



Considering International Mobility for LGBT+ Scientists

For employers, managers and institutions

International mobility can pose unique challenges for LGBT+ scientists, and it is imperative that employers and institutions take these issues into account at all stages. LGBT+ individuals should be informed and empowered to make whatever choices they consider best for their own safety and wellbeing, and employers and institutions have a responsibility to facilitate this.

No employee should be passed over for, or prevented or discouraged from undertaking, development opportunities involving international mobility based on their LGBT+ status. A risk assessment should be created collaboratively, and it should be clearly communicated that the intention of this is to ensure all parties are fully informed and the travelling employee is supported.

Equally, policy and practice should affirm that individuals' careers will not suffer if they decline an international assignment or opportunity based on circumstances regarding their LGBT+ status (or indeed any other protected characteristic). Organisations should commit to seek out and/or support alternative development opportunities in this case. This principle applies equally in the case of fieldwork during the course of academic study.

Be aware that international travel may involve periods spent in more accepting cultures that can make returning to less accepting home cultures particularly difficult, and organisations should ensure support is provided for this.

Points to consider for all travel

- Be flexible with means of travel where possible; for example, some trans people prefer not to fly due to facing particular issues with airport security procedures.
- Make booking processes transparent, and ensure that employee data, including legal names and gender markers, is kept confidential and secure (for more information see our **resource** on building trans-inclusive workplaces).

Provide specific support

- Connect employees with information about LGBT+ organisations locally/nationally in the target destination.
- Consider identifying a mentor in the target country who is specifically trained in providing support in relation to LGBT+ issues.
- Be aware that you may not know about an employee's LGBT+ status. Family members who relocate alongside an employee may also be LGBT+ even if that employee is not. Consider how you can offer wider support that does not require an employee to 'out' themselves.

Take an organisational approach to LGBT+ mobility

- Create an LGBT+ mobility policy – or update existing policies – that clarifies the organisation's responsibilities and signposts support.
- Ensure job advertisements include details of necessary, expected, or likely international travel associated with the role.
- Review your areas of operation, and the locations to which individuals are expected to travel as part of their position, with LGBT+ safety and rights in mind. Consider whether strategic changes are needed.
- Advertise that your existing non-discrimination/equality and diversity policy applies globally (or create a specific global non-discrimination policy); make it clear that anti-LGBT+ discrimination is unacceptable wherever your organisation is operating. Ensure employees feel that their safety, rights and wellbeing are prioritised and taken seriously.



International mobility risk assessment: points to consider

Whether you're an individual scientist, an academic institution, or an employer, it's important to research and consider potential risks relating to international mobility for LGBT+ people.

It's also important to avoid relying on generalised assumptions about which parts of the world are accepting or intolerant of LGBT+ people, and in what ways. For example, countries that a cisgender (non-trans) gay man might consider welcoming may present particular legal or cultural issues for a non-binary transgender person; by contrast, legal gender recognition for trans men and women might exist in places where same-sex activity is heavily criminalised. This list of suggested starting points can help guide your research.



There's an expected responsibility to make sure that collaborations will be protected, placing LGBTI academics in situations in which we feel we have to return to the closet... Institutions should be way more assertive stating to international collaborators that our communities are diverse, and "that's that".



– Interviewee, 'Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists' report



In the destination jurisdiction...

- Are LGBT+ people legally protected from workplace and other discrimination? (Be aware of differences in protections between sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.)
- Is same-sex activity criminalised? (Be aware this can mean that in practice LGBT+ people are criminalised, regardless of activity they do or don't engage in; alternately, in some countries, these laws are rarely applied. Be aware of gender differences in the law.)
- Are public indecency or similar laws habitually used to criminalise LGBT+ people?
- Is there legal gender recognition for trans people? Does this carry any conditions (such as particular medical interventions)?
- What laws dictate healthcare access for LGBT+ people? (Relevant even for shorter trips; for example, in a medical emergency, can doctors legally refuse care due to trans status?)
- What recognition exists for same-sex partnerships and parents? (This may affect longer trips/relocations as dependants may not be able to relocate.)
- Are freedom of expression, association and assembly restricted in relation to LGBT+ people or issues?
- What non-legal factors (e.g. societal acceptance, hate crime level, media visibility, community support, intersectional issues) may be relevant to consider?
- Is there support – such as an LGBT+ group or organisation – available in the local area or at a regional or national level?



Pointers and suggestions for LGBT+ individuals

Some helpful questions to ask

- Is the conference I'm attending or the institution or organisation hosting me explicitly LGBT+-friendly?
 - Do they have a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression?
 - Are safeguarding and accountability processes clear?
- Is my lodging company or travel provider LGBT+-friendly?
 - [iglta.org](https://www.iglta.org), [purpleroofs.com](https://www.purpleroofs.com), and [misterbandb.com](https://www.misterbandb.com) are useful resources
- Am I aware of the legal situation in the country I'm visiting, including criminalisation, discrimination protections, healthcare access, and any restrictions on freedom of expression or assembly?
- Am I informed more generally on the cultural customs and values of the country I'm visiting, for example expectations relating to dress?
- Is there an accessible local LGBT+ group or organisation? If not, are there any national groups I can make remote contact with?

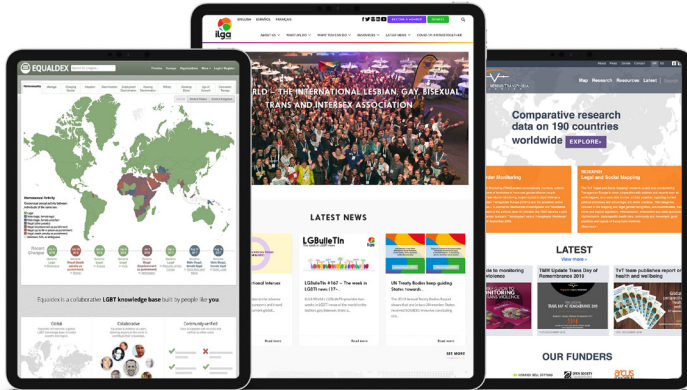
- Will I be comfortable being out, and to whom? If not, how will I answer any questions or respond to any assumptions made about me or my partner(s)?
- Do I know the legality of transporting any medication or related items, such as controlled drugs and syringes, across particular borders? Is any extra documentation or license necessary?



Practical travel tips

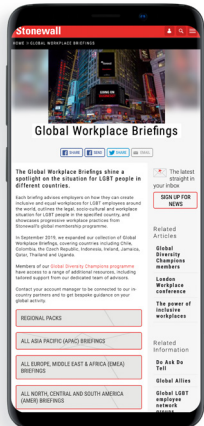
- Carry digital, physical, and paper copies of important documents in separate and secure places.
- Know who to contact in an emergency and keep digital and physical records of emergency contact details.
 - This might include your country's embassy, consular assistance, your employer, local authorities, and your travel insurance provider. A list of British embassies can be found at gov.uk/world/embassies
- Travel with a friend or colleague if possible – if you're attending a conference abroad, try to link up with a person that you know and trust who is also attending.
- Research travel insurance plans to ensure comprehensive cover.
- Leave your itinerary and contact information, including flight numbers and contact details for your accommodations and host institution/organisation/conference, with a trusted person.
- In countries that criminalise LGBT+ people, think about what authorities may find in your belongings and digital devices – consider your options before travelling, e.g. the option of removing digital content that could unintentionally identify you as LGBT+.
- Be conscious of how you use social media, particularly where you are asked to provide it as part of a visa application, or where communications may be monitored by state authorities. You may want to use a VPN (virtual private network) if you wish to access your accounts during your travels.
- Be extra cautious with dating apps - those with location functions enabled may update automatically when you travel, even if you don't open them.

Further information and resources



equaldex.com, ilga.org,
transrespect.org

Invaluable resources for a global view of legislation and other issues relevant to LGBT+ life.

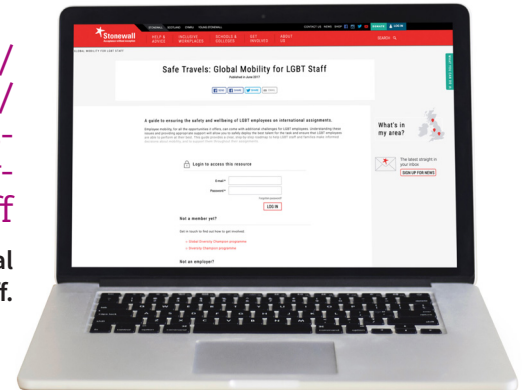


stonewall.org.uk/global-workplace-briefings

A collection of more in-depth summaries of legislation and cultural environment in a number of countries.

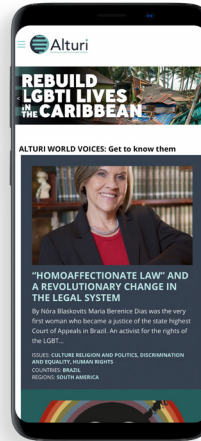
stonewall.org.uk/resources/safe-travels-global-mobility-lgbt-staff

A guide to global mobility for LGBT+ staff.



alturi.org

A site dedicated to global LGBT+ news and activism, useful for researching the broader cultural environment in a country.



FIND MORE RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING LGBT+ INCLUSIVITY
IN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITIES AND WORKPLACES



Taking concrete steps towards greater LGBT+ inclusivity is a key part of fostering diverse and welcoming scientific workplaces.

This resource is part of the Royal Society of Chemistry LGBT+ toolkit, which aims to tackle the key workplace issues faced by LGBT+ physical scientists. The toolkit builds on the findings of the 2019 report *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists*, and includes resources to equip everyone to take part in positive change: employers, colleagues, and LGBT+ people.



Whoever you are, you can make a real difference towards LGBT+ inclusivity in science.


Find out more at rsc.li/lgbt-toolkit


To learn more about the terminology used in this resource, see our **Glossary**

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