



The State of LGBTQI People's Economic Inclusion **Philippines**



babaylanes, inc.

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Acknowledgements

The report is part of Finance Inc.¹ - a three- year multi-country initiative (2018-2020) helping financial institutions focused on international development in the Asia Pacific region to be more inclusive of LGBTQI people's needs, concerns and potential. The initiative which, in addition to research consists of additional components, including advocacy and partnership-and capacity building, is being implemented by APCOM and partners in in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines.

This report was prepared as part of a series of four reports titled "The State of LGBTQI People's Economic Inclusion". The reports focus on the experiences of members of LGBTQI communities with regards to economic and social inclusion: their enjoyment of rights to employment, access to financial resources and services, education and health. The research was conducted in four countries in South-East Asia, namely: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines. In addition to the four reports, a short overview report has been produced, summarising common patterns, variations, main findings and recommendations for improved economic inclusion in the four countries.

The reports have been prepared by APCOM² in collaboration with country partner organisations in the four countries. For the Philippines report, the research was undertaken by Babaylanes Inc³ between July and October 2019.

Babaylanes would like to acknowledge and thank Edwin Salonga, Vince Rapisura, Joel Acebuche and Percival Cendaña for the guidance throughout the research process. Thanks also to Edwin Salonga for facilitating the focus group discussions.

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APCOM would also like to express its sincere thanks to Voice⁴, our funding partner for Finance Inc. project⁵, under which the research reports were done.

APCOM and Babaylanes have joint responsibility for the content of this report, including any errors or misrepresentations.

¹ APCOM (2018), Finance Inc: Developing an LGBTQI Inclusive Approach for the Asian Development Bank. <https://www.apcom.org/storage/2018/12/Compass-Series-Finance-Inc-rev-2-10122018.pdf>

² APCOM <https://www.apcom.org/>

³ Babaylanes: <https://www.facebook.com/babaylanesinc/>

⁴ Voice, an initiative by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is an innovative grant facility that supports the most marginalised and discriminated people in ten countries in Africa and Asia. It aims to amplify and connect thus far unheard voices in efforts to leave no one behind. <https://voice.global/>

⁵ APCOM (2018), Finance Inc: Developing an LGBTQI Inclusive Approach for the Asian Development Bank. <https://www.apcom.org/storage/2018/12/Compass-Series-Finance-Inc-rev-2-10122018.pdf>



Executive Summary

The research was conducted between July and October 2019. Babaylanes undertook the research project in the Philippines and conducted in-depth focus group discussions with 23 LGBTQI Filipinos.

The outcome is this report which aims to give an overview of how the human rights of LGBTQI people in the Philippines have been framed and upheld and the current main challenges and opportunities for LGBTQI people's social, economic and financial inclusion. Set against this context the 23 people directly affected by the current policies, practices, attitudes and behaviours, provide a much more detailed picture of their lived experiences; the barriers they face as LGBTQI people, in improving their livelihoods and reaching their full potential, and their suggestions for changing the current situation.

While we acknowledge the limited scope of the research and would like to make clear that the research does not purport to be comprehensive, nor paint a full picture of the situation for all LGBTQI people in the Philippines, we believe that it contains important evidence on the current barriers to and opportunities for significantly advancing economic inclusion of LGBTQI people in the Philippines. When combining previous research findings, including the 2018 report "Economic Inclusion of LGBTQI People in Southeast Asia: A Background Research Report on Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines"⁶ as well as the three additional country reports in Cambodia, Indonesia and Laos, a pattern emerges which should be explored in much greater detail by undertaking more data generation and in-depth qualitative and quantitative research.

The Philippines has come a long way but there are still many barriers to full and meaningful inclusion

Although there is relative acceptance of LGBTQI individuals in the Philippines, especially in comparison to some of its neighbouring countries, the degree of inclusion of LGBTQI Filipinos varies within the community, across sectors and across geographies. There has been a draft Anti-Discrimination Bill in the making since 2000 but because of a strong anti-LGBTQI lobby, a national law has yet to be enacted. However, at local level, 18 cities have designed policies, and measures to combat discrimination, including against LGBTQI people.

All 23 focus group participants had narratives of exclusion to share and agreed that discrimination and stigma permeate multiple institutions and the public which makes it difficult for LGBTQI groups to navigate through their day-to-day routines. LGBTQI people face structural barriers for full inclusion in the education system, in the work place, and in the health care system. Attitudes and behaviour from mainstream society, including from family members, are based on heteronormative standards. Therefore, some LGBTQI people choose to hide their identities.

The movement towards social inclusion, however, has been strengthening over the years, thus increasing the community's visibility in the Philippines. Visibility, however, within economic and financial institutions was observed to have some risks as it comes with vulnerability. Participants of the focus group discussions shared how they may experience further marginalisation upon disclosure of their SOGIESC⁷, which proves how difficult it would be for transgender and gender non-conforming Filipinos, given the lack or weaknesses of anti-discrimination policies and practices.

Progress of inclusion, however, in the current labour market in the Philippines is evident since LGBTQI Filipinos now get highly recognised jobs, including high profile positions in the media, in corporate industries, and more recently, in politics. Openly LGBTQI individuals are now being elected as politicians in local government and in congress which is a clear sign of growing acceptance. However, companies are still free to reject prospective candidates for a job, solely because of their SOGIESC.

⁶ [Link to report when ready](#)

⁷ The abbreviation SOGIESC is used to describe sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics collectively. For more information, go to page 12.



Lived Experiences: Economic exclusion of LGBTQI people in the Philippines

Employment, entrepreneurship and financial services

"I don't disclose my sexual orientation because of fear that they wouldn't be okay with it, knowing that my boss is very religious... For most people, there really is a feeling of anxiety that when they find out that you are a member of the LGBT community, it might affect your [working] relationship".⁸

The focus group participants were able to recognise instances of inclusion in work spaces. However, all of them had experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and other forms of challenges distinct to sexual minorities. Various forms of discrimination can be observed ranging from bullying, harassment, unfair dismissal, refusal of promotion and differences in salaries.

Many participants reported that the range of economic opportunities available for them is being limited by persistent heteronormative and cissexist conditions. Many LGBTQI individuals strive to do better economically in the hope of not being seen as liabilities by their families. Focus group participants reported that striving to become high earners is used to compensate for one's marginalised status as an LGBTQI person.

Education and Health

Educational institutions in the Philippines have, in accordance with the Constitution, academic freedom to set and meet their own objectives. This freedom can be used to design and implement policies that are discriminatory against students of diverse SOGIESC. Many participants spoke of experiences of discrimination and bullying from peers and education staff, and it was in particular in the transgender focus group that severe instances of discrimination was reported. Some shared their stories from schools which are not inclusive when it comes to their gendered uniforms. In those schools, transgender individuals are branded as "cross-dressers," which is considered to be a violation of the schools' policies. Some transgender participants also reported being misgendered by professors.

Many participants had experiences of barriers to accessing adequate health facilities and not receiving LGBTQI-sensitive services. Participants from the gay and bisexual cisgender male group and transgender group expressed their dismay over discriminatory remarks in HIV testing centres which may potentially stop the target population accessing these services.

Overall, experiences of exclusion, stigma and discrimination in the aspects of education, health, employment are related to the prevailing heteronormative standards. Experiences of exclusion in the aspects of education, health, and employment, while looked into separately, are interrelated and negatively affects the life prospects of LGBTQI people. This is compounded by the apparent pressure for LGBTQI Filipinos to overcompensate for their minority status by raising their economic value.

⁸ Voice of a participant from the cisgender lesbian and bisexual women's focus group.



Recommendations

Each country report contains a number of recommendations towards government, the private sector, and organisations working on LGBTQI issues. APCOM and Babaylanes, with partners, will continue to advocate for those recommendations to be acted on with a view to address structural and other barriers for full economic and social inclusion and participation for LGBTQI people in the Philippine society.

The recommendations call for adoption and implementation of inclusive policies and programmes. The lived experiences and direct voices of the 23 brave LGBTQI individuals who dared to speak up and out and volunteered their time, knowledge and experiences of economic exclusion in the Philippines have informed most recommendations. Below are a few and for a full set of recommendations, please go to pages 30-33:

1. The government should urgently pass and implement the 2000 Anti-Discrimination Bill;
2. Best practices of inclusion policies and practices should be highlighted and be anchors in the advocacy for equality, diversity and inclusion.;
3. Financial institutions should be made familiar with the realities faced by LGBTQI Filipinos so that they can offer adequate LGBTQI sensitive services;
4. The government should establish, with adequate funding, effective, anonymous and easily accessible mechanisms for LGBTQI people, their friends and families, to report discrimination.

Introduction

Founded in 2007, APCOM Foundation (APCOM⁹) is a Bangkok-based not-for-profit organisation representing and working with a network of individuals and community-based organisations across the Asia and the Pacific region. APCOM works to improve the health and rights of gay men, other men who have sex with men, and people and communities of diverse sexual orientation, gender identities and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in the Asia and the Pacific region.

APCOM has a primary focus on HIV because it is a key health issue for gay men and other men who have sex with men in Asia and the Pacific region. APCOM aims to contribute to addressing other related health issues for our communities such as sexual health, mental health and drug use. APCOM also focuses on improving relevant human and legal rights across the region as discrimination, stigma, criminalisation and exclusion impact on the health outcomes of the communities we serve.

Babaylanes, Inc.¹⁰ is the alumni organisation of the pioneering student LGBT organisation from the University of the Philippines, UP Babaylan. Officially established in 2008, it envisions a society free from discrimination and homophobia where LGBT individuals can enjoy their rights and attain their fullest potential in the spirit of equality, justice, and equity. Its mission is to work for the strengthening and consolidation of LGBT communities towards achieving the collectivisation of efforts against discrimination and homophobia and advocate for LGBT rights and welfare. Babaylanes, Inc. is the convener of the National LGBT Students Network, composed of the different LGBT student organizations that Babaylanes, Inc. has worked with. It is also the current Secretary General of LAGABLAB Network, a broad coalition of LGBT organizations in the Philippines focused on passing legislation that are SOGIESC-sensitive and responsive.

⁹ APCOM: <https://www.apcom.org/>

¹⁰ Babaylanes: <https://www.facebook.com/babaylanesinc/>



1. Rationale behind the report and next steps

This report is part of Finance Inc.¹¹ – a three- year multi-country initiative (2018-2020) which aims to engage financial institutions focused on international development as well as the private sector in the Asia Pacific region to be more inclusive of LGBTQI people's rights, concerns and potential. The project, which in addition to this research series, consists of additional components, including advocacy and partnerships building, -and capacity building strengthening, is being implemented by APCOM and partner organisations in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines.

Narratives of stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identities of LGBTQI people abound globally. These narratives are replete with experiences of challenges and issues in enjoying basic economic, social and cultural rights including rights to employment, education, health care and access to economic participation and financial resources.

The World Bank states that: “[d]espite some legal and social advances in the past two decades, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people continue to face widespread discrimination and violence in many countries. This discrimination and violence lead to exclusion, and this exclusion has adverse impacts on both the lives of LGBTI people as well as on the communities and economies in which they live”.¹²

The World Bank also states that “increasing evidence indicates that LGBTI people suffer lower education outcomes due to discrimination, bullying and violence; higher unemployment rates; and a lack of access to adequate housing and health services and financial services”.¹³

The Philippines report aims to give an overview of how human rights of LGBTQI people in the Philippines have been framed and the current main challenges and opportunities for LGBTQI social, economic and financial inclusion.

Much more evidence gathering is needed as the area of economic and financial inclusion of LGBTQI people is under-researched. In addition to the insights of this and the three other reports which will form the basis for new learnings and strategies, report findings will also inform additional project components including advocacy with the private sector, government and other stakeholders. Similarly, the initiative will aim for future scale up.

The research and voices of those LGBTQI members people who participated in the project will contribute to and inform future actions in engaging directly with financial institutions and the private sector in and across the four countries to advance the goal of LGBTQI inclusion in terms of policies, practices and programs.

2. Research and focus group methodologies

The research consists of a review of literature and focus group discussions undertaken and conducted between July and October 2019. The research part includes reviewing existing country specific data and previous research relevant to LGBTQI inclusion.

Three focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 23 participants were held, guided by a set of questions developed by APCOM in collaboration with Babaylanes in order to capture the living realities for LGBTQI people in the Philippines. Focus group one consisted of 4 cisgender¹⁴ lesbian women and 4 cisgender bisexual women; focus group two had 7 cisgender gay men as discussants, and focus group three consisted of 2 queer participants, 4 transgender men and 2 transgender women.

¹¹ APCOM (2018). Finance Inc: Developing an LGBTQI Inclusive Approach for the Asian Development Bank. <https://www.apcom.org/storage/2018/12/Compass-Series-Finance-Inc-rev-2-10122018.pdf>

¹² The World Bank: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cisgender: denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.



Some participants were students and for those in employment, occupations were diverse and consisted of researchers, corporate workers, sales executives, educators, businesspersons, consultants, performers (Drag Queens) and freelance workers. The age range of participants were between 20 and 41 years old. In terms of highest educational attainment 9 participants were still taking their undergraduate degrees, while 14 of them are already working. 8 of these individuals were college graduates, 5 of them were graduate students, and 1 already had a master's degree.

The participants of the focus group discussions were briefed prior about the nature of the research and all institutions involved in it. They were informed that participation would be entirely voluntary and that they would be able to opt out at any time during the process. Confidentiality was also assured by not disclosing anyone's identity in the research and by keeping the transcriptions private to the focus group coordinators and researchers.

Throughout the entire research process, the vulnerabilities of participants were always under consideration and extra caution in language and reporting had to be exercised to ensure the utmost sensitivity to the nuances of experiences of LGBTQI groups. The narratives that were gathered from the focus group discussions were consolidated for the participants to identify opportunities for improvements and to provide suggestions. The participants recognised that there are opportunities for LGBTQI individuals and for various institutions.

3. Scope and limitations of this report

While we acknowledge the limited scope of the research and would like to make clear that the research does not purport to be comprehensive, nor paint a full picture of the situation for all LGBTQI people in the Philippines, we believe that it contains important evidence on the current barriers to and opportunities for significantly advancing the economic inclusion of LGBTQI people in the Philippines. Combining previous research findings, including the 2018 report: "Economic Inclusion of LGBTQI People in Southeast Asia: A Background Research Report on Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines" ¹⁵ and the three additional country reports from Cambodia, Indonesia, and Laos, a pattern emerges, which should be explored in much greater detail by collecting more data and undertaking more in-depth qualitative and quantitative research, surveys, data generation, and analysis.

For this report it is also relevant to underscore further limitations of the research: The participants were selected by referrals from the existing formal and informal networks of Babaylanes Inc and because of this this method of sampling our research encountered multiple limitations. This research was only able to reach LGBTQI people currently residing in Metro Manila and therefore these narratives will not be able to cover and represent the diverse experiences of Filipinos as a result of the cultural and economic disparities among regions of the country. Further, despite having only two participants with no current sources of income among the 23 focus group discussants, the fact that 9 of them had yet to experience full-time employment brings a limitation to the data presented.

¹⁵ [Link when report is ready](#)



4. Definitions and Terminology

Economic Inclusion

We are using the definition of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development:¹⁶ Economic inclusion, the opening up of economic opportunities to under-served social groups, is integral to [...] sustainable market economies. An inclusive market economy ensures that anyone regardless of their gender, place of birth, family background, age or other circumstances, over which they have no control, has full and fair access to labour markets, finance and entrepreneurship and, more generally, economic opportunity.

Exclusion

In defining exclusion, we take inspiration from the definition used by Prof. Lee Badgett¹⁷ as 'the structural manifestations of stigma in institutional settings, reducing LGBT people's access to equal treatment and participation in a wide range of social institutions, including schools, workplaces, health care settings, the political process, the financial system, the criminal justice system, families, government programs, and other laws and policies'.

Financial Inclusion

We are using the World Bank definition: *"Financial inclusion means that individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs – transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance – delivered in a responsible and sustainable way"*.¹⁸

LGBTQI

We are using the acronym LGBTQI to refer to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queer, and intersex populations and communities. APCOM recognises that there is diversity across culture and country contexts in the use those and related terms, and that some languages do not have exact words to describe sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. We are basing our terminology on the Yogyakarta Principles +10¹⁹ and also use the abbreviation SOGIESC to describe sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics collectively:

SOGIESC

Sexual Orientation - each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.

Gender Identity - how each person identifies in relation to their true sense of gender. This deeply-felt sense of self may refer to being man, woman, or other genders (e.g. genderqueer, non-binary).

Gender Expression - each person's presentation of the person's gender through physical appearance – including dress, hairstyles, accessories, cosmetics – and mannerisms, speech, behavioural patterns, names and personal references, may or may not conform to a person's gender identity.

Sex Characteristics - each person's physical features relating to sex, including genitalia and other sexual and reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, hormones, and secondary physical features emerging from puberty.

MSM - Men who have sex with men.

Social Inclusion

The process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background - can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies, practices and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizen's and residents' participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

¹⁶ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. <https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/projects-and-sectors/economic-inclusion.html>

¹⁷ Badgett, Lee, et al. (2014). The Relationship Between LGBT Inclusion and Economic Development: An Analysis of Emerging Economies. The Williams Institute. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/lgbt-inclusion-and-development-november-2014.pdf>

¹⁸ The World Bank. Financial Inclusion. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/financialinclusion/overview>

¹⁹ Yogyakarta Principles Plus 10 (YP+10) (2017) is an authoritative statement of the human rights of persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/>

Current human rights context and how it affects LGBTQI people in the Philippines

Brief History of LGBTQI identities in Philippine society

Although there is relative acceptance of LGBTQI individuals in the Philippines, especially in comparison to some of its neighbouring countries, the progress observed in the Philippines does not guarantee safety and inclusion.

Identities and practices that do not conform to current heteronormative standards²⁰ were common and not always perceived as deviances in some precolonial communities. Assigned men at birth taking the identity, role, and/or behavior of women, were acknowledged by their community. These individuals even took on the role of the powerful position as *babaylan*²¹ – who not only led their communities in matters of spirituality, medicine, and wisdom but also took part in politics and economics.²² However, subsequent Spanish and American colonisation forcibly rearranged the institutional structures of Philippine society and standardised norms that made it difficult for a culture of acceptance to survive. As the religious institutions were being dominated by Christianity, patriarchy and machismo were strengthened which not only changed the political landscape for women but also imposed sanctions on queer and homosexual practices and identities.²³

At the contemporary setting this indigenous familiarity might have resulted in this “tolerance” for non-heteronormative identities. Unlike countries around the Philippines, homosexuality was never criminalised.²⁴ In the 2017 ILGA-RIWI Global Attitudes Survey on Sexual, Gender, and Sex Minorities, data show that 20 per cent of the population in the Philippines believe that people with different sexual orientations do not deserve their equal rights to be protected. Though it can still be considered alarming, it is lower than countries such as Indonesia where the percentage is 43 per cent.²⁵ This sometimes gives people the false idea that the Philippines is a safe space for LGBTQI individuals. However, the delays and continuous opposition to LGBTQI-affirmative policies demonstrates gaps in inclusion.

Reformation of legal and civil society

LGBTQI advocates in the Philippines often root their claims to this indigenous culture of acceptance with the aid of human rights and SOGIESC as guiding frameworks.²⁶ This arguably started when civil society resumed after the end of Marcos’ tyrannical regime in 1986 which led to the formation of various progressive organisations bringing into various political terrains innovative advocacy approaches which includes promoting LGBTQI rights.²⁷ By 1999, there were enough LGBTQI advocates and organisations to form two networks – LAGABLAB²⁸ LGBT Network and Task Force Pride.

²⁰ Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the default, preferred, or normal mode of sexual orientation.

²¹ Babaylan is a Visayan term referring to indigenous healers, shamans, and spiritual leaders. They are often played by female figures, but this role was never limited to cisgender women. Transgender women who take on these roles were called “asog.”

²² Carolyn Brewer. (2004). Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines. *Filipinas: A Journal of Philippine Studies* 43, no. 145. 129-30. https://www.academia.edu/30035210/Shamanism_Catholicism_and_Gender_Relations_in_Colonial_Philippines_1521_1685_by_Carolyn_Brewer_State_of_Virginity_Gender_Religion_and_Politics_in_an_Early_Modern_Catholic_State_by_Ulrike_Strasser_review

²³ Garcia, J. Neil. (2004). Male Homosexuality in the Philippines: A Short History. *IIAS Newsletter* 35, no. 13. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d860/3912ca73927c43667dbf0f1306f68c8d9687.pdf>

²⁴ Duncan, Pamela. (2017). Gay relationships are still criminalised in 72 countries, report finds. *The Guardian*. 27 July 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/27/gay-relationships-still-criminalised-countries-report>

²⁵ International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, trans and Intersex Association. (2017). *Minorities Report 2017: attitudes to sexual and gender minorities around the world*. The ILGA-RIWI Global Attitudes Survey on sexual, gender and sex minorities. <https://ilga.org/minorities-report-2017-ilga-riwi-global-attitudes-survey>

²⁶ Cardozo, Bradley. (2014). “A” Coming Out” Party in Congress? LGBT Advocacy and Party-List Politics in the Philippines.” PhD diss., UCLA. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/49v8j2vx>

²⁷ Tadem, Teresa. (2009). *Localizing and globalizing advocacies and alternatives: A comparative analysis of five global civil society movements*. Localizing and Transnationalizing Contentious Politics: Global Civil Society Movements. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. 219-255. <https://www.unrtd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/search/0922DDE84F73CFABC125761D0024D6D4>

²⁸ Lagablab means blaze in Filipino. The name of the network is also short for the Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network. <https://www.facebook.com/LagablabNetwork/>

These organisations took advocacy into the congress. In the late 1990s Akbayan Citizen's Action Party reached out and consulted LGBTQI groups, including LAGABLAB on issues and needs of LGBTQI communities and people. In 2000, through Akbayan Rep. Etta Rosales, LGBTQI advocates filed the Anti-Discrimination Bill.²⁹ However, because of a strong anti-LGBTQI lobby the bill has still not been enacted and made into law.

The bill, however, was approved unanimously in the 17th congress by the lower chamber in 2017³⁰ and anti-discrimination ordinances³¹ have been passed by multiple local governments. With 18 cities, one municipality, three barangays³² and six provinces having their own anti-discrimination ordinances, 20 million Filipinos are legally protected despite 81 million Filipinos being left with the absence of a national bill.³³

Religious institutions influencing change

Religion also plays a large role in shaping the environment that LGBTQI Filipinos live in. While the 1987 constitution includes the separation of church and state and religious freedom of Filipinos, Christian churches influence legal advances in relation to LGBTQI issues. Religious institutions are active in discussions regarding affirmative laws such as which prohibit discrimination and recognizes marriage equality. Fortunately, there are now denominations which are accepting of the LGBTQI community while some are actually headed by them. Churches, such as the Metropolitan Community Church, have been providing safe spaces and have been contesting the conservative stances of multiple religious institutions.³⁴

Overall, civil and political conditions have advanced the current state of LGBTQI rights. On the one hand, there are institutions that are active in gatekeeping the democratic rights of LGBTQI Filipinos and on the other hand, the entry of human rights, electoral reforms, and resumption of civil society has allowed agents to actively promote LGBTQI rights.

²⁹ Bilon, Xavier James. (2018). History of the Anti-Discrimination Bill in Philippine Congress <https://sites.google.com/up.edu.ph/xibilon/advocacy/history-of-anti-discrimination-bill-in-philippine-congress>

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ordinances are rules or laws enacted by local government units

³² Barangay is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines

³³ Bilon, Xavier James. (2018). Anti-Discrimination Ordinances in the Philippines. <https://sites.google.com/up.edu.ph/xibilon/advocacy/history-of-anti-discrimination-bill-in-philippine-congress>

³⁴ Evangelista, John Andrew. (2017). MakiwarlaMakiwarla! Wag Mashokot! : Metro Manila Pride March as Pakikibaka and Pakikibeki within the Philippine LGBT Movement. MA Thesis in Sociology, University of the Philippines. Diliman Quezon City.

Lived Experiences: Economic exclusion of LGBTQI people in the Philippines

Employment, Entrepreneurship and Financial Services, Education, Health Employment

General Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion

Every participant in the focus group discussion had narratives of exclusion to share. It was agreed that discrimination and stigma permeate multiple institutions and the public domain, which has made it difficult for LGBTQI groups to navigate through their day-to-day routines. While there are instances of institutional discrimination being blatant and easy to locate, there was mutual recognition from all participants' experiences of exclusion that may not be as visible.

One particular way that LGBTQI Filipinos navigate through these circumstances is to refrain from disclosing their own SOGIESC. There is also a recognition that the perceived SOGIESC can result in further discrimination to one's actual SOGIESC. A possible explanation for this, according to participants, is that gender expression is based on resonating stereotypes in the Philippine society on the *bakla*³⁵ and *tomboy*,³⁶ when individuals act in ways that are not expected of them and in ways that do not conform to heteronormativity.

This was particularly the case for transgender individuals and this group shared many narratives of exclusion when accessing facilities and institutions, thus depriving them of services and opportunities.

Multiple narratives of family issues were brought to the table. There were narratives of shame coming from the families of focus group participants, as well as perceptions of hostility, making it hard for them to come out because of these negative experiences happening in their families

Not disclosing one's identity was observed to be a critical decision. Based on the narratives, it is not something that guarantees an improvement nor impairment of one's well-being. While there were participants from all groups with negative experiences, with some tantamount to risks after coming out, there were also narratives of acceptance from families, groups, and institutions.

Some participants were privileged to be surrounded by accepting peers in schools and workplaces and some had a community for themselves through interests, such as drags which have persisted as a subculture. Some have engaged with organisations and in social movements and some are active in media and in politics.

Employment

There are multiple employment sectors which LGBTQI Filipinos can enter into and some participants shared how they have managed to find equal opportunity employers. Progress of inclusion in the current labour market in the Philippines is evident since LGBTQI Filipinos manage to get highly recognised jobs, including high profile positions in the media, corporate industries and more recently, in politics. Openly LGBTQI individuals are now being elected as politicians in local government³⁷ and in congress³⁸ which is a clear sign of growing acceptance.

³⁵ Bakla is a colloquial term which often refers to effeminate males. Though it can also mean attraction to the same gender, it is different from a gay man, whose gender expression is a separate characteristic.

³⁶ Tomboy is derived from the English language which can pertain to an assigned female at birth whose gender expression leans more towards masculinity. In the Philippine context, it is often interchanged with lesbian.

³⁷ One of the participants in the cisgender male group is an out gay politician in Metro Manila.

³⁸ Geraldine Roman became the first openly transgender woman in the House of Representatives. She was elected by the first district of Bataan in 2016.



The focus group participants were a mix of students, researchers, corporate employees, sales executives, educators, business persons, consultants, performers (e.g. Drag Queens), politician, and freelance writers. While they were able to recognize instances of inclusion in work spaces, all of them had experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and other forms of challenges distinct to sexual minorities. Various forms of discrimination can be observed ranging from bullying, harassment, unfair dismissal, refusal of promotion and differences in salaries.³⁹ Discriminatory practices and heteronormative standards can already be observed at the recruitment stage, thus lowering the chances for LGBTQI individuals of getting employed. According to a trans woman participant, she had a difficulty finding a job because of her gender identity:

"Right now, I'm working as a tutor in a [tutorial and review] center. Prior to that I had attempts at finding a job as a tutor as well since it was more flexible and appropriate given that I am also taking classes. The difficulty is when dealing with parents – one of the concerns of the Human Resources Department is, "We cannot accept you because it might cause issues with our clients".

Fortunately, this participant eventually found a center that allows her to express herself in whatever way she wants. She added that although she had clients and students who questioned her identity, as an educator, she took it as an opportunity to teach about transgender experiences.

Whether to disclose one's sexual and/or gender identity was a recurring theme from the focus group discussions, also when it relates to economic inclusion. A participant from the lesbian and bisexual cisgender women group shared her experience:

"I don't disclose my sexual orientation because of fear that they wouldn't be okay with it, knowing that my boss is very religious... For most people, there really is a feeling of anxiety that when they find out that you are a member of the LGBT community, it might affect your employment."

Stereotypes of LGBTQI groups also influence the decisions of which types of jobs to go for. The cisgender women group shared narratives of how lesbian and bisexual women with masculine gender expressions enter jobs that fit their stereotype, such as security lady guards for example. Gay and bisexual cisgender men are seeking jobs such as hair and make-up artist which fit their stereotype.

There are agencies in many industries that accept applicants regardless of their SOGIESC but, as in schools, staying within heteronormative and cissexist work places can be a challenge. Stigma and discrimination from peers and employers are still common and can influence performance and well-being of LGBTQI groups. Participants shared how people in authority still have biases against them; refrain from promoting LGBTQI employees, and add more barriers to economic opportunities. A participant from the transgender group who is also an activist recalled the narratives of one of her peers:

"In the BPO industry,⁴⁰ there are call centers which hire many transgender women, but the difficulty is the access to many of their facilities... We have members [in our organization] who are nurses. They find it difficult to stay in a public hospital which is not accepting because of stereotypes of what a male nurse should look like – short hair, for example, otherwise you'll be out. Our transgender sisters felt the need to comply, so they cut their hair and masculinise themselves to keep their jobs"

³⁹ Hoel, Helge, Duncan Lewis, and Anna Einarsdóttir. (2014). The ups and downs of LGBs workplace experiences: discrimination, bullying and harassment of lesbian, gay and bisexual employees in Britain. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281091403_The_ups_and_downs_of_LGBs_workplace_experiences_Discrimination_bullying_and_harassment_of_lesbian_gay_and_bisexual_employees_in_Britain

⁴⁰ The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry is the industry of third-party companies providing for any business process, including call-center relations, human resources and data gathering

Knowing that these circumstances occur in many workplaces, some individuals may consider this when seeking jobs, which limits their opportunities. A participant from the lesbian and bisexual cisgender women group recalled how she declined a job offer because they required her to wear skirts, even though the job position was not on the frontline and client-facing. These policies, most of the time, are not even inclusive to transgender individuals.

A transgender participant shared how she personally felt when she was faced with these policies:

"When I started to fully transition and I started using the facilities for women I also started getting complaints from my co-workers, so in that workplace which was a call center, I had to negotiate my job. They were asking me to make a choice between my dignity as a woman or employment. If you want to stay here, you have to use the male toilet. In the end, no matter how many people I spoke with, including HR, they said that they can't do anything because there is no law that tells us to recognise who you are. So, I had to resign because I chose my dignity as a trans woman. I'd rather not have a job than have one which will take away my dignity as a trans person."

Entrepreneurship and financial services

In the Philippines, many LGBTQI individuals strive to do better economically in the hope of not being seen as liabilities by their families. Focus group participants reported that striving to become high earners is used to compensate for one's marginalised status as an LGBTQI person. Some participants also reported that they needed to be ready to being financially independent if their families would disown and alienate them. However, in their quest to do well economically, many participants reported that the range of economic opportunities available for them is constantly being limited by persistent heteronormative and cissexist conditions.

Participants have not encountered direct barriers that prohibit people of diverse SOGIESC to open bank accounts and getting loans and/or insurances. However, there are challenges within financial institutions and most have policies with heteronormative assumptions. For example, LGBTQI individuals cannot list their partners of the same gender under insurance beneficiaries with most providers. One participant from the lesbian and bisexual cisgender group reported that even though their insurance providers allowed same gender partner in their beneficiaries, her own employers initially withheld this information from her. Another participant from the same group shared how the providers of a company she works for also allowed this arrangement, but only if they could provide a proof of marriage which is a not always possible since same-sex marriage is not yet legal in the Philippines and not every Filipino would have the possibility to get married overseas.

Other instances of cissexist attitudes and standards were discussed and transgender focus group participants shared how they would often encounter problems when valid IDs were required for transactions. There were instances where transgender persons would be accused of identity theft or having fake IDs because a banking staff member would perceive an incongruence between the person before them and what is written in their IDs. Another recognised challenge among participants in all three focus groups was how financial agents have biases against LGBTQI groups. Two participants from the gay and bisexual cisgender men group shared how they had problems accessing loans and insurances as LGBTQI Filipinos are perceived as risky groups because of stigma, and how HIV is often being tied to their identities. One participant said that when his sexual orientation was brought into the discussion with an agent, he was asked to get tested for HIV. Another participant who willingly disclosed himself as a PLHIV⁴¹ said that his status got in his way:

"My HIV status became a hindrance but there should be a revision as of now [regarding this custom] because if you tested positive for HIV, that doesn't mean that you're automatically dying".

41. Person living with HIV

Policies and customs in these institutions do not explicitly discriminate against LGBTQI groups but a persistent culture of misinformation and bias results in financial barriers for sexual minorities.

Education

Educational institutions in the Philippines have, in accordance with the Constitution, academic freedom to set and meet their own objectives. This can be used to design and implement policies that are discriminatory against students of diverse SOGIESC. Participants of the 2013 Philippine National LGBTI Community Dialogue, expressed how this provision affects many LGBTI Filipinos in educational institutions⁴². Without an anti-discrimination law, students can potentially be denied access to all schools, disciplinary action may be taken against them, and, in some cases, they may be expelled for their perceived or actual SOGIESC. For example, a catholic school in the Philippines withheld the diplomas of high school boys after photos of them kissing were uploaded to Facebook. They were given certifications⁴³ from their school instead to allow them to enroll in universities⁴⁴. There are, however, legal instruments to combat bullying in schools. For example, the Child Protection policy of the Ministry of Education has specific mention of SOGIESC but there is no monitoring on how this policy is being implemented and how this affects the welfare of LGBTQI students.⁴⁵

Because of these conditions, staying within educational institutions can be a challenge for LGBTQI students. They are already grappling with challenges in terms of their sexuality at home and within themselves, but they are also subjected to questioning, justification and abuse in school settings which influence their educational performance negatively⁴⁶. Verbal bullying and social exclusion are very common practices in schools as is physical bullying and sexual harassment by peer students, as well as academic and administrative staff. Students rarely report these instances given the lack of independent support mechanisms.⁴⁷

Structural conditions in educational institutions affect the long-term quality of life of LGBTQI individuals. According to the World Bank's report: Economic Inclusion of LGBTI Groups in Thailand, pupils and students who face discrimination in school have difficulty in completing their degrees and have lower chances of attaining high incomes. There is even an indication of differences in terms of difficulties since the report revealed that transgender respondents suffered most instances of discrimination, followed by lesbian women and gay men.⁴⁸

This information is backed up by experiences of focus group participants. While there were participants who were fortunate to have attended progressive schools, some of them shared their own negative experiences from institutions, particularly, religious educational primary schools and universities. The experiences of the participants align with the earlier statement on how academic freedom is often used to justify discriminatory policies and practices.

⁴² UNDP, USAID. (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report. Bangkok. P 30. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAA888.pdf

⁴³ While certifications allows for enrolment in college, diplomas are traditionally 'valued' more as it entail having completed their education.

⁴⁴ Mangosing. (2012). 6 boys barred from joining graduation over 'public kissing.' <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/169117/catholic-school-bars-6-boys-from-joining-graduation-over-public-kissing>

⁴⁵ UNDP, USAID. (2014) Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report. Bangkok. P 30. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAA888.pdf

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch. (2016). Like Walking Through a Hailstorm. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/07/walking-through-hailstorm/discrimination-against-lgbt-youth-us-schools>

⁴⁷ UNESCO. (2015). From insult to inclusion: Asia-Pacific report on school bullying, violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235500>

⁴⁸ World Bank Group. (2018). Economic inclusion of LGBTI groups in Thailand (Vol. 2): main report (English). Washington. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/269041521819512465/main-report>



Most schools in the Philippines have uniforms and they are, most of the time, gendered and trans-exclusive. This is a problem for pupils and students whose gender expressions do not fit with heteronormative standards, for example lesbian or bisexual women who are more masculine. Not conforming to these heteronormative and sexist policies may result in disciplinary sanctions, including not being able access school premises or academic events. One participant from the bisexual and lesbian cisgender women group recalled an experience from her high school:

"Some students were denied access to school because they were not conforming to the proper uniforms set by the school. Other people also were not allowed to join graduation rites and other exercises in school just because they were not following the rules set by the schools".

Transgender focus group participants also shared similar experiences. In schools which are not inclusive when it comes to their gendered uniforms, transgender individuals are branded as "cross-dressers," which is considered to be a violation of the schools' policies. Even if schools allow them to continue their education in these premises, staying within these institutions is a huge challenge. A participant from the transgender group told their experience on how they were asked to leave both the male and female restrooms by maintenance officers. Gendered uniforms and facilities maybe something trivial for mainstream populations but it can lead to significant anxiety and discomfort for these individuals.

One of the participants from the transgender group shared her experience of misgendering and discrimination by one of her instructors in college:

"When I was still in the political science department, we had a professor who kept on misgendering me even though during that time I was already presenting myself as transgender. One time for an exam, I wanted to wear leggings since I was more comfortable with them but the professor said that it was only for women to wear and she kept insisting that I was a man."

Health

LGBTQI Filipinos face challenges when it comes to accessing health services. Even before they encounter these barriers to accessible health services in the Philippines, LGBTQI groups are at a disadvantage because of the ways in which their health and well-being are compromised due to discrimination and stigma most of the time. This means that LGBTQI groups have more demands which are, unfortunately, not always met.

Mental health issues are common examples. Ilan Meyer's minority stress framework is widely used in research, showing that multiple stressors observed among LGBTQI individuals have significant psychological impacts on them. Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, concealment or disclosure of identity, internalised homophobia, and expectations of rejection are identified as stressors placing LGBTQI individuals in a position more prone to mental health issues.⁴⁹ While the Psychological Association of the Philippines has come to recognise and address this problem by having their own affirmative policies and interest groups,⁵⁰ there are reports which indicate that the Philippines lacks counselors who are adequately trained to respond to the distinct needs and concerns of LGBTQI individuals.⁵¹ Consequently, this problem translates to lesser economic development and opportunities of LGBTQI groups.

⁴⁹ Meyer, Ilan H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: conceptual issues and research evidence." *Psychological bulletin* 129, no. 5): 674. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2072932/>

⁵⁰ Manalastas, Eric Julian, Beatriz A. Torre, E. J. Manalastas, and B. A. Torre. (2016). *LGBT psychology in the Philippines*. *Psychology of sexualities review* 7, no. 1: 60-72. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301807803_LGBT_psychology_in_the_Philippines

⁵¹ UNDP, USAID. (2014). *Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report*. Bangkok. P. 33. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAA888.pdf

Among the LGBTQI youth in the Philippines, suicidal tendencies were alarmingly observed to have increased. In Eric Manalastas' 2013 analysis on the nationally representative Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey⁵², 16 per cent of young gay and bisexual men were reported to have contemplated suicide which is double the percentage of young heterosexual men (8 per cent).

Another specific LGBTQI health issue is the rising number of cases of HIV. Transgender women and men who have sex with men (MSM) are considered vulnerable populations. It is worth noting, however, that this vulnerability is not recognised, not only because of the patterns on how the virus is being transmitted, but also because of a repressive legal environment and the lack of adequate laws, policies and practices. In 2018, however, the Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act was signed to repeal the Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 2018. Several improvements were made, such as provisions to resolve issues of service accessibility, including addressing geographical isolation of communities, stigma and misinformation, imposing sanctions on those who discriminate against people living with HIV, and ensuring confidentiality.⁵³ The availability and accessibility of HIV-related services were aimed to be improved by this Act, but challenges remain: The government which is the primary provider of HIV-related services often lack the financial and human resources and, as a result, civil society organisations have to bridge the gap. In addition, services are often marketed mostly as an MSM issue which excludes other members of the community, particularly the transgender community.⁵⁴ The Act is a mark of progress but a lot more is yet to be done to guarantee the accessibility and inclusion of LGBTQI Individuals in HIV-related services, and healthcare services in general. In addition to having more resources and stronger partnerships with civil society organisations, providers must also be able to offer LGBTQI-sensitive services sensitivity. Participants from the gay and bisexual cisgender male group and transgender group expressed their dismay over discriminatory remarks in testing centres which may potentially stop the target population from accessing these services. One participant from the transgender group shared a story:

"For the trans women community, it's very unfortunate to experience transphobic service providers. There was one time at this health care provider for HIV...what happened was, I was with my friend and I was told, 'sir, please fill up this form.' I then said, 'oh I'm transgender.' I thought he got it the first time until they called me and said, 'sir, it's your turn already.' My friend initiated to corrected them by saying 'you should call her ma'am because she's a trans woman.' But even after I finished the counseling part, I was still referred to as 'sir'...It is so frustrating since these individuals are supposed to have undergone trainings and gender sensitivity seminars but they don't apply it well. A lot of businesses undergo gender sensitivity trainings but this does not translate into practice, and the same can be said to this situation. A lot of trans women then refuse to get tested".

While testing centres and medication are free of charge and accessible, vulnerable groups sometimes are not aware of the availability of free and accessible services because of structural stigma and misinformation regarding SOGIESC and HIV.

⁵² A large questionnaire-based interview study conducted by the University of the Philippines Population Institute in 2003. The data are based on a nationally representative sample of young Filipino adults from 16 administrative regions of the Philippines including the National Capital Region and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, including 894 barangays, using two-stage cluster sampling. Respondents in the male subsample were 8,042 young Filipino men ages 15 to 24 (M = 18.8, SD = 2.8).

⁵³ Ranada, Pia. (2019). Duterte signs law strengthening HIV, AIDS health services. Rappler, 9 January 2019. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-signs-hiv-aids-policy-act-2018>

⁵⁴ UNDP, USAID. (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report. Bangkok. At: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAA888.pdf

Groups within the community have their own distinct challenges but they all expressed how heteronormative and cissexist health practitioners are regarding health in general. The cisgender women group in particular shared their experiences with social hygiene clinics. They mentioned instances of doctors and staff prying about their sexual partners and giving them unsolicited advice or lectures. This not only places these women in awkward and anxiety-inducing situations but these types of clinics are no longer perceived as safe spaces. One participant from the lesbian and bisexual cisgender women group shared this story:

"There's this butch lesbian who got in line in an OB [clinic]⁵⁵ clinic but she was asked to step out of the line since they did not see the point for her to consult an OB doctor. It is bothersome to think that there are so many layers in this. It was one of the only one accessible for her since health centres are the only ones who mainly support the urban poor sector. Also, she was judged primarily because of her gender expression. One of my observations is that there is no education on sexual reproductive health that is not heteronormative. The confusion and awkwardness stems from the heteronormative assumptions of service providers"

These dynamics may often be overlooked but they are significant for women's welfare especially those who are not well-informed of their health rights.

Transgender individuals face additional challenges in addition to their vulnerability to HIV. Because of the medical procedures necessary for those undergoing transition, which is unfortunately not addressed by service providers, a lot of transgender individuals are vulnerable to multiple health complications and left excluded from services. Transgender Filipinos encounter problems which include issues related to the use of hormones, cosmetic surgeries and products for implants. With the lack of accessible services, a lot of transgender individuals resort to self-medication and other alternatives, making them more prone to further health complications.⁵⁶ According to a transgender participant, meticulous maintenance is necessary to avoid these complications:

"if you're a transgender man and you're undergoing hormonal replacement therapy, you'd be injecting hormones which can be detrimental to your liver if you're not careful and you don't monitor your blood. So, you need to have yourself regularly checked. For a normal individual, medical checkups are done when they're feeling some type of irregularity, but for us, we need to have some laboratory work done every three monthsSome of these are not even covered by our health card or insurance".

⁵⁵ OB: Obstetrics and Gynecology clinics. A doctor who specialises in obstetrics focuses on pregnancy. The discriminatory act stated above implies that a lesbian woman may no longer seek medical advice on matters of pregnancy.

⁵⁶ Mendoza, John Ryan. (1995). Transgender Rights are Human Rights. Outrage Magazine. <https://outragemag.com/transgender-rights-are-human-rights/>

Conclusion

The Center for International Private Enterprise, defines economic inclusion as “*equality of opportunity for all members of society to participate in the economic life of their country as employers, entrepreneurs, consumers and citizens,*” with the private sector as a “*central partner in fostering economic growth.*”⁵⁷ A suggested specific for the role of the financial sector is embedded in the World Bank’s definition of financial inclusion, namely “*that individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs – transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance – delivered in a responsible and sustainable way.*”⁵⁸ If we were to use these definitions as standards, the narratives obtained from both the focus group discussions and literature review indicate that there are multiple gaps in the Philippine society when it comes to economic inclusion.

The country’s political history has eventually led to significant progress in terms of LGBTQI rights but the narratives of participants brought to the surface nuances of their experiences. Discrimination and stigma still permeates multiple institutions and they act as barriers to economic inclusion. In areas of education, income, healthcare, and financial institutions, these barriers are not necessarily obvious and measurable. Schools do not often reject students because of their SOGIESC, and LGBTQI Filipinos can still access educational institutions. However, this does not mean that they do not encounter challenges along the way. The narratives have exposed the tendency to shy away from educational opportunities and resources because other conditions enable cultures of discrimination and stigma. Not only can participation be limited, but narratives have highlighted experiences of unfair treatment. Given the lack of an operational and functioning national anti-discrimination law, there are not enough safeguards and guarantees, for example for LGBTQI students to seek protection from limiting environments which affects their economic output and welfare.

When it comes to employment, conditions are more varied since there are multiple industries which Filipinos can choose from, but some of the negative experiences are still carried over in work places. Furthermore, societal expectations inform the recognition and acknowledgment of opportunities of LGBTQI people, which is why there are narratives of how some LGBTQI Filipinos often choose jobs which fit their stereotype. Opportunities and resources may not be deprived from them, but LGBTQI Filipinos themselves process these opportunities distinctively from others in a way that affects their career later on. However, multiple sectors have already been penetrated since equal opportunity employers are emerging and even public offices can now be accessed which gives LGBTQI people political power in addition to political participation. However, the lack of an anti-discrimination law becomes relevant once again. Companies are still free to reject applicants solely because of their SOGIESC. For others, holding on to opportunities and resources which they have already accessed has been also difficult because of the culture of stigma and discrimination which are still free to roam around workplaces.

For those who manage to hold on to opportunities and resources despite the hostility physical and mental welfare can become an added issue, which also means added expenses. Access to healthcare services in general are recognised to have been open regardless of SOGIESC. The most pressing barriers to these services were economic, but because of the barriers to economic institutions LGBTQI Filipinos have to face, this can still be an LGBTQI- related issue. Some practitioners may give unsolicited remarks about their SOGIESC which distances the patients from them. Resources are available but it is possible for them to be unrecognised because of the discomfort in these services. Healthcare providers also fail to give attention to health issues which LGBTQI Filipinos are vulnerable to.

⁵⁷ Bettcher, Kim, and Teodora Mihaylova. (2015). Economic inclusion: Leveraging markets and entrepreneurship to extend opportunity. Center for International Private Enterprise. <https://www.slideshare.net/TeodoraMihaylova/fs05262015-economic-inclusion>

⁵⁸ The World Bank. Financial Inclusion. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/financialinclusion/overview>



Progress has been made to prevent cases of HIV, for example, but it has been heavily marketed to gay men, leaving other groups isolated. Stigma also perpetuates these services which is why, even with the free and accessible medication, some LGBTQI individuals choose not to avail of them. In these cases, stigma is manifested not only in policies of institutions, but also in the consciousness of the service providers which affects the quality of services. Transgender individuals also raised complications related to their transitioning. With the lack of institutional attention to these services, many are opting to self-medicate. However, doing so only puts them in need of more medical attention, which means additional costs.

LGBTQI Filipinos face tremendous pressure to raise their economic status because of their minority status and yet the system works against their favour. At first glance, the country might seem progressive and inclusive, thanks to the particularity of Philippine history in relation to sexual minorities and the political participation of LGBTQI Filipinos and allies. However, looking at the conditions from the perspective of the community can make one see how inequality persists, not only at the level of institutions, at the level of the state, but also at the level of the consciousness of the majority of Filipinos.

Recommendations

The recommendations below, primarily targeted towards government and the private sector, are largely based on the lived experiences and suggestions for improvement from the 23 focus group participants. Some have been drafted by the research team based on existing and new findings.

APCOM and Babaylanes, with partners, will continue to advocate for those recommendations to be acted on with a view to remove structural and other barriers for full economic and social inclusion and participation for LGBTQI people in the Philippine society.

Adoption of non-discriminatory and inclusive policies

The government should pass and implement the 2000 Anti-Discrimination Bill and review and alignment of some laws to ensure alignment with the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion;

1. Educational institutions should design and implement non-discriminatory policies and practices;
2. Transgender students should be able to wear school uniforms according to their preferred gender identity;
3. Multilateral development banks and financial institutions should strengthen LGBTQI inclusion by developing, integrating, and implementing LGBTI-focused workplace-, financial-, health- and educational policies and practices and foster effective alliances with multiple state and non-state actors for multilateral cooperation to promote LGBTQI inclusion;



Implementation of non-discriminatory and inclusive programmes

4. The government should establish, with adequate funding, effective, anonymous and easily accessible mechanisms for LGBTQI people, their friends and families, to report discrimination and violence;
5. Support groups and advocacy committees for LGBTQI youth should be established and funded at schools, institutions and within communities to deal with discrimination. Networks of parents, families, and allies from different sectors should be created to offer support to LGBTQI people;
6. Best practices of inclusion policies and practices should be promoted by local authorities, employers, insurance providers, the Metropolitan Community Church and other religious institutions, openly LGBTQI local government policy- and decision makers, and others;
7. More financial and human resources should be allocated to government to provide quality, LGBTQI-sensitive healthcare services in general, and HIV-related services;
8. Businesses and LGBTQI groups should partner in advocating for more inclusive workplace environments and business practices by promoting examples and good practices of businesses in the Philippines who are practicing inclusion;

Awareness Raising and Training

9. An awareness campaign by the Department of Health should be designed and implemented, targeted to vulnerable groups, some of whom are unaware of free and accessible services healthcare services throughout the Philippines, including HIV-related services;
10. Educational staff and administrators in educational institutions, including in the non-formal education sector; health service providers; local authorities; employers and financial service providers should receive training to raise their awareness and be able to offer LGBTQI-friendly and sensitive services. This includes training for teachers on how to support non-heterosexual students, for service providers at the frontline on how to sensitively interact with clients and for private employers on how to respect and protect LGBTQI rights in the workplace;
11. Financial institutions should be made familiar with the realities faced by LGBTQI Filipinos and so that they can offer LGBTQI sensitive services;

Bridging the data gap on LGBTQI inclusion

12. Partnerships should be fostered between the private and public sectors, academic institutions and organisations working on LGBTQI rights, and funds made available, for more rigorous research to improve and expand available data and information on LGBTQI inclusion. This will inform programs aimed to address and improve the situation of LGBTQI populations in the region;
13. The research capacity of LGBTQI organisations should be built and strengthened so that they are able to meaningfully design, implement, evaluate and participate in qualitative and quantitative research projects on LGBTQI-related issues.

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We are united in advocating for issues around HIV and those that advance the rights, health and well being of people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

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