



Being LGBTQIA+ in Uganda

This is a fact sheet for anyone who is concerned about views in Uganda surrounding people who identify as LGBTQ.

What does the law say in Uganda?

In Uganda, where many people uphold conservative religious and social values, it is illegal to engage in homosexual activity, which is no different from many African and Asian countries.

“An Act to prohibit any form of sexual relations between persons of the same sex; prohibit the promotion or recognition of such relations and to provide for other related matters.”

- Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014

In May 2021, the Parliament of Uganda passed the Sexual Offences Bill which reinforces the ban on same-sex relations. Police regularly target, abuse, and arrest people based on their presumed sexual orientation and gender identity. Although the laws do not explicitly mention transgender and gender-non-conforming individuals, law enforcement officials often conflate gender identity with sexual orientation, and, as such, trans people are detained and charged under the same laws.

In May 2023, the President Museveni gave assent to the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023. Under the new bill, homosexual conduct will still be illegal, but **identifying as homosexual without conducting in homosexual acts will not be outlawed**. The bill states that ‘*serial offenders*’ – defined by the legislation as those who transmit a terminal illness like HIV/AIDS through homosexual sex, and those who have same sex relations with a minor or a vulnerable adult i.e. a person with a disability, now face the death penalty. The law also imposes a 20-year prison sentence for ‘promoting’ homosexuality.

The bill does not criminalise those who identify as LGBTQ+

What are people’s general attitudes in Uganda towards being LGBTQIA+?

The general attitude in Uganda towards being LGBTQ is that it is unnatural; however, Ugandan people understand that it is accepted in western cultures. There have recently been successful LGBTQ pride rallies in Kampala that were peaceful, undisturbed, and supported by the Ugandan police force: the only gay pride marches in East Africa. However, government officials have repeatedly shut down other Pride events, LGBTQ events and conferences, and raided LGBTQ friendly social spaces. Films, tv shows, and radio programs have been banned for “homosexual content”. Violence from private individuals is also high and hate speech in the media is strong. Despite all of this, Uganda has an enthusiastic and persistent LGBTQIA+ activist community. We await to see the impact of the new legislation on the LGBTQIA+ activist community.

Have you hosted any LGBTQIA+ volunteers in the past?

We have had many LGBTQIA+ volunteers who have come to Uganda and they have all thoroughly enjoyed their time with us.

Do you provide training for your team in Uganda?

We hold training every year with our team in Uganda in preparation for our volunteering projects. This training covers the key cultural differences between the UK and Uganda including views on the LGBTQIA+



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community. Our team in Uganda understand and respect that as an inclusive organisation, people from all backgrounds, faiths, gender identities and sexual orientations are welcome. Our local team are friendly, respectful, and totally accepting of how our volunteer identify and choose to live their lives.

Are there any precautions that I would need to take?

Ugandans, as with most of African national, are very conservative. Ugandans do not generally show public displays of affection, so regardless of your sexuality or how you identify, we strongly request that you respect the local culture and do the same.

As part of your induction, you will receive cultural training to ensure that you act in a way that is respectful of the community we have been welcomed into to deliver the playground project. Our advice includes not discussing your sexual orientation/gender identification with those outside your project group, not engaging in any public displays of affection and not engaging in any sexual acts with local people due to the significant risks of HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, we strongly advise our volunteers not to have same-sex relations whilst in Uganda, as it is illegal. The Foreign Commonwealth office says: **“Homosexual activity is illegal and not tolerated in Uganda’s conservative society. Public displays of homosexuality like kissing in public places could lead to arrest and imprisonment.”** For more info from the FCO please see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice>

What would happen if Ugandans found out that I am part of the LGBTQ community?

Due to the legal status of homosexuality and differences in social etiquette in Uganda, Ugandans do not perceive the same visual cues that Westerners may align to a queer identity. Some Ugandans have been aware of volunteers identifying as LGBTQ, and this has not caused any issue. Ugandans are fully aware that their culture is very different from that of the UK and are therefore likely to accept the differences – as long as you are acting in a culturally respectful way.

What if I feel at risk in Uganda?

We work hard to ensure that no volunteer ever feels at risk for any reason whilst on our projects. We provide training to our local team and to every volunteer to ensure that cultural differences are respected. We have robust risk management and safeguarding processes in place, finely honed over the past decade of hosting nearly 2,500 young volunteers. Should at any point during your volunteering feel at risk, for whatever reason, we have staff accessible at all times to support you and ensure your safety. We also have excellent links with the British High Commission in Uganda should any situation escalate and require Foreign Office intervention.

If you have any further questions about this matter, then you are more than welcome to contact Amy at amy@playactioninternational.org to chat things though 🗨️