

How to.... Work with Staff Opposed to LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

Opposition to diverse SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics) inclusion among colleagues and staff is the unfortunate reality in some humanitarian organisations, particularly those operating across diverse cultural, religious, and legal contexts. Managers and Human Resource (HR) teams can face the challenge of upholding organisational values and compliance obligations while navigating genuine disagreement, discomfort, or hostility from some staff members.

This guide offers practical, principled approaches for engaging constructively with staff who resist diverse SOGIESC inclusion, without compromising the dignity, safety, or rights of LGBTQIA+ colleagues. The goal is not to force changes in beliefs, but to establish and maintain a culture of respect and professional conduct.

- **Conduct, Not Belief:** Organisations cannot legislate what staff believe, but they can set clear standards for professional behaviour in line with accepted organisational values.
- **Dignity Is Non-Negotiable:** All staff and beneficiaries have the right to be free from harassment, discrimination, and hostility, regardless of SOGIESC.
- **Engagement Over Exclusion:** Dialogue and education can be more effective than disciplinary approaches alone.
- **Management Support Matters:** Line managers need guidance and backing from senior leadership to navigate these situations with confidence.

If any staff member's behaviour constitutes harassment, discrimination, or a threat to the safety of LGBTQIA+ colleagues, this must be addressed through formal HR and safeguarding processes immediately. This guide does not replace disciplinary procedures.

Practical Steps for Aid Organisations

1. Understand the Nature and Source of Opposition

- Distinguish between different types of resistance: passive discomfort, active non-participation, verbal objection, and harmful or discriminatory conduct.
- Avoid assuming all opposition is the same. A staff member who quietly opts out of a Pride event is in a different position from one who makes derogatory remarks about LGBTQIA+ colleagues.
- Gather information carefully and confidentially before reacting, to ensure your response is proportionate and informed.

2. Clarify and Communicate Organisational Standards

- Ensure all staff understand that while personal beliefs are respected, professional conduct standards apply to everyone. Use codes of conduct, HR policies, and induction processes to make this explicit.
- Frame inclusion expectations around behaviour and professionalism, not personal values: staff are not required to personally affirm SOGIESC identities, but they are required to treat all colleagues equally with dignity and respect.
- Use clear, consistent language e.g. *“our organisation requires all staff to treat colleagues, beneficiaries and partner organisations with respect, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. This is a condition of employment.”*
- Ensure these standards are applied consistently across the organisation - selective enforcement undermines credibility and trust.

3. Create Space for Private Dialogue

- Invite those staff to a private, confidential conversation with a manager or HR focal point. This signals that concerns are heard without giving opposition a public platform.
- Listen actively and without judgement. Acknowledging someone’s discomfort does not mean endorsing their position.
- Ask open questions: *“Can you tell me more about your concerns?”* or *“What would help you feel more comfortable with the organisation’s approach?”*
- Be clear about what is and is not negotiable: professional conduct is non-negotiable; participation in optional inclusion events is not required.

4. Invest in Education and Awareness

- Offer SOGIESC awareness sessions to staff that focus on humanitarian principles, human rights. Where relevant, reference national laws pertaining to HIV/AIDS and ‘Key Populations’ together with rights-based language.
- Use evidence-based approaches: share data on the wellbeing benefits of inclusive workplaces for all staff, not just LGBTQIA+ employees.
- Invite guest speakers, including people with lived experience, to share personal perspectives in a safe, moderated setting where appropriate, and on a voluntary basis.

5. Engage Trusted Community or Religious Voices

- In contexts where religious or cultural leaders carries significant weight and influence, consider (where appropriate) engaging respected community leaders, faith leaders, or peers who hold inclusive views and can speak credibly to colleagues.
- Seek out examples of faith-based frameworks that affirm both religious identity and human dignity for LGBTQIA+ persons. These exist across many traditions and can be powerful in shifting perspectives.

6. Support LGBTQIA+ Staff Through the Process

- Ensure that LGBTQIA+ staff are not left carrying the burden of educating or persuading resistant colleagues. This is a management and organisational responsibility.
- Maintain confidential feedback channels so LGBTQIA+ staff can report concerns without fear of exposure or retaliation.
- Check in regularly and proactively with LGBTQIA+ staff to assess their sense of safety and wellbeing. Do not wait for a formal complaint.
- Be transparent with LGBTQIA+ staff that the organisation is actively working to address opposition, without sharing confidential details about individual colleagues.

7. Apply Graduated and Proportionate Consequences

- Minor or first-instance resistance may be addressed through conversation and education.
- Repeated refusal to comply with professional conduct standards, or any behaviour that constitutes harassment or discrimination, must trigger formal HR processes.
- Document incidents carefully, consistently, and in line with your organisation's safeguarding and HR policies.
- Ensure consequences are applied consistently across staff at all levels. Senior staff who model non-inclusive behaviour undermine the entire organisational culture, and reputation of the organisation.

Additional Resources

- **The PRIDE Centre:** Templates, legal analysis, and tools for [LGBTQIA+ inclusion](#) in humanitarian settings.

☑ Checklist for Organizing Pride in Restrictive Environments

- [] **Identify the Type of Opposition:** Distinguish discomfort, non-participation, verbal objection, and discriminatory conduct - each requires a different response.
- [] **Review Organisational Policies:** Ensure your Code of Conduct, HR policies, and safeguarding frameworks explicitly cover SOGIESC-based discrimination.
- [] **Communicate Standards Clearly:** All staff must understand that professional conduct—treating colleagues with dignity and respect—is non-negotiable, regardless of personal beliefs.
- [] **Hold a Private, Confidential Conversation:** Engage resistant staff one-on-one. Listen actively; do not give opposition a public platform.
- [] **Distinguish Belief from Behaviour:** Affirm that personal beliefs are private; make clear that discriminatory behaviour in the workplace is not acceptable.
- [] **Offer Education and Awareness:** Provide access to SOGIESC training framed around professional skills, humanitarian principles, and human rights.
- [] **Engage Trusted Voices:** Where appropriate, work with respected community, faith, or peer voices who can model inclusive values.
- [] **Protect LGBTQIA+ Staff:** Ensure LGBTQIA+ colleagues are not burdened with managing resistant staff; provide confidential reporting channels and regular wellbeing check-ins.
- [] **Apply Graduated Responses:** Use conversation and education for minor resistance; invoke formal HR processes for harassment, discrimination, or repeated non-compliance.
- [] **Document Incidents:** Record concerns, conversations, and actions consistently and in line with HR and safeguarding policies.
- [] **Ensure Consistent Enforcement:** Apply conduct standards equally across all staff levels, including senior leadership.
- [] **Share Resources:** Direct staff to [The PRIDE Centre](#) for information and guidance.

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