



# SINGAPORE



Population: 5+ million people



Stonewall Global Diversity Champions: 67



## THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE

In Stonewall's **Global Workplace Equality Index**, broad legal zoning is used to group the differing challenges faced by organisations across their global operations.

Singapore is classified as a Zone 3 country, which means sexual acts between people of the same sex are illegal.

Two further zones exist. In Zone 1 countries, sexual acts between people of the same sex are legal and clear national employment protections exist on grounds of sexual orientation. In Zone 2 countries sexual acts between people of the same sex are legal but no clear national employment protections exist on grounds of sexual orientation.

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

The Constitution **protects rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly** in relation to **all citizens** under Article 14, subject to other Acts of Parliament.

**Sexual orientation and gender identity** are **not** expressly **mentioned**.

**Public assemblies and public processions** are **regulated by the Public Order Act**. The Act does not expressly restrict the right of LGBT persons.

Different **government agencies** are authorised to **enforce restrictions and regulations on** the rights to **freedom of expression, association and assembly**.

The Info-communications and Media Development **Authority regulates the media** and has published codes of practice that regulate, among others, films, television programmes and advertisements. These codes contain certain **restrictions on the portrayal of LGBT themes**.

The Ministry of Home Affairs stated in a 2016 press release that **foreigners are not allowed to organise, speak at or participate in LGBT-themed events** and that **foreign entities should not fund, support or influence such events**.

### FAMILY AND SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

"Acts of gross indecency" between men are prohibited, **criminalising sexual activity between men** with a penalty of up to two years imprisonment under Section 377 A of the Penal Code. The section was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2014.

The **legal age** of consent is 16 years under S376A of the Penal Code. The law is **silent on female same-sex sexual activity**.

**Same-sex marriages** solemnised in Singapore or elsewhere are **void** under Section 12 of the Women's Charter.

**Trans people** who have **undergone sex-reassignment surgery may legally marry** a person of the **opposite gender** under Section 12(2) of the Women's Charter.

Same-sex couples have **no legal right to adopt children** under the Adoption of Children Act.

### EQUALITY AND EMPLOYMENT

Article 12(1) of the Constitution states that **everyone is equal before the law**, but it does not explicitly refer to sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Discrimination** against citizens **in regard to a specified list of characteristics** is **prohibited** under Article 12(2) of the Constitution. This list does not include **sexual orientation and gender identity**.

There is **no law** that expressly **prohibits employment discrimination against LGBT people**.

Legislation governing professional behaviour of certain professions, such as the Legal Profession Act, **may prevent individuals from practicing their profession if convicted of a criminal offence**.

### GENDER IDENTITY

Trans people can **change** their **legal gender to female or male** under Section 12 of the Women's Charter. The legal gender can be changed **on identity cards and passports** but **not birth certificates**.

This is subject to the **requirement of a "sex re-assignment procedure"**. The scope of this procedure is not defined under the Act.

**All persons can change** their **legal name** under Section 10 of the National Registration Regulations. This requires the submission of a deed poll, reflecting the intended name change.

### IMMIGRATION

**No laws** or case law exist that **allow for dependant visas** for same-sex couples.



## A VIEW FROM SINGAPORE

**Paerin Choa** is a Singaporean lawyer and the spokesperson of Pink Dot Sg, a non-profit movement working for a Singapore in which all Singaporeans, regardless of their sexual orientation, are free to love and be loved. Pink Dot Sg has a growing list of international corporate sponsors and focuses on an annual event where people come together to celebrate the freedom to love.



### What are the biggest challenges facing LGBT people in Singapore?

Section 377 A of the Criminal Code directly targets gay and bi men by criminalising sexual acts between men. This law is rarely enforced in practice, but it acts as a serious barrier to progression. As such it doesn't only affect gay and bi men, but also the LGBT community as a whole. For instance, health services and campaigns tailored to the needs of LGB people are not allowed, as they would 'promote' sex between men. In education, teachers are not trained how to counsel and support LGBT students. LGBT organisations that have applied to be registered as societies have had their applications rejected, denying them the status of a legal entity and thus making it harder for them to operate and receive donations. Until section 377 A is abolished, many of these issues will remain.

### Which specific issues affect lesbians, bi women and trans people?

Lesbians and bi women face discrimination based on their sexual orientation just like gay and bi men, in addition to discrimination based on their gender. As for trans people, depending on the age in which they start to transition, they may already face discrimination and stigmatisation in schools. This often affects their education. With lower qualifications, their employment opportunities will be limited and some may have to resort to sex work to make a living. Even with proper qualifications, some employers are not open-minded enough to hire trans employees.

### Are LGBT issues discussed in the media?

Regulations by the Media Development Authority ban content that justifies or 'normalises' being LGBT on mainstream media. Consequently, LGBT people leading normal, purposeful lives are erased on mainstream media. However, the younger generation in particular are increasingly informed about LGBT issues through the internet and social media. But while people are progressing and attitudes are changing, laws remain a barrier.

### Can you describe the recent challenges and restrictions Pink Dot has faced?

Pink Dot Festival is an annual gathering where people come together and celebrate the freedom to love. The event has been taking place at Singapore's Speakers' Corner since 2009 and has received global corporate sponsorship for many years. However, in November 2016, the government made changes to the Public Order Act, which governs assemblies in public places in Singapore. Because of these amendments, only Singaporean citizens and permanent residents can now attend the event. Furthermore, only Singaporean citizens and Singapore-controlled companies can sponsor any public assemblies in Singapore, including Pink Dot. That meant we suddenly lost all international sponsors overnight. As a reaction to this, a few local entrepreneurs came together and spearheaded a campaign to rally local businesses to support Pink Dot. The campaign is called 'Red Dot for Pink Dot' and was a huge success. 120 local businesses stepped up and became sponsors of Pink Dot 2017. However, the event had to take place under very restrictive conditions. The police required the park to be barricaded and they conducted checks of identity cards to ensure that only Singaporeans and permanent residents entered.






### What is the workplace like for LGBT people and what can organisations do to promote equality?

The workplace environment for LGBT people can differ significantly depending on the industry and the individual business. Big global businesses have started to champion LGBT equality in Singapore, and many have recently launched local LGBT network chapters. To make employees comfortable with joining, businesses should address worries LGBT employees may have and ensure senior managers are supporting the network. Successful LGBT managers in the workplace should also be profiled. Additionally, many organisations sponsor Pink Dot, although unfortunately this is now only an option for local businesses.

## LGBT INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

### THE FOUNDATIONS

There are several steps that employers can take to start creating a supportive workplace environment for their LGBT employees in Singapore:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Consult local LGBT organisations to understand the local context for LGBT people</b></li> <li> <b>Introduce explicitly LGBT-inclusive anti-discrimination and bullying and harassment policies</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Train HR staff and promote inclusive policies</b></li> <li> <b>Carry out LGBT-inclusive diversity training</b></li> <li> <b>Encourage senior managers to promote their commitment to LGBT inclusion and equality</b></li> </ul> |
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### NEXT STEPS

Once a foundation has been built, there are further steps employers can take to bring about positive change for LGBT people. For example:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Establish employee engagement mechanisms like LGBT networks and allies programmes</b></li> <li> <b>Carry out LGBT awareness-raising events</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Partner with local LGBT groups to advance LGBT equality beyond the workplace</b></li> <li> <b>Work with suppliers and partners to advance LGBT workplace equality</b></li> </ul> |
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Employers can improve their initiatives by participating in Stonewall's Global Workplace Equality Index - a free benchmarking tool offering a clear roadmap to LGBT inclusion in the workplace. [www.stonewall.org.uk/gwei](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/gwei)



## LEARN FROM STONEMALL'S GLOBAL DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS

### Barclays

Through unconscious bias training, Barclays Singapore enables its senior leaders to work towards an equal and inclusive work environment. The employee handbook also contains Barclays' LGBT inclusive anti-discrimination policy, building the foundation for an equal workplace environment. In 2012, Barclays Singapore made further commitments to the policy by introducing partner medical benefits for all employees, regardless of the partner's sex or gender identity. Barclays' LGBT network Spectrum has an active chapter in Singapore that works to enable LGBT employees to bring their whole selves to work. In October 2015, the Spectrum Allies Campaign was launched, with senior leaders showing their support by becoming allies or supporters of Spectrum. Beginning in 2015 and continuing annually, Spectrum Singapore organises a quiz night, the proceeds of which are donated to the local LGBT group Oogachaga. The network was also a founding sponsor of Pink Dot, and in 2017 Barclays supported a private showing of the play Tango based on real-life same-sex couple raising a family in Singapore.

### Norton Rose Fulbright

Norton Rose Fulbright's global diversity and inclusion strategy includes a focus on gender identity and sexual orientation. All global messaging related to these topics is accessible on the intranet to all staff in Singapore. In line with its global strategy, Norton Rose Fulbright has an Asia LGBTQA Pride network, consisting of partners, lawyers and business services staff. The network recently participated in, and sponsored, a raffle prize for a fundraiser organised by a local LGBT group. The group provides counselling, support and personal development for LGBT individuals, couples and families. In recognition of the firm's Global Inclusion Month in October, the Singapore office hosted an event where people from diverse backgrounds were invited to share their stories with staff. Participants included LGBT individuals.



## GET INVOLVED



### THE ANNUAL LGBT CALENDAR

**June** - Pink Dot SG: festival celebrating the LGBT community. [www.pinkdot.sg](http://www.pinkdot.sg)

**August** - IndigNation: LGBTIQ+ Pride season. [www.indignationsg.wordpress.com](http://www.indignationsg.wordpress.com)

Check the events websites for the most up-to-date information on dates and participation requirements.



### FIND LGBT GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

**Oogachaga** - a group providing community-based counselling, support and personal development opportunities for the LGBTQ community. The group also runs professional and corporate trainings. [www.oogachaga.com](http://www.oogachaga.com)

**Purple Alliance** - an LGBT organisation conducting research and running events and training to empower individuals and advance the equality of LGBT people, including workplace equality. [www.thepurplealliance.com](http://www.thepurplealliance.com)

**Sayoni** - a community of LGBT women organising and advocating for equality regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation. [www.sayoni.com](http://www.sayoni.com)

**SG Rainbow** - a community group for gay, bi and queer men aged 18 to 35 in Singapore. [www.sgrainbow.org](http://www.sgrainbow.org)

**T Project** - an organisation running a shelter for trans people at risk in Singapore. The group also engages in campaigning and fundraising activities to empower the trans community in Singapore. [www.facebook.com/theprojectsg](https://www.facebook.com/theprojectsg)

**Inter-University LGBT Network** - a network of LGBT groups in Singapore universities collaborating to create safer and more inclusive school communities for everyone regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. [www.interunilgbt.wixsite.com/interunilgbt](http://www.interunilgbt.wixsite.com/interunilgbt)



### GET LOCAL LGBT UPDATES

**Dear Straight People** - an online LGBT publication based in Singapore. [www.dearstraightpeople.com](http://www.dearstraightpeople.com)



## STONEWALL'S GLOBAL DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME WORKS WITH 67 ORGANISATIONS OPERATING IN SINGAPORE.

Our team of workplace advisors offers tailored one-to-one advice on how to create LGBT-inclusive workplaces globally. If you would like to receive support or want to be featured as a case study in one of our Global Workplace Briefings, contact Stonewall.

Stonewall  
192 St John Street, London  
EC1V 4JY  
United Kingdom

Switchboard: +44 (0) 20 7593 1850  
Info Line: +44 (0) 800 050 2020  
Email: [info@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:info@stonewall.org.uk)  
Website: [stonewall.org.uk](http://stonewall.org.uk)

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