



DATE: November 20, 2024

TO: UN OHCHR

FROM: Outright International

RE: Input for HC Report Pursuant to Human Rights Council Res. 55/14

Outright International

Outright International works with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) human rights movement, documenting and exposing human rights violations against LGBTIQ people and advocating 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, and civil society partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

Outright's Global Intersex Program aims to address the unique and intersecting human rights issues impacting people born with physical sex characteristics that don't align with typical notions of either a female or male body. Outright has issued submissions to national and state lawmakers to inform legislation protecting intersex people from harmful medical interventions in [Greece](#) and [Australia](#), made [submissions](#) informing reports by UN Special Procedures mandate holders on the subject of sports and human rights as pertaining to intersex people, and contributed during the Human Rights Council informal sessions in Geneva on Human Rights Council Resolution 55/14 on intersex human rights. We regularly work in partnership with activists around the world to advance the human rights of intersex persons.

Worldwide Violence and Discrimination Against Intersex Individuals

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.

In December 2024, Outright will publish the report *"I Am" Intersex: Global Voices for Intersex Justice* based on desk research and qualitative interviews conducted with intersex activists in 2024. It centers the movement's development in eleven select countries where Outright has engaged with intersex activists. Outright's engagement spans a range of initiatives, including grant support, technical assistance, training, and other opportunities through Outright programs such as LBQ Connect, UN Advocacy Week, and the Rights and Religion Fellowship.

Outright conducted individual semi-structured interviews remotely via video link with 15 activists from 11 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Serbia, and Thailand. The research found that intersex people worldwide are in a fight for recognition, for bodily autonomy, and, sometimes, for their very lives. Intersex people confront pervasive violence and discrimination:

- Violence in the form of **medically unnecessary and nonconsensual surgery, including intersex genital mutilation**, on infants and young children is a standard practice in many medical establishments, including hospitals and clinics.
- **Abandonment and infanticide** by family members is rampant.
- **Bullying** and violence by both peers and adults in schools are commonplace.
- Anti-intersex prejudices and **harmful practices by healthcare providers** compromise intersex people's life-long health.
- **Administrative failures and gaps regarding identity documents** create barriers to full participation in education, the workforce, and society.
- Exclusion of intersex women from **participation in sports**, particularly at the international level, in addition to or resulting from invasive sex testing and medical exams.

Non-Consensual Harmful Medical Procedures

Globally, intersex infants and young children endure irreversible harm due to forced medical interventions, including unnecessary and irreversible 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.

These harmful medical practices akin to torture occur in hospitals and clinics worldwide and may be viewed by some as a profitable business. A November 2024 industry report dispassionately proclaimed that the global intersex medical interventions market size is anticipated to hold a significant share by 2033, growing more than 11% compound annual growth rate over ten years¹. The report further breaks down anticipated growth projects by region, stating Asia-Pacific is expected to grow the fastest during this period.

Protecting the bodily autonomy of intersex children against the medical industrial complex and preventing irreversible physical and emotional harm by ending these destructive medical practices is one of the global intersex movement's top priorities.

¹ Spherical Insights, "Global Intersex Medical Interventions Market," November 2024, <https://www.sphericalinsights.com/reports/intersex-medical-interventions-market>.

Moreover, no single country in the world has put in place 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.

Abandonment and Infanticide

In some parts of the world, children born with visible genital differences at birth are routinely abandoned by family members or even at risk for infanticide. Misconceptions about the birth of an intersex child being a curse or a bad omen in some cultures also cause some birth mothers to be abandoned by their husbands, extended families, and communities.

Hindering Access to Services

In some countries, when an intersex child is born and deemed not to meet standard ideas about being 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 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 sometimes 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 leads to more barriers in education, employment, and access to services while putting them at greater risk for other forms of violence and discrimination.

In much of the world, intersex children face bullying and violence at the hands of both 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.

Exclusion from Participation in Sport

Intersex women face significant challenges when participating in sports at various levels. For decades, intersex women in sports, especially in professional and elite-level athletics, have been subjected to coercive sex testing and medical interventions that amount to violence. For intersex athletes, these practices often lead to their disqualification from the competition of their choice. World Athletics—the governing body for the sport of track and field athletics, formerly known as The International Association of Athletics (IAAF)—for years has tried to prevent female athletes with various intersex traits, also known as differences in sex development, from participating in its global competitions.

Specifically, World Athletics has targeted women with hypogonadism, a natural variation that involves possessing higher than typical levels of androgens such as testosterone. World Athletics has accused them of having an unfair substantial advantage due to their natural sex variations. A series of revisions of World

Athletics regulations have failed to end medical violence against female intersex athletes and have demonstrated the determination of World Athletics to exclude them.

Global South Activists Survey Results

In mid-2024, Outright surveyed intersex activists from the Global South to better understand the movement's priority issues, challenges, and needs. Twenty-six activists participated, including twelve from Africa, eight from Latin America, and six from Asia. Outright listed six issues affecting intersex communities – nonconsensual harmful medical practices, access to intersex-affirming health care, access to self-attested legal-gender recognition, discrimination and bullying in schools, child abandonment and/or infanticide, and workplace discrimination.

Outright analyzed the top three priorities of all participants. For 96% of participants, “Nonconsensual Harmful Medical Practices” was among their top three priorities; 85% of participants rated “Intersex Affirming Health Care” among their top priorities; and 42% included “Child Abandonment/Infanticide” among their top priorities.

For African and Asian participants, more than 50% prioritized “Child Abandonment/Infanticide,” indicating that this problem is significantly more pervasive in Africa and Asia than in Latin America. A small number of respondents, 8%, indicated that their number one priority was “Access to Self-Attested Legal Gender Recognition.”

Generally speaking, data concerning the incidence of intersex child abandonment and infanticide are not readily available. These egregious human rights violations against intersex children are not often acknowledged or discussed publicly. However, during interviews, some intersex activists from Africa shared anecdotal knowledge of both abandonment by family members and infanticide at either the hands of family, birth attendants, or traditional healers.

For example, activist Sammie MacJessie notes the immense challenge in Malawi is the widely shared cultural belief that intersex people are cursed, and many believe the prevailing myth that they are “evil demons.” They explain intersex children are seen as taboo, bringing bad luck to both their family and community, that a large number of intersex children drop out of school due to severe bullying, and that some infants are killed soon after birth by either the midwife or a parent.