

**UNITE IN PRIDE  
TRANS NOW,  
THEN & ALWAYS**



**National  
Oceanography  
Centre**



A GLOBAL TIMELINE OF TRANS HISTORY



TRANS RIGHTS AND RECOGNITION IN THE UK



TRANS RIGHTS TODAY

---

Welcome to this second edition of our booklet exploring trans history in the UK and around the world. Building on our original booklet, this updated version expands the timeline, context and lived experiences that continue to shape the global trans community.

Within these pages, you'll find stories of resistance, resilience and recognition - from early gender-diverse identities across cultures to landmark moments in legal and social progress. We also reflect on the UK's trans history, spotlighting the movements, individuals and policies that have challenged discrimination and opened paths toward visibility and inclusion here.

Trans rights are human rights, yet they remain under threat in many parts of the world. This booklet is offered as a resource for understanding, a celebration of identity and a reminder that the struggle for equality is both ongoing and shared. Whether you are reading to learn, to support others or to find echoes of your own experience, we hope it serves as a meaningful contribution to our workplace and beyond.



**Mosaic of Theatrical Masks, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD**

Discovered at the *Thermae Decianae* and now held in the *Capitoline Museums*, this Roman mosaic depicts the iconic masks of *Tragedy* and *Comedy* resting on a ledge. Rooted in earlier Greek theatre traditions, these masks symbolised character, emotion and gender. In Ancient Greece, all theatrical roles were performed by men, who wore masks to portray women. This practice of cross-gender performance was central to Greek drama, offering space for gender expression within strict social norms.

## A GLOBAL TIMELINE OF TRANS HISTORY

The history of gender-diverse people is rich, varied and far older than many assume. Across cultures and centuries, people have lived outside rigid gender binaries, often in ways deeply rooted in tradition. Below is a look through the history of trans and gender-diverse experiences, plotting key events to the present day.

### C. 4000 BCE – SOUTH ASIA

#### HIJRA COMMUNITY

Gender-diverse individuals have long existed in the Indian subcontinent. Hijras appear in ancient texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Kama Sutra*, where they are portrayed as auspicious, powerful and spiritually significant figures. During the Mughal period (16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), Hijras held prominent positions in royal courts, often serving as advisors, guards or custodians of harems.

Today, Hijras are legally recognised as a third gender in countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

*How do historical accounts challenge common Western narratives about gender diversity being a recent or “modern” development?*

### PRE-CONTACT ERA – THE AMERICAS

#### TWO-SPIRIT IDENTITIES

Many Indigenous Nations across North America acknowledged more than two genders. Individuals now referred to as Two-Spirit, a pan-Indigenous term introduced in 1990, often held esteemed roles as mediators, spiritual leaders and healers.

Despite colonisation, these traditions persist and are being revitalised by Two-Spirit people today.

*What are the risks of applying modern labels to traditional identities?*

### C. 3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY BCE – ANCIENT GREECE

#### RELIGION AND THEATRE

Gender expression in Ancient Greece was complex and culturally specific. Religious rituals, performance and mythology all created space - though not always acceptance - for gender diversity.

Greek theatre also provided another outlet for gender fluidity. All roles were performed by men, including female parts with cross-dressing central to many plays. However, this form of expression was tightly controlled and did not equate to acceptance of gender-diverse identities in society at large.

*How can we tell the difference between performative and lived expressions of gender in history?*



**John Eliot Preaching to the Indians, Darley, 19<sup>th</sup> century**  
 Colonial missionary efforts in North America aimed to convert Indigenous peoples to Christianity. These missions were not only religious but cultural, enforcing strict European gender norms and contributing to the suppression of traditional gender-diverse roles. Despite such pressures, many Indigenous communities preserved these roles through resistance, resilience and oral tradition. Credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

## 218–222 CE – ANCIENT ROME

### EMPEROR ELAGABALUS

Elagabalus is one of the earliest recorded figures whose life suggests a trans-feminine identity. Historical sources, though often biased and hostile, describe how Elagabalus asked to be called a woman and sought medical transition, reportedly offering vast sums of gold to any physician who could help her physically transition. As a ruler, she also challenged gender norms through dress and public behaviour.

While the accuracy of some accounts is debated, Elagabalus remains a significant figure in understanding gender variance in ancient history.

*What does Elagabalus tell us about how gender identity has been perceived - and often misunderstood - through historical narratives?*

## 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY – ENGLAND

### ELEANOR RYKENER

Eleanor Rykener appears in a surviving court record from 1395, where she is described as living as a woman, working as an embroiderer and engaging in sex work. She was arrested while in women's clothing and questioned by authorities, who recorded her history in surprising detail.

Despite operating in a time of strict religious and gender norms, Eleanor's existence and resilience give insight into how gender-diverse lives were lived - and policed - in medieval England.

*Why do some histories survive while others are lost or erased?*

## 15<sup>TH</sup>–19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

### COLONISATION AND SUPPRESSION

European colonial powers imposed rigid binary gender norms wherever they settled, outlawing and marginalising gender-diverse roles. In the Americas, the suppression of Two-Spirit identities was accompanied by Christianisation and forced assimilation.

Despite these pressures, many gender-diverse identities persisted through oral tradition, community support and spiritual practice.

*What can we learn from the resilience of communities that preserved gender-diverse identities despite efforts to erase them?*

## 1871 – INDIA

### CRIMINAL TRIBES ACT

Under British colonial rule, the Criminal Tribes Act labelled Hijras - and many other marginalised groups - as inherently criminal. This law enabled constant surveillance and harassment, criminalising the public presence of Hijras despite their respected cultural roles. It imposed rigid ideas of gender and morality, disrupting traditions that had existed for centuries.

Although the Act was repealed in 1952, its legacy remains. Hijra communities still face stigma, discrimination and police harassment - echoes of colonial categorisation that continue to shape attitudes today.

*How do colonial laws continue to shape attitudes and treatment of gender-diverse people long after independence?*



**Statue of Marsha P. Johnson, Central Park, New York City**

A powerful tribute to a trailblazing trans woman of colour whose bravery and activism were central to the Stonewall Riots of 1969, Marsha's unwavering commitment to justice, visibility and support for marginalised queer and trans people continues to inspire. This statue serves as a reminder of the vital role that trans people have played in shaping history and pushing forward the fight for equality. Credit: Flickr/Elvert Barnes.

## 1919–1933 – GERMANY

### THE INSTITUTE FOR SEXUAL RESEARCH

Dr Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician and sexologist, founded the institute in Berlin in 1919. It supported trans and queer individuals with medical care, research, and advocacy. The institute issued “transvestite passes” for people to safely dress in public and offered some of the earliest documented gender-affirming surgeries.

In 1933, the Nazi SA destroyed the institute, burned its extensive library and archives, and erased much of this early history.

*How has political extremism historically threatened gender-diverse people and their knowledge?*

## 1969 – USA

### STONEWALL RIOTS

In the early hours of 28 June 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City. While such raids were common, that night sparked resistance. Patrons and locals fought back, leading to several days of demonstrations. Trans women of colour, including Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, are often cited as key figures in the uprising.

Though not the beginning of LGBTQIA+ activism, Stonewall became a rallying point, inspiring a global movement for change.

*Why is it important to centre the experiences of the most marginalised within historical moments of resistance?*

## 1972 – SWEDEN

### LEGAL RECOGNITION

Sweden became the first country in the world to legally recognise gender transition. Trans people could amend their legal documents to reflect their gender identity and access state-sponsored gender-affirming medical care. However, the law also required sterilisation, a policy that remained until 2013. Despite this, Sweden's early legislation marked a major step in human rights law.

*How can progressive policies still create harm, and what does meaningful reform look like?*

## 1990s–2000s

### GLOBAL MOMENTUM

During this period, international momentum for trans rights accelerated. Legal recognition began appearing in countries such as the Netherlands, Australia and parts of South America. Trans people were increasingly visible in academic research, documentaries and grassroots campaigns.

Notable milestones include the founding of global trans organisations like Transgender Europe (TGEU, 2005) and national reforms in Argentina, which would later inspire landmark legislation. Media representation also started shifting, with more complex portrayals of trans characters and lives.

*What role does representation play in changing public attitudes toward trans people?*



**A prominent Hijra activist, performer and cultural leader, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, 2017**  
Laxmi continues to play a vital role in advancing transgender rights in India. She actively champions the legal recognition of the third gender, a landmark achievement that protects the rights of gender-diverse communities under the constitution. Through her advocacy, Laxmi challenges the lingering impacts of colonial-era discrimination and fights for the full inclusion of Hijras and other marginalised groups in education, healthcare and public services.

## 2014 – INDIA

### A THIRD GENDER

In a landmark judgement, India's Supreme Court ruled that the constitution protects the rights of transgender people under fundamental rights to equality and freedom. It officially recognised a third gender category and directed government bodies to ensure inclusion in education, healthcare, and public services.

This ruling helped to re-legitimise long-marginalised communities such as Hijras, Aravans and Jogappas. It also marked a significant cultural and legal reversal of colonial-era discrimination.

*How does legal recognition impact day-to-day experiences for gender-diverse communities?*

## 2015 – MALTA

### SELF IDENTIFICATION

Malta passed the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act, allowing individuals to legally change their gender based on self-identification - without requiring medical diagnosis or intervention. The law also banned non-consensual medical interventions on intersex children.

Malta's legislation set a new global standard, rooted in bodily autonomy and the right to self-determination.

*What does true bodily autonomy mean and who gets to decide?*

## 2020s

### GLOBAL VISIBILITY AND BACKLASH

Public figures like Laverne Cox, Elliot Page and Travis Alabanza have played pivotal roles in raising public awareness and visibility of trans lives, particularly through media, arts and advocacy.

Despite this visibility, trans people have faced intensifying backlash. Anti-trans legislation and rhetoric have surged globally, with particular focus on restricting youth access to gender-affirming healthcare, banning trans athletes and censoring education around LGBTQIA+ topics.

*Why do visibility and backlash often appear side by side in human rights movements?*

## 2019–2023

### THE PANDEMIC AND ITS AFTERMATH

The pandemic severely disrupted access to gender-affirming healthcare. Lockdowns, overwhelmed health systems and resource shifts caused delays, cancellations and denial of treatments such as hormone therapy, surgeries and mental health support.

These interruptions affected not only physical health but also mental wellbeing, with social isolation and economic hardship compounding barriers for many marginalised trans people.

*What can the pandemic teach us about building fairer support for trans people in future crises?*



**Trans Rights Protest in London, Soho London, 2021**  
Protesters gather wearing face masks and holding signs, standing united in the ongoing fight for trans rights amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite disruptions to healthcare access and increased social isolation, trans communities continue to demand visibility, justice and equality. Credit: Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona.

## PRESENT DAY

### ONGOING ADVOCACY AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

Trans communities worldwide continue to push for legal recognition, healthcare access and social inclusion, building on earlier gains while facing new challenges. Increasing numbers of countries are adopting self-identification laws and expanding protections in education, employment and healthcare, reflecting a growing understanding of gender diversity as a fundamental human right.

At the same time, some regions experience intensified backlash, with legislation targeting trans youth healthcare, public participation and expression. Misinformation and political debates fuel stigma and threaten hard-won progress. In response, trans activists and allies are deepening grassroots organising, legal advocacy and cultural visibility to protect and advance rights.

Media representation and public figures remain crucial in challenging stereotypes and inspiring younger generations, while community-led mutual aid and support networks provide vital lifelines. The path ahead is one of both hope and resistance, highlighting the importance of solidarity, resilience and continued commitment to equality.

*How can global solidarity strengthen local efforts to ensure trans rights and wellbeing for all?*

## NATIONAL SUPPORT

### STONEWALL UK

The largest LGBTQIA+ rights organisation in the UK, offering resources, guidance, and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

[stonewall.org.uk](http://stonewall.org.uk)

### MERMAIDS

A UK charity which supports transgender and gender-diverse children, young people, and their families.

[mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://mermaidsuk.org.uk)

### GENDERED INTELLIGENCE

A trans-led charity focused on increasing understanding of gender diversity and supporting young trans people.

[genderedintelligence.co.uk](http://genderedintelligence.co.uk)

### ALL ABOUT TRANS

A project aimed at improving media representation of trans people and providing resources for accurate portrayal.

[allabouttrans.org.uk](http://allabouttrans.org.uk)

### TRANSACTUAL UK

A network of trans and non-binary activists advocating for trans rights and visibility in the UK.

[transactual.org.uk](http://transactual.org.uk)

## TRANS RIGHTS AND RECOGNITION IN THE UK

The history of trans rights in the UK is a complex journey of resilience, struggle and gradual progress. From early recorded instances of gender diversity to contemporary legal and social battles, trans people have continually challenged societal norms and fought for recognition, dignity and equality. This timeline highlights key moments that have shaped the landscape of trans rights, healthcare and visibility, while reflecting ongoing challenges and the path forward.

### 18<sup>TH</sup> - 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

#### PIONEERS OF GENDER NONCONFORMITY

Historical records reveal examples of gender nonconformity in the UK dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One notable figure was Charles de Beaumont, the Chevalier d'Éon, who publicly lived as both a man and a woman during the late 1700s, challenging rigid gender norms of the time.

During the Victorian era, gender variance was often hidden due to strict societal expectations. Yet some, like Boulton and Park - two men arrested in 1870 for dressing as women - defied these norms, drawing public and legal attention to issues of gender expression.

*How do you think early public cases of gender nonconformity shaped societal attitudes towards gender diversity in later years?*

### EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

#### TRAILBLAZERS OF MEDICAL TRANSITION

Lili Elbe, a Danish painter, was among the first known people to undergo gender reassignment surgery in the early 1930s. Though not British, her story reached the UK and influenced public views on transgender identities.

Roberta Cowell, a British trans woman, became one of the first in the UK to have gender reassignment surgery in 1951, marking an important moment of visibility for trans people in Britain.

*What impact do you think early medical transitions had on public understanding and acceptance of trans people?*

### 1960s TO 1980s

#### GROWING AWARENESS AND ORGANISED ADVOCACY

April Ashley, a British model, was outed as transgender in 1961, leading to a landmark legal case and increased public awareness despite widespread prejudice. In the 1970s, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality expanded its focus to include trans issues, recognising the shared struggles within LGBTQ+ communities.

The founding of Press for Change in 1989 marked a crucial step for organised trans rights activism in the UK, playing a vital role in pushing for legal recognition and rights.

*How important is community organisation and visibility?*

**Frederick Park and Ernest Boulton, 1869**

Also known by their stage names, Fanny and Stella, the pair were arrested in 1870 after being seen in public wearing women's clothing, leading to a sensational trial at the time. Although they were ultimately acquitted, their case drew unprecedented public attention to gender nonconformity in Victorian Britain and remains one of the earliest documented legal episodes involving gender expression in the UK.



**1989**

**STRUCTURED HEALTHCARE ACCESS**

The establishment of specialised NHS Gender Identity Clinics, beginning notably with the Charing Cross Hospital clinic in London, marked a crucial development in the UK. These clinics provided a more formalised and accessible pathway for trans people seeking gender-affirming healthcare.

While they represented progress in medical support, long waiting lists and limited resources have often posed significant challenges. The clinics have remained central to trans healthcare in the UK, reflecting both progress and ongoing struggles in equitable service provision.

*How can healthcare systems better balance specialised care with accessibility to meet the needs of gender-diverse communities?*

**1996**

**LEGAL MILESTONES TOWARDS EQUALITY**

The European Court of Justice ruled in P vs. S and Cornwall County Council that it was unlawful to dismiss a person because of their gender reassignment, establishing that employment discrimination against trans people was illegal under EU law.

The landmark decision marked the first time trans rights were explicitly protected under EU legislation, setting a powerful precedent that paved the way for future legal recognition and anti-discrimination protections.

*What are the benefits and challenges of requiring medical diagnosis for legal gender recognition?*

**2004**

**LEGAL RECOGNITION AND BUREAUCRACY**

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 introduced the Gender Recognition Panel, a tribunal responsible for evaluating applications for legal gender change. This was a landmark moment for legal recognition of trans identities in the UK, allowing individuals to obtain new birth certificates.

However, the panel's process has faced criticism for its complexity, invasiveness and exclusion of non-binary identities. Debates continue about reforming this system to be more inclusive, respectful and less bureaucratic.

*What would a fair and dignified legal recognition process look like for trans and non-binary people today?*

**2010s**

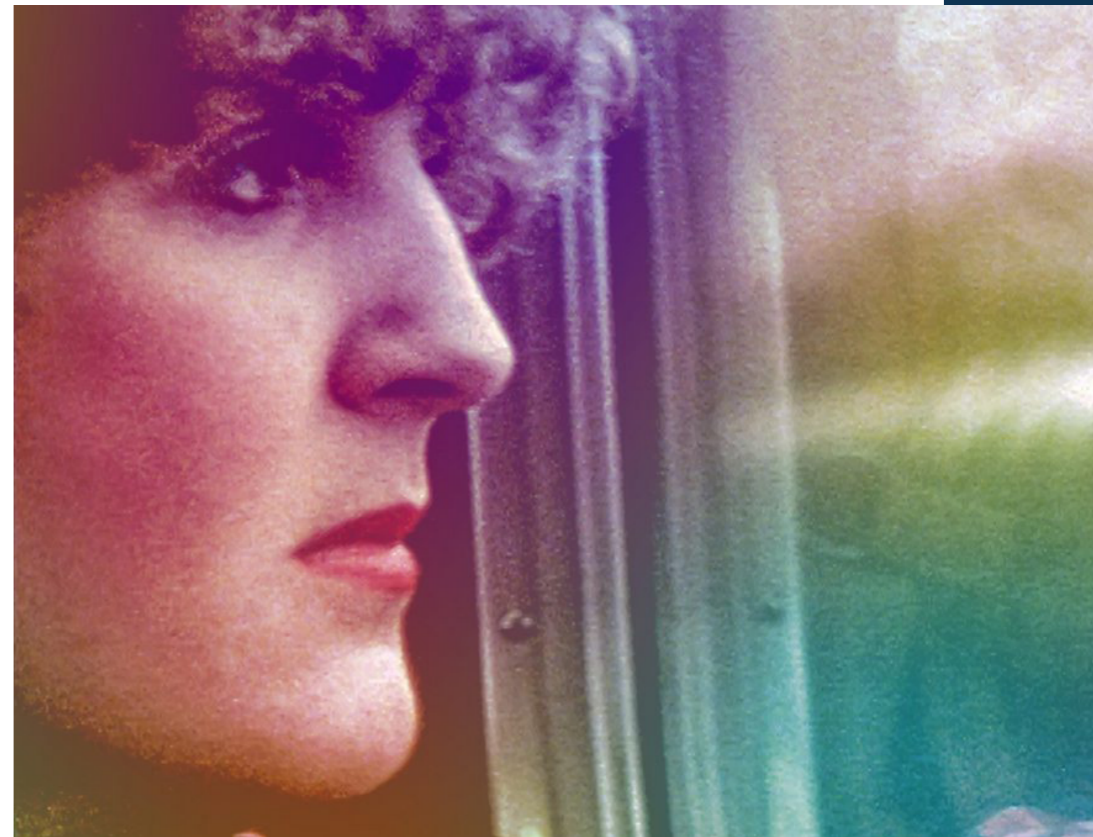
**MODERN LEGAL PROTECTIONS AND VISIBILITY**

The Equality Act 2010 offered comprehensive protections by recognising gender reassignment as a protected characteristic against discrimination. Whilst the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013 positively affected many trans people by allowing same-sex marriage and removing the need to annul marriages upon gender recognition.

Visibility of trans people in public life continue to increase with many public figures using their platforms to advocate and educate.

*How does visibility in media and culture influence legal and social acceptance of trans people today?*

**Julia Grant in the BBC documentary series "A Change of Sex", 1979-1989**  
A pioneering British trans woman, Julia Grant became one of the first trans people to share her transition journey on national television through a groundbreaking BBC documentary series. Her story offered the UK public an unprecedented look into the experiences of trans people, including her treatment at the Charing Cross Gender Identity Clinic. Julia helped bring visibility to the challenges of medical transition and the often difficult dynamics between trans patients and clinical gatekeepers at the time. Credit: BBC.



## PRESENT DAY

### LEGAL AND HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES

The UK Supreme Court issued a landmark judgment with significant legal implications regarding the definition of “woman.” The case focused on how the Gender Recognition Act and the Equality Act are interpreted, particularly in relation to legal recognition and access to single-sex spaces. While the court confirmed that trans people holding a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) are legally recognised in their affirmed gender, it also ruled that certain single-sex services may lawfully exclude trans women in specific circumstances, effectively emphasising a definition of “woman” based on biological sex for those contexts.

This ruling has caused a ripple effect in public discourse, policy, and service provision. Critics argue that it opens the door to increased discrimination and legal uncertainty, especially for non-binary people and those without a GRC, while supporters claim it provides clarity for organisations. The judgment has intensified debates over gender identity, legal rights and the responsibilities of public bodies, exposing deep divisions and ongoing legal ambiguities.

At the same time, trans people in the UK continue to face serious barriers to accessing gender-affirming healthcare through the NHS. Long waiting lists, inconsistent clinical pathways and regional disparities leave many without essential care. These healthcare challenges are compounded by persistent social stigma, misinformation and a rise in hate crimes.

*How should legal systems uphold the rights of trans people while also addressing public concerns?*

## REGIONAL SUPPORT

### SOUTHAMPTON

#### BREAKOUT YOUTH

A support service for LGBTQIA+ young people in Hampshire.

[breakoutyouth.org.uk](http://breakoutyouth.org.uk)

#### NO LIMITS

A charity offering support and advice to young people in Southampton.

[nolimitshelp.org.uk](http://nolimitshelp.org.uk)

#### THE RAINBOW PROJECT

A community organisation that provides support and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

[therainbowprojectsouthampton.co.uk](http://therainbowprojectsouthampton.co.uk)

### LIVERPOOL

#### GYRO (GAY YOUTH 'R' OUT)

A youth group offering support to LGBTQIA+ young people.

[ypas.org.uk/what-we-do/well-being-services/gyro](http://ypas.org.uk/what-we-do/well-being-services/gyro)

#### SAHIR HOUSE

A charity providing support, information, and advocacy for people living with HIV, with a focus on LGBTQIA+ communities in Liverpool.

[sahir.org.uk](http://sahir.org.uk)

**Trans Aid Cymru Protest, Cardiff, Wales, 21 April 2025**  
The UK Supreme Court's ruling - originating from a Scottish case - on the legal definition of "woman" under the Equality Act 2010. The decision has had wide-reaching repercussions across the UK, including Wales, sparking concerns about the exclusion of trans people from single-sex spaces. Over a thousand people, both transgender and cisgender, gathered to voice their opposition, chanting and singing as they marched through the city centre. Credit: Wikimedia/Sleepytimecat





**Pride Activists, St Petersburg, Russia, 2014**

2014, a year marked by international scrutiny as the country hosted the Winter Olympics in Sochi. While the world celebrated sport, Russia's LGBTQIA+ community faced severe restrictions, including a ban on so-called "gay propaganda" and the enforcement of a 100-year ban on Pride events in Moscow. Despite threats of arrest and violence, demonstrators risked their safety to be seen, heard and counted. Credit: Flickr/Maria Komarova.

## TRANS RIGHTS TODAY

### LEGAL RECOGNITION OF GENDER IDENTITY

Being able to update legal documents - like passports, birth certificates or driving licences - is vital for trans people's dignity, safety and access to daily life. But the path to legal recognition varies widely depending on where in the world someone lives.

#### SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Some countries allow trans people to change their legal gender through self-identification, meaning no medical procedures or psychiatric diagnoses are required. Countries like Argentina, Ireland, New Zealand and Malta lead the way here, offering a simple, respectful legal process.

These systems recognise that identity is personal, not something to be approved by doctors or courts.

#### MEDICALISED SYSTEMS

Elsewhere, legal gender change is still tied to medical or psychological steps. This may include a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, proof of surgery, or even sterilisation as seen in countries like Japan, South Korea and parts of Eastern Europe.

Some nations also require people to be unmarried, forcing divorce if they're in a same-sex relationship under the law.

These systems make recognition difficult or impossible for those who can't access, afford, or don't want medical transition.

#### NO RECOGNITION OR CRIMINALISATION

In at least 13 countries, there is no legal way to change gender on documents. In some places, including Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Indonesia, being openly trans can lead to arrest, harassment or loss of rights.

Without matching documents, trans people often struggle to access education, healthcare or employment safely.

#### REVERSALS AND BACKLASH

Even where progress has been made, trans rights are now under threat in several countries.

Hungary banned legal gender changes entirely in 2020. Russia followed with sweeping restrictions in 2023.

In the US, some states have introduced laws blocking changes to ID documents or rolling back protections.

These rollbacks are often driven by political narratives rather than evidence, with real consequences for people's lives.

### GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

- 30+ countries allow gender change through self-ID
- 80+ countries require medical or psychological steps
- 13 countries criminalise trans identities or offer no legal recognition



KLINIK POH TONG, Shieko Reto, 2014

A satirical sign mimicking the aesthetic of informal medical ads to highlight the complex, often absurd realities faced by transgender individuals. The installation critiques the bureaucratic, social and medical "waiting rooms" trans people must navigate—offering both a call for empathy and a powerful reflection on institutional gatekeeping. Translations of the text include Hormone treatments, Laser procedures and Silicone implants or injections. Credit: Flickr/Inzi.

## HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Access to safe, supportive, and affordable healthcare is essential for many trans people - whether that means hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgeries or mental health support. But around the world, the reality of accessing this care is uneven and often deeply inadequate.

### AFFIRMING CARE AS A RIGHT

In some countries, gender-affirming care is part of public healthcare systems. Argentina, Canada, New Zealand and several European nations offer trans healthcare through national health services. This includes access to hormone therapy, psychological support and, in some cases, surgeries - all with protections in place against discrimination.

These systems are guided by international health standards that treat trans identities as natural human variation and not a disorder.

### PATCHY, PRIVATE OR GATEKEPT

In many places, trans people face long waiting lists, high costs, or have to meet strict medical criteria to access care.

Even in countries with public healthcare (like the UK), trans people often wait years for a first appointment, pushing many into private care if they can afford it.

In countries like the US, access depends on insurance, which may or may not cover gender-affirming care. Some states explicitly ban coverage.

Gatekeeping by medical professionals - such as requiring multiple

psychiatric assessments - can delay or block treatment altogether.

This leads many trans people to self-medicate or rely on informal networks, increasing health risks.

### NO ACCESS OR CRIMINALISATION

In a number of countries, gender-affirming care is banned or simply unavailable.

In Russia and several US states, doctors are now prohibited from offering hormone therapy or surgery to trans minors, with efforts to restrict adult care as well.

In parts of Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, such care is either legally blocked or stigmatised to the point that very few providers offer it.

In some cases, trans people seeking care are instead subjected to conversion practices or institutional abuse.

Even basic healthcare can be a challenge when trans people are denied treatment, misgendered, or harassed in clinics.

## GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

- A small but growing number of countries treat gender-affirming care as a human right
- Many others rely on private systems or outdated medical models that delay or restrict access
- In over 20 countries, gender-affirming care is banned or so inaccessible it might as well be



**A memorial at the vigil for Nea Milivojević, Serbia, 2023**

The memorial emerged as a powerful act of mourning and resistance in a country where LGBTQIA+ rights remain precarious and public expressions of queer identity are often met with hostility. Though Serbia has made some legislative steps forward, entrenched homophobia and transphobia continue to endanger lives. This act of remembrance was later destroyed by right-wing activists, underscoring the very violence it protested against. Credit: Wikimedia/ImStevan.

## PROTECTION FROM DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Around the world, trans people face higher rates of violence, discrimination and exclusion- simply for being themselves. Legal protections can help, but they're far from universal and enforcement is often inconsistent.

### LEGAL PROTECTIONS IN LAW

Some countries have introduced national laws that explicitly protect trans people from discrimination and hate crimes.

Canada, Sweden, South Africa, Portugal and Uruguay include gender identity in anti-discrimination and equality laws.

These laws apply to employment, housing, healthcare, education and access to public spaces.

In some cases, hate crime legislation also recognises anti-trans violence as a specific offence, helping improve reporting and data collection.

Legal protections don't end violence, but they do send a clear message: trans people have the right to live in safety and dignity.

### PARTIAL OR POORLY ENFORCED PROTECTION

In many countries, laws exist but don't go far enough or are simply not applied. In India, for example, the 2019 Transgender Persons Act was a landmark step, but critics say it falls short on enforcement and still treats trans people differently in key areas.

In countries like Mexico or Brazil, strong anti-discrimination laws exist, yet violence against trans people remains extremely high due to weak

policing, social stigma and impunity.

Even with laws in place, trans people are often harassed by authorities, denied services or discriminated against with no meaningful recourse.

### NO PROTECTION - OR STATE-LED PERSECUTION

In dozens of countries, trans people are offered no legal protection - and in some, they are actively targeted by the state.

In parts of the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, trans people can be arrested for "public indecency" or "impersonation."

In Uganda and Indonesia, recent crackdowns have led to police raids, arbitrary arrests and violence against trans communities.

Without legal recognition or inclusion in rights frameworks, trans people are often invisible to the systems meant to protect others.

Violence may come from family, strangers, police or within healthcare systems - which too often goes unreported.

## GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

- 65+ countries have some form of anti-discrimination protection based on gender identity
- Only a small number have hate crime laws that include trans people
- In dozens of countries, there are no protections at all—and sometimes, persecution is written into law



**Sarah McBride alongside Rep. Joe Kennedy, Washington DC, 2018**  
McBride, the first openly transgender state senator in the United States, marking the launch of her memoir, *Tomorrow Will Be Different*, which chronicles her journey through personal loss, activism and political leadership. A powerful advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights, McBride made history when she was elected to the Delaware State Senate. Her presence in public office represents a growing, hard-won visibility for trans people in American politics and a continued push for equality in law and society.

## EVERYDAY INCLUSION AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Laws and policies are one part of the picture but the reality of life for trans people also depends heavily on social attitudes, media representation and the ability to live openly without fear. Across the world, these experiences range from pride and visibility to isolation and risk.

### GROWING VISIBILITY AND SUPPORT

In many countries, trans people are increasingly visible in public life and media. Thailand, India, Argentina and the US have seen trans politicians, actors, athletes and activists rise to national attention.

Trans Pride events are growing in number and size, from Berlin to Manila to São Paulo, helping build community and challenge stigma.

Schools, universities and workplaces in places like Sweden, Canada and Australia are introducing inclusion policies and trans-led training. This growing visibility helps challenge stereotypes, especially when paired with supportive communities and public education.

### UNEVEN PROGRESS

In many places, progress is happening but it's fragile, or limited to certain areas. Urban areas in countries like Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and the Philippines often have strong queer communities but rural areas remain unsafe or hostile.

In the UK and parts of Europe, public discourse has become more polarised. Media coverage often frames trans rights as "debates," leading to increased harassment.

Even where attitudes are shifting, trans people may still face rejection from family, bullying in school, or barriers to employment. Social support is often tied to access: to education, community spaces and healthcare - all of which vary greatly by region.

### STIGMA, ISOLATION AND FEAR

In some countries, being trans remains taboo, shameful or punishable - leading to high rates of mental health distress and social exclusion.

In parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, even speaking openly about gender identity can lead to loss of housing, family rejection or violence.

In some regions, religious or political leaders fuel anti-trans sentiment, framing trans people as threats to tradition or morality.

In these contexts, many trans people live in secrecy, cut off from peers or support networks.

Even where there is no law against being trans, social hostility can make life extremely unsafe.

## GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

- Trans visibility and support are increasing in many places, especially among younger generations
- But stigma, misinformation and fear remain widespread - especially in rural areas and conservative societies
- The gap between policy and lived experience is often wide

**NOC.AC.UK**



National Oceanography Centre is a company limited by guarantee, set up under the law of England and Wales, (Company no. 11444362) and a registered charity (England & Wales: 1185265 & Scotland: SC049896).

Registered address: European Way, Southampton, SO14 3ZH, United Kingdom +44 (0)23 8059 6666

© National Oceanography Centre 2025