

Legislating Against Conversion Practices

April 2025



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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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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgments | 4 |
| Executive Summary | 5 |
| 1. About Conversion Practices | 6 |
| What are conversion practices? | 6 |
| Are there conversion practices in my country? | 6 |
| Do we need explicit legislation in order to combat conversion practices? | 7 |
| Checklist: What laws and regulations should be reviewed before drafting a bill? | 10 |
| 2. The Content of the Bill | 12 |
| Definition: What are conversion practices? | 12 |
| An atypical legislative approach: Negative definition | 13 |
| Deciding the term to be used | 14 |
| Establishing sanctions | 16 |
| A preventive approach | 17 |
| Outright’s resources for legislative intent | 21 |
| 3. From Bill to Law: Get Ready for the Parliamentary Process | 23 |
| The importance of survivors’ voices | 24 |
| The Importance of Involving National LGBTQ and Human Rights Organizations | 26 |
| The importance of health professionals’ voices | 27 |
| The importance of religious leaders’ voices | 29 |
| Answers to the main doubts and criticisms | 30 |

Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Alberto de Belaunde, Co-Director of Queer Legal Futures at Outright International. It was edited by Venus Aves and reviewed by Neela Ghoshal.

Outright International would like to thank Megan Buckner for designing and laying out the report. We are deeply grateful to all the activists, legislators, and healthcare professionals who shared their testimonies, enriching this report with their invaluable insights and experiences.



Executive Summary

This publication aims to serve as a guide for parliamentarians and activists advocating for legislation to combat conversion practices. Conversion practices are efforts to change, suppress, or alter an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to align with heterosexual, cisgender norms.

At Outright International, we do not view legislation against conversion practices as an end in itself or the only pathway to change. Laws alone do not change realities, particularly in contexts marked by barriers to justice, systemic inequalities, and pervasive cultures of impunity. Instead, we see legislation as one of many means to promote accountability among state agents to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals from these harmful practices.¹ The legislative process has the secondary benefits of empowering key stakeholders and generating public awareness.

This guide, which draws from evidence based on lived experiences, provides a public policy and political approach that is both agile and practical. It incorporates best practices from existing laws and legislative proposals, as well as testimonies from legislators and activists who have firsthand experiences navigating this process. By combining strategic insights and actionable recommendations, this accessible guide seeks to empower stakeholders with the tools they need to advance effective legislative measures and foster meaningful change.

¹ Outright International’s work is inclusive of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) communities. We do not include the “I” in the acronym in this instance because we are not addressing issues faced by intersex individuals in this guide. While intersex individuals often face harmful medical practices that clearly relate to conversion practices, such as non-consensual surgeries or interventions aimed at “normalizing” their bodies, these actions fall outside the scope of what is traditionally defined as conversion practices and what existing and proposed laws encompass.

01 About Conversion Practices

WHAT ARE CONVERSION PRACTICES?

Conversion practices are efforts to change, suppress, or alter an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to align with heterosexual, cisgender norms by any means. They are based on the discredited belief that being LGBTQ is a disorder or abnormality that requires correction. These practices encompass a wide range of actions, including psychological counseling, religious rituals, forced medical treatments, and violent interventions such as beatings or corrective rape. They aim to enforce heteronormative and cisnormative standards, often justified by cultural, religious, or familial values. Outright uses the term "conversion practices" rather than the more commonly used "conversion therapy" because such practices have no therapeutic benefit and do not work.²

Globally, conversion practices are driven by various actors, including religious leaders, health care professionals, educators, and family members. They may involve coercion, manipulation, or even voluntary participation under societal pressure, particularly in regions where LGBTQ individuals face stigma and discrimination. The effects of these practices are profoundly harmful, leading to psychological trauma, depression, social anxiety, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation. Survivors frequently report lasting emotional scars and loss of self-acceptance.

The main global human rights organizations and medical associations unequivocally condemn conversion practices as unethical and harmful. Eradicating conversion practices requires survivor-centered advocacy and broader societal efforts to challenge the cultural and ideological norms that perpetuate these harmful interventions.

ARE THERE CONVERSION PRACTICES IN MY COUNTRY?

Wherever homophobia and transphobia are present, conversion practices tend to emerge in various forms. These practices sometimes take place in secrecy, adapting to local cultural and societal norms. They can involve private or public institutions, often going unnoticed due to their covert nature and the stigma surrounding LGBTQ identities.

The lack of visibility surrounding conversion practices remains a significant challenge. According to the 2019 report by Outright International, this invisibility stems from the clandestine nature of these practices in some countries, their widespread acceptance

² Other human rights organizations refer to conversion practices using other terms, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression change efforts (SOGIE change efforts).

as “appropriate treatment” in others, and the shame or fear of retaliation and further discrimination faced by survivors.³ These factors not only obscure the prevalence of these practices but also create barriers to addressing them effectively.

While formal reporting remains scarce, civil society organizations and, increasingly, national human rights institutions have stepped in to document cases and raise awareness. However, as our 2019 report underscores, the exact prevalence of these practices is difficult to determine.

DO WE NEED EXPLICIT LEGISLATION IN ORDER TO COMBAT CONVERSION PRACTICES?

At Outright International, we believe that it is not strictly necessary to have specific legislation in order to combat conversion practices, as many countries already have laws addressing gender-based violence, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and discrimination. These existing legal frameworks can often encompass and address the harm caused by conversion practices, holding perpetrators accountable and providing mechanisms to protect survivors. Advocacy efforts can focus on ensuring these laws are effectively enforced and interpreted to include conversion practices, offering immediate tools for justice and protection without waiting for new legal measures.

Moreover, many international human rights instruments condemn actions that infringe on personal autonomy, dignity, and equality, which include practices like conversion efforts. By leveraging existing laws and international standards, governments and civil society organizations can build strong cases against these harmful interventions. This approach highlights the urgency of addressing conversion practices while demonstrating that their eradication does not depend solely on passing new laws.

What are the advantages of having explicit legislation against conversion practices?

Explicit legislation aimed at eradicating conversion practices offers a wide range of advantages, both practical and transformative. It establishes enforceable obligations on governments, ensuring accountability. Legislation can also trigger proactive state-led prevention efforts. When legislation is truly holistic—and not simply punitive—it can address the systemic discrimination fueling these practices and provide survivor-centered support while fostering cultural and societal change. We can draw from the experiences of our colleagues in feminist movements who have advanced holistic legislation to counter gender-based violence. Even when specific acts that constitute gender-based violence, such as physical and sexual assault, are already prohibited under existing legislation, an explicit gender-based violence law can situate these harms in context, contributing to an understanding of them as efforts to violently enforce gender norms and hierarchies and furthering efforts to address root causes. An explicit law addressing harms perpetrated against a vulnerable group can also set out tailored strategies to prevent violence from occurring in the first place and, when it does occur, to support survivors.

Legislation on eradicating conversion practices can create a clear legal framework, align national policies with global human rights standards, and build coalitions among diverse stakeholders, amplifying efforts to eradicate these harmful interventions. Below, these advantages are explored in detail.

³ Outright International, *Harmful Treatment: The Global Reach of So-Called Conversion Therapy*, 2019, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/global-reach-so-called-conversion-therapy>.

Establishing clear legal obligations

Explicit legislation creates a framework that imposes direct responsibilities on governments to prevent, regulate, and respond to conversion practices. Unlike laws that broadly address physical or mental harm, these targeted measures ensure that the specific characteristics of conversion efforts—rooted in discrimination and identity erasure—are adequately addressed. By doing so, such legislation not only protects individuals from harm but also reinforces the state’s commitment to LGBTQ people’s human rights and dignity.

Strengthening institutional frameworks

Dedicated legislation provides clarity and consistency, defining the roles of government agencies, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders. This ensures effective implementation through training programs, enforcement mechanisms, and standardized professional practices. Such a framework not only safeguards individuals but also reinforces institutional accountability.

Embedding prevention and supporting survivors

Effective laws go beyond punitive measures, emphasizing prevention and survivor support. By embedding these obligations into legislation, governments can proactively address root causes, such as misinformation and societal stigma, reducing the demand for these practices.

Amplifying survivor voices for public awareness

The legislative process itself serves as a critical platform for raising awareness. By amplifying survivor stories and exposing the devastating psychological and emotional impacts of conversion practices, public debates foster a cultural shift toward acceptance and inclusion. This visibility reduces stigma, encourages broader societal understanding, and challenges harmful misconceptions about LGBTQ identities.

Aiding cultural transformation

Beyond its immediate legal impact, explicit legislation has a broader societal function. It sends a clear message that the State unequivocally opposes practices that deny individuals their identity and humanity. This stance fosters cultural transformation by challenging societal norms that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion.

Outright’s position is that laws prohibiting or regulating conversion practices should be context-specific, prevention-focused, survivor-informed, and aligned with international law. They should not rely primarily or exclusively on the coercive power of the carceral state but instead emphasize looking beyond individual criminal liability to address root causes.

Right: Sign: “Hatred does not make us any less gay.” Lima Pride March 2023.
Credit: Outright International.



Argentina's Law on Mental Health, passed in 2010, states that a person cannot receive a mental health diagnosis exclusively based on their "sexual choice or identity." In practice, this serves as an indirect ban that prevents health professionals from engaging in conversion therapies. However, in September 2024, legislator Esteban Paulón introduced a bill explicitly aimed at eradicating these practices.

Paulón explained the motivation behind the proposal: *"We know that 'conversion therapies' or conversion efforts are often carried out under fictitious labels. No one says, 'I'm conducting a conversion practice'; instead, they speak of retreats or use other euphemisms. So, we felt it was important that, in light of a regulation that may be somewhat vague, we define these practices concretely and specifically to be able to combat them effectively."*⁴

The eradication of conversion practices targeting minors was discussed in Switzerland in 2016, with the Federal Council concluding that the existing legal and regulatory framework was sufficient to address the issue. The Council emphasized that current laws, professional codes of conduct, and the country's robust support network for youth provide adequate protection, and therefore, no new legislation was necessary.

In a statement, the government adds: *"The practice of psychotherapy as a private economic activity under one's professional responsibility is subject to the provisions of the Law on the Professions of Psychology. These professional obligations, set out in binding terms, include practicing with care and professionalism, respecting the limits of one's competencies, and upholding the rights of clients and patients. The canton that issued the therapist's license oversees compliance with these obligations. Conversion therapies, whether conducted on minors or adults, constitute a breach of these duties. If reported, the supervising authority can impose disciplinary measures, including a permanent ban on practicing."*⁵

⁴ Outright interview with Esteban Paulon, virtual, December 16, 2024.

⁵ Federal Council of Switzerland, Interdiction et punissabilité des thérapies visant à "traiter" l'homosexualité chez des mineurs, Interpellation 16.3073, June 17, 2016, <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefte?AffairId=20163073>.

CHECKLIST: WHAT LAWS AND REGULATIONS SHOULD BE REVIEWED BEFORE DRAFTING A BILL?

Before legislating explicitly against conversion practices, it is essential to review a range of existing legal frameworks to identify gaps and ensure comprehensive protection.

Anti-discrimination laws

Evaluate existing anti-discrimination laws to determine whether they comprehensively cover sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Wherever possible, these laws should explicitly prohibit practices that attempt to alter or suppress these aspects of identity, ensuring robust protections against discrimination and harm.

Mental health laws

Laws governing mental health rights and services should be examined to ensure they prevent the misuse of psychological or psychiatric interventions as tools for conversion practices. These laws must emphasize informed consent, ethical standards for practitioners, accessible complaint mechanisms, and accountability for violations.

Health care regulations

Examine laws and professional standards governing health care providers to verify if they indirectly prohibit conversion practices. These regulations should mandate affirmative, evidence-based care for LGBTQ individuals and outline sanctions for providers engaging in harmful or unethical practices.

Criminal laws

Penal codes addressing physical and psychological harm, as well as laws against torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, often already prohibit many of the abusive practices used in conversion efforts, such as forced confinement, beatings, or certain forms of psychological manipulation. Strengthening their enforcement or interpretation to explicitly include some forms of conversion practices can provide immediate legal recourse for survivors.

Consumer laws

Consumer protection legislation against false advertising and fraud should be assessed. Many conversion practices are marketed as “therapeutic” or “healing” interventions despite being discredited and harmful. Robust consumer protections can prevent such misleading claims and hold perpetrators accountable for exploiting vulnerable individuals and their families.

Gender-based violence

Laws addressing gender-based violence should be reviewed to ensure they comprehensively protect individuals from all forms of psychological, emotional, and economic harm. These laws may already establish state obligations to prevent violence, provide survivor support mechanisms, and address root causes through education and awareness programs. Strengthening these frameworks can help ensure that protections are inclusive and effectively enforced.

□ Child protection laws

Child protection laws should be assessed to confirm that they safeguard minors from all forms of harm, including neglect and denial of appropriate care. These laws may already include provisions that protect children from coercion, ensure access to mental health support, and empower child welfare agencies to intervene when necessary. Reviewing these regulations can help determine whether they adequately prevent harmful interventions that attempt to suppress or alter a child's identity.

□ Education laws

Review laws and regulations governing educational institutions to ensure they promote respect and inclusivity. These regulations should mandate training for teachers and staff to support LGBTQ students and prevent practices that undermine their dignity. Curricula should include affirming content that fosters understanding and respect for diversity, creating a safe environment for all students. Additionally, inclusive anti-bullying policies should be established and strengthened, ensuring effective prevention mechanisms.

Conversion practices as a form of gender-based violence

"At the core of gender-based violence is the imposition of rigid gender roles and expectations, usually in alignment with patriarchal norms. Conversion practices are predicated on the belief that deviations from heteronormative and cisnormative standards are inherently wrong and need to be corrected. This enforcement of binary gender roles and heteronormativity is what constitutes the essence of gender-based violence in the context of conversion practices."⁶

Right: Sign: "You can't pray away the gay." Vienna Pride 2021.
Credit: Ivan Radic.

⁶ Outright International, *Using Gender-Based Violence Frameworks to Eradicate Conversion Practices in Latin America*, 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/using-gender-based-violence-frameworks-eradicate-conversion>.



02 The Content of the Bill

DEFINITION: WHAT ARE CONVERSION PRACTICES?

Establishing a clear definition of what constitutes conversion practices is essential in any legislation against conversion practices for several reasons. First, it ensures that all stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society, survivors, actual or potential perpetrators, and the general public, have a shared understanding of the issue. This common framework is critical for identifying and addressing the various forms these practices can take, whether they involve psychological manipulation, physical violence, deprivation, or coercive religious rituals. Without a clear definition, efforts to combat these practices risk being fragmented or inconsistent.

Second, a precise definition provides the foundation for effective legal and policy responses. It helps legislators draft laws that explicitly address the harmful actions involved in conversion practices, ensuring that the language is neither too vague and overly broad nor too narrow. This clarity is crucial for enforcement, as it enables authorities to recognize, investigate, and prosecute these acts, and counteracts the risk of legal loopholes that perpetrators might exploit.

Third, a clear definition supports advocacy and awareness-raising efforts by providing a concrete basis to explain why these practices are harmful and why they should be eradicated. It enables survivors and activists to articulate their experiences in terms that resonate with broader human rights principles, fostering public understanding and support.

Lastly, a well-defined framework strengthens international collaboration by aligning local, national, and global efforts to combat conversion practices. It ensures that data collection, reporting, and advocacy efforts are consistent, enabling comparisons across contexts and amplifying calls for comprehensive action.



Right: Activists of “Caribe Afirmativo” with polo shirts reading “I have nothing to cure.” Maicao Pride March 2024. Credit: Caribe Afirmativo.

An example of a clear definition of what conversion practices are is the law passed in Canada:

“Conversion therapy means a practice, treatment or service designed to:

- (a) change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual;*
- (b) change a person’s gender identity to cisgender;*
- (c) change a person’s gender expression so that it conforms to the sex assigned to the person at birth;*
- (d) repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour;*
- (e) repress a person’s non-cisgender gender identity; or*
- (f) repress or reduce a person’s gender expression that does not conform to the sex assigned to the person at birth.”⁷*

Another example of clear language is in the Costa Rican bill:

“It is prohibited to threaten, coerce or force a person to hide, modify or deny their sexual characteristics, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation, as well as to submit to aversive treatments of any kind that pretend to convert, revert or modify by way of pretended cure their sexual characteristics, gender expression, gender identity or sexual orientation and that represent a threat to their health, well-being and individual freedom.”⁸

AN ATYPICAL LEGISLATIVE APPROACH: NEGATIVE DEFINITION

Including a definition of what does *not* constitute a conversion practice in legislation is an effective way to counteract deliberate attempts to conflate ethical practices with harmful ones. Those acting in bad faith, particularly anti-gender groups, may try to mischaracterize gender-affirming care for transgender individuals or mental health support for people exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity as equivalent to conversion practices.⁹ These groups often employ false news, exaggerations, and lies to distort the debate and undermine legitimate, supportive interventions. By clearly distinguishing such practices, the law prevents these distortions and ensures that its purpose remains focused on addressing abuse.

⁷ An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy), *Statutes of Canada 2021*, c.4, 2021, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-4/royal-assent>.

⁸ Adición de los artículos 35, 68 bis, 384 bis y de un inciso e) al artículo 260 de la ley general de salud, n.º 5395, de 30 de octubre de 1973 y sus reformas, Expediente 20.970, 2018, <http://www.aselex.cr/boletines/Proyecto-20970.pdf>.

⁹ Aletha Adu, “Gender-affirming care for children ‘form of conversion therapy’, says Badenoch,” *The Guardian*, December 6, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/06/gender-affirming-care-for-children-form-of-conversion-therapy-says-badenoch>.

Such a definition also protects professionals from potential legal risks and misinterpretations. Without clear exclusions, health care providers offering gender-affirming treatments or therapists engaging in exploratory discussions could face unwarranted scrutiny or hesitation in their work. Clarifying what falls outside the scope of conversion practices creates a secure framework for practitioners to provide evidence-based, ethical care confidently.

Additionally, explicitly stating what is *not* considered a conversion practice reinforces the legislation's intent: to protect individuals from coercion and harm while affirming their identities. It ensures that the law targets abusive actions without casting doubt on practices that uphold autonomy and dignity.

An example of a proposed law with a clear definition of what shouldn't be considered conversion practices is the [bill presented in Chile](#):

"The following practices shall not be considered [conversion practices]:

I. Any affirmative support provided to LGBTIQ+ individuals, and in general, any service or intervention that supports or affirms non-cisgender gender identities or non-heterosexual sexual and/or romantic orientations, including those aimed at:

- a. Supporting a person undergoing or considering a gender transition;*
- b. Helping a person express their non-heterosexual sexual and/or romantic orientation or non-cisgender gender identity publicly in their family, school, or community environment, or through their clothing, physical appearance, and other elements linked to their gender expression;*
- c. Facilitating social support, skills, and coping strategies focused on interpersonal and community relationships that may be affected by potential discrimination resulting from the public disclosure of their non-heterosexual sexual and/or romantic orientation or non-cisgender gender identity.*

II. Any health service related to the free development and/or affirmation of non-cisgender gender identities or expressions, or non-heterosexual sexual and/or romantic orientations, including hormonal therapy, genital surgeries, or other surgical or endocrinological interventions aimed at achieving a more feminine or masculine appearance for trans, non-binary, or non-cisgender individuals."¹⁰

DECIDING THE TERM TO BE USED

Conversion practices are known by many names: "conversion therapies," "conversion therapy practices," "sexual reorientation," "gay cure," "dehomosexualization," and "SOGIECE" (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression Change Efforts), to name a few.

We use the term "conversion practices" instead of the more commonly used "conversion therapies" because the latter implies a therapeutic or health-related benefit, which these practices categorically lack. Referring to them as "therapy" risks legitimizing actions that

¹⁰ Promueve el acompañamiento afirmativo a personas LGBTIQ+, y prohíbe los esfuerzos para cambiar la orientación sexual y la identidad o expresión de género, Boletín 15172-34, 2022, https://tramitacion.senado.cl/appsenado/templates/tramitacion/index.php?boletin_ini=15172-34.

are unethical, harmful, and widely discredited by medical and mental health professionals worldwide. The term “conversion practices” more accurately captures the range of harmful actions, often outside any legitimate therapeutic context, aimed at changing or suppressing a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. However, we recognize that it may also be imperfect: for example, most jurisdictions lack a clear legal definition of what constitutes a “practice,” creating the risk that such laws may be interpreted very broadly to encapsulate casual comments or consensual associative interactions.

The terms “SOCE” (Sexual Orientation Change Efforts) and “SOGIECE” (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression Change Efforts) are used in some academic spaces. We avoid using them and generally do not recommend such terms in legislation because these terms are complex and challenging to communicate to the general public. Our goal is to ensure clarity and accessibility when discussing this issue, making “conversion practices” the most effective term for public awareness and advocacy efforts.

However, legislators must have this conversation with activists and survivors to ensure that the chosen term not only reflects a communication strategy or a conceptual reflection but also aligns with the expectations and experiences of everyone involved. This collaborative approach helps ensure that the pursuant legal language is both empowering and representative of those most affected by these harmful practices.

In the case of the [Argentine bill](#), the legislature decided to directly address the problem of having several terms to refer to this problem, searching for more clarity:

“For the purposes of this law, the terms ‘conversion practices against individuals of sexual diversity,’ ‘conversion therapy,’ ‘gay cure,’ ‘sexual reorientation,’ ‘critical gender therapy,’ or Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, or Gender Expression, hereinafter referred to as SOGIECE, all indistinctly refer to any practice, mechanism, ‘treatment,’ false therapy, sustained effort, service, or systematic disapproval conducted on an individual or group, whether with or without their consent, that may have as one or more of its objectives the following:

- (a) To change the sexual and/or emotional orientation, whether real or perceived, of a person to heterosexual, or to induce them to do so;*
- (b) To change a person’s self-perceived gender identity to cisgender, or to induce them to do so;*
- (c) To change a person’s gender expression to conform to a stereotypical notion of their sex assigned at birth, or to induce them to do so and/or to pressure them to behave and dress in ways aligned with stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity;*
- (d) To suppress, reduce, and/or eliminate non-heterosexual attraction or behavior, or to induce them to do so;*
- (e) To suppress, reduce, and/or eliminate non-cisgender gender identity, or to induce them to do so;*

(f) To suppress, reduce, and/or eliminate a person's gender expression that does not conform to a stereotypical notion of their sex assigned at birth, or to induce them to do so; and

(g) To discourage a person's gender transition or to promote the detransition of a trans, non-binary, or non-cisgender person."¹¹

ESTABLISHING SANCTIONS

When legislating on conversion practices, it is essential to recognize that these practices can take various forms and that sanctions must be proportional to the severity and nature of each case.

Administrative measures are particularly relevant in professional contexts: revoking the licenses of doctors, psychologists, social workers, educators, or other specialists who promote or perform conversion practices is a key tool to protect individuals and uphold ethical standards in settings such as the health professions or schools. Such sanctions send a clear message that these practices are incompatible with ethical professional conduct and human rights.

Germany's Law for Protection against Conversion Therapy establishes specific sanctions for medical practices aimed at modifying or suppressing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, deeming such actions illegal. Under this legislation, a temporary ban on practicing medicine for up to ten years may be imposed.¹²

In the civil sphere, sanctions may include fines for institutions or individuals who promote or commercialize these practices, as well as strict regulation of advertising that perpetuates the false idea that it is possible to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. These measures help combat the promotion and normalization of such practices while providing legal avenues for victims to seek redress for the harm they have suffered.

Right: Sign: "Love is not a plague." Equality March 2019 in Katowice, Poland. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

¹¹ Ley de erradicación de los esfuerzos de cambio de la orientación sexual, identidad o expresión de género (ECOSIEG), Proyecto de Ley 7052, 2024, <https://www4.hcdn.gob.ar/dependencias/dsecretaria/Periodo2024/PDF2024/TP2024/5642-D-2024.pdf>.

¹² Gesetz zum Schutz vor Konversionsbehandlungen, *BGBI.* I S. 1285, 2020, <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/konvbehschg/BJNR128500020.html>.



One legal option is to use consumer protection laws to fight conversion practices. These may include laws prohibiting anti-discrimination, anti-scam, or misleading advertising.

In *Ferguson v. JONAH* (2015), a New Jersey jury unanimously determined that the conversion therapy practices offered by Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH) constituted consumer fraud. The plaintiffs, former clients of the organization, argued that they had been misled by false claims that their homosexuality could be “cured.” During the trial, evidence revealed that JONAH’s techniques were not only ineffective but also harmful, including humiliating practices such as requiring participants to engage in extreme physical exercises or reenact traumatic abuse scenarios. The verdict established that promoting conversion therapy as a legitimate cure for homosexuality violated state consumer protection laws, setting a critical legal precedent in the fight against these practices.¹³

On the other hand, **criminal penalties** should be reserved for the most serious cases, such as those involving coercion, physical or psychological abuse, violations of fundamental rights, or acts that constitute torture. Examples of these practices include beating, sexual violence, forced confinement, the use of electric shocks, food deprivation, or forced medication, all of which can cause irreparable physical and emotional harm. Legislation in this area must align with international standards, such as the UN Convention Against Torture, to ensure that such violations are appropriately sanctioned. Additionally, when considering the criminalization of these practices, it is essential to carefully evaluate the potential impact on vulnerable communities. Excessive criminalization, especially in contexts where justice systems are limited or discriminatory, could exacerbate the marginalization of historically oppressed groups, such as racial or religious minorities.

Ultimately, laws should aim to eradicate conversion practices, addressing not only their manifestations but also the structural roots that perpetuate them, such as social prejudice, institutional discrimination, and lack of access to information. By adopting a preventive approach, legislation can become a transformative tool to protect victims, prevent future abuses, and promote a more inclusive and respectful society.

A PREVENTIVE APPROACH

Legislation against conversion practices must adopt a preventive approach to effectively address the root causes of these harmful interventions and ensure their long-term eradication. Prevention involves not only prohibiting certain practices themselves but also tackling the societal prejudices and misinformation that sustain “conversion ideology,” or the belief that people can and should change their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. This approach requires a comprehensive strategy that fosters understanding, acceptance, and respect for sexual and gender diversity across all levels of society.

One critical element of prevention is **public education**. Broad awareness campaigns are essential to highlight the harms of conversion practices and dispel myths about sexual orientation and gender identity—and can be mandated through legislation.

¹³ Erick Eckholm, “In a First, New Jersey Jury Says Group Selling Gay Cure Committed Fraud,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/26/nyregion/new-jersey-jury-says-group-selling-gay-cure-committed-fraud.html>.

These campaigns can challenge deeply ingrained prejudices, fostering an environment where diversity is understood and embraced. Schools, workplaces, and community spaces should serve as platforms for disseminating inclusive messages that celebrate the richness of human diversity.

The [Change or Suppression \(Conversion\) Practices Prohibition Bill](#) passed by the Australian state of Victoria in 2021 assigns educational functions to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission:

“(1) The Commission must—

“(a) establish and undertake information and education programs in relation to change or suppression practices; and

(b) promote and advance the objects of this Act and be an advocate for this Act.

(2) The Commission must undertake programs to disseminate information and educate the public with respect to—

(a) the objects of this Act; and

(b) any other matters relevant to the provisions of this Act.”¹⁴

A [2024 amendment to the Penal Code in Portugal](#) states:

“It is the Government’s responsibility to ensure adequate, effective and urgent measures to protect children and young people from practices aimed at altering, limiting or repressing sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, namely through: (...) [p]romoting dialogue with key stakeholders, including professional associations, scientific societies and health sector institutions, religious organizations and spiritual groups or communities, educational institutions and community-based organizations, in order to raise awareness of human rights violations related to practices aimed at altering, limiting or repressing sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.”¹⁵

Another key prevention strategy involves the **implementation and strengthening of comprehensive non-discrimination laws**. It is crucial to ensure legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in areas like employment, health care, and education. Such protections not only provide legal recourse for individuals facing discrimination but also signal a societal commitment to equality and inclusion, reducing the perceived legitimacy of conversion practices. They also help ensure that LGBTIQ people have equitable access to essential services, which is particularly relevant for mental health services tailored to the needs of the LGBTIQ population.

¹⁴ Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act, Act 3/2021, <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/change-or-suppression-conversion-practices-prohibition-act-2021>.

¹⁵ Lei n.º 15/2024, *Diário da República*, n.º 20/2024 Série I de 2024-01-29, <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/15-2024-839477377>.

Among other aspects, Peru's proposed law "prohibiting efforts that seek to change sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression or attempt to attack the free self-determination of individuals" modifies the Psychologist's Labour law, stating that psychologists should perform their work "without discrimination, from a human rights, gender, sexual diversity, and intercultural approach."¹⁶

Governments should also prioritize **training professionals** who work closely with LGBTQ individuals and populations as a vital preventive measure. Legislation can establish requirements that health workers, educators, and social service providers receive comprehensive training on affirming care practices that respect the rights and dignity of LGBTQ individuals. Such training can counteract the influence of unscientific and harmful beliefs within professional spaces, ensuring that these environments provide support rather than harm.

A bill in Colombia seeking to prohibit certain conversion practices and promote non-discrimination includes the following provision in Article 10:

*"Professional training for human health talent. Higher Education Institutions that include training for human talent in the health sector within their academic programs must, within the framework of their university autonomy, ensure the updating of academic training plans to reflect the most current scientific evidence regarding non-heterosexual sexual orientations, diverse gender identities and expressions, and the physical and mental health risks posed by SOGIECE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression Change Efforts)."*¹⁷

Legislation can also mandate the development of **accessible support systems for LGBTQ individuals** and their families. Many families turn to conversion practices out of a misguided belief that they are helping their loved ones. Providing families with resources, counseling, and support can help them navigate their concerns in affirming and constructive ways. Similarly, survivors of conversion practices must have access to psychological and legal support to aid in their recovery and empower them to share their experiences.

Right: Sign: "Nothing to cure." Lima Pride March, 2023.
Credit: Outright International

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Por medio del cual se prohíben los esfuerzos de cambio de orientación sexual e identidad y expresión de género (ecosieg) en el territorio nacional y se promueve la no discriminación por motivos de orientación sexual, identidad y expresión de género diversas en las redes de salud mental y otras instituciones y se dictan otras disposiciones, Proyecto de Ley 272/2022, <https://www.camara.gov.co/camara/visor?doc=/sites/default/files/2023-05/PONENCIA%201ER%20DEBATE%20PL%20272-22C%20-%20INCONVERTIBLES.docx>.



Germany's Law for Protection Against Conversion Therapy provides for the creation of a federal counseling service:

"The Federal Centre for Health Education shall set up a telephone and online advice service. The advice shall be aimed at:

- 1. all persons who are or may be affected by conversion treatment and to their relatives and*
- 2. all persons who, for professional or private reasons, deal with or advise on sexual orientation and self-perceived gender identity."*

Counselling is offered in several languages and anonymously."¹⁸

Laws can require **research, monitoring, and disaggregated data collection** to inform further policy development. Understanding the prevalence, methods, and impacts of conversion practices can guide governments and other stakeholders in designing targeted interventions. Furthermore, laws must prohibit the use of public funds to support organizations or individuals that promote or conduct these harmful practices.

France's 2022 law "Prohibiting practices aimed at modifying a person's sexual orientation or gender identity" includes a provision on monitoring:

"The Government shall present to Parliament, within twelve months of the promulgation of this law, a report providing an overview of practices, behaviors, or repeated statements aimed at modifying or suppressing the sexual orientation or gender identity of victims. This report will be accompanied by figures on the number of people affected each year and measures to better prevent these phenomena, such as communication with citizens and training for professionals in the national education system, the judiciary, the national police, and the national gendarmerie. It may be debated under the conditions provided for in the rules of parliamentary assemblies."¹⁹

Ultimately, while these preventive measures represent international good practices, it is up to legislators and activists to assess their feasibility and adapt them to their unique legal, cultural, and social contexts. Collaborative efforts that consider local realities can ensure that the chosen strategies are both effective and sustainable, contributing to the eradication of conversion practices and fostering a society that respects and celebrates diversity.

¹⁸ Gesetz zum Schutz vor Konversionsbehandlungen, BGBl. I S. 1285, 2020, <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/konvbehshg/BJNR128500020.html>.

¹⁹ Loi n° 2022-92 du 31 janvier 2022 interdisant les pratiques visant à modifier l'orientation sexuelle ou l'identité de genre d'une personne, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000045097703/2025-02-25>.

OUTRIGHT’S RESOURCES FOR LEGISLATIVE INTENT

In some legislative systems, proposals include a formal explanatory statement or introduction (legislative intent), which outlines the rationale and justification for the proposed law. This section provides an opportunity to present evidence and arguments that support the need for the legislation. In countries where legislative intent is not a formal requirement, this information can still serve as a strong foundation for opinion pieces, resources for journalists, parliamentary debates, and advocacy materials.

Since 2019, Outright International has been researching the issue of conversion practices, gathering evidence on their impacts and contexts across different regions. As a result of this work, the organization has published a series of reports that can serve as valuable resources to inform and support the arguments in legislative initiatives aimed at addressing and eliminating these harmful practices.

| YEAR | TITLE | SUMMARY |
|------|--|---|
| 2024 | <u>Using Gender-Based Violence Frameworks to Eradicate Conversion Practices in Latin America</u> | This report offers an in-depth exploration of conversion practices as a form of gender-based violence in Argentina, Ecuador, and Guatemala. It provides a significant contribution to framing these practices as forms of gender-based violence, emphasizing their coercive and harmful nature. |
| 2024 | <u>Eradicating Conversion Practices in South Africa: Legal and Policy Approaches</u> | This publication narrows in on South Africa as an opportunity to examine possibilities for eradicating conversion practices within a legal framework that recognizes the equality of LGBTQ persons. It aims to provide advocates with some strategies to curtail conversion efforts through the use of the law. |
| 2024 | <u>The Applicability of African Human Rights Standards In Addressing Conversion Practices</u> | This publication seeks to enhance the capacity of human rights defenders, survivors, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders who seek to eradicate conversion practices through the use of the African human rights system. Drawing from African human rights standards, frameworks, and institutions, the report provides a detailed but user-friendly and accessible guide. |
| 2022 | <u>Pathways for Eliminating Conversion Practices</u> | This report provides an overview of the harmful impacts of conversion practices, aiming to equip activists, legislators, and other stakeholders with strategies to advocate for their eradication, including through engagement with health systems, religious leaders, and the law. It highlights best practices from global and regional contexts, emphasizing survivor voices and evidence-based approaches. |

| | | |
|------|--|--|
| 2022 | <u>Converting Mindsets, Not Our Identities</u> | This report exposes the prevalence, nature, and impact of conversion practices in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. It draws on extensive research, including surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with survivors, practitioners, and community members in these countries. |
| 2019 | <u>The Global Reach of So-Called Conversion Therapy</u> | This pioneering report sheds light on the harmful and pervasive practice of conversion therapy worldwide, providing the first-ever global analysis of its nature, extent, and impact. Focusing on diverse cultural and regional contexts, it combines insights from extensive research, survivor testimonies, and expert interviews to highlight the devastating psychological and physical consequences of these practices. |



Right: Sign: "The only choice I made was to be happy." Lisboa Pride March 2024.
Credit: Esquerda.

03 From Bill to Law: Get Ready for the Parliamentary Process

The parliamentary process to legislate against conversion practices requires a well-coordinated and collaborative strategy that engages a wide range of stakeholders. Coalition building—the construction of broad and diverse alliances—is essential for achieving meaningful progress in complex political contexts. Bringing together survivors, mental health professionals, religious leaders, human rights organizations, and other key actors not only strengthens the legitimacy of the proposal but also enables the issue to be addressed from multiple perspectives, dismantling prejudices and resistance.

Joint efforts help create a powerful narrative that combines scientific evidence and the testimonies of those who have experienced these harmful practices, backed by international human rights standards, and the ethical and moral support of various sectors of society. By amplifying credible voices across different spheres, it becomes possible to counter misinformation and opposition arguments while establishing a dialogue centered on human dignity and fundamental rights.

Moreover, coalition building is a practical exercise in tolerance and synthesis: it identifies common ground among diverse perspectives and channels these shared priorities toward a common cause. By prioritizing an inclusive and cross-cutting approach, coalition building maximizes opportunities for legislative success and reinforces the message that eradicating conversion practices is a shared responsibility that benefits society as a whole.

The following sections highlight three key actors in this process—survivors, mental health professionals, and religious leaders—whose voices are critical to achieving meaningful change.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SURVIVORS' VOICES

Involving survivors' voices in the legislative process is critical to ensuring that the resulting laws are comprehensive and effective. Survivors bring firsthand knowledge of the harm caused by conversion practices, offering insights that cannot be fully captured by academic studies or advocacy reports. Their lived experiences can highlight the diverse and often covert forms these practices take, helping lawmakers identify specific actions that must be addressed. This input ensures that legislation responds to the reality of those directly affected and avoids leaving gaps that could be exploited.

Survivors' participation also humanizes the legislative process, shifting the focus from abstract policy discussions to the tangible impact on individuals' lives. By sharing their stories, survivors challenge misconceptions, reduce stigma, and build empathy among lawmakers and the public. Their voices make the harm caused by conversion practices undeniable, fostering a sense of urgency and moral responsibility to act. This can also create opportunities for societal dialogue, encouraging broader support for the legislation and its implementation.

Furthermore, involving survivors empowers them by recognizing their agency and resilience. It helps transform them from victims into key stakeholders, allowing them to shape the solutions to the issues they have faced. This inclusion not only strengthens the legitimacy of the legislation but also ensures it is survivor-centered, prioritizing their rights, dignity, and recovery. Their involvement can lead to more robust protections and support mechanisms, such as trauma-informed care and avenues for justice, making the legislation both practical and transformative.

However, it is equally important to ensure that survivors' involvement is handled with care and respect, avoiding any risk of re-victimization. Participation must be voluntary, with clear safeguards to protect survivors from retraumatization during public hearings or policy discussions. Trauma-informed approaches should guide their involvement, prioritizing their emotional well-being and offering psychological support if needed. Survivors should have control over how their stories are shared, ensuring they feel empowered rather than exposed.

Iván Tagle is one of the founders and the executive director of *Yaaj México*, an organization that championed the law against conversion practices in Mexico. Tagle is also a survivor of conversion practices and was able to share his testimony in various committees and events within the Mexican Congress. When sharing his participation in the legislative process, he told us:

"For me, it meant reparation for the damage, settling a historical debt that our country owed to those of us who were victims and now survivors of these practices. This struggle has been an act of resilience, an expression of community, and a demonstration of transformative action. We turned the pain and adversity we experienced into a hope-filled response, to ensure that no young person has to face what we faced, simply for being, loving or expressing themselves freely."²⁰

²⁰ Outright interview with Iván Tagle, virtual, December 16, 2024.

Gastón Oneto is a psychologist, artist, and survivor of conversion practices in Argentina. He produced a testimonial theater play about his case and actively participates in the meetings to promote the bill in Argentina:

“In my experience, being part of the legislative process to eradicate so-called ‘conversion therapies’ has been extremely restorative: to feel that we are doing something so that this doesn’t happen to other people. This in some way helps to compensate for the harm suffered and puts us in a place of greater health and justice.”²¹

Paola Santillán, a survivor of conversion practices, is also an LGBTIQ activist and intersectional feminist working at Yaaj Mexico:

“It helped us to transform pain into a fight. For more than fifteen years, that conviction sustained us until we achieved a historic triumph: the approval of the law. Being part of the legislative process was essential for our voices, marked by pain and resistance, to be transformed into change. Making our stories visible through the media sensitized society and pressured congresses to legislate. This achievement represents justice for those of us who suffered these practices and the promise that no one else will face them.”²²

Randy Boissonnault, former LGBTQ2 special advisor to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for domestic issues and a Canadian parliamentarian during the legislative debate about conversion practices, underlines the pivotal role played by survivors. He recounts how previous attempts to pass similar legislation had failed, emphasizing that it was the direct involvement and advocacy of survivors that ultimately ensured the law’s passage:

“With the help of civil society, the voices of survivors helped us to ban conversion therapy in Canada with a rare unanimous consent motion in Parliament. We listened. We did not give up. We prevailed. Thanks to the work of survivors.”²³

Salma Luévano was one of the first trans congressmembers in Mexico and led the bill that sought to eradicate conversion practices in that country:

“It is very important to have the voices of survivors. In the case of Mexico, it helped the legislative initiative to move forward. In all legal initiatives that deal with issues related to victims or survivors, it is very important to have those voices throughout the legislative process, to raise awareness and generate empathy in the legislators so that they see that these are real problems that affect real people.”²⁴

²¹ Outright interview with Gastón Oneto, virtual, December 19, 2024.

²² Outright interview with Paola Santillán, virtual, December 19, 2024.

²³ Outright interview with Randy Boissonnault, virtual, January 21, 2025.

²⁴ Outright interview with Salma Luévano, virtual, January 4, 2025.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVING NATIONAL LGBTQ AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

National LGBTQ organizations play a vital role in the fight against conversion practices. These groups have deep, localized knowledge of the specific cultural, legal, and social contexts in which conversion practices occur. By working closely with these organizations, legislators and advocates can ensure that proposed laws are not only effective but also contextually appropriate and sensitive to the lived realities of those most affected.

These organizations often provide direct support to survivors, making them key partners in shaping survivor-centered approaches to legislation. Additionally, they are instrumental in researching and documenting cases of conversion practices, helping to uncover their prevalence, methods, and impacts. This research not only informs evidence-based legislation but also brings visibility to an issue that often remains hidden due to its clandestine nature and the stigma surrounding LGBTQ identities.

In addition, national LGBTQ organizations are instrumental in community engagement. They serve as trusted voices within their communities, helping to build public awareness, counter disinformation, and foster support for legislative initiatives. Their involvement strengthens coalitions and amplifies the reach of advocacy campaigns, creating a unified front against harmful practices.

Mainstream or non-LGBTQ focused human rights organizations can also play a helpful role in crafting legislation. They can help frame the urgency of eradicating conversion practices within the context of broader human rights imperatives. They can also advise on measures to ensure that legislation to eradicate conversion practices does not unduly infringe on rights to freedom of association, expression, and religion.

By involving these organizations from the outset, legislative efforts can benefit from their expertise, networks, and credibility. This collaborative approach not only enhances the quality of the legislation but also reinforces the broader movement to protect and uphold the rights of LGBTQ individuals.



Right: "Homosexuality is not an illness." Pride March in Mexico City, 2024. Credit: Yaaj Mexico.

Randy Boissonnault, the Canadian parliamentarian, suggests to parliamentarians who are about to initiate the legislative process:

“Reach out. Listen. Tell the human story. Get a third-party NGO to quantify the scale of the issue. When a Vancouver-based LGBTQI organization demonstrated that the issue had affected over 20,000 men and thousands of women, it changed the game.”²⁵

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS’ VOICES

Incorporating the voices of health professionals into the legislative process is essential to creating effective and ethical laws against conversion practices. These professionals bring critical expertise on physical and psychological well-being, helping lawmakers understand the profound harm caused by these practices, including long-term trauma, depression, and suicidal ideation. Their insights ensure that the legislation is grounded in scientific evidence and aligns with established health standards, reinforcing its credibility and impact.

Health professionals also play a vital role in distinguishing harmful conversion practices from legitimate, affirming care. Their expertise is crucial in defining what constitutes supportive interventions, such as exploratory therapy or gender-affirming care, protecting these practices from being mischaracterized or unintentionally restricted. This clarity helps ensure that the law does not inadvertently hinder ethical therapeutic practices while targeting coercive and abusive actions.

Moreover, involving health professionals in the legislative process fosters collaboration and trust between the medical community and policymakers. It signals a commitment to evidence-based decision-making, encouraging broader support for the legislation among practitioners. Their involvement can also help design accompanying measures, such as public awareness campaigns and professional training, to prevent conversion practices and promote inclusive mental health care. By including their voices, the legislation becomes not only more precise but also better equipped to address the root causes and consequences of conversion practices.

Susel Paredes is the first openly lesbian congressmember in Peru. She has been promoting a bill against conversion practices in her country:

“It is essential to involve health professionals because they give us an objective and scientific component to the fight. They give us the necessary ground to point out that you can’t cure a disease that doesn’t exist. It is not just another opinion; it is what they show with evidence.”²⁶

Pierre Brouard is a registered Clinical Psychologist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa and the recent acting Director of the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and

²⁵ Outright interview with Randy Boissonnault, virtual, January 21, 2025.

²⁶ Outright interview with Susel Paredes, virtual, December 19, 2024.

Gender at the University of Pretoria. He is also on the Executive of the Sexuality and Gender Division of the Psychological Society of South Africa and a Board Member of the Professional Association for Transgender Health South Africa:

“Mental health providers are often in the frontline of care for survivors of Conversion Practices. This is because they have the skills to deliver affirming and restorative care to LGBTQIA+ individuals, rooted in understanding and never judging gender and sexual diversity.

Survivors of conversion practices often face layered trauma, compounded by stigma, discrimination, and coercive interventions, intended to be for their “benefit”. This trauma not only increases the risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation but can also create social, cultural, spiritual, and economic dislocation and lifelong distress. Psychologists and other mental health professionals and providers know that survivors may experience complex post-traumatic stress disorder and often require ongoing and intense psychological support.

We now know from Minority Stress Theory that systemic stigma, prejudice, and discrimination towards LGBTQIA+ people undermines their well-being, contributing significantly to health disparities by fostering shame, guilt, and hypervigilance. Conversion Practices contribute to this Minority Stress, exacerbating its impact.

Conversion practices are regarded by the profession of psychology as unethical, as having no scientific efficacy, as being a form of rejection, degradation, and, in some cases, torture. Knowing this, it is crucial that the voices of psychologists and other mental health professionals and providers, and their relevant professional bodies, are heard in any effort to outlaw these practices.”²⁷

In December 2023, Outright International promoted a public statement by mental health organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean condemning conversion practices.²⁸ The statement clearly highlighted the negative impact of conversion practices on survivors, urged states and governments to take action, and called on mental health professionals, as well as their unions, organizations, and associations, to take proactive leadership in addressing and denouncing conversion practices in various professional settings, as well as in media and public discourse.

The statement was signed by several prominent organizations: The Caribbean Alliance of National Psychology Associations, the Latin American Psychoanalytic Federation, the Federal Council of Psychologists of Brazil, the Federation of Psychologists of Venezuela, the Colombian Professional Association of Psychology, the Peruvian Society of Psychoanalysis, the Gender and Sexualities Commission of the Professional Association of Psychologists of Chile, and the Professional Association of Psychologists of Santa Fe, Argentina – First Circumscription.

²⁷ Outright interview with Pierre Brouard, virtual, February 4, 2025.

²⁸ Outright International, “Urgent Call for the Eradication of Conversion Practices in Latin America and the Caribbean,” press release, December 18, 2023, <https://outrightinternational.org/press-release/urgent-call-eradication-conversion-practices-latin-america-and-caribbean>.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS' VOICES

Involving the voices of religious leaders in the legislative process to combat conversion practices can be transformative, though it is often challenging. Religious leaders hold significant influence in many communities, shaping cultural values and moral perspectives. When they support legislation that opposes conversion practices, they can help shift public attitudes, challenge harmful narratives, and foster acceptance of LGBTQ individuals within faith-based contexts. Their endorsement of such laws can lend credibility and moral weight to advocacy efforts, encouraging broader societal buy-in.

However, engaging religious leaders requires navigating deeply rooted beliefs and cultural norms that may perpetuate these practices. This makes it essential to identify allies within faith communities who already embrace inclusive and affirming approaches. These leaders can amplify the message that conversion practices are harmful and incompatible with fundamental religious principles of compassion, dignity, and love. By framing the issue as one of protecting human rights and rejecting coercion, these voices can open doors for dialogue in contexts resistant to change.

Including religious leaders also helps address fears and misconceptions within faith communities. Their participation can reassure followers that the legislation is not an attack on religion but a measure to protect individuals from harm. While their involvement may be challenging to secure in certain contexts, the potential for meaningful societal impact underscores the importance of their voices in shaping laws that not only eradicate harmful practices but also promote inclusion and understanding.



In 2020, the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives issued a statement through which religious leaders from diverse traditions united to condemn conversion practices. Their declaration emphasizes the importance of implementing and strengthening anti-discrimination laws based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in areas such as employment, health care, and education. It also highlights the need to ensure access to essential services, particularly inclusive mental health services. This interfaith commitment reflects a collective dedication to equality and inclusion, aiming to eradicate harmful practices and promote the well-being of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.²⁹

Right: London Pride 2024. Credit: Outright International.

²⁹ Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives, "Declaring the Sanctity of life and the dignity of all," statement, <https://globalinterfaith.lgbt>.

ANSWERS TO THE MAIN DOUBTS AND CRITICISMS

It is essential to have clear and well-founded answers to the doubts and criticisms that may arise regarding the proposed legislation. This not only strengthens the initiative's defense but also helps dispel fears and misunderstandings among those who may not yet fully grasp the importance of eradicating these practices. Responses must be direct, accessible, and aligned with human rights principles to connect with diverse audiences and build broader support.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that some opponents of the legislation may raise legitimate concerns rooted in freedoms of association and expression. These are fundamental rights, and any legislation must be crafted with care to respect them while addressing harmful practices. Critics may also raise legitimate concerns, from a human rights perspective, if legislation appears excessively reliant on criminal legal systems, which are often themselves a locus of rights violations. Transparent and inclusive dialogue can help address these concerns, clarify the scope of the law, and ensure that it is designed to balance these freedoms with the protection of vulnerable individuals from harm.

However, it is equally crucial to recognize that legislative proposals will face attacks from anti-gender groups. These organizations, often backed by international funding, have perfected disinformation strategies that include spreading lies and exaggerations. These attacks are not improvised; they are part of well-coordinated campaigns aimed at delegitimizing advances in LGBTIQ people's human rights by appealing to unfounded fears and distorting the scope of the proposed laws.

To ensure these disinformation campaigns fail, thorough and strategic preparation is essential. This involves constantly monitoring the narratives and tactics of anti-gender groups, crafting clear and effective messages that resonate with public concerns, and having trained spokespeople who can communicate with authority and empathy. Moreover, it is crucial to strengthen alliances with media outlets, civil society organizations, and influential figures who can amplify fact-based messages and swiftly counter disinformation. An effective strategy should also include creating accessible spaces for public dialogue, where concerns can be addressed and trust can be built around the goals of the legislation.

Finally, it is important to frame this debate within a broader context: these anti-gender campaigns are not exclusive to one country or region but are part of a global strategy aimed at rolling back progress on equality and human rights and bolstering authoritarianism. Recognizing this dynamic and addressing it with a strategic and collaborative approach is essential to counter disinformation and ensure that the proposed legislation fulfills its purpose of protecting the dignity and rights of LGBTIQ individuals.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do parents have the right to raise their children as they see fit? If so, don't they have the right to subject them to conversion practices?

It is important to differentiate between parents' rights to raise their children and children's rights to be protected from harmful practices. While parents have the responsibility to care for and educate their children according to their beliefs and values, they also have the obligation not to endanger their children's health and well-being.

Certain forms of conversion practices can constitute child abuse or neglect, as they inflict psychological, emotional, or even physical harm on children. These practices are widely recognized as harmful and inhuman by medical and mental health professionals, and they violate children's rights to safety and dignity. Laws addressing conversion practices are designed to protect children from such harm, regardless of whether these practices are initiated by parents or others.

Would seeking to eradicate conversion practices rooted in specific creeds violate religious freedom?

Religious freedom is not an absolute right. This right must be balanced with other fundamental rights and values, such as equality, non-discrimination, identity, physical and psychological integrity, and human dignity.

Well-crafted laws that aim to prevent, prohibit, or regulate forms of conversion practices should not interfere with the practice of religion itself. Individuals and religious organizations can continue to believe what they wish and practice their faith according to their religious beliefs and traditions. Laws that prohibit the use of coercive methods to attempt to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity are not an attack on religion—they are simply reinforcing the role of the state in preventing acts, in any sector, that are unwanted and cause harm.

Do these laws affect freedom of expression?

Fundamental rights like freedom of expression are not absolute and can have reasonable limits, and democratic countries establish restrictions on freedom of expression to protect people's rights and prevent harm to society. That said, legislators have a responsibility to ensure that any restrictions on expression are carefully justified and do not disproportionately affect this right. This means being explicit in the legislation about its purpose and scope, ensuring it addresses harmful actions without encroaching on legitimate expression of ideas or beliefs.

Would a law to eradicate conversion practices affect a trans person's ability to seek medical treatments to express their gender identity?

Gender-affirming medical treatments are not conversion practices. Laws addressing conversion practices should clearly distinguish between harmful interventions aimed at suppressing or altering an individual's sexual orientation or gender expression and affirming medical care that supports individuals in making decisions about their gender and body.

This argument may arise as part of disinformation strategies by anti-LGBTQ sectors. It is, therefore, essential for the law to explicitly define conversion practices and make clear

that gender-affirming care, which is provided based on informed consent and professional standards, is not included. Clear definitions and exclusions within the law help to prevent misuse and ensure that it protects, rather than restricts, access to affirming care for trans individuals.

Should legislation against conversion practices apply only to cisgender gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, excluding transgender individuals?

Such an exclusion would be deeply unjust and harmful. Conversion practices are damaging regardless of whether they target a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Transgender individuals are often subjected to the same harmful and coercive efforts to suppress or change their identities, causing significant psychological, emotional, and physical harm.

A similar debate occurred in the United Kingdom in 2022, where an initial proposal for prohibiting forms of conversion practices excluded transgender individuals.³⁰ This exclusion faced widespread criticism from LGBTQ organizations, mental health experts, and human rights advocates, who argued that it created a harmful double standard and left transgender people unprotected. The exclusion was seen as a step backward for equality, as it ignored the evidence that transgender individuals are also frequently targeted by such practices, often with devastating consequences.

Laws aimed at eradicating conversion practices must protect all individuals, including transgender people, because the underlying issue is the attempt to invalidate or alter fundamental aspects of a person's identity. Excluding transgender individuals from such protections not only leaves them vulnerable to abuse but also perpetuates discrimination against an already marginalized group. Indeed, given the heightened marginalization of trans people, laws should include, in their preventive provisions, an explicit emphasis on the state's obligation to provide public education that enhances understanding of gender diversity.

Comprehensive legislation ensures that all LGBTQ people, regardless of whether they are cisgender or transgender, are equally protected from harmful practices that have no therapeutic value and violate basic human rights.

³⁰ Sophie Gallagher and Josh Parry, "Conversion therapy: Ban to go ahead but not cover trans people," *BBC*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60947028>.



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