



Alliance  
internationale  
francophone  
pour l'égalité  
et les diversités

## Lessons Learned

# LGBTQI+ inclusive PSEA policies: Lessons learned from Égides

Digna's Case Study #5 – January 2023

## Introduction

### The Case Study

This case study covers the uniqueness of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in the context of international LGBTQI+ work, and its impacts on the process of designing a policy reflecting the necessary intersectional and inclusive perspective. It highlights the many challenges faced in the development of the policy, considering the young organization's limited capacities and distinctive identity in the international cooperation sector as an international LGBTQI+ alliance. This case study aims to identify and share Égides' unique experience in developing a truly intersectional policy for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and address some of the stigmas still surrounding LGBTQI+ work in the sector.

- **Leadership from higher governance is crucial, especially to prioritize the issue, encourage participation at all levels of the organization, and ensure proper allocation of resources.** The participatory process can be used as a unique opportunity to both raise awareness on PSEA and build ownership, knowledge, and capacities.
- **A PSEA policy should be inspired by the organization's own values and principles, but also scaled to its current capacities.** The policy's ambition and scope must grow with the organization's ability, as a living document.
- **For a PSEA policy to be truly inclusive, it is crucial for the organization to be consistent in setting their values clearly at all levels of the organization – from the headquarters to country offices.** The practice of values and principles can be heavily influenced by norms, attitudes and behaviours related to specific contexts and significant disparities may exist in the implementation of some principles between offices. If an organization chooses to adopt an intersectional approach – which includes sexual and gender diversity – it must absolutely ensure that it is understood and accepted equally by everyone in the organization, regardless of their context, to avoid re-victimization and potential harm for LGBTQI+ survivors and victims of SEA, who could then be discouraged from reporting concerns.
- **Understanding of PSEA varies significantly based on diverse factors such as geography, sector, experience, culture, and a participatory approach helps tremendously in ensuring the policy addresses a coherent ensemble of common needs and priorities of frontline organizations, especially for a membership-based organization.**

## About the Policy

The movement to improve the ways PSEA is addressed and implemented has been gaining momentum. There is increasing awareness of the necessity to adopt an intersectional feminist approach within the sector, which includes acknowledging the impacts of other dimensions of a person's identity on their level of vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). As an international LGBTQI+ organization, Égides has always recognized that more must be done in the area of PSEA, and that various factors such as age, disability, migration status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics should shape the response to SEA. Current PSEA policies and practices rarely go beyond the binary concept of gender, and hardly ever address stereotypes and perceptions surrounding LGBTQI+ communities that can negatively affect an organization's handling of SEA cases.

In 2021, Égides drafted its first PSEA policy, which aims to ensure that all people and communities it works with are protected regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. In accordance with the organization's strong values, the policy was designed around a resolute intersectional perspective, aiming to recognize and respond to the various types of discrimination faced by individuals within a PSEA framework, based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex characteristics, but also their ethnicity, skin color, religion, among other identity factors.

"This policy is based on an inclusive and feminist approach, focusing on the rights and needs of survivors as actors in their own lives. It is based on an intersectional analysis of personhood and sexual violence to understand the interactions between the many forms of discrimination that particularly compound the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ people."

The policy aims to be first and foremost preventative, and includes specific measures to stop sexual exploitation and abuse from happening in the first place, including:

- Creating a specific communication strategy to promote and disseminate prevention information among staff and partners.
- Conducting background checks in the recruitment process of new employees.
- Implementing mandatory PSEA training as part of the onboarding and orientation package for new employees.

## Process



To ensure the development of a PSEA policy that responds to Égides' objectives, it was crucial to secure the support of a consultant who not only had the required PSEA expertise in the international cooperation sector, but also possessed the required sensibility to LGBTQI+ issues, diversity, and intersectionality. Those requirements were laid out in a set of terms of reference to find a consultant who would be able to take various responsibilities under the supervision of the executive director, including:

- Developing a PSEA policy that conforms to Canadian and international standards, from a feminist, intersectional and survivor-centered perspective.
- Creating a training module on the policy for the Égides' team and partners.
- Building an implementation plan for the policy, including reporting mechanisms, investigations processes, protection systems, and remedies, as well as targeted actions for dissemination, information, and training.

For Égides, it was also essential for the process to be spearheaded by senior leadership in the organization: the executive director remained the point of reference for the consultants, the board of directors was not only consulted but also kept up to date on the elaboration, and eventually gave the final signoff on the policy, ensuring high level buy-in.

The policy development process took a participatory approach, which included the voices of staff, management, board of directors, and around 80 member organizations – the number of member organizations of Égides at that time in 2021 – through an online survey. It also involved individual key informant interviews with implementing partners. A total of 46 responses were collected through the process, including 12 interviews with local partners in projects in Africa, Europe, and North America. This established a first portrait of LGBTQI+ organizations' understanding of PSEA, availability of resources for survivors, as well as issues related to LGBTQI+ people's access to those resources, especially in hostile contexts to LGBTQI+ communities. The policy was drafted based on the collected data and discussed with the board's governance committee for multiple rounds of feedback and adjustments before the final version was presented to the board of directors for approval. At the time of this case study publication, Égides is still working with the consultant to create a code of conduct, training modules and implementation plan for the policy.

## Learnings from the participatory approach

As a small-scale organization with a very large membership, Égides' member organizations are at the heart of its work. PSEA, in its prevalent form in the international cooperation sector, is also a relatively new topic for the LGBTQI+ sector, that needs exploration. It was therefore essential to support a participatory process to establish a baseline related to LGBTQI+ organizations' perceptions and understanding of the subject. The results revealed there is very limited knowledge in the LGBTQI+ sector about what PSEA is and entails.

Because of the diversity of organizations and geographic locations, the consultants also played a crucial role in unpacking the various dimensions addressed in the process, such as levels of understanding of PSEA, perceived vulnerability, and diversity of legal frameworks. The survey had to be accessible for anyone unfamiliar with PSEA.

The consultants ensured that:

- terms were adequately defined,
- the difference between a PSEA policy and a human resources policy against sexual and psychological harassment in the workplace was clarified,
- the project and its rationale were properly introduced,
- questions on sensitive issues were clearly formulated.

## Levels of responsibility

The diversity of countries and partners working with Égides poses its own challenges, with vastly varying attitudes, norms, and behaviours, especially related to LGBTQI+ issues, with a lot of Égides' member organizations working in hostile contexts. Égides therefore acknowledges the need to contextualize its policy, including the preventive strategies laid out in it, as well as to map locally available resources and service providers. As a small-scale and young organization, Égides does not have the capacity to conduct the contextualization for all its 180 member organizations working in 31 countries across the world; the policy lays out this process as a responsibility of partners and members in their own local contexts. The design phase of the procedures to implement the policy will be an opportunity to further reflect on the different levels of responsibility and accountability and ensure that all stakeholders in the network will play their role in the process, from training to addressing reports, investigating, and protecting survivors and victims, based on their proximity to communities, availability of services and their own organizational capacities.

## Support to Survivors and Do No Harm

The international cooperation sector in Canada as a whole does not have a significant experience related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. Égides has therefore decided to include the definitions of key terms to clarify the diverse dimensions of identity that its policy intends to cover.

Égides' policy aims to look at PSEA from a feminist perspective, in line with the organizational values that were adopted at its foundation in 2019. Additionally, a human-centered approach was applied from the beginning of the design process, analyzing the different aspects of identity and their impact on people's levels of vulnerability to SEA and needs in accessing adequate support and services.

The policy also acknowledges the shared responsibility for diversity and inclusion as essential factors to achieve transformative change in the way SEA cases are being addressed at all stages, beyond the analysis of vulnerability based on sex or age only. It pushes the organization to consider

experiences of inequality, discrimination and violence lived by LGBTQI+ communities. Most importantly, the policy deliberately focuses on survivors and victims and their empowerment along the process, with concrete measures to be adopted to acknowledge and address trauma, to evaluate and mitigate risks – including the risks of re-victimization – as well as to implement principles of confidentiality and do no harm.

The principle of do no harm is particularly crucial in the work of Égides and lays an even more considerable challenge to the implementation of a PSEA policy when it comes to accessing support services and possible legal recourse for LGBTQI+ victims and survivors of SEA. Considering the social stigma existing around LGBTQI+ communities and the criminalization of same-sex relationships and non-conforming gender identities and expressions in many contexts Égides' members work in, further reflection in collaboration with local LGBTQI+ organizations will be needed to ensure the safety of all parties involved in reported SEA cases.



# Challenges

Developing a PSEA policy for a small and young organization comes with many challenges, including that novelty of SEA in the LGBTQI+ sector and the limited level of resources available to conduct this work:

## 1. Addressing knowledge gaps:

PSEA as it is known in the international cooperation sector is still relatively new in the LGBTQI+ sector, and it took Égides several months to get the policy approved by its board of directors, partly due to low levels of awareness about what PSEA is, and the distinction between a PSEA policy and human resources policy against harassment in the workplace. It resulted in significant delays in the implementation of the policy itself and the design of the processes and mechanisms required. The consultants also had to face important challenges trying to reconcile sometimes conflicting perspectives on the scope of the policy, the feminist vision of the board, and the PSEA norms and standards set at Canadian and international levels, with some directors feeling the policy presented to them was not going far enough in terms of protection.

## 2. Organizational capacities as a global network:

The scope of the policy originally covered Égides, its staff, board directors, partners, and all 180 member organizations. This became a capacity concern – human and financial – to actually support the responsibility laid out in the document.

The scope of the policy was then limited to Égides, its staff, board directors, and partners which are in a contribution agreement with the network. Égides is currently reflecting on the ways to support the diffusion of its policy to its member organizations and the development of their capacities to address SEA.

## 3. Sex work:

Sex work has been a sensitive issue in the international cooperation but is a central topic in LGBTQI+ work globally, with a significant representation of LGBTQI+ communities among sex workers. While IASC's standards seem to clearly prohibit sex work – often conflating it with sexual exploitation – Égides needed to be more nuanced in its approach, and its policy had to reflect the principle of empowerment it carries. Égides decided to establish a clear distinction between sex work and sexual exploitation and acknowledge the empowerment and rights of sex workers. The policy explains that:

*“Égides makes no judgment about people involved in the sex industry, including those who engage in sex work and provide sexual service in exchange for money, gifts, or material support (transactional sex). Égides supports unconditionally the rights of those persons to live and work in safe environment, with dignity, free from any form of exploitation, and to access adequate healthcare and participate in their community.*”

However, due to the unequal power relations inherent to international cooperation work (...), Égides strictly prohibits its staff, and related personnel and strongly discourages its partners' staff from buying or exchanging sex for money, employment, material support or any form of payment from any person participating or benefitting from a project or program implemented by Égides or its partners.

*The participation in consensual sex work, strictly outside the framework of a project or intervention conducted by Égides or one of its member organizations, is at the discretion of the individual. In contexts of strong social, gender, economic or hierarchical inequalities, the use of sex work could be considered an abuse of power. Égides reiterates that acts of sexual abuse and exploitation are strictly prohibited, regardless of the context and circumstances in which they are committed."*

#### 4. Finding French-speaking resources:

Égides was created to bridge a crucial gap in the international LGBTQI+ action, which is mainly conducted in English, with very little access to international spaces and funding for French-speaking activists and organizations across the world. That same challenge appeared when looking for French-speaking PSEA experts, who were much fewer than English-speaking consultants.

## Recommendations

Taken from the perspective of intersectionality, inclusion, and participation, the lessons learned from Égides are applicable to any organization, whether it specifically works with LGBTQI+ populations or not. It is important to acknowledge that LGBTQI+ people are still to this day mainly invisible to international cooperation organizations, who often do not have the capacities or the tools – such as comprehensive gender analysis tools – allowing to understand the reality of those communities in development or humanitarian contexts. Any organization will most likely have to work at one time or the other with people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities or expressions, regardless of the objectives and targets of their programs and projects; it is crucial to ensure that their policies and practices acknowledge the differentiated challenges and needs of LGBTQI+ communities, especially in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Égides made the choice for its policy to be resolutely survivor-centered before being reputation-centered, and is clear that any PSEA intervention should be intentional as to not re-victimize LGBTQI+ survivors and victims of SEA and to promote empowerment along the process.

“The issue of LGBTQI+ persons’ status in their countries and within different communities and cultures not only makes them particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence, but also at particularly high risk of being re-victimized, judged, excluded, or even violated when reporting SEA or in investigative and judicial proceedings. An assessment of SEA risks within the organization and in each operational context and response should be conducted and reviewed regularly, and specific measures should be designed and implemented to prevent the risks of re-victimization of survivors in SEA proceedings.”

## About Égides

Égides is a young international cooperation organization created in May 2019, with the objective of connecting, mobilizing, and supporting LGBTQI+ activists across the French-speaking world. An international alliance of 180 member organizations in 31 countries worldwide, Égides brings together on an international scale, groups, communities, organizations, and collectives aiming to fight against discriminations based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, in all places where French is a relevant language for support and action. As an LGBTQI+ organization promoting empowerment, collective action, and international solidarity, Égides upholds strong values of feminism, intersectionality, and decolonization.



DIGNA, THE CANADIAN CENTRE OF EXPERTISE ON THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE, IS A PROGRAM OF COOPERATION CANADA



DIGNA IS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART THANKS TO THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA THROUGH GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA