



Tisa Grant
National Census Advisory Committee
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
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January 14th, 2019

Submission regarding LGBT inclusion in upcoming Census 2020

Dear Ms Grant,

Thank you for responding to our query earlier this month regarding the LGBT inclusion in the upcoming Census 2020. Please allow us the opportunity to provide this official submission in regards to the Census 2020.

Information gathered in the National Surveys have brought significant developments in the realms of Human Rights Advancements in Belize. However, as our submission contends, further inclusion is needed to properly reflect a true representation in order to truly reflect all persons and families in Belize, including LGBT families.

The experiences of LGBT families and the diversity and complexity of family structures have evolved and we fully believe that the Census 2020 is the platform to gather and disseminate this information.

For further information or to further discuss our submission, please contact us on 623-6062, or by email ourcirclebze@gmail.com.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Salazar', is positioned above the printed name.

Derricia Castillo-Salazar

Vice President of Our Circle on behalf of the Our Circle Team

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About Our Circle

Our Circle was formed in 2013 as the peak body for LGBT families in Belize. The acronym LGBT refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The mission of Our Circle is to reflect equality and equity within the diversity of the LGBT community, by encouraging active participation from the community in achieving a solid, safe support system for the LGBT community and families in Belize. Its volunteer Board consists of committed LGBT members who share the common experience of raising families. Our Circle was legally registered as a *Non-Governmental Organization* in January 2017. Our Circle is an incorporated organisation, governed by a constitution which provides a structure for how the group operates.

What is a Rainbow Family?

A Rainbow Family is a same-sex or LGBT parented family. At Our Circle, we define a Rainbow Family as: any lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/ gender diverse, intersex, or queer person who identifies with our community and has a child or children; or is planning on having a child or children by way of donor insemination (known or unknown), surrogacy (altruistic or commercial), foster care, foster to adoption, adoption (domestic or international), opposite sex relationship, co-parenting or other means. Rainbow families, like many modern families, come in all shapes and sizes and are formed in many different ways. But the thing we all have in common is that our families are created through love.

For the community, by the community

Our Circle is a volunteer-led organisation, providing a network of support to children and families within the Belizean LGBT community.

Introduction

Since 2013, Our Circle has been working adamantly towards the legal recognition of LGBT families. This includes recognising same-sex de facto relationships, expanding the definition of 'parent' to enable same sex partners to be legal parents. However, there are still areas in which more needs to be done to reflect the experiences of LGBT families and the diversity and complexity of family structures.

The key role played by the Census in providing government, private sector and the general population with information about the composition of the Belizean population means that is vital that the LGBT population is accurately represented in Census data. This requires that the Census survey is formulated in a way that is inclusive of the LGBT community.

Our submission focuses on the following issues identified in regards to the upcoming 2020 Census process:

- Limitations of Census questions in reflecting LGBT families and relationships
- Relationships and families not captured by the Census
- Capturing information about gender diversity

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- Limitations on availability of accurate data for purposes of planning and service provision

Limitations of Census questions in reflecting LGBT families and relationships

We acknowledge that the SIB is able to identify same-sex parented families through matching data provided in response to key questions even though this information is not specifically requested. National surveys, including the Census continues to include questions which were explicitly based on the heterosexual parented family model. Asking questions about a person's "father" and "mother" cannot be answered accurately in relation to person whose parents are not a man and a woman.

Requiring members of the LGBT community to complete a form that does not respond to their family's experience entrenches the experience of marginalisation rather than promoting inclusiveness.

Relationships and families not captured by the Census

The data obtained in the Census enables the SIB to be able to calculate the number of same-sex relationships where members of a couple live within one the one household. As there are no questions that ask specifically about sexual orientation, same sex relationships between people who do not live in the same household are not captured.

The Census does not capture same-sex parented families where the parents live in separate households due to relationship breakdown or for some other reason. There are many single parents in the LGBT community and there needs to be differentiation between same-sex parented and heterosexual parented single parent families. Further, the way in which families are formed within the LGBT community means that many families transcend a single household. For example, some lesbian couples have a co-parenting arrangement with a known sperm donor who has taken on a parenting role. The Census needs to be able to capture the variety of structures encompassed by LGBT families. This has implications not just in terms of social inclusion but also in providing accurate data for use in planning of government and other services.

Capturing information about gender diversity

People who are gender diverse or have children who identify as gender diverse are not able to report their gender through opting to follow an additional procedure. There should be options for those wanting to provide a response other than 'male' or 'female' on gender. Not being able to accurately report their gender creates a perception among gender diverse members of the community that they were being excluded.

Consideration also needs to be given to how the question on gender diversity interfaces with the rest of the survey questions. Our Circle recommends that the SIB consult further with peak bodies for trans and gender diverse people.



Limitations on availability of accurate data for purposes of planning and service provision

There is a concern that if data obtained through the Census is not an accurate representation of the population, the government would not have information necessary for planning and resource allocation for government services.

A lack of comprehensive publicly available data has made it difficult to estimate the whole LGBT population. Accurate data is necessary to inform decision making and allocation of resources, for example in the areas of mental health and sexual health. With the Census 2020 approaching, Our Circle's biggest concerns is the risk of LGBT people being undercounted, or even worst uncounted.

Recommendations

- Eliminate questions such as questions that are founded on heterosexual relationships to the exclusion of same sex parented families and ensure that questions are inclusive of gender diversity.
- Formulate questions which are more inclusive of LGBT families by being able to capture relationships and families where members live in different households.
- Consult key LBGT organisations prior to implementing procedures for the collection of data on gender diversity in the Census and other national surveys.
- Where additional procedures are necessary, take steps to communicate to those affected.
- Our Circle recommends that the SIB consult further with peak bodies for trans and gender diverse people, and people with intersex variations.