadian missions abroad may not be in the best position to immediately administer this initiative, because establishing the kind of trust needed to reach local organizations simply takes time. A collaborative approach with Canadian CSOs offers a real-time opportunity to demonstrate what a FFP that fully incorporates LGBTQI+ inclusion looks like.

## **ii) Integrating LGBTQI+ Official Development Assistance (ODA) into FIAP**

While this \$30 million in direct funding for LGBTQI+-specific initiatives is a welcome and necessary investment, it is certainly not nearly enough to address the needs of this population—particularly given that in 2017-2018, Canada spent \$5.37-billion in ODA.<sup>13</sup> That year, just 3 percent of bilateral international development assistance was gender-targeted. Although 95 percent of international bilateral aid is being used to be gender inclusive by 2021, just 15 percent is slated to be gender-targeted. It is also unclear how much of this targeted funding will reach LGBTQI+ initiatives.

There is a real danger to silo LGBTQI+ ODA now that a specific fund has been established. LGBTQI+ Canadian civil society expects this is just the beginning phases of ensuring LGBTQI+ inclusion in the FIAP and, as a result, strengthening Canada's FFP. We recommend that the government officials convene a working group with Canadian LGBTQI+ CSOs to determine how to expand the \$30M ODA into a longer term integrated fund within the FIAP.

## **2. Responding to evolving vulnerabilities: Canada's FFP must focus on LGBTQI+ transient populations—including refugees as part of its feminist approach.**

### **Building on the work already started by LGBTQI+ civil society to provide supports to LGBTQI+ refugees**

Policy development that recognizes and engages with some of the lived realities of LGBTQI+ people globally is desperately needed. This includes addressing the evolving vulnerabilities of LGBTQI+ transient populations, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and human rights defenders (HRDs).

Under this policy priority, the FFP Scene-Setter notes the issue of human trafficking, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse. Here, policy makers must recognize the intersecting vulnerabilities that make transgender women especially likely to be affected by sex trafficking and preyed upon by traffickers. Trans women, an at-risk population even within LGBTQI+

communities, are often entirely excluded from the traditional labour market and therefore face a disproportionate risk of entrapment into sex trafficking. These women also sometimes face surveillance and threats from gangs, making the prospect of escaping their country extremely difficult.

For a number of reasons, LGBTQI+ persons are also disproportionately likely to engage in survival sex and dangerous sex work. Employment discrimination and stigma pushes LGBTQI+ people into poverty, often leaving this work as one of the few available sources of income. Rainbow Railroad has helped hundreds of people with these lived experiences, helping them to safely establish new lives. The FFP must recognize these particular vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQI+ individuals—particularly trans women—and how partnering with LGBTQI+ CSOs will be instrumental in helping to address them. Building on the reference in the Scene-Setter, Rainbow Railroad has observed and documented how COVID-19 has disproportionately affected LGBTQI+ persons who are internally displaced.<sup>14</sup>

While Canada has made huge strides toward increasing the resettlement of LGBTQI+ refugees<sup>15</sup> in the country through partnership with civil society and the Rainbow Refugee Assistance Partnership,<sup>16</sup> it must consider internally displaced persons (IDPs) in order to truly adopt a feminist approach.

## Understanding LGBTQI+ IDPs

### i) Recognizing state-sponsored crackdowns

Rapid social- and state-sponsored violence or “crackdowns” represent one of the key emerging vulnerabilities for LGBTQI+ people globally. When the social climate becomes unlivable, or when state-sponsored violence breaks out via crackdowns, SOGIESC human rights defenders (HRDs) become prime targets. These situations may demand immediate evacuation. In the face of such persecution, grounds for asylum can and should be claimed. To help address the evolving vulnerabilities of global human rights advocates, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is currently developing a dedicated refugee stream for HRDs.<sup>17</sup> But HRDs who are still in-country are not refugees, and therefore will not be covered under the current proposed HRD protection stream. Rainbow Railroad urges policy makers to consider how those who operate in the SOGIESC rights defense spaces are particularly vulnerable, often facing severe social and legal consequences—including the death penalty. This must be addressed when considering refugees in Canada’s FFP.

### ii) Creating a durable solution

The response to “crackdowns” highlights a wider issue in the current Canadian asylum mechanism, whereby a durable solution does not exist for in-country asylum seekers—including LGBTQI+ transient populations and IDPs. The global refugee crisis represents one of the greatest international humanitarian challenges of our time; in 2019, 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to “persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order.”<sup>18</sup> Of these, over 50 percent were IDPs.<sup>19</sup> And while Canada has made recent strides in our refugee resettlement policies and practices, IDPs have largely been left out of them. For LGBTQI+ individuals who face specific barriers to leaving their origin country and becoming refugees because of their SOGIESC status—which, at its core, is an expression of gender-based violence—alternative pathways are desperately needed. Over the last several years Canada has been positioning itself as a global leader on SOGIESC human rights and is uniquely positioned to generate such pathways.

Canada must consider creating a durable IDP policy that effectively harnesses the knowledge and resources of capable referral organizations. Generating a solution for LGBTQI+ IDPs and working with LGBTQI+ NGOs and CSOs will ensure a uniquely Canadian FFP strategy.

## Conclusion

In order to fully implement a FFP strategy, LGBTQI+ integration in the areas of its FIAP and refugee strategy is key. This must include direct partnership with Canadian CSOs. Canadian LGBTQI+ civil society has already begun to co-ordinate efforts to become effective partners with the government on specific SOGIESC issues. Now is the time to leverage this wealth of knowledge and expertise in Canada’s FFP.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Dignity Network Canada is a group of civil society organizations across Canada involved in supporting the human rights of people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) globally.  
<http://www.dignityinitiative.ca/en/>
- <sup>2</sup> The Rainbow Coalition for Refuge is an umbrella organization of LGBTQI refugee resettlement organizations in Canada. Its steering committee consists of: Calgary Rainbow Railroad Station (End of the Rainbow Foundation), Capital Rainbow Refugee, Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, OCASI, Rainbow Railroad, Rainbow Refugee, and the Rainbow Refugee Association of Halifax
- <sup>3</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0020702020953425>
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid
- <sup>7</sup> GAC's Scene Setter for Feminist Foreign Policy Dialogue
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2019/02/canada-announces-new-funds-in-support-of-lgbtq2-rights.html>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/cfli-fcil/index.aspx?lang=eng>
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/assets/pdfs/publications/odaaa-17-18-eng.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> [https://assets.website-files.com/5996edc0ab717100012bd6a9/5ed90f74afac27b1e4fb9e1c\\_Link%201.pdf](https://assets.website-files.com/5996edc0ab717100012bd6a9/5ed90f74afac27b1e4fb9e1c_Link%201.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/canada-role/lgbtq2.html>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2019/06/canada-announces-new-initiative-to-support-lgbtq2-refugees.html>
- <sup>17</sup> The Minister will "introduce a dedicated refugee stream to provide safe haven for human rights advocates, journalists and humanitarian workers at risk, with a target of helping resettle as many as 250 people a year." <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2019/12/13/minister-immigration-refugees-and-citizenship-mandate-letter>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5ee200e37/unhcr-global-trends-2019.html>
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid