

Joint Submission on the 3rd Cycle Universal Periodic Review of Trinidad and Tobago



Family Planning Association of Trinidad & Tobago has a mission to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights, through advocacy and the provision of quality services to men, women and young people in Trinidad and Tobago. FPATT is an affiliate of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

FPATT is also grateful for the contributions of the Youth Advocacy Group to the content and recommendations of this report.

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CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice (formally known as Coalition Advocating for the Inclusion of Sexual Orientation) is a feminist Civil Society Organisation committed to ensuring wholeness, justice and inclusion for Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) communities, by developing analysis, alliances and advocacy. CAISO's casework programme (called Wholeness and Justice launched in 2020) uses law and social work to prevent and redress violations of human rights and dignity related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and to strengthen human rights self-efficacy and advocacy by LGBTI persons. CAISO's advocacy leadership seeks to strengthen national human rights machinery and mobilize collaborative civil society use of human rights mechanisms; and works to shift public understanding, discourse and policy on sexuality, gender, citizenship and rights.

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The CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago is a volunteer non-governmental organisation focused on advocacy and public awareness and education on and for the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The organisation strives to cultivate a vibrant community that will support, strengthen and guide the development of frameworks as a critical cog in the advocacy wheel while promoting the essential tenets of the Convention, and engaging with communities in a manner that adds significant value into effective, sustainable development.

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I. Introduction

1. This report will focus on two major areas of concern relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights, namely discrimination against people based on real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) and the role of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and child sexual abuse.

II. Human Rights Obligations

2. Trinidad and Tobago received a large number of gender-related recommendations during both the first and second cycle of the UPR. The majority of gender-related recommendations focused on sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence and marital rape; sexual harassment; child, early and forced marriage and harmful practices; and violence/discrimination against LGBTI people. Recommendations relating to the theme of this report include 15 recommendations on violence and discrimination based on SOGIE, all of which were noted. The government supported all 18 recommendations relating to sexual and gender-based violence, but unfortunately noted the one recommendation on prohibiting the marital rape of minors and 6 of the 7 recommendations to eliminate child, early and forced marriage—the one exception was a supported recommendation from Chile to “Strengthen efforts to prevent and eradicate forced marriage of children and adolescents.” A single recommendation on CSE from Slovenia, “Ensure comprehensive sexuality education, with a view to preventing teen pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections, in particular HIV,” was also noted.
3. Trinidad and Tobago is a state party to numerous international human rights treaties, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (1973), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1978), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1978), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1990), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1991), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2015).
4. The ICCPR and CEDAW enshrine the right to be free from violence and discrimination, including based on gender, and the CRC enshrines this right for children specifically. The ICESCR includes the right to health, which, as the CESCR Committee has elaborated in General Comment 36, explicitly includes the right to sexual and reproductive health.ⁱ
5. Trinidad and Tobago is also a signatory to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (Egypt, 1994), the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development (2013), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (1995). All of these commitments obligate States to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health information, education, services and rights, and the right to a life free from sexual and gender-based violence.

III. Discrimination and Violence based on SOGIE

6. In 2017, the Trinidad and Tobago “buggery” law was challenged in court. Sections 13 and 16 of the Sexual Offences Act 1986 criminalized consensual sexual behavior between adults with prison sentences of between 5 years (for sexual acts such as oral sex) to 25 years (for

“buggery”—this was raised from 10 years to 25 in 2000).ⁱⁱ Although in theory this law applied to oral and anal sex between any consenting adults, it was applied to criminalize consensual sexual acts between individuals of the same sex. In April 2018, the Trinidad and Tobago High Court ruled that the law was unconstitutional as it infringed on the rights of LGBT citizens and criminalized consensual sexual acts between adults and violated the human rights to privacy, liberty and freedom of expression.ⁱⁱⁱ

7. Despite the progress in decriminalizing sexual behavior, there are no legal protections against discrimination or hate crimes based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression in Trinidad and Tobago,^{iv} and no legal recognition of gender identity is possible, leaving transgender people particularly vulnerable. The Equal Opportunity Act, which prohibits specific forms of discrimination, does not include LGBTI people. Religious leaders, who have considerable power and influence in the society, are often leading voices disparaging LGBTI people. In response to the constitutional ruling, religious leaders representing the 90% of Trinidad and Tobago’s population that is Christian, Hindu or Muslim, held a news conference calling on the government to amend the country’s Marriage Act to explicitly limit marriage to only a biological man and a biological woman and to refuse to amend the Equal Opportunity Act to include protection from discrimination based on SOGIE.^v
8. Numerous other laws remain active, which perpetuate discrimination against LGBTI people. Family and relationship laws provide recognition and protection for non-marital, cohabitational relationships, but define these relationships as between persons of the opposite sex. This includes the Administration of Estates Act (2000),^{vi} which provides for a cohabitant to have right to inherit a portion of the deceased’s estate, the Cohabital Relationships Act (1998),^{vii} which provides for a Court to make an order declaring a title or right to, or adjusting interests in property as well as the payment of maintenance to persons who live together “on a bona fide domestic basis,” and the Domestic Violence Act (1997) (Ch. 45:56), which provides, inter alia, for survivors of domestic violence to obtain a protection order from the Court which can order the abuser to vacate any premises, compensate the victim for losses, pay maintenance for the applicant and any child.^{viii}
9. Because hate crimes against people based on real or perceived SOGIE are not recognized, there is no reliable country data on the prevalence, but community organizations and NGOs on the ground confirm the high rate of violence and discrimination the LGBTI community, especially transgender women, face in nearly every aspect of their lives. Qualitative civil society research sheds valuable light on the everyday experiences of LBGTI+ people living in Trinidad and Tobago. The Silver Lining Foundation and UNESCO report, *Trinidad and Tobago School Climate Report: Bullying and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools* demonstrates that the higher rates of discrimination and violence faced by LBGTI+ people starts early: LGBT students experienced verbal, physical, sexual and cyber bullying at higher rates than non-LGBT students in secondary school, with Sexual Orientation/Gender Expression in the top three most common causes of verbal teasing, harassment or intimidation. Both girls and LGBT students showed more fear of bullying than male and non-LGBT peers.^{ix}
10. Another important contribution to this data is the collection of Lifestories from 18 working-class LGBTQI people living in Trinidad and Tobago, focusing on experiences with family, support systems and related violence, as well as an assessment of needs and ideas for social change and transformation. This research was led by Friends for Life, a twenty-three year-old LGBTI

organization, and the University of the West Indies, Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS). The research methodology was community-based and participatory, through in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews, and produced significant findings.^x

11. The Lifestories research documents the enormous and overwhelming violence and discrimination faced by the community, especially those most marginalised in terms of gender identity and socio-economic status, particularly in the context of post-decriminalisation backlash. All 18 persons interviewed had experienced multiple forms of violence, from childhood sexual abuse, to teenage experiences of survival sex and assault, to adult experiences with violence in/out of intimate relationships and violence in under-served marginalised communities. Further, lesbian and genderqueer women, transwomen, feminine gay men and genderqueer/non-binary persons experienced higher rates of violence. This qualitative data and findings support the experiential evidence and work of LGBTI community organisations who have reported these issues for years, and who also share the analysis that LGBTI+ communities disproportionately experience gender-based violence and that homophobia and transphobia is the direct cause of homelessness, economic insecurity, unemployment, and lack of access to social services (healthcare in particular) for many LGBTI+ people living in Trinidad and Tobago. The research team recently completed the review and summary of findings in 2020 and results are in the process of being finalized for publication.
12. Additionally, valuable evidence is arising from a casework and strategic litigation programme called Wholeness and Justice run by CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice, which aims to not only support communities with legal and social services, but also to document human rights violations and discrimination faced by LGBTI persons with a particular focus on trans, gender non-conforming and non-binary person. The programme started in March 2020, but had to pivot amidst the pandemic, and focused on offering urgent support to 75 people (including LGBTI persons, migrants, and female sex workers) who were left out of government support grants during the lockdown. This work continues, and has expanded since December 2020, accepting clients for social and legal services. The programme has documented 13 cases of discrimination and violations from January to March 2021 and is offering psycho-social support, lawyering, emergency grants, and advocacy empowerment.^{xi} Additional information from this programme will be forthcoming later this year.
13. In the Pan American Health Organization 2018 *Gender-based Violence, HIV, and Key Populations in Latin America and the Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados Country Report*, participants reported experiencing emotional, physical, sexual, and economic violence as well as other human rights violations.^{xii} Nearly all participants reported experiencing violence in any setting, with the most common settings before the age of 18, during sex work, from intimate partners, in public spaces, in health care settings, and from police.^{xiii}
14. Based on community forums with effected populations, and the psychosocial and socioeconomic information, experiences with GBV and other forms of violence and policy concerns from the Lifestories project, a coalition of NGOs working to advance the rights of LGBTI+ people to be free from discrimination and violence developed a 2020 LGBTI Policy Agenda, a 13-point plan launched prior to the 2020 General Election to highlight the needs of this community at a key political moment. The Policy Agenda was revised in October 2020 with new targets based on the re-elected government with updated Ministries and Agencies - who have all been contacted and

sent the policy agenda. Key areas raised included addressing violence and discrimination against LGBTI people in the areas of housing, employment, health care, insurance and social services. Discrimination and violence in those areas result in high rates of poverty, homelessness, violence against LGBTI people, especially by family members within their homes (linked to leaving home and high rates of homelessness), and the withholding of life-saving medical services such as HIV medication,^{xiv} areas in which the plan also asks the government to act. The policy and the process for development is available here: <https://portal.caribbeansexualities.org/alliance-for-justice-and-diversity-policy-agenda/>

15. This is a crucial political moment in the history of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of LGBTI rights. During the last two UPR cycles, the government noted recommendations to decriminalize sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex. Because this has now taken place as the result of the High Court ruling, the government is well placed to accept future recommendations that address the needs of LGBTI people, especially those regarding violence and discrimination. While there is still much progress to be made to end the persecution of people based on SOGIE and the violation of their human rights, the 3rd cycle of the UPR has the unique opportunity to encourage the government to take stronger action to protect rights in the face of a changing society.

IV. Comprehensive Sexuality Education

16. Comprehensive sexuality education empowers young people with information and education about their sexual and reproductive health and rights so they are able to decide freely and responsibly, matters related to their sexuality, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. It goes beyond biological information to include *values creation* around human rights and gender equality, which are key to combating root causes of gender-based discrimination and violence, including against people based on SGOIE. CSE achieves this by providing children and young people with age-appropriate and phased education based on human rights, gender equality, dignity, relationships, reproduction, sexual behaviors risks and prevention of ill health, and emphasizes values such as respect, inclusion, non-discrimination, equality, empathy, responsibility and reciprocity.^{xv}
17. As a party to the Montevideo Consensus (2013), Trinidad and Tobago committed to “ensure the effective implementation from early childhood of comprehensive sexuality education programs, recognizing the emotional dimension of human relationships, with respect for the evolving capacity of boys and girls and the informed decisions of adolescents and young people regarding their sexuality, from a participatory, intercultural, gender-sensitive, and human rights perspective.” Trinidad and Tobago does have a Health, Family and Life Education program, but objective evaluation of the curriculum finds that it scores only 24% when analyzed by the “Sexuality Education Curriculum Review and Assessment Tool for Latin America and the Caribbean (SECRAT-LAC)” developed by UNESCO, which demonstrates that the HFLE in Trinidad and Tobago lacks a legal framework, programmatic commitments, reporting mechanisms, training for facilitators, outreach campaigns and budget allocation, and only meets 53% of curricular content requirements.^{xvi}

A. Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health

18. CSE is particularly important in the context of Trinidad and Tobago because it empowers young people by making them aware of their human rights, including the recently guaranteed right not to

be subjected to child, early and forced marriage. In June 2017, the parliament unanimously passed legislation to outlaw child marriage through the amendment of various marriage and divorce laws, changing the legal age for marriage to 18 years (it was previously allowed for girls as young as 12 years old and 16 for boys, depending on their religion).^{xvii} This legislation brings national law into alignment with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Trinidad and Tobago is a party.

19. However, while the age of marriage has changed, it has serious repercussions on the rights of young people to access sexual and reproductive health services. Without access to SRH services, young people do not have access to the services and commodities they need to exercise their human rights to health and bodily autonomy. CSE must be complemented by access to the full range of comprehensive SRH services, which are currently prohibited in Trinidad and Tobago for all people under the age of 18. This can have a bolstering, bi-directional relationship role in supporting positive health seeking behaviour of young people. With the implementation of minors' access to SRH services, it means that those young people (out of school youth) who do not have access to CSE can still access education critical for their rights and health.
20. Serious concerns related the sexual and reproductive health of young people arise from the results of the *Trinidad and Tobago School Climate Report: Bullying and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools*. Most concerning were the outcomes related to sexual violence. Data from 9 Caribbean countries indicates that 47.6% of females and 31.9% of males described their first intercourse as forced or coerced and held family members or persons known to their family responsible for the act.^{xviii} Of the 651 students surveyed for the Silver Lining Foundation report, 100 students reported some form of sexual violence (53 were female and 47 males), but of these, 15 female students and 28 male students were unsure if their experiences (which they described as forced touching of breasts and genital areas) counted as molestation or rape. Of those raped, 17 girls were sure and 9 were unsure, while 11 boys were sure and 13 were unsure. The report cites a lack of information about what constitutes rape and consent as responsible for this, explaining that "some female students mentioned having been drinking alcohol with the person who assaulted them, or having kissed or flirted, and thought this is made them responsible for what happened."^{xix} The study made a recommendation for "True and accurate age-appropriate sex and sexuality education including consent, rights and protections, laws, social norms, safe-sex practices, and understanding sexual diversity."
21. In a country where young people experience high rates of sexual and other gender-based violence, but lack the information to identify and report abuse, CSE is essential to protecting their health. CSE enables young people to make informed decisions about relationships and sexuality and navigate a world where their health and well-being are still threatened by serious risks, such as sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, gender- and sex-based violence, and unplanned pregnancy.^{xx} It has positive effects, including decreased risky sexual behaviors and lowered risks of unplanned pregnancy, HIV and other STIs,^{xxi} as well as including increased knowledge and improved positive behaviors associated with sexual and reproductive health.^{xxii}

B. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

22. CSE is also critically needed in Trinidad and Tobago to prevent and address harmful social and cultural patterns, eliminate prejudices, gender inequalities and other root causes of sexual and gender-based violence, and ensure all people understand and can exercise their human rights and bodily autonomy. As demonstrated in the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (2018), extensive studies and research demonstrate that CSE fosters positive social

outcomes that are crucial to ending gender-based discrimination, including increased gender equitable attitudes, improved confidence or self-identity, preventing and reducing gender based and intimate partner violence and discrimination, increasing gender equitable norms, self-efficacy and confidence, and building stronger and healthier relationships.^{xxiii}

23. This has an impact on addressing the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls, but also gets to the root of violence and discrimination against people based on their real or perceived SOGIE. LGBTI people are often targeted with violence and discrimination because they are perceived as departing from societal norms that dictate gender expression and sexual behavior.^{xxiv} For example, in *Trinidad and Tobago School Climate Report: Bullying and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools*, the students showed adherence to strict gender binaries believing in appropriate and exclusive behaviours for each gender, but showed a lack of understanding of the terms related to gender. The concept of masculinity was seen in positive terms, while the concept of femininity was negative, but boys' behaviours and gender expressions are more closely policed than girls- Verbal attacks based on notions of masculinity targeted against a boy's sexuality or gender expression were mostly heard on a daily basis.
24. The pillars of CSE which focus on the diversity of human sexuality and gender, as well the values of respect, inclusion, non-discrimination, equality, and empathy play a key role in this preventative effect.^{xxv} Indeed, the RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence against Women framework developed by WHO with UN Women, and endorsed by 12 other UN agencies, shares several key pillars with CSE, including strengthening relationship skills; building more gender-equitable relationships; combating beliefs and social norms that justify gender-based violence, such as harmful traditional gender stereotypes and strict roles; and building norms that support non-violence, respect for diversity, and gender equality.^{xxvi}

V. Recommendations

25. Based on the above considerations, we kindly request that Member States make the following recommendations to the government of Trinidad and Tobago during the 3rd cycle of the UPR:
 1. **Take steps to establish a national human rights mechanism in line with the Paris Principles, which includes discrimination and violence against people based on SOGIE within its mandate, with appropriate resources dedicated to its functioning.**
 2. **Revise the existing HLFE to bring it in line with international guidelines on sexuality education and dedicate funding for on-going training of facilitators and implementation of the curriculum for all primary and secondary students.**
 3. **Amend the Equal Opportunity Act to end the legal discrimination of persons on the basis of sexual orientation and to add LGBTI status as a protected status under the act.**

ⁱ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 22 (2016) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health (article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), U.N. Doc E/C.12/GC/22

ⁱⁱ Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, Sexual Offences Act of 2000 (Act 27 of 1986, amended by 20 of 1994, 31 of 2000, 12 of 2012), Sections 13, 16 https://rgd.legalaffairs.gov.tt/laws2/alphabetical_list/lawspdfs/11.28.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/13/trinidad-and-tobago-sexual-offences-act-ruled-unconstitutional>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20180412164145/https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/trinidad-tobago-gay-sex-ruling/>;

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/13/trinidad-and-tobago-court-overturns-same-sex-intimacy-ban#>

^{iv} <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/trinidad-and-tobago/report-trinidad-and-tobago/>

^v Religion News, “Trinidad and Tobago’s Religious Leaders call on Government to Uphold Anti-LGBT Laws,” July 20, 2018 <https://religionnews.com/2018/07/20/trinidad-and-tobagos-religious-leaders-call-on-government-to-uphold-anti-lgbt-laws/>

^{vi} Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, the Administration of Estates Act (2000) Ch. 9:01, https://rgd.legalaffairs.gov.tt/Laws2/Alphabetical_List/lawspdfs/9.01.pdf

^{vii} Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, Cohabitation Relationships Act (1998) Ch. 45:55, https://rgd.legalaffairs.gov.tt/Laws2/Alphabetical_List/lawspdfs/45.55.pdf

^{viii} Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, Domestic Violence Act (1997) (Ch. 45:56) https://rgd.legalaffairs.gov.tt/Laws2/Alphabetical_List/lawspdfs/45.56.pdf

^{ix} United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Associated Schools Network (UNESCO ASP) *Trinidad and Tobago School Climate Report: Bullying and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools* (2017)

^x Sexual Culture of Justice: Lifestories of LGBTQI+ Persons in TT, <https://portal.caribbeansexualities.org/lifestories-of-lgbtqi-persons-in-tt/>

^{xi} CAISO : Sex and Gender Justice, Wholeness and Justice, <https://caisott.org/wholeness-and-justice>.

^{xii} Pan American Health Organization 2018 *Gender-based Violence, HIV, and Key Populations in Latin America and the Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados Country Report* (2018), p.4 <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-linkages-trinidad-barbados-gbv-april-2018.pdf>

^{xiii} Pan American Health Organization 2018 *Gender-based Violence, HIV, and Key Populations in Latin America and the Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados Country Report* (2018), p.4 <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-linkages-trinidad-barbados-gbv-april-2018.pdf>

^{xiv} Alliance for Justice and Diversity, 2020 LGBTI Policy Agenda 2.0 (October 2020) <https://caisott.org/2020-lgbti-policy-agenda> <https://newsday.co.tt/2020/08/02/lgbti-wants-equality-in-governance/>

^{xv} UNESCO, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education 16 (2018).

^{xvi} Mira Que Te Miro, Trinidad and Tobago, Comprehensive Sexuality Education <https://miraquetemiro.org/en/countries/TTO/42/>

^{xvii} <http://www.ttparliament.org/legislations/a2017-08.pdf>

^{xviii} United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Associated Schools Network (UNESCO ASP) *Trinidad and Tobago School Climate Report: Bullying and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools* (2017) p.41, citing Sandra D. Reid, Rhoda Reddock and Tisha Nickenig. “Breaking the silence of child sexual abuse in the Caribbean: A community-based action research intervention”. Caribbean Research Empowerment Network. Mar 07, 2016.

<http://www.thecren.com/index.php/blog/99-breaking-the-silence-of-child-sexual-abuse-in-the-caribbean-a-community-based-actionresearch-interventio>

^{xix} *Trinidad and Tobago School Climate Report: Bullying and Gender-Based Violence in Secondary Schools* p.41

^{xx} UNESCO, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education 16 (2018).

^{xxi} UNESCO, INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL GUIDANCE ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION 28 (2018).

^{xxii} UNESCO, INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL GUIDANCE ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION 28 (2018). Evidence also suggested the following are additional outcomes of CSE: delayed initiation of sexual intercourse, decreased frequency of sexual intercourse and number of sexual partners, reduced risk taking, increased use of condom and contraception.

^{xxiii} UNESCO, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education 28-9 (2018).

^{xxiv} <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-linkages-trinidad-barbados-gbv-april-2018.pdf> p. 6.

^{xxv} UNESCO, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education 16 (2018).

^{xxvi} RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence against Women (2019) <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/respect-women-preventing-violence-against-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5901>