

Sexual orientation and gender identity in Canada's "feminist" international assistance

International Journal

2020, Vol. 75(3) 313–328

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DOI: 10.1177/00207020200953425

journals.sagepub.com/home/ijx**Erin Aylward**

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Abstract

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), launched in June 2017, marks the first time that sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) have been mentioned in an overarching Canadian aid policy. The inclusion of SOGI in the policy document sent an important signal to domestic and international development partners on the need to consider these sources of discrimination and marginalization. This article asks two basic research questions. First, what is the place of SOGI in Canada's "feminist" international assistance? Second, what additional steps does Canada's development program need to take to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people in the Global South? Based on an analysis of official documents and secondary sources, we argue that FIAP itself sends only a weak signal about the importance of SOGI-related concerns, but Canadian foreign aid has expanded its understanding of LGBTI issues and has begun to commit dedicated resources to addressing them. Nonetheless, the initial programming (2017–2019) was channelled in an ad hoc manner and through one, major stand-alone commitment, rather than through a broader framework that would guide SOGI's integration into Canadian programs over the long term. If serious about addressing LGBTI rights more systematically, the Canadian government needs to expand its definition of what SOGI entails and move

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beyond niche programming to recognize the cross-cutting dimension of LGBTI rights in foreign aid, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Keywords

Foreign aid, sexual orientation, gender identity, LGBTI, Canada, feminism

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), launched in June 2017, marks the first time that sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) have been mentioned in an overarching Canadian aid policy. Although Canadian involvement in defending the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights in the Global South predates FIAP, the inclusion of SOGI in the policy document signals to domestic and international development partners the need to consider these sources of discrimination and marginalization in foreign aid projects and programs.¹

This article asks two basic research questions. First, what is the place of SOGI in Canada's "feminist" international assistance? Second, what additional steps does Canada's development program need to take to protect the rights of LGBTI people in the Global South? We argue that FIAP itself sends only a weak signal about the importance of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) concerns, but Canadian foreign aid has expanded its understanding of LGBT issues and has begun to commit dedicated resources to addressing them. Nonetheless, the initial programming (2017–2019) was channelled in an ad hoc manner and through one major stand-alone commitment, rather than through a broader framework that would guide SOGIESC's integration into Canadian programs over the long term. If serious about addressing LGBTI rights more systematically, the Canadian government needs to expand its definition of what SOGIESC entails and move beyond niche programming to recognize the cross-cutting dimension of LGBTI rights in foreign aid, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We make those arguments based on publicly available information, including government documents and secondary analysis by academics and civil society

1. As discussed below, the FIAP document uses the expressions "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" a few times, but never the words lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, or the acronym LGBT. In this article, we use the terms SOGI and LGBT interchangeably in relation to FIAP. These terms have been the predominant ones used in relation to sexual and gender diversity internationally over the last two decades. In recent years, however, the scope has often been expanded to include the rights of intersex people (individuals born with sex characteristics that do not fit conventional definitions for female or male bodies). We therefore prefer to use the acronyms LGBTI and SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) when not referring directly to the FIAP document or to other initiatives whose scope excludes sex characteristics.

groups.² Our focus is on the development of Canadian aid policy, rather than its implementation or results “on the ground,” since most of the work that we discuss remains in the initial stages of policy and program development. The article begins by examining Canadian contributions to international LGBT rights prior to FIAP’s adoption. Next, it examines the policy document’s content on sexual orientation and gender identity. It then turns to an analysis of initial SOGI programming under FIAP (2017–2019) before examining how LGBTI rights could be mainstreamed and further integrated into Canada’s aid program. A final section summarizes these findings and outlines potential areas for future research.

Sexual orientation and gender identity in Canada’s pre-FIAP development policy

As LGBT Canadians progressively achieved greater legal equality at home in the 1990s and 2000s, the Canadian government increasingly sought to promote LGBT rights internationally, especially through the United Nations and other international fora. Under the Conservative government of Stephen Harper, in power from 2006 to 2015, and especially while John Baird was Minister of Foreign Affairs (2011–2015), Canada became more proactive in publicly condemning homophobic policies and practices abroad, notably in Uganda and Nigeria, and fast-tracked the asylum applications of 100 gay Iranians. However, the measures were sporadic, selective, and, in the case of some public statements, not particularly effective as “bullhorn diplomacy.”³

Prior to 2017, Canada’s actions on this topic were mainly through its foreign policy and via multilateral mechanisms, rather than its foreign aid program. Very few funds were actually dedicated to supporting LGBTI rights organizations in the Global South. Epprecht and Brown report that, as of mid-November 2014, a search of the online database of Canadian aid projects revealed that not one mentioned the words homosexual, homosexuality, lesbian, gay, transgender, LGBT, or intersex.⁴

The main source of financing for LGBT-related activities during that time was the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), a pool of money put at the disposal of Canadian embassies in the Global South to finance small projects, most of which are proposed by local civil society groups.⁵ In fact, the Harper government

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2. Erin Aylward is a board director with the Dignity Network and previously worked for Global Affairs Canada. Although these experiences have informed her understanding of the issues discussed in this article, the article’s analysis draws on publicly available documents and does not incorporate any privileged information.
 3. Marc Epprecht and Stephen Brown, “Queer Canada? The Harper government and international lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex rights,” in Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi, eds., *Omissions and Obligations: Canada’s Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press University, 2017), 69–90.
 4. Epprecht and Brown, “Queer Canada?”, 84n. As of 28 December 2019, the browser listed a dozen projects with those keywords.
 5. See Government of Canada, “The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives,” Government of Canada, <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/cfli-fcil/index.aspx?lang=eng> (accessed 27 December 2019).

designated LGBT rights as a priority area for CFLI funding in the 2014–15 fiscal year and provided a total of C\$886,000 to 44 organizations working on that topic in some 34 countries during that period.⁶ In 2015 and 2016, the Canadian government provided a total of US\$1.6 million in aid via 56 separate grants in the area of international LGBT rights, presumably mostly through CFLI, equivalent to 0.02% of total Canadian development assistance for those years.⁷

At the same time, the Canadian government provided funding from the aid budget to anti-LGBTI groups. For instance, a Canadian evangelical Christian group that “described homosexuality as a perversion and a sin” received over C\$700,000 for its projects on HIV/AIDS mitigation and on water and sanitation in Uganda between 2008 and 2014.⁸ When the media reported on the funding of the group in February 2013, the then Minister of International Cooperation Julian Fantino promised to review the funding and then declared the following day that it was compliant with government policy. He defended the partnership with the homophobic organization by arguing, “We fund results-based projects, not organizations.”⁹

Before 2017, the Canadian government thus lacked a coherent framework to consider sexual orientation and gender identity within its development assistance program. The next section considers the extent to which FIAP provides one.

Sexual orientation and gender identity in FIAP

The Liberal government of Justin Trudeau adopted FIAP in June 2017, one and a half years into its first mandate. As mentioned above, it is the first overarching Canadian aid policy to address SOGI. As such, it constitutes something of a breakthrough, albeit a modest one. The FIAP document mentions sexual orientation and gender identity three times, in addition to once in the minister’s introduction to the policy. However, SOGI is only invoked as part of varying lists of a dozen or so sources of discrimination and marginalization from which women and girls suffer. For instance, FIAP recognizes that, “Women often face additional intersectional discrimination, including on the basis of their race, ethnicity,

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6. Rob Salerno, “How Canada is funding global LGBT rights,” *Daily Xtra*, 25 June 2015, <https://www.dailyxtra.com/how-canada-is-funding-global-lgbt-rights-67987> (accessed 27 December 2019).
 7. Global Philanthropy Project, “2015/2016 Global resources report: Government and philanthropic support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities,” Global Philanthropy Project, Oakland, CA, 2016, https://lgbtfunders.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2015-2016_Global_Resources_Report.pdf (accessed 27 December 2019), 89. We calculated the percentage using data obtained from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Query Wizard for International Development Statistics, <https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/> (accessed 29 December 2019).
 8. Government of Canada, “Project Browser,” Government of Canada, <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/> (accessed 27 December 2019).
 9. Quoted in Canadian Press, “Fantino defends Uganda grant decision against anti-gay claims,” *CBC News*, 11 February 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/news/fantino-defends-uganda-grant-decision-against-anti-gay-claims-1.1393736> (accessed 27 December 2019).

religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or migrant or refugee status, among other aspects of personal identity.”¹⁰

The fact that SOGI is mentioned only within a long list of sources of identities does not provide much of a mandate for the Canadian aid program to do more to support LGBTI rights. In fact, the cursory mentions expose FIAP to accusations of paying only lip service to the issue. Despite its reference to intersectionality, the document never discusses any particularities of women or girls who are marginalized because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e., lesbians and bisexual and transgender women). FIAP’s understanding of intersectionality is indeed “flat” and constitutes more of a “buzzword” that is invoked than a concept that is applied.¹¹

FIAP explicitly focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. As such, the lack of specific consideration of SOGI is especially notable given the intrinsic connection between gender and both sexual orientation and gender identity, which is not present to the same extent for the other forms of identity-based discrimination on FIAP’s list. Sexual orientation is inherently connected to gender because it is based on the gender(s) of the people to whom a person is sexually attracted. For instance, a woman can be described as lesbian or bisexual because she is attracted to people of the female gender. Likewise, gender identity is, as the term itself makes clear, based on gender—namely each person’s internal and individual experience of gender, which may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.¹² Transgender women, transgender men, and gender non-conforming people around the world experience disproportionate levels of violence and discrimination because of this gender variance. Thus, gender does not just intersect with sexual orientation and gender identity; SOGI is inextricably linked to gender. Consequently, an aid policy that focuses on gender equality could be expected to make more than just passing mentions of sexual orientation and gender identity as part of undifferentiated lists of sources of marginalization that women and girls experience.

Despite FIAP’s claim to have gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as its core, a closer reading of the document reveals that it is much more preoccupied with women and girls than with gender equality per se. In addition, its view of gender is fundamentally a binary one. FIAP divides the Global South’s populations into, on one hand, women and girls (to be empowered) and, on the other hand, men and boys (to be engaged in order to promote attitudinal change). Despite the references to discrimination based on gender identity, nothing in FIAP

10. “Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy,” Global Affairs Canada, Government of Canada, Ottawa, 2017, 49.

11. Corinne L. Mason, “Buzzwords and fuzzwords: Flattening intersectionality in Canadian aid,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 25, no. 2 (2019): 203–219.

12. Yogyakarta Principles, *Yogyakarta Principles: Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. (Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta Principles, 2007), 6.

challenges that binary construction of gender.¹³ Moreover, because FIAP describes only women and girls as being marginalized because of sexual orientation and gender identity, the policy appears uninterested in discrimination against gay, bisexual, and transgender men, and of gender non-conforming people.

In addition, the choice of the terms sexual orientation and gender identity is somewhat limiting. Since roughly 2016, some civil society organizations, UN bodies/mechanisms and states have favoured a more expansive terminology: sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).¹⁴ The latter two terms provide a more complete definition of LGBTI communities: gender expression, or a person's presentation of gender through physical appearance, differs from gender identity (and indeed may not conform to one's gender identity). First, while identity can be limited to internal identification (for example, a person could present as a man but identify as a woman), expression is by definition external and thus more likely to be a source of active discrimination and violence. If lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people are identifiable, it is usually for their gender-variant public expression that does not conform to other people's gendered expectations. To reflect this distinction, the word *expression* is often added to the term gender identity.

Second, mentioning sex characteristics would make FIAP inclusive of intersex people (people who are born with physical features relating to sex that do not fit conventional definitions for female or male bodies).¹⁵ Intersex people, as babies or children, are often subjected to medically unnecessary, irreversible surgical interventions without their consent—including in Canada.¹⁶ Such rights violations and the lagging socio-economic outcomes of intersex people have been increasingly recognized as salient at the international level.¹⁷

By using SOGI rather than SOGIESC, FIAP adopts a terminology that does not fully encompass the diversity within the LGBTI communities and thus does not accurately portray the full range of rights abuses to which their members are subjected. As illustrated below, Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the government

13. See broader discussion of the Canadian government's use of the term gender in Taryn Husband-Ceperkovic and Rebecca Tiessen, "Beyond the binary: Sexual orientation and gender identity in Canadian foreign policy," in Manon Tremblay and Joanna Everitt, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender, Sexuality and Canadian Politics* (forthcoming).
14. See ARC International, International Bar Association, and International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, "Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics at the Universal Periodic Review," 2016, <http://www.pgaction.org/inclusion/pdf/resources/2016-11-SOGI-report-Arc-Intl.pdf> (accessed 20 May 2020).
15. Intersex individuals can variously identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or straight; as male, female or gender nonbinary; and as cisgender or transgender. They are, thus, not necessarily included under the terms sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or LGBT.
16. See Egale Canada, "'65 reasons': The rights of intersex people in Canada," Egale Canada, 26 February 2019, <https://egale.ca/awareness/65-reasons/> (accessed 29 December 2019).
17. See, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations, *Background Note on Human Rights Violations against Intersex People*, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations, Geneva, n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/LGBT/BackgroundNoteHumanRightsViolationsagainstIntersexPeople.pdf> (accessed 29 December 2019).

department that houses Canada's aid program, has taken steps that go beyond the limits of the SOGI term. Interestingly, FIAP does not use the acronym LGBT or its constituent parts. The decision not to do so might have been to align its terminology with usage in many international fora, where SOGIESC rather than LGBTI is generally favoured as a more inclusive formulation—even though it still uses SOGI rather than SOGIESC. This choice also has the advantage of referring to sources of discrimination rather than culturally specific identities which might not be adopted by those that they are meant to describe.

Finally, any consideration of the novel inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in Canadian aid policy must also reflect other donor countries' aid policies. Doing so adds some needed perspective on any potential claims of Canadian leadership in this area. A fuller comparative review is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth mentioning that the Swedish government began publishing studies on SOGI issues in development as far back as 2005.¹⁸ Its 2005 gender equality policy mentions sexual orientation, albeit not gender identity and without much discussion.¹⁹ The following year, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency published its first action plan on LGBT issues.²⁰ Since then, it has also published several inventories of its work on SOGI.²¹ For its part, the American government required in 2011 "that U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons," and its aid agency adopted in 2014 an "LGBT Vision for Action."²² There are thus several countries that have, over the past 10 to 15 years, done far more than Canada in integrating SOGI issues into their development policy.

This disparity is also reflected in Canada's standing among other donor countries in LGBTI-related development assistance. According to the Global Philanthropy Project's figures on international aid for LGBT issues in 2015 and 2016, Canada's investment (US\$1.6 million, as mentioned above) amounts to just 4.2% of the Netherlands's investment (US\$37.8 million) and 5.4% of Sweden's investment (US\$29.4 million) during this period. Denmark, Norway, and Finland were also reported to have contributed more than Canada. Furthermore, while the US and the UK did not submit their 2015–2016 figures, both countries' overall contributions were probably significantly more than Canada's.²³

18. Lotta Samelius and Erik Wågberg, "Sexual orientation and gender identity issues in development," Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm, 2005.

19. "Promoting gender equality in development cooperation," Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm, 2005.

20. "Action plan for SIDA's work on sexual orientation and gender identity in international development cooperation 2007–2009," Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm, 2006.

21. For instance, Lennart Peck, "An inventory of Swedish Development Cooperation: Sexual orientation and gender identity," Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm, 2007.

22. "LGBT Vision for Action: Promoting and Supporting the Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals, United States Agency for International Development, Washington, 2014.

23. "Global Resources Report," 17, 20.

Unlike policies in other donor countries, FIAP does not provide guidance on how to address LGBTI rights in the Global South. Given the policy's limitations detailed above, it is hard to state with any certainty what the implications are of its timid mentions of SOGI. They could be interpreted as virtue signalling by the Trudeau government. However, even if that were the extent of the government's intention, GAC officials and Canada's development partners could use the allusions to SOGI to justify funding applications and programming in support of LGBTI rights. The SOGI content, as limited as it is, could thus serve a purpose that goes beyond any original intent. The next section examines how Canada's aid programming has reflected LGBTI concerns since FIAP's adoption.

SOGI programming under FIAP, 2017–2019

Except for a few projects or funding commitments related to SOGI in multilateral venues, the Canadian government does not appear to have announced any commitments or programming reflecting SOGI in the year following FIAP's release. In December 2017, GAC provided the London-based Royal Commonwealth Society with C\$337,652 to develop research and dialogues on "legal tools that could be used to assist interested Commonwealth governments with reforms to improve the legal standing and the lives of LGBT persons."²⁴ In May 2018, in order to support LGBTI people under threat in Russia, Canada contributed C\$200,000 to the Global Equality Fund, a multi-stakeholder funding platform hosted by the US government and focused on LGBT rights.²⁵ To some extent, the lack of substantive programming announcements related to SOGI within FIAP's first year is not surprising, given the time required to develop, formalize, and announce a funding commitment. Indeed, the two projects mentioned above may well have been developed before FIAP explicitly identified SOGI as an area to be included in its "feminist" international assistance.

The limited scope of announcements related to Canada's support for SOGI became more conspicuous in August 2018 during Canada's hosting of the Equal Rights Coalition's (ERC) Global Conference on LGBTI Human Rights and Inclusive Development, held in Vancouver. In 2017–2019, Canada and Chile served as co-chairs of the ERC, an intergovernmental coalition focused on advancing LGBTI human rights and inclusive development in close collaboration with civil society.²⁶ Many observers expected a major LGBT aid announcement to

24. Government of Canada, "Project profile—Toward a More Inclusive Commonwealth," Government of Canada, <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/d003818001> (accessed 28 December 2019).

25. Theresa Wright, "Baloney meter: Andrew Scheer says Canada sends foreign aid to rich countries" *National Post*, 6 October 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/canada-news-pmn/baloney-meter-andrew-scheer-says-canada-sends-foreign-aid-to-rich-countries> (accessed 29 December 2019).

26. Government of Canada, "Equal Rights Coalition" https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/coalition-equal-rights-droits-egaux.aspx?lang=eng (accessed 29 December 2019).

come from Canada during this event. Prior to the conference, the Quebec Ministry of Foreign Relations announced a C\$4 million commitment to developing a global Francophone LGBT network, and a Canadian network of civil society organizations publicly called on GAC to commit “new funding to move Canada into the leading tier of countries who support LGBTI human rights work globally.”²⁷ In response, Randy Boissonnault, the Prime Minister’s Special Advisor on LGBTQ2 Issues, announced the following commitments at the end of the conference:

1. To chair a working meeting with Canadian civil society and government officials, to “build a path forward together,”
2. To update the “Voices at Risk” guidelines for Canada’s overseas missions on supporting human rights defenders to include specific LGBTI guidance,
3. A C\$1 million call for proposals to address LGBTI rights during violent conflict through GAC’s Peace and Stabilization Operations Program.²⁸

That the Government of Canada’s top announcement at this conference was to host a follow-up meeting suggests an acknowledgement that more work was required for investing in LGBTI development assistance. Moreover, the C\$1 million announced for the call for proposals was very modest, amounting to a quarter of the commitment that a provincial government had announced in LGBTI development assistance a few months earlier.

While not mentioned in Boissonnault’s closing speech, GAC’s press release “backgrounder” also included two additional announcements. The first was a C\$1 million project focused on strengthening the justice system in Honduras’s response to high rates of gender-based crimes, including crimes against LGBTQ2 and intersex people. Buried even further down in the backgrounder to the press release, GAC made a commitment to “address gaps in its understanding, policy discourse and programming approaches to support the expansion of inclusive initiatives that advance LGBTQ2 and intersex human rights and improve socio-economic outcomes for LGBTQ2 and intersex persons in developing countries” through four strategies: (1) outreach with LGBTQ2 and intersex organizations and persons, (2) training to build capacity of GAC staff, (3) “enhanced collection and use of disaggregated data” on LGBTQ2 and intersex persons’ realities in developing countries, and (4) the introduction of a policy marker to track

27. Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie, “Le Québec toujours plus engagé en faveur des droits des personnes LGBT,” 11 June 2018, <https://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/fr/salle-de-presse/communiqués/18407> (accessed 29 December 2019); Dignity Network, “Civil society calls on Government of Canada for greater action on LGBTI rights globally,” 2 August 2018, <https://www.amnesty.ca/news/civil-society-calls-government-canada-greater-action-lgbti-rights-globally> (accessed 29 December 2019).

28. Privy Council Office, “Equal Rights Coalition Global Conference on LGBTI Human Rights and Inclusive Development: Speech by Randy Boissonnault MP,” Government of Canada, 7 August 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/news/2018/08/equal-rights-coalition-global-conference-on-lgbti-human-rights-and-inclusive-development.html> (accessed 29 December 2019).

international assistance programming in this area.²⁹ In doing so, GAC acknowledged gaps in its understanding, policy discourse, and programming, and identified a number of strategies that could help to rectify the “flatness” of FIAP’s integration of an intersectional analysis in relation to SOGI.

Following on the promised meeting with civil society and GAC, presided over by Boissonnault in the fall of 2018, the Minister of International Development Marie-Claude Bibeau delivered a much more substantial announcement in February 2019, alongside Boissonnault. More specifically, Canada committed C\$30 million in dedicated funding over 5 years, to be followed by C\$10 million per year in subsequent years to “advance human rights and improve socio-economic outcomes for LGBTQ2 people in developing countries.”³⁰

The policy commitments and the lack of significant aid announcements at the ERC conference suggest that SOGI’s meaningful inclusion through FIAP is unlikely to simply organically emerge by virtue of several cursory mentions of sexual orientation and gender identity within the document. Among other potential barriers, the above-mentioned policy commitments highlight how limited relationships with relevant LGBTI stakeholders, limited internal capacity, lack of data, and lack of current tracking impede work in this area. Moreover, the existence of an external political actor—Boissonnault, whose LGBTQ2 Secretariat was based in the Privy Council Office—and advocacy on the part of Canadian civil society organizations appear to have been essential to advancing this work.

These developments also demonstrate an interesting shift in language. Whereas FIAP referred to SOGI, the August 2017 and February 2019 announcements refer to “LGBTQ2 and intersex.” This terminology denotes an important expansion by including sex characteristics as an additional category that is not encapsulated in the terminology of SOGI, albeit as an awkward “add-on” formulation. Hence, the initial framing of SOGI within FIAP does not appear to have discursively constrained how issues of sexual and gender diversity may subsequently be developed.

However, these announcements also shift from FIAP’s focus on SOGI to a more identity-centred formulation that appears to simply amalgamate the more commonly used domestic (LGBTQ2) and international (LGBTI) acronyms. GAC’s choice of language in this instance also appears to privilege identities associated with sexual and gender diversity that are more commonly connected with countries in the Global North, and with North America in particular. While the inclusion of the “2” to refer to “two-spirit” people could be considered an important effort to centre Indigenous perspectives, the concept of two-spirit is generally

29. Global Affairs Canada, “Canada is committed to further supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit and intersex policies domestically and abroad,” Government of Canada, 7 August 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2018/08/canada-is-committed-to-further-supporting-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer-two-spirit-and-intersex-policies-domestically-and-abroad.html> (accessed 29 December 2019).

30. Global Affairs Canada, “Canada announces new funds in support of LGBTQ2 rights,” Government of Canada, 7 February 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2019/02/canada-announces-new-funds-in-support-of-lgbtq2-rights.html> (accessed 29 December 2019).

understood as a term used by some Indigenous nations/communities in North America to describe individuals who carry both male and female spirits.³¹ The term, however, does not encapsulate other Indigenous forms of sexual and/or gender diversity expressed and found in other regions of the world (nor, indeed, all forms of sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous communities in Canada itself).

Canadian LGBTQ2 organizations have praised GAC's advances in securing funding and policy commitments related to SOGIESC.³² The Global Philanthropy Project's most recent report indicates an increase in SOGI's inclusion within Canadian aid: During the 2017 and 2018 fiscal years, Canada is reported to have invested approximately US\$5 million in SOGI-focused development assistance through 54 grants.³³ However, it is too soon to conclude that FIAP has or will generate meaningful space through which SOGIESC will be integrated in development policy or programming. The main SOGIESC-related announcements since FIAP's adoption have been primarily through relatively minor multilateral projects, policy commitments from 2018 around which it is not clear whether any substantive progress has been made,³⁴ and through a much-lauded commitment of C\$30 million over 5 years and C\$10 million in subsequent years to advance LGBTQ2 and intersex human rights and socio-economic outcomes. A more meaningful and enduring demonstration of the integration of SOGIESC into FIAP and resultant programming will be the extent to which SOGIESC analyses are mainstreamed throughout GAC's proposals and programming, an issue which we address in the next section.

Mainstreaming SOGIESC in Canada's "feminist" international assistance

The most relevant potential case through which to evaluate the success (or even existence) of SOGIESC mainstreaming is Canada's program to advance international sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Historical and contemporary understandings of SRHR clearly conceptualize rights related to SOGI as inherent to SRHR. Indeed, the term sexual rights was originally pioneered in multilateral spaces by lesbian activists in the 1990s.³⁵ While this term encompasses

31. Julie Depelteau and Dalie Giroux, "LGBTQ issues as Indigenous politics: Two-Spirit mobilization in Canada," in Manon Tremblay, ed., *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 64–81.

32. Dignity Network, "Progress assessment: Canada's progress on supporting LGBTI human rights globally since 2015," 7 October 2019, <http://www.dignityinitiative.ca/wp-content/uploads/Dignity-Network-Progress-Assesment.pdf> (accessed 29 December 2019).

33. Global Philanthropy Project, "2017/2018 Global resources report: Government and philanthropic support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities," Global Philanthropy Project, https://globalresourcesreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GRR_2017-2018_Color.pdf (accessed 31 May 2020), 117.

34. Dignity Network, "Progress Assessment," p. 4.

35. Françoise Girard, "Negotiating sexual rights and sexual orientation at the UN," in Richard Parker, Rosalind Petchesky, and Robert Sember, eds., *Sex Politics: Reports from the Frontlines* (Rio de Janeiro: Sexuality Policy Watch, 2007), <https://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/sexpolitics.pdf> (accessed 29 December 2019).

a broad range of issues that extend well beyond sexual orientation, its focus from its inception on an “individual’s right to have control over and decide freely on matters related to her or his sexuality, free of coercion, discrimination and violence” is highly relevant to sexual orientation.³⁶ In recent years, experts have also asserted that sexual rights should be interpreted to include one’s right to express and define one’s gender identity.³⁷ Hence, in addition to considering LGBTI individuals as marginalized populations who should be considered in the design and delivery of SRHR programming (for example, in relation to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted illnesses, or in response to forms of sexual or gender-based violence such as “corrective” rape against lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender men), the rights and needs of these communities are a core component of SRHR itself.

SRHR has emerged as a core funding priority of the Trudeau government, which further underscores the relevance of examining how SOGI is integrated into this portfolio. In March 2017, GAC committed C\$650 million over 3 years to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.³⁸ During the Women Deliver Conference in Vancouver in June 2019, the Canadian government announced that it would commit C\$700 million per year to SRHR beginning in 2023. Yet, without further awareness-raising, advocacy, and policy work to better highlight the interconnections between SOGIESC and SRHR, the latter risks becoming a particularly high-profile example of FIAP’s lip service to SOGI while failing to acknowledge or operationalize SOGIESC’s meaningful inclusion.

The initial March 2017 announcement on SRHR stated that the goal of Canada’s C\$650 million contribution to SRHR “is to reduce unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, and protect and promote the health and rights of women and girls, giving them the opportunity to develop their full potential and contribute to the development of their communities.”³⁹ The announcement also examines 10 areas that the SRHR commitment will support, only one of which makes any direct reference to SOGIESC: “advocacy activities of women’s, youth,

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36. United Nations, *Proposals for Consideration in the Preparation of a Draft Declaration, A/CONF.177/L.1*, 24 May 1995, <https://www.un.org/esa/documents/ga/conf177/aconf177-11en.htm> (accessed 29 December 2019).
37. Ann M. Starrs, Alex C. Ezeh, Gary Barker, Alaka Basu, Jane T. Bertrand, Robert Blum, Awa M. Coll-Seck, Anand Grover, Laura Laski, Monica Roa, and Zaba A. Sathar, “Accelerate progress—sexual and reproductive health and rights for all: Report of the Guttmacher–Lancet Commission,” *The Lancet* 391, no. 10140 (2018): 2642–2692. This expert publication, however, does not explicitly examine how rights related to one’s sex characteristics—and in particular, rights violations related to non-consensual and medically unnecessary surgeries performed on intersex babies and children—could or should be considered as a component of SRHR.
38. Government of Canada, “Sexual and reproductive health and rights,” Government of Canada, 4 December 2019, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/global_health-sante_mondiale/reproductive-reproductifs.aspx?lang=eng (accessed 29 December 2019).
39. Government of Canada, “Canada’s commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights—March 8, 2017, announcement,” Government of Canada, 1 June 2017, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/global_health-sante_mondiale/reproductive_faq-reproductifs_faq.aspx?lang=eng (accessed 29 December 2019).

Indigenous, and LGBTI civil society groups.” Hence, although sexual rights are inherently connected to advocating for LGBTI communities’ rights, the extent to which SOGIESC is included in GAC’s analysis amounts to it being listed (last) as one kind of civil society organization for which advocacy activities could be included. Moreover, the announcement’s exclusive use of binary language related to gender (i.e., women and girls) calls into question the inclusion of issues related to gender non-conforming and intersex people, trans men, as well as cisgender men who face persecution on the basis of their gender expression. Thus, the initial SRHR announcement fails to acknowledge—let alone privilege—how SOGIESC rights claims and issues are explicitly included in SRHR. Moreover, the language it uses excludes some of the more marginalized identities and perspectives from these communities.

The 2019 call for proposals related to Canada’s SRHR announcement, offering funding worth C\$325 million over 5 years, is even less clear on how SOGIESC relates to SRHR. The five “identified critical gap areas” feature no explicit reference to SOGIESC and are defined as “reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education, family planning, and contraceptives, safe and legal abortion and post-abortion care, sexual and gender-based violence (including child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation and cutting), and advocacy activities for SRHR.”⁴⁰ We are unaware of any examples of LGBTI-focused organizations receiving funding under the SRHR programming by the end of 2019. As a result of this exclusion, Canadian civil society organizations have called on GAC to develop and implement a strategy for integrating LGBTI issues into its SRHR programming, among other relevant areas.⁴¹

While Canada’s announcement of C\$30 million over 5 years to advance LGBTQ2 and intersex rights and socio-economic outcomes is undeniably an advance beyond any previous SOGIESC-related funding, there are, as of yet, few indications that SOGIESC has been systemically integrated as a policy area since FIAP’s adoption. However, the past few years have also marked an era in which LGBTI, feminist, and other civil society organizations have joined forces to advocate for SOGIESC-inclusive development policy, with at least some openings to advance SOGIESC in development assistance.

In addition to simply seeking to see SOGIESC better reflected in various action areas and policy documents stemming from FIAP, other policy provisions are required to advance this work substantively and securely. For example, Canada’s “feminist” aid policy does not prohibit providing aid funds to

40. Government of Canada, “Call for proposals—health and rights for women, adolescent girls and children,” Government of Canada, 17 September 2019, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/health_rights_women-sante_droits_femmes.aspx?lang=eng (accessed 29 December 2019).

41. Dignity Network, “Policy recommendations on how Canada can defend and support human rights for LGBTI people around the world,” Dignity Network, 2019, <http://www.dignityinitiative.ca/wp-content/uploads/Dignity-Newtork-Recomendations-2019-EN-FR-ii.pdf> (accessed 29 December 2019).

organizations that engage in advocacy or programming that promotes intolerance, hatred, or discrimination toward LGBTI people, which, as mentioned above, has occurred in the past. Additional research and policy safeguards are needed to ensure that such programming does not export or inflame anti-LGBTI or anti-SRHR sentiments in aid recipient countries. Other donors, including the European Union, Norway, and the US have begun to put such provisions in place.⁴²

Furthermore, Canadian programming in relation to SOGIESC should highlight security concerns and best practices related to “do no harm” in the context of LGBTI work. For instance, LGBTI human rights organizations are often unable to legally register in the countries where some of the more dire rights violations take place; provisions should therefore be put in place to enable such organizations to access funds. In such contexts, Canadian policies on the transparency and visibility of its aid contributions need to be re-examined in order to protect the security of activists involved. Refining emergency-response mechanisms are a further, critical component of ensuring that Canada’s aid can help support those LGBTI organizations in most acute need of assistance. Provisions related to emergency relocation for at-risk human rights defenders, and funding for holistic security capacity-building and assessment can also be of particular importance in light of the trauma and risks that individuals working on SOGIESC face. In sum, there are numerous ways Canada can and should mainstream SOGIESC concerns in its “feminist” international assistance policy.

Conclusion

As this article argues, Canada’s 2017 Feminist International Assistance Policy marked an important symbolic step forward in the inclusion of LGBTI concerns in the Canadian foreign aid program. It constitutes the first mention of sexual orientation and gender identity in an overarching Canadian aid policy document. However, as demonstrated, the cursory mentions—always part of a longer list of potential sources of women and girls’ marginalization—fail to recognize any specificities of LGBTI people and the discrimination they face directly related to gender concerns. Moreover, despite the references to sexual orientation and gender identity, the policy document reproduces a gender binary that exacerbates oppression on the basis of SOGIESC. FIAP does not provide any concrete guidance on how to address sexual orientation and gender identity.

Since FIAP’s adoption, GAC has announced some additional funding and policy commitments related to international LGBTI rights and socio-economic outcomes. However, these funding decisions appear to have been made in an ad hoc manner, often in response to specific events (e.g., the ERC conference) and external pressure (for example, from other parts of the federal government or from Canadian civil society), rather than as part of a strategy or vision to address

42. See, for example, Dignity Initiative, “Advancing dignity: Assessing Canada’s Global Action on Human Rights for LGBTI People” (Toronto: Dignity Network, 2016), 20.

SOGIESC concerns through development assistance. In addition to adopting an overarching framework (as other countries have), the Canadian government—if it is serious about integrating SOGIESC in its “feminist” international assistance—needs to mainstream SOGIESC into its non-LGBTI-focused aid programs and projects, above all in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as develop a range of broader policies, including prohibiting the funding of anti-LGBTI organizations and addressing security considerations related to funding at-risk LGBTI organizations. As of late May 2020, the government had not publicly communicated any intent to implement such measures.

The Trudeau government’s second mandate and the appointment of a new Minister of International Development in November 2019 provide GAC with an opportunity to expand its focus on LGBTI rights. Initial signs, however, are not promising. Among other things, Randy Boissonnault, who had played a key role in moving some of the initiatives forward in 2017–2019, was defeated in the October 2019 elections, and the position of Special Advisor on LGBTQ2 Issues to the Prime Minister has been eliminated. Moreover, the new mandate letters of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of International Development make no mention of SOGIESC-related issues. The Trudeau government might well be losing interest in international LGBTI rights.⁴³

It is still too soon to assess the actual modalities and results of aid funding for SOGIESC-related issues, notably the announcement of C\$30 million in February 2018, which remains in the preliminary stages of implementation. Future research can examine the approaches, funding decisions, and outcomes related to that fund, as well as any additional programs that GAC may announce. Such research would benefit from a more engaged assessment of how LGBTI rights defenders and scholars in the Global South assess Canadian assistance or donor support more generally.⁴⁴ In particular, it will be important to examine how the funding activities address the various components of SOGIESC, the extent to which programs use an intersectional lens to take into account overlapping identities and their particularities, and the extent to which policies are adapted or developed to address security considerations related to LGBTI aid.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Morgane Rosier for research assistance.

43. Stephen Brown, “Don’t abandon the global push for LGBTI rights,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 16 January 2020, A9. In her response to Brown’s article, the Minister for Diversity and Inclusion seems to suggest that she is assuming Boissonnault’s coordinating role, including at the international level. She does not, however, mention any new measures being taken at GAC to defend international LGBTI rights—see Bardish Chagger, “Canada stands up for LGBTQ2 communities, here and abroad,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 January 2020, <https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/chagger-canada-stands-up-for-lgbtq2-communities-here-and-abroad> (accessed 10 February 2020).

44. For example, see Liesl Theron, John McAllister, and Mariam Armisen, “Where do we go from here? A call for critical reflection on Queer/LGBTIA+ activism in Africa,” *Pambazuka News*, 12 May 2016, <https://www.pambazuka.org/gender-minorities/where-do-we-go-here> (accessed 31 May 2020).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Erin Aylward thanks the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation for funding support. Stephen Brown gratefully acknowledges financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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