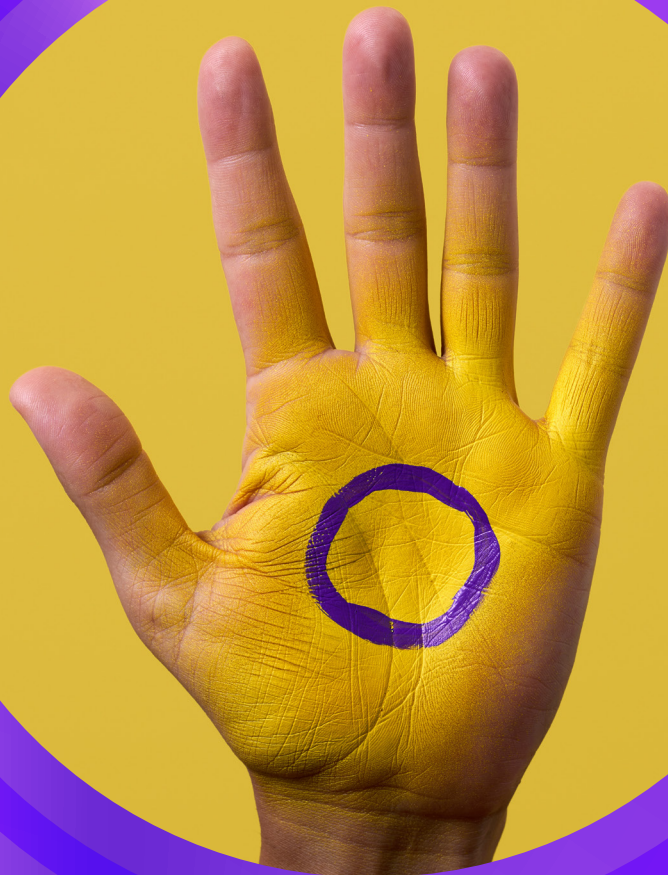


“I Am” Intersex:

Global Voices for
Intersex Justice

December 2024



OUTRIGHT
INTERNATIONAL



Outright International works together for better LGBTIQ lives.

Outright is dedicated to working with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, with staff in over a dozen countries, Outright works with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, governments, humanitarian and development institutions, and civil society partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

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Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Kimberly Zieselman, Senior Advisor for Global Intersex Rights at Outright International. It was edited by consultants Jaime Grant and Jack Harrison-Quintana and reviewed by Neela Ghoshal for Outright International. Hazel Olson-Dorf, Content Creator for Outright International, developed the "I Am" Intersex campaign infographics included in this report.

Outright International recognizes its intersex partners: Brújula Intersexual, Intersex Brazil, Intersexuales Chile, Intersex Ghana, Intersex Nigeria, Intersex Persons Society of Ghana, Intersex Persons Society of Kenya, Intersex Philippines, Intersex Thailand, Ivy Foundation, Kenya National Commission for Human Rights, Potencia Intersex, and XY Spectrum.

Outright International would like to thank Joanne Joseph, who copyedited the report, and Megan Buckner for the design and layout of the report.



Introduction

Intersex

Adjective • /in-ter-sex/

A broad umbrella term describing nearly 2% of the population with innate variations of sex characteristics (such as genitals, reproductive organs, chromosomes, and/or hormones) that don't align with typical notions of either a female or male body.

People born with variations of sex characteristics have been present throughout human history in every culture and society. Evidence is especially prominent in the recorded history of spiritual practices, where intersex people have often held revered roles as leaders.

Despite vibrant contributions to their communities across millennia, intersex people today are in a fight for recognition, for bodily autonomy, and sometimes, for their very lives. They confront pervasive violence and discrimination, including:

- Violence in the form of **medically unnecessary and nonconsensual surgery, including intersex genital mutilation**, on infants and young children;
- **Rampant abandonment and infanticide** by family members;
- **Bullying** and violence by both peers and adults in schools;
- **Lack of access to intersex competent and affirming healthcare**, combined with anti-intersex prejudices and harmful medical practices, which significantly compromise intersex people's life-long health;
- **Administrative failures and gaps regarding identity documents** which create barriers to full participation in education, the workforce, and society as a whole;
- Exclusion of intersex women from **participation in sports**, particularly at the international level, in addition to, or resulting from many often being subjected to invasive sex testing and medical exams.

In every part of the world, intersex people live in fear and secrecy, while suffering human rights violations, simply because of the naturally occurring variations of their anatomy. Globally, intersex infants and young children endure irreversible harm due to forced medical interventions, including unnecessary surgeries. These infants face existential violence in their earliest moments of life through intersex genital mutilation, or the destruction of naturally occurring genitalia to produce sex characteristics that conform to rigid binary notions of what genitalia should look like. These harmful and disfiguring surgeries impact the well-being

of intersex people throughout their lives, often resulting in the need for multiple surgeries to address the health impacts of the original violence.

In the face of these daunting abuses, intersex activists across diverse cultural, political, and economic contexts have, nonetheless, created a thriving movement for justice. This report showcases the diligent work of these leaders, illuminating a global movement that cries out for solidarity and justice.

Protecting the bodily autonomy of intersex children, and preventing irreversible physical and emotional harm by ending these destructive medical practices, is one of the intersex movement's top priorities. In some parts of the world, family members routinely abandon children born with visible genital differences or commit infanticide. Misconceptions about the birth of an intersex child signaling a "curse" or "bad omen" in some cultures, also cause certain husbands, extended families, and communities to abandon the birth mothers. Raising awareness and supporting parents and families to accept and nurture the well-being of intersex children and their mothers, is another significant movement goal.

Moreover, every country lacks enforceable comprehensive, competent, and intersex-affirming medical standards and care. In many nations, the lack of appropriate diagnostic services and/or medications puts intersex people's lives and well-being at grave risk. Improving standards of care and advocating for intersex-affirming medical practices across the lifespan of intersex people is a further goal.

In most of the world, intersex children face bullying and violence at the hands of students and teachers, causing them to drop out of school and lose their right to education. This theft of education has a lasting negative impact on individual intersex people and their communities. Fighting for intersex people's right to education is, therefore, another movement goal.

In some countries, when an intersex child is born and does not meet binary stereotypes of female or male, authorities refuse to legally register them, thereby excluding them from access to essential services such as health care and education. They struggle in a society that refuses to acknowledge them, surviving in a kind of administrative limbo where they barely exist.

In other cases, intersex people do not identify with the sex that was recorded in their official records and was in some cases surgically forced upon them. Accordingly, much like transgender people, they face barriers as adults in securing identity documents that align with their authentic experiences of their gender. This struggle leads to more barriers in education, employment, and access to services while putting them at greater risk of other forms of violence and discrimination. Creating the means to secure appropriate identity documents for intersex people is a core movement goal.

The last two years have seen pivotal advances for intersex people on the global stage. In April 2024, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed the first-ever intersex resolution calling on member states to enhance efforts to combat discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against intersex people.¹ Prior to this, in March 2023, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights passed a resolution on the promotion and protection of the rights

¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Combating discrimination, violence and harmful practices against intersex persons*, adopted April 5, 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltid/g24/048/06/pdf/g2404806.pdf>.

of intersex persons in Africa.² Some activists are seizing upon these victories in multilateral spaces to drive change at home.

The case studies that follow are intended to bring these critical human rights issues to the attention of government authorities; funders; stakeholders in the human rights, development, and humanitarian sectors; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) activists and organizations, which often aspire to include intersex people and issues, but do not always have the knowledge base or tools to do so meaningfully. The report aims to convey how this dynamic global movement is growing and how others can act in solidarity with its goals. It highlights the movement's priorities and challenges, calling for increased intersectional allyship, rights-based policymaking on intersex issues, and funding for the entire global movement.

² African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Intersex Persons in Africa* - ACHPR/ Res/ 552, March 21, 2023, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/resolution-promotion-and-protection-rights-intersex-persons>.

Methodology

This report is based on research conducted by Outright International's Senior Advisor for Global Intersex Rights, including desk research and qualitative interviews with intersex activists.

This brief centers the movement's development in 11 select countries where Outright International has engaged with intersex movements. The organization's engagement with intersex activists and movements spans a range of initiatives:

- Outright International's Global Intersex Program currently provides grants to organizations for organizational development, capacity building, research, and advocacy, including aspects related to legal and policy reform.
- Its LBQ Connect program includes intersex participants who are lesbian, bisexual, or queer.
- Outright International's Alliance for Equality initiative funds organizations doing work to advance intersex human rights in eligible countries.
- Its United Nations Program supports intersex activists amongst its participants and fellows in various activities, including UN Advocacy Week in New York.

Outright International's Senior Advisor for Global Intersex Rights conducted individual semi-structured interviews remotely via video link with 15 intersex activists from 11 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Serbia, and Thailand. The report also relies, in part, on data collected during Outright International interviews with intersex people in 2022.

All participants consented to interviews and to the publication of their full names in this report. The aim of the interviews was to aid in the understanding of the legal and social contexts facing intersex human rights movements in each country, their priorities, challenges, and successes.

The infographics throughout this report include photos and quotes that individual activists voluntarily submitted in 2024 as part of Outright International's "I Am" Intersex campaign.

Global Intersex Voices

Argentina

"In Argentina, the intersex movement continues to make visible the experiences of intersex people and publicly denounce the child genital mutilation that continues in our territories."

- Pauli Sosa, Pontencia Intersex, Argentina



Argentina has long been at the cutting edge of LGBTIQ rights. It was the first country in Latin America to guarantee marriage equality for all couples. It blazed a path forward for trans rights by removing barriers to legal gender recognition as early as 2010, even offering national identity cards with nonbinary gender marker options. In the intersex space, Argentina has produced revolutionary intersex thinkers and activists who are opening up the space for meaningful legal and policy change.

Argentina is home to several intersex organizations working to promote visibility and push for the rights and recognition of intersex persons. Mauro Cabral Grinspan has advocated for intersex rights for the past 20 years and has been a key voice in Argentina and worldwide, holding important leadership positions and contributing to global intersex advocacy in numerous ways. In 2023, he founded Justicia Intersex to push for legislative protections in Argentina.

Another key player in the Argentine movement is Potencia Intersex, which Pauli Sosa founded in 2020. Despite challenges with official registration, Potencia Intersex has found fiscal sponsorship through Tierra Violeta, an allied feminist organization. Sosa started the organization after first obtaining support and resources from Brújula Intersexual, a Mexico-based intersex organization that provides support for the movement throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Sosa wrote in a testimony published in 2023:

Through Brújula, I could understand that I wasn't a person with a disease, but a body different from other bodies and that I belonged to a group of people who respond to an international political movement that seeks to end genital mutilation in childhood, which is part of the experiences that intersex people go throughout our lives and that increasingly needs to be heard, to be listened to, to be seen... because, even today, there are children who undergo surgery to be mutilated and their bodies corrected [...] so they can fit into the binary logics that move the world.³

Potencia's mission is to raise awareness and offer education in society about the lived experiences of the intersex community from a transfeminist and body diversity perspective. It describes itself as a group of intersex people living in various parts of the Mapuche–Argentine territory with diverse, nonbinary, feminized identities. The organization generates physical and virtual community spaces for meetings and collective work. Since 2022, it has conducted virtual biweekly meetings with over 50 intersex people from different parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. Potencia also holds two annual in-person convenings, the most recent of which showcased intersex art, including music, theater, photography, and drawings.

In collaboration with another emerging organization, Argentina Intersex, Potencia Intersex created educational materials on intersex people's lived realities and distributed them at the country's biggest Pride event in Buenos Aires in 2023. The group engaged Pride attendees to raise awareness and build solidarity among LGBTQ people and their allies.

Potencia Intersex occupies a range of advocacy spaces with groups working on transgender, disability, and intersex rights, and it uses these opportunities for dialogue. But, as Sosa told Outright International, "there is [still] a lack of knowledge about our realities."⁴ The organization is also developing intersex-inclusive sex education materials, with plans to conduct teacher training next year, and is mapping the socioeconomic and health situation of intersex people in Argentina.

Currently, there are no specific laws protecting intersex persons in Argentina. But, the country's intersex movement is developing comprehensive draft legislation. In 2020, Justicia Intersex presented a draft bill, *Comprehensive Protection of Sexual Characteristics*, which aims to protect rights to autonomy, bodily integrity, truth, and freedom from discrimination regardless of sex characteristics.⁵ It was introduced in the House twice, but never considered. Activists collectively hope such legislation will eventually be considered, but due to changes in government leadership, no action had been taken at time of writing.

³ Alcántara, Eva, Laura Inter, Frida Flores, and Carlos Narváez-Pichardo. 2024. *Brújula Intersexual: Working Strategies, the Emergence of the Mexican Intersex Community, and Its Relationship with the Intersex Movement*, Social Sciences 13, no. 8: 414. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13080414> (accessed on October 4, 2024).

⁴ Outright International, *Beyond the Rainbows and Glitter: Pride Around the World in 2023*, June 2024, https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/OutRight_Pride_Report_2024_v2%2010.06.2024.pdf.

⁵ Justicia Intersex, *Draft Law on the Comprehensive Protection of Sexual Characteristics*, <https://justiciaintersex.org/proyecto-de-ley-2/> (accessed on September 25, 2024).

Brazil

"In Brazil, the challenges for both intersex and trans people are compounded by the broader socio-political context, pervasive conservatism, and escalation of transphobia and interphobia, further constraining our community's advocacy."

- Vidda Guzzo Faustino,
Intersex Brazil



The story of intersex rights in Brazil is deeply embedded in the country's mainstream politics. Once Brazil achieved democracy in 1988, one might have expected intersex people's rights to advance. However, intersex individuals and groups have consistently encountered barriers to human rights, inclusion, and civic and political participation, including as a result of social conservatism, medical gatekeeping, and poverty among the intersex community.

In 2003, the Brazilian Federal Council of Medicine passed a resolution recommending intersex genital mutilation and hormone therapies, calling such interventions necessary responses to a "biological and social emergency."⁶ These obstacles have intensified since 2016 due to political crises, the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which further marginalized intersex communities. In response to these challenges, intersex political mobilization and organizing in Brazil have concentrated on raising public awareness, building community, and developing support initiatives.

In 2020, Carolina Iara was elected the first intersex parliamentarian at the municipal level, and was re-elected in 2022 at the state level. Her successful campaigns represent a significant step forward for intersex representation and demonstrate the potential for participatory innovation in governmental spheres.

⁶ Brazil Council of Medicine, CONSELHO FEDERAL DE MEDICINA RESOLUÇÃO Nº 1.664, May 12, 2003, https://abmes.org.br/arquivos/legislacoes/Res_CFM_1664_120503.pdf (accessed on September 25, 2024).

But barriers persist. Conservatism and authoritarianism remain powerful forces within Brazilian society, continuing to restrain intersex activism. Additionally, networks of Portuguese-speaking activists have been smaller than English, French, or Spanish networks, limiting activists' participation in international spaces and limiting knowledge sharing and collective strategy development.

Associação Brasileira de Intersexos (ABRAI) was founded in 2018 and, since 2020, Thais Emilia, an intersex woman and mother of three intersex children, has led it. Emilia works with an executive board comprising parents and intersex activists. Her passion arose out of losing her intersex baby to unrelated heart complications. Emilia was unable to obtain a death certificate because her intersex child's birth certificate bore the word "undetermined" under "sex marker." However, after much advocacy, in 2021, Brazil's National Council of Justice authorized intersex children to be registered without a sex marker on their birth certificates.⁷ This allows for an intersex child to be officially registered and legally recognized without any specific sex marker, and instead is simply stamped, "unknown." The marker can be updated to either "female" or "male" at any time in the future. According to ABRAI, this has been beneficial and has greatly reduced the number of surgeries conducted on intersex children. Twenty eight intersex babies, in its network alone, are now legally registered without a sex marker. Another advancement occurred in August 2024 when the Federal Council of Psychology issued a resolution setting new guidelines for intersex-affirming mental health practices in Brazil, thanks to the tireless work of activists including Emilia.⁸

Intersex Brazil is a national intersex-led organization dedicated to advocating for the protection and promotion of intersex people's human rights. Intersex Brazil focuses on strengthening dialogue between society and the state to put an end to intersex genital mutilation in Brazil. Through its work, Intersex Brazil aims to reform national human rights policies and ensure that intersex voices are heard in the public arena. Most notably, in March 2023, Intersex Brazil engaged in productive dialogue with the Brazilian government via the National Secretariat for the Rights of LGBTQIA+ People, which falls under the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, established in January 2023. This engagement culminated in a landmark Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat and Intersex Brazil, marking the government's commitment to support the rights of intersex people, beginning with sustained dialogue.⁹

On the International Day of Intersex Solidarity and Remembrance in November 2023, the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship issued an ordinance to formally establish the Working Group for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of Intersex Persons — a historic milestone for intersex political participation in Brazil.¹⁰ This unprecedented step reinforces collaboration between Brazil's intersex activist network and the government in

⁷ Brazil National Justice Inspector, Provision No. 122 of August 13, 2021, <https://atos.cnj.jus.br/atos/detalhar/4066> (accessed on September 25, 2024).

⁸ Brazil Federal Council of Psychology, Resolution No. 16 Establishing Standards for Professional Practice with Intersex People, August 30, 2024, <https://atosoficiais.com.br/cfp/resolucao-do-exercicio-profissional-n-16-2024-estabelece-normas-de-atuacao-para-a-categoria-profissional-em-relacao-as-pessoas-intersexo?origin=instituicao> (accessed on November 6, 2024).

⁹ National Secretariat for the Rights of LGBTQIA+ Persons. 2022. Memorandum of Understanding (Memorando de Entendimento) signed by the National Secretariat for the Rights of LGBTQIA+ Persons, represented by Symmy Larrat, and Intersex Brazil. Outright International has viewed a copy of the memorandum, which has not been made public.

¹⁰ Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship/National Secretariat for the Rights of LGBTQIA+ People. 2023. Ordinance No. 5, November 8, 2023. Diário Oficial da União, November 9, 2023, ed. 213, sec. 1, 25, <https://www.in.gov.br/web/dou/-/portaria-n-5-de-8-de-novembro-de-2023-521753117> (accessed on November 6, 2024).

addressing the severe violations and abuses that harm the physical and psychological well-being of intersex individuals. The Working Group, which includes government and civil society representatives, is tasked primarily with developing recommendations and proposals for national human rights policies concerning intersex persons in Brazil. The group includes substantial intersex representation, with Intersex Brazil currently holding three seats, ABRAI holding one seat, and an Allied Expert holding another, for a total of five non-governmental seats on the Working Group. It is expected to deliver a final report in 2025, which will likely be followed by continued conversations and advocacy with both the Ministers of Health and Human Rights and Citizenship. Activists are cautiously optimistic about positive legal and policy developments resulting from the engagement.

Chile

"We are making progress; however, there is still a lack of oversight and enforcement to ensure compliance with the Health Minister's guidelines protecting children born with variations of sex characteristics."

**- Pati Ahumada Escobar,
Intersexuales Chile**



The Intersex movement in Chile has made incredible strides, despite having to weather backlash and backsliding as it pushes the country forward.

As in many countries, the horrors of intersex genital mutilation for Chilean intersex children have been commonplace. In 2015, Chile's Ministry of Health issued a circular prohibiting unnecessary medical procedures on intersex children, but this order was met with resistance from the medical community, and the ministry annulled it just eight months later.¹¹ In 2019, intersex activist, Pati Ahumada Escobar, founded Intersexuales Chile. Despite being a young organization, it has already enjoyed great success. Activists are raising visibility and educating community stakeholders, including public health centers, local and national governmental bodies.

In 2022, after a more progressive government came to power, the country's First Lady created a permanent space for LGBTIQ voices in monthly task force meetings with officials, inviting Intersexuales Chile to attend. This was the first time an intersex organization was physically invited to the Presidential Palace. It was also the first time intersex representatives were invited to the table to be heard, and taken seriously by those in power.

¹¹ Chilean Ministry of Health Division of Disease Prevention and Control, Circular No.18, *Instructions on Aspects of Healthcare to Intersex Children*, December 22, 2015, <https://ihra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Circular-08-22.12.15-Instruye-Sobre-Ciertos-Aspectos-de-la-atencion-de-Salud-a-Ninos-y-Ninas-Intersex.pdf> (English Translation: https://abmes.org.br/arquivos/legislacoes/Res_CFM_1664_120503.pdf) (accessed on September 26, 2024).

That same year, with the passage of Law 21,430 on Guarantees and Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, Chile instituted a prohibition against discrimination based on sex characteristics.¹² And in 2023, the Ministry of Health once again issued a circular that explicitly prohibits surgeries, procedures on, or medical treatments for intersex newborns, children, and adolescents, that have the sole purpose of modification to meet social expectations. It also instructs health teams to adopt additional measures that ensure the best interests of children and adolescents with variations in sexual characteristics.¹³

Activists at Intersexuales Chile worked closely with the Ministry of Health to establish the new intersex-affirming guidelines for health practitioners, this time with support from the country's medical association. While not a binding law, the circular represents significant progress for the intersex community; it creates a system of accountability for health practitioners, and will bolster ongoing efforts to educate them on intersex health and rights.

¹² Chilean Minister of Social Development and Family, *Law 21,430 on Guarantees and Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents*, March 15, 2022, <https://www.diariooficial.interior.gob.cl/publicaciones/2022/03/15/43203/01/2099181.pdf> (accessed on September 26, 2024).

¹³ Chilean Ministry of Health Division of Disease Prevention and Control, Circular No.15, *Instructions to Health Providers to Adopt all Necessary Measures to Ensure the Best Interest of Children and adolescents with variations of sex characteristics*, November 7, 2023, <https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Circular%20N%C2%BA%2015%20Interes%20superior%20nna%20VCS%20copia.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2024).

Ghana

"I will fight until my last breath to ensure that intersex individuals are understood, accepted, and able to build their self-confidence."

– **Salamatu Yakubu ("Ummi"),**
Intersex Ghana / Key Watch Ghana



Intersex people in Ghana confront a hostile and politicized environment in which they face specific human rights abuses and are also sometimes caught in the crosshairs of attacks on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people. In 2021, a member of parliament introduced a bill that would criminalize any "LGBTQIAAP+" person, defined as "a person who holds out as a lesbian, a gay, a bisexual, a transgender, a transsexual, a queer, an ally, a pansexual, or a person of any other sociocultural notion of sex or sexual relationship that is contrary to the sociocultural notions of male and female or the relationship between male and female; a person who may be questioning that person's sexuality; [or] a person who has a biological anomaly regarding the gender to the person assigned at birth, including intersex."¹⁴

The provision criminalizing intersex people for their very existence was ultimately stripped from the draft bill, but its initial inclusion demonstrates the political class's ignorance and reflexive hostility toward people with sex characteristics that defy the binaries that parliament is seeking to forcibly impose. A version of the bill that prohibits "holding out" as LGBTQ or an "ally," passed by Ghana's parliament in February 2024, is currently facing constitutional

¹⁴ UN OHCHR, *Draft bill on "Proper Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill 2021" – An analysis by UN Independent Human Rights Experts*, August 12, 2021, <https://ghana.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Public%20-%20OL%20GHA%2003.08.21%20%283.2021%29.pdf>.

challenges and the president has not signed it into law. In July 2024, the Supreme Court affirmed the country's existing colonial-era law criminalizing same-sex conduct.¹⁵

While intersex people narrowly escaped the criminalization of their very existence, an intersex activist told Outright International, they knew that intersex newborns are being abandoned or killed in rural areas, due to the belief that intersex persons are "cursed" and an "abomination."¹⁶ Many intersex children are also subjected to harmful mutilation either at the hands of traditional healers or in hospitals.

Key Watch Ghana is a national organization, actively raising visibility and awareness while providing support and economic empowerment services to intersex and gender-diverse people in the local community. Its intersex program, commonly referred to as "Intersex Ghana," collects data about intersex people in the country and works to change laws and policies to protect intersex children from infanticide and intersex genital mutilation, and to provide legal gender recognition for intersex adults. Their visibility-raising efforts include the production of a documentary called *My Biology, My Truth* that delves into lived experiences and societal perceptions of intersex persons from four regions in Ghana.

In March 2024, the organization held a stakeholder meeting on "Ending Intersex Genital Mutilation, Challenges and The Socio-Economic Empowerment of Intersex and Gender Diverse Persons in Ghana." Intersex and gender-diverse activists, private business owners, Human Rights Commission members, government officials, lawyers, and NGO allies came together to discuss intersex genital mutilation and understand how it is linked to socioeconomic disempowerment. Agreed-upon recommendations included storytelling in advocacy efforts, data collection, and targeted education with various religious groups.

Another intersex-led organization emerging in Ghana, Intersex Persons Society Ghana, aims to increase visibility and conduct educational activities directly targeting health centers and schools. Its founder, Fafali Akortsu, is a trained mental health counselor and seasoned advocate who helps intersex people and their families get information and peer support. Having attended boarding school as a child, Akortsu recalls the pain of being called "a witch" by teachers and parents, and being forced to live in the basement of the dormitory, separated from other students. As with most intersex activists, Akortsu told Outright International, that the passion and commitment to do this work are fueled by traumatic personal experiences.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Ghana: Supreme Court Upholds Colonial-Era Anti-LGBT Law," July 29, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/29/ghana-supreme-court-upholds-colonial-era-anti-lgbt-la>.

¹⁶ Outright International interview with Fafali Akortsu, Intersex Persons Society of Ghana, August 15, 2024.

Kenya

"As the first intersex State Officer in Kenya, I am living proof that being different does not diminish our humanity or our potential."

- Dr Dennis Wamalwa, Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights & Intersex Society of Kenya



Kenya has emerged as a leading country in Africa with respect to recognizing and protecting the human rights of intersex persons. It stands as a powerful example that explicitly pro-intersex laws can be passed at country level and that intersex lives matter to the extent that they should be counted on national surveys up to, and including, the national census.

Senior Counsel John Chigiti, an intersex legal expert who has worked on intersex issues since 2007, is a key ally in Kenya, and a driving force for promoting and protecting intersex people's human rights. In 2014, Chigiti brought the case of *E. A. & Another vs. Attorney General & 6 Others* to the High Court of Kenya. The case centered on the rights of intersex children to be recognized as Kenyan citizens. The mother of the first petitioner, "Baby A," filed the case on behalf of her child and other intersex persons. The mother alleged that Kenya's birth certificate forms discriminated against her child, because they only allowed for the selection of "sex" as either male or female, leading medical personnel to instead place a question mark on her child's birth certificate. The petitioners argued that the question mark violated the child's rights to legal recognition, dignity, and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment. The court acknowledged that laws and guidelines are needed to protect intersex people. It directed the government to develop an appropriate legal framework governing issues of intersex children, to collect data on intersex persons in Kenya, and to formulate guidelines to inform the treatment of intersex persons.

This ruling ultimately led to the formation of a government “Taskforce on Policy, Legal, Institutional and Administrative Reforms Regarding Intersex Persons.”¹⁷ In 2018, the taskforce published a comprehensive report making several important recommendations, including, most significantly, the creation of an intersex (“I”) sex marker on all official documents.¹⁸ The taskforce further recommended the Ministry of Health formulate comprehensive treatment guidelines based on a child- and human rights-based approach for the medical care and protection of intersex children and that it establish free or subsidized specialized intersex medical care. It also recommended that the government conduct awareness and sensitization initiatives at all education levels.

In 2019, Kenya became the first African nation — and one of the only countries in the world — to count people with innate variations of sex characteristics as part of its national census. Census results have made visible the experiences of 1,524 intersex respondents.¹⁹ While this is certainly an undercount of the actual intersex Kenyan population, it represents an enormous step forward in awareness.

In 2022, Kenya adopted amendments to its National Children’s Act, recognizing the existence of intersex children and specifying their right “to be treated with dignity, and to be accorded appropriate medical treatment, education and consideration as a special need category in social protection services.” The law further prohibits “organ change or removal in case of an intersex child” if it is performed without the “advice of a medical geneticist.” It creates a separate category of “a child in need of care and protection” that includes a child who “has been or is likely to be subjected to ... intersex genital mutilation,” as well as “a child who is intersex and is subjected to, or likely to be subjected to, discriminatory treatment or abuse.”²⁰ The law is still imperfect in its pathologizing approach, treating intersex variations as disabilities while still permitting intersex genital mutilation upon the advice of a “medical geneticist,” but it made progress in establishing intersex children as a class of persons with human rights in need of protection from harmful practices.

Additionally, the Kenyan government established a new Intersex Persons Commission, housed within the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), which included several legal and medical experts and intersex individuals. However, according to the KNCHR, at the time of this report, the Intersex Persons Commission was not active due to a loss of government funding support.²¹

A significant reason for the progress made in Kenya is the incredible involvement of the KNCHR and, specifically, Dr. Dennis Wamalwa, the first intersex person to ever serve on the Commission. Before being appointed a Commissioner, Dr. Wamalwa came out publicly as

¹⁷ ACRISL, Baby “A” & another v. Attorney General & 6 others, Petition No. 266 of 2013, Kenya, <https://www.acrisl.org/casenotes/mudzuru-ampamp-another-v-ministry-of-justice-legal-ampamp-parliamentary-affairs-no-ampampothers-const-application-no-7914-cc-12-15-2015-zwcc-12-20-january2016ccz-122015-ghfkj-b44w5-wz5en-mwjha-nedjk#:-:~:text=This%20case%20relates%20to%20the,child%20and%20other%20intersex%20persons> (accessed on July 24, 2024).

¹⁸ Report of the TaskForce on Policy, Legal, Institutional and Administrative Reforms Regarding the Intersex Persons in Kenya, Abridged Version, December 2018, <https://www.knchr.org/Portals/0/INTERSEX%20TASKFORCE%20FREPORT-Abridged%20Version.pdf> (accessed on July 24, 2024).

¹⁹ Nita Bhalla, Reuters, Kenyan census results a ‘big win’ for intersex people, November 4, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/kenyan-census-results-a-big-win-for-intersex-people-idUSKBNIXE1U8/>.

²⁰ Law of Kenya, The Children Act, Chapter 141 [Rev. 2022], <http://kenyalaw.org:8181/exist/rest/db/kenyalex/Kenya/Legislation/English/Acts%20and%20Regulations/C/Children%20Act%20-%20No.%2029%20of%202022/docs/ChildrenAct29of2022.pdf> (accessed on July 24 2024).

²¹ Outright International interview with Commissioner Dennis Wamalwa, KNCHR, May 2024.

intersex in 2020. His role as an outspoken advocate, working with the KNCHR, Kenyan intersex activists, and parents of intersex children, has been integral to the intersex movement's notable advances in Kenya.

Not surprisingly, in a country where same-sex conduct is criminalized and there is strong anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ rights ideology, intersex activists and the KNCHR have intentionally advocated outside of an LGBTQ framework and instead focused on children's rights, disability rights, and health care. When exploring the intersections of LGBTQ and the intersex community, another commissioner spoke about what she referred to as "the inevitable discrimination by association that intersex people would otherwise suffer from."²²

Intersex activists James Karanja and Ryan Wangui founded the Intersex Persons Society of Kenya in 2016 to promote and protect the human rights of intersex people in Kenya through education, advocacy, and community support. While building community and raising visibility, the Intersex Persons Society of Kenya moved fairly quickly into advocacy by forming a strategic partnership with the KNCHR and an established intersex organization in Uganda called the "Support Initiative for People with Atypical Sex Development," founded by Julius Kaggwa. Kaggwa is a pioneer of the intersex human rights movement on the continent, training and mentoring several other intersex people in the region, including Karanja.

Intersex Persons Society of Kenya activists were instrumental in lobbying for the inclusion of intersex persons in Kenya's national census, and introducing the third sex marker, "I," in 2019. They also played a key role in enacting the 2022 Children's Act amendments, including protections for intersex children. Meanwhile, in 2019, Peter Maingi, the parent of an intersex child, started the Association of Intersex Parenthood, comprising parents and caregivers of intersex children. The group focuses on the empowerment and capacity building of parents, caregivers, and allies of intersex persons in Kenya. The group has begun to engage in more visibility-raising and advocacy for intersex rights.

Despite the strong efforts and progress in Kenya, Commissioner Wamalwa reports there are still thousands of intersex people in Kenya afraid to come out, and there is still so much awareness-raising and education needed for true intersex acceptance. There is an ongoing effort to document the lived realities of intersex Kenyans, to both increase visibility and empower more intersex people to come out, be counted, and live freely and authentically. Commissioner Wamalwa further reports that since the 2022 Children's Act amendments passed, there has been a notable spike in inquiries coming into the KNCHR, especially from parents of intersex children seeking consultation and support.

Currently, activists from the Intersex Persons Society of Kenya and the Association of Intersex Parenthood, alongside the greater movement, are actively educating key stakeholders, including parliamentarians and religious leaders, to pass the Intersex Persons Bill, filed in 2023. This groundbreaking bill aims to address a broad range of issues facing children and adults born with variations of sex characteristics, including a clear ban on intersex genital mutilation.²³

²² Outright International interview with Commissioner Jedidah Mwaruhiu, KNCHR, July 2022.

²³ Draft Intersex Persons Bill, 2023, https://www.knchr.org/Portals/0/INTERSEX%20PERSONS%20BILL-%202023-%20IPICC_1.pdf (accessed on November 5, 2024).

Malawi

"Unrecognized, but still existing in a small corner, Malawian intersex people are some of the most resilient persons I have ever met. We do weather any storm."

**- Sammie Macjessie,
Ivy Foundation, Malawi**



African activists have charted a variety of paths through the tensions that can arise between anti-LGBTQ bias and discrimination based on sex characteristics. For many, creating more visible separation between these issues has been a fruitful strategy, but in Malawi, experience has shown that keeping the connections between our movements can, at times, also yield results.

Sammie Macjessie is the founder and executive director of the Ivy Foundation. Recognizing common identity issues, Macjessie created the Ivy Foundation in 2016 as an organization and safe space for intersex and LBQ persons in Malawi. As in many African countries, same-sex relations are criminalized in Malawi. As such, the Ivy Foundation maintains a safe house and conducts awareness-raising and education on intersex issues. The organization's initial goal was to foster change at primary and secondary schools. However, the schools ultimately rejected its continued access, so it has been forced to pivot and redirect its educational efforts to colleges for midwives, nursing, and medical schools.

Macjessie notes, an immense challenge in Malawi is the widely shared cultural belief that intersex people are "cursed and taboo," bringing bad luck to both their families and communities. Many believe the prevailing myth that they are "evil demons." Intersex children are referred to by a term that translates into English as "weird thing." Macjessie told Outright International that a large number of intersex children drop out of school due to severe bullying, and that either midwives or parents kill some infants soon after birth.

In 2023, the Ivy Foundation published *The Intersex People in Malawi: A Situational Analysis*.²⁴ The report highlights the challenges intersex people in the country face and potential strategies to build resilience in the community. Several recommendations focus on sensitizing healthcare providers and developing intersex-affirming standards of care, while others focus on awareness-raising in schools and training media. The study quotes one intersex person as saying, "A health worker told my parents to kill me, but my parents said they didn't want to since I am also a human being and a gift from God and also that they didn't ask for me to be in this state." The report acknowledges the challenges of a unified movement: "It is apparent that by being entirely entwined with LGBTQ, the intersex community in Malawi may not adequately advance its agenda. It is therefore strongly recommended that the intersex community should consider intersex exclusive programs to avoid the potential backlash associated with the larger LGBTQ community."²⁵ Recognizing that Malawians tend to accept gender diversity more than sexual diversity, a further recommendation is to "establish gender markers other than male or female."²⁶

Activists are now focused on advancing recommendations issued by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in its 2023 *Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Intersex Persons in Africa*.²⁷ When writing this brief, the Ivy Foundation reported that they had drafted guidelines to aid lawmakers in eventually passing a new law to promote and protect the rights of intersex persons in Malawi.

²⁴ Ivy Foundation, *The Intersex People in Malawi: A Situational Analysis*, November 2023, https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Intersex%20Report%20Malawi_Draft_01_Zieselman%20Comments.docx.pdf (accessed November 21, 2024).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁷ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Intersex Persons in Africa* - ACHPR/Res. 552, March 21, 2023, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/resolution-promotion-and-protection-rights-intersex-persons>.

Mexico

“There is no social justice if the experiences and struggles of people with intersex variations from the Global South are not included.”

**– Laura Inter,
Brújula Intersexual, Mexico**



While there is currently no regional intersex organization in Latin America, Mexico has produced activists who have sought to build bridges between those organizing for intersex liberation all over the Spanish-speaking world, in both the Americas and Europe.

In 2013, intersex activist, Laura Inter, founded Brújula Intersexual, which they refer to as a “project” rather than an organization. While based in Mexico, Brújula Intersexual aims to serve all Spanish-speaking intersex communities. Its main objective is to transform harmful medical practices and the social representation of intersex bodies. Brújula Intersexual created support groups for specific intersex variations because many intersex people lack exposure to the term “intersex” and are only familiar with the diagnosis they were given.

Among these groups, the one for people with an intersex variation known as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, (CAH), stands out. The group has more than 800 members; some are adults with CAH, but most are parents, especially mothers, of children with CAH living in various Spanish-speaking countries. It is common in the group for attendees to discuss topics like genital surgeries, and for adults with CAH who have suffered the medicalization of their bodies to challenge mothers who defend medical protocols. Thanks to the information and various opinions shared in the group, a significant and growing number of mothers is now taking a stand against unnecessary genital surgeries, either because they heard stories of people who were victims of these surgeries, or because they had surgeries performed on their own children, and have seen the longer-term health problems that result over time. This advocacy by mothers has created a cohort of Mexican doctors, including pediatricians,

endocrinologists, and even surgeons, who are already making recommendations against surgeries to individual parents, instead advising them to wait until adolescence or adulthood when the person concerned can participate in the decision.

Since 2016, Brújula Intersexual has collaborated with the National Council to Prevent Discrimination through consultancies and other specific projects to support the creation of informed public policies based on recognizing intersex human rights. In 2017, Mexico City adopted the Political Constitution of Mexico City, which prohibits discrimination based on sex characteristics.²⁸ In 2017, Brújula Intersexual was also instrumental in getting the Mexican Ministry of Health to publish a recommendation against medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children as part of the *Protocol for Access without Discrimination to the Provision of Medical Care Services for LGBTI and Intersex Persons*.²⁹

In 2020, Brújula Intersexual participated in designing and presenting the results of the first national, government-sponsored intersex survey in Mexico. On the subject of medically unnecessary surgeries on minors born with intersex bodies, the survey found that “four out of ten people reported having had surgery [to address intersex variations] in their life. It is striking that almost one in ten people answered that they didn’t know if they had any surgery or not, which could be associated with a lack of information and consent about medical interventions in an early stage of life.”³⁰ The study also “reveals that a little more than six out of ten surgeries didn’t have the affected person’s consent. Only in 5% of the cases of irreversible body modification medical interventions the parents were informed about the option of delaying the medical interventions until their child is of legal age.”³¹

This is just one finding from the survey results that will serve as a helpful advocacy tool moving forward. The data obtained from the survey was used to support and update subsequent efforts in awareness-raising, education, and public policy. Specifically, the information collected allowed Brújula Intersexual and other activists to more effectively argue for the need to change policies and practises related to the medical care of people with intersex variations, based on recent and relevant evidence.

Brújula Intersexual has many other initiatives in progress, including a guide for parents of intersex children, a guide about CAH, and a book of stories about intersex people in Mexico. In October 2024, Brújula Intersexual celebrated its 10th anniversary at the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, where the group showcased a commemorative short film titled “Opening the Compass [Brújula]” featuring 28 intersex individuals, family members, and allies from various Spanish-speaking countries. Additionally, Brújula Intesexual is working with Mexico’s National Council to Prevent Discrimination on producing a public action guide on intersex aimed at policymakers.

As members of Brújula Intersexual described their work in a recent article:

²⁸ Sexuality Policy Watch, *Diversity in the Constitution of Mexico City*, March 1, 2017, <https://sxpolitics.org/diversity-in-the-constitution-of-mexico-city/16612> (accessed October 28, 2024).

²⁹ Mexican Ministry of Health, *Protocol for Access without Discrimination to the Provision of Medical Care Services for LGBTI and Intersex Persons*, June 21, 2017. https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/234684/210617Protocolo_Comunidad_LGBTI_DT_Versi_n_III_17_3.pdf (accessed November 4, 2024).

³⁰ Brújula Intersexual and The National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination, *Discrimination and violence against intersex people: results of the intersex survey Executive Summary*, 2020.

³¹ *Ibid.*,12.

Brújula Intersexual's structure is organic and dynamic, and collaboration and knowledge exchange have been key elements in its operation. Digital platforms are the vehicle through which it has been possible to reach a wide and diverse audience. The testimony-based work methodology has allowed this organization to capture and give voice to the unique experiences of intersex people, contributing to the construction of a resilient and supportive network. Community-building and trust-building were the key focus of its work in the first decade. Brújula Intersexual is referred to as a safe space where it is possible to share experiences and find support. In terms of impact, Brújula Intersexual has managed to influence public policies in Mexico by collaborating with state and educational institutions and generating informative materials. It has sought the transformation of institutional practices through the training of public servants. Brújula Intersexual's work is characterised by a profound connection with its members, seeking to balance the demands of restorative justice for past injustices with the creation of new narratives and tools for a better future for intersex people.³²

³² Alcántara E, Inter L, Flores F, Narváez-Pichardo C. Brújula Intersexual: Working Strategies, the Emergence of the Mexican Intersex Community, and Its Relationship with the Intersex Movement. *Social Sciences*. 2024; 13(8):414. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/13/8/414> (accessed November 4, 2024).

Nigeria

“Intersex people in Africa have always existed, yet our stories are often erased. The African Intersex Movement is a voice for dignity, rights, and visibility, ensuring that we live authentically and without fear.”

**- Obioma Chukwuike,
Intersex Nigeria**



Intersex people face a wide range of human rights abuses in Nigeria, including intersex genital mutilation, particularly in the larger cities. Abandonment of intersex children takes place particularly in the country’s more rural areas. Intersex activist, Obioma Chukwuike, founded Intersex Nigeria, also known as the Center for Healthcare Development and Youth Empowerment, in 2019. In August 2024, the organization opened its second office and now operates out of Lagos and Abuja. Intersex Nigeria does visibility-raising, advocacy, peer support, and educational training, including through the production of videos of intersex people sharing their personal stories. In 2022, “What is intersex?” was the seventh most Googled “What is...?” question of the year in Nigeria, which Intersex Nigeria proudly attributes to its visibility-raising that year.³³

Intersex activism in Nigeria faces several challenges, including a poor economy with rising inflation, safety and security issues, and a government that has criminalized both same-sex intimacy and LGBTQ advocacy. Fundamentalist religious views from both Christians and Muslims also present challenges to the intersex community in Nigeria. Particularly when communicating with parents of young intersex children, activists report they do not mention intersex as part of the broader queer umbrella due to stigma. Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural country, and there is a real need for information and resources to be translated into local languages, particularly in the country’s more rural areas.

³³ BBC News Pidgin, *Top Google Searches 2022*, December 8, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/articles/cx0787gjlko.amp> (accessed on November 13, 2024).

Intersex Nigeria is creating an informative toolkit for policymakers, conducting research, and advocating with relevant agencies and government-owned companies for national-level policy change. Activists reported long wait times and the need to slog through bureaucracy to meet and speak with public officials. Resource constraints can also be a real barrier to activism. Over the last two years, Intersex Nigeria has collaborated with Cameroonian activists to conduct research on the perception of intersex people and intersex genital mutilation in both countries. Results are expected to be published before the end of 2024. During this research initiative, Intersex Nigeria connected with an ally in the Nigerian Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and it plans to hold intersex educational training for NHRC coordinators from different regions of the country.

Activists are also exploring the possibility of working with other government agencies and ministries to amend the country's anti-violence law, which currently prohibits some forms of female genital mutilation but fails to protect against intersex genital mutilation.

Philippines

"In the Philippines, we remain largely invisible. By amplifying our voices, we strive to be recognized, respected, and celebrated for who we truly are."

**- Dana Mae Padre,
Intersex Philippines**



Jeff Cagandahan, a founding board member of Intersex Asia, and the first intersex person in the Philippines to change his sex marker after success in the courts, founded and officially registered Intersex Philippines in 2019. Along with community building, raising visibility, and educating LGBTQ peers, Intersex Philippines also advocates for legal change.

One of Intersex Philippines's first successful projects involved raising awareness in the intersex community about the Health Department's offer of discounted medicines that are vital for some intersex people with the common trait of Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. This helped to save the lives of many intersex children and adults. Intersex Philippines has been instrumental in filing legislation known as "the Cagandahan Bill" to codify legal gender recognition for intersex persons. If passed, the "Act Authorizing the City or Municipal Civil Registrar and the Consul General to Change the Sex and Name of the Intersex Person Appearing in the Civil Register Without the Need of a Judicial Order" would allow intersex persons to change their legal gender with just a doctor's note through the civil registry, rather than a lengthy, burdensome court proceeding. As of August 2024, the bill successfully made it through the committees and is eventually headed to a full House of Representatives vote.³⁴ Notably, Intersex Philippines works independently from, but in close collaboration with, transgender activists pursuing similar legislation. Many hope the successful passage of the intersex bill will

³⁴ Michelle Abad, *Philippine News*, *Bill advancing intersex rights hurdles House panel*, August 28, 2024, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/bill-advancing-intersex-rights-hurdles-house-committee-august-2024/> (accessed on November 19, 2024). Philippines House Bill No. 9555, November 15, 2023, https://docs.congress.hrep.online/legisdocs/basic_19/HB09555.pdf.

be a first step towards future legal gender recognition for endosex (non-intersex) transgender and nonbinary persons in the Philippines.

While Intersex Philippines is making great progress, a real challenge to growing the movement is rooted in the economic situation of most intersex persons and the need for them to be able to make a living while engaging in activism. It is a challenge to engage intersex people in advocacy work when they are preoccupied with basic survival, and Intersex Philippines told Outright International that many lack the skills to make a living. The organization's current strategic goals include providing livelihood programs for members and parents, growing membership, and providing leadership capacity training while continuing to educate medical professionals, and lobby for policy changes in government to promote and protect intersex human rights.

Serbia

"Intersex people are still hidden in Serbia, due to unnecessary shame, secrecy, and stigma."

**- Kristian Randelović,
XY Spectrum, Serbia**



Unlike much of Western Europe, there is very little intersex activism in the Balkans. However, in 2017, intersex and trans activist, Kristian Randelović, founded XY Spectrum after realizing no other organizations were specifically addressing intersex issues. XY Spectrum's mission is to promote the rights and quality of life for intersex and trans people and their families. Randelović is also a steering committee member for the regional intersex organization, OII Europe.

Randelović told Outright International that much of Serbia is still healing from the effects of war, and there is cultural and religious resistance to any axis of human difference, including LGBTIQ people, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized communities. Randelović said many parents keep children with disabilities "locked in the house" to keep them safe and away from societal stigma. Notably, in the last few years, the Russian government's use of anti-LGBTQ propaganda to build its political power in the region, has had a big impact on Serbian acceptance of LGBTQ people, which also negatively impacts intersex acceptance.

According to XY Spectrum, the biggest challenge for intersex organizing in Serbia is the difficulty locating intersex adults to take the first steps toward building a community for peer support and education. This is usually the first step in movement organizing, but it has been extraordinarily difficult in Serbia. Without such a community, it is extremely hard to raise awareness, change hearts and minds, offer intersex education in institutions such as schools, or impact any real legal change. But that has not stopped XY Spectrum. The organization has effectively brought together parents of young intersex children, creating safe spaces for peer

learning and support. This has had a positive impact on reducing intersex genital mutilation in Serbia. The organization has successfully educated medical professionals, helping them to use more of a human rights framework in their approach to the care of intersex infants and children. Most specialized care is centralized in the capital city of Belgrade, where XY Spectrum has been able to focus its collaboration with medical professionals and parents.

In 2021, Randelović and XY Spectrum were influential in working with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality to add sex characteristics to the country's amended anti-discrimination law. However, despite this positive step, without any really visible intersex community, it is unclear to what extent legal protections are being implemented.

In 2023, XY Spectrum published the first-ever intersex graphic novel in Serbia. Written in Serbian, the colorful hardbound book provides a new, accessible educational tool for multiple generations to learn about intersexuality and raise much-needed visibility. Currently, it is planning to conduct research using uniquely available data regarding incidences of intersex surgeries in a major Serbian children's hospital in Belgrade. Additionally, the organization is planning a first-ever Serbian intersex research conference to be held in the fall of 2025.

Thailand

“At Intersex Thailand, we stand against interphobia in our culture and challenge the myths that label us as 'bad karma' or 'abnormal.' Our diverse sex characteristics are not flaws, but beautiful variations of human biology.”

– **Nada Chaiyait, Intersex Thailand**



Despite Thailand’s reputation for being accepting of LGBTQ people, interphobia remains a major societal problem. This reportedly became painfully evident during the 2024 Summer Olympics when (alleged intersex) Algerian female boxer, Imani Khelif, beat Thai female boxer, Janjaem Suwannapheng, to win the gold medal in Paris. Activists reported a notable increase in online hate toward intersex persons. It was a crude reminder of how much work still needs to be done in Thailand.

Nada Chaiyait, an intersex and transgender person and international human rights lawyer, co-founded Intersex Thailand, launching on Intersex Awareness Day in 2021. Chaiyait reflects on meeting Taiwanese intersex activist, Hiker Chiu, at an ILGA Asia (Asian Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) conference in Bangkok a few years prior – a turning point for her personally, and as an activist. Intersex Thailand focuses on connecting more intersex people in the country, empowering them to become activists, raising awareness, and engaging in political advocacy. Intersex Thailand has also hosted some training sessions at Thai medical schools. It will soon launch a campaign called “Intersex Universe,” an initiative to educate Thai society about the fundamental truth that individuals born with diverse innate sex characteristics deserve the same respect and human rights protections afforded to all.

Intersex Thailand is pursuing legal advocacy and has drafted comprehensive intersex rights legislation aiming to address both discrimination based on sex characteristics and legal gender recognition. The bill was officially submitted to Parliament on November 14, 2024.

Conclusion

From Argentina to Thailand, courageous intersex activists are coming together, educating key stakeholders, raising visibility, and fighting harmful medical practices and other forms of violence and discrimination. Similar to homophobia and transphobia, interphobia causes irreparable emotional and physical harm due to others' fears of "difference" — in the case of intersex people, innate physical differences. Regardless of what global region in which they live, intersex children and adults are struggling for basic human rights, including bodily autonomy, dignity, the right to identity and self-determination, a life free from medical torture, the right to non-discrimination, and the right to health, happiness, and full participation in society.

Intersex people in each region face unique challenges, but their struggles also highlight common themes. For example, in much of Eastern Europe, there is a notable lack of openly intersex people and few activists speaking out. Despite this, some advocates continue their work, but many have identified the mostly hidden intersex community as the single biggest barrier to progress. This stands in contrast to a strong regional advocacy organization and a developed movement further west.

In Latin America, while impressive efforts are taking place at the national level in several countries, there is still an absence of coordinated regional efforts, and language access remains a significant barrier. However, Brújula Intersexual in Mexico has taken on the role of serving as a major hub for Spanish-speaking intersex people and parents in both Mexico and the broader region.

In several African countries, activists are successfully advocating for justice, and a strong regional organization, the African Intersex Movement (AIM), has emerged to help organize and build intersex activism capacity across the continent. Despite these strategic and coordinated efforts, activists in Africa report widespread discrimination and often serious misperceptions that intersex people are taboo, or a superstition that they are actual demons, causing infants to be abandoned, mutilated or even killed. Intersex school children commonly suffer from bullying and many drop out without completing a basic education.

In Asia, a strong regional organization, Intersex Asia, has developed and assists with research and movement capacity building. Robust awareness-raising efforts are beginning to shift perceptions and inform society. However, there is still much work to be done to fight interphobia in many places, including those like Thailand, where LGBTQ acceptance has progressed.

Across the globe, intersex adults are not able to access intersex-competent or affirming health care, while infants and young children continue to be subjected to unnecessary forced medical interventions, including surgeries.

To thrive, intersex movements around the world need support from global funders and other stakeholders. Key strategies to emerge from this research include the following recommendations to support intersex movements in achieving their goals:

- **Resourcing and amplifying local intersex leadership around the world;**
- **Supporting intersex convenings for strategic exchange among these leaders;**
- **Resourcing regional hub organizations for the intersex movement;**
- **Identifying politically and culturally specific challenges in regions, and creating strategy-building opportunities among these leaders;**
- **Funding intersex leaders to collaborate with adjacent movements, such as those working on children's rights, female genital mutilation, disability rights, and LGBTQ people's rights, to build alliances.**

The global intersex movement needs a significant infusion of resources to strengthen capacity and sustain activism to achieve much-needed change. With less than two percent of all LGBTIQ+ funding going to intersex-led organizations and activism focused on intersex issues, the broader queer movement must make a bigger and longer-term investment in fighting intersex violence and discrimination.³⁵

As the preceding narratives attest, the intersex human rights movement is ready to advance, cultivating partners and funders from intersectional movements like children's rights, women's rights, disability rights, and the movement against anti-female genital mutilation. This strategic opportunity is essential to address the priority of ending nonconsensual and violent medical practices on infants and young children. Developing a cross-movement coalition at the local, regional, and international levels is a logical next step.

The intersex movement across the world is growing each year despite overwhelming political, cultural, and medical resistance, yet funding for these intrepid activists and leading organizations remains fairly flat.³⁶ This needs to change. As an LGBTIQ partner organization, Outright International stands ready to support the intersex movement, while affirming and amplifying the capacity of intersex activists on the ground to lead.

³⁵ Lukomnik, J., Frazer, S., Cabral Grinspan, M., and Nepon, E. (2024). *The State of Intersex Organizing* (3rd Edition). Global Philanthropy Project, <https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/2024/10/28/the-state-of-intersex-organizing-3rd-edition/>, 17-18, 47.

³⁶ Ibid.



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