**WORDS4PRIDE - WORKING SESSION WITH VIETNAM´S LGBTQI+ SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTATIVES**

**A conversation about the meaning of words that reflect the reality of LGTBQI+ people in Viet Nam and all around the world**

Co-organised by the Embassy of Spain and UN Women in Viet Nam

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**Dialogue background and scope**

With reference to the context of Viet Nam, the Civil Code was amended in 2015, with a provision in Article 37 that stipulates that the law should regulate the process of acquiring legal gender marker change. The Ministry of Health (MOH) was tasked to develop legislation to this end. Although MOH started this process promptly, it stagnated for a couple of years, but the development of the Gender Affirmation Law (GAL) has since been reinvigorated. As of now, the GAL is expected to be submitted to the Government for review in June 2022, and National Assembly (NA) in April 2023.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Against this backdrop, a coalition of civil society organizations (CSOs) called C4TRANS has been actively involved in the development of the GAL from the outset, as has the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Viet Nam (UN Women). In that context, there have been various advocacy and genuine efforts to support the MOH Legal Drafting Committee. Most notably are the mandatory Gender Impact Assessment, updated UN brief, and a comparative legal study on gender marker change legislation, produced in 2021-2022 with support from UN Women.

In celebration of Hanoi Pride 2022 and inspired by the forthcoming launch of the first-ever published Spanish-Vietnamese LGBTQI+ dictionary (hereafter referred to as “dictionary”), produced by the Embassy of Spain in Viet Nam, on 1 July 2022 the Embassy of Spain and UN Women in Viet Nam co-organised an event, entitled “Words4Pride – Working session with Viet Nam’s LGBTQI+ Social Organisations Representatives” with over 20 representatives of the Vietnamese LGTBQI+ communities, social organisations, UN Agencies and the Government agencies. The main objectives are to discuss the meaning of words, to receive feedback on selected Vietnamese words that are included in the dictionary, and how they reflect the LGBTQI+ in Viet Nam, and all around the world.

It is in the belief of organisers that the understanding of those words and the reality of the LGTBQI+ communities that they reflect is the basic starting point for the meaningful evolution of the social development of any country. From a better understanding of words, a more cohesive, tolerant, and strong society will emerge.

In light of the COVID-19 situation in Viet Nam now being under control, the session was held in person at the Residence of the Ambassador of Spain to Viet Nam.

The event was attended by Deputy Director-General of Gender Equality Department, Ministry of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs Ms. Ngo Dieu Linh, Vice Director of Department of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Health (and “Editor-in-Chief” of the Gender Affirmation Law Draft) Ms. Dinh Thi Thu Thuy, and Founder of Ladies of Viet Nam and LGTBQI+ advocate and sexual educator Mia Nguyen. The event consisted of an introduction to the dictionary by the Ambassador of Spain to Viet Nam, followed by group discussions of words that matter. Participants were divided into three groups with an assignment of 4 LGBTQI+ words per each (a list of words was hereafter in the agenda). At the end of the group discussion, they regrouped to recap and reflect on their discussions and how words were perceived from different perspectives. The session concluded with a lunch which served as a great opportunity to tie the relationship between social organisations, Government and the international community, in a casual setting.

**Summary of the main discussion**

The working session begins with the welcoming remarks from H.E. Ms. Pilar Méndez Jiménez, Ambassador of Spain to Viet Nam with an introduction to the Spanish LGTQIB+ dictionary and the Spanish experience, as well as an explanation of why the Embassy is hosting this working session and why it is important for Spain, followed by a speech by Ms. Elisa Fernandez Saenz, Representative, UN Women in Viet Nam with a glimpse on the Gender Affirmation Law work underway in Viet Nam and the importance of recognition of the rights and inclusion of people with diverse identities and expression and sexual orientations and sex characteristics to fulfil true gender equality. The hosts then give the floor to representatives of the Government, UNAIDS, and Vietnamese Social Organizations to introduce themselves and their works, and finally Mia Nguyen to brief the group work exercise

The points summarized below are drawn from the sharing and reflection of three working groups.

**Group 1**

Group 1 consists of representatives from the Government (Ministry of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), and the Ministry of Health), social organisations, and the translator of the dictionary which is moderated by Dr. Oriol Solà, Cultural Counsellor of the Embassy of Spain in Hanoi.

Ms. Ngo Dieu Linh, Deputy Director-General of the Gender Equality Department, MOLISA expresses the expectation to receive more experience sharing from Spain, via the Embassy of Spain in Viet Nam, on the adoption of same-sex marriage in Spain, including the challenges in law-making processes and difficulties in implementing it. She also commends the practical meaning of the dictionary to policymakers, to understand the definitions of genders and related terms, especially in the process of drafting the Gender Affirmation Law, the meaning of the terminology of family and marriage in Vietnam, and how to use normal and abnormal in the Vietnamese context.

Ms. Dinh Thi Thu Thuy, Vice Director of the Department of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Health (MOH) shares the experience of MOH in drafting the gender affirmation law that protects the rights of LGBTQI+ communities. In the context of Viet Nam, there are cultural differences between regions where the people from the North are usually more closed with their private lives. MOH aims to formulate a law that not only integrates such differences and perceptions but also outlines consistent implementation across the North, the Central, and the South of Viet Nam. It is important that policymakers understand the needs of the citizens before being able to design a policy and a law that reflects their needs, and words play a vital role in this process to help LGBTQI+ and other people define themselves and the reality they are in.

Ambassador Pillar commends MOH’s efforts in submitting the draft Gender Affirmation Law Dossier to the Government. She finds it curious to see the GAL is prepared before the same-sex marriage law which is opposite to the evolution in Spain where same-sex marriage regulation came before the equivalent of the GAL in Spain, the project of which had been approved by the Spanish Government that same week. She also expresses that Spain faced nil difficulties in implementing the same-sex marriage law because people’s rights are equal and the processes were already in place. There were no real administrative shocks because it was only a matter to extending the same rights and procedures that were available to a part of the society to all of its members, therefore resulting in a more egalitarian and integrated society.

As for selected words for group discussion:

* Normal vs. Abnormal / Diversity / any Fobia and specifically Serofobia

According to Group 1, the incorporation of these two words will object to the definitions of other words included in the dictionary. Therefore, Group 1 recommends not to include the words Normal and Abnormal in the dictionary.

* Diverse Family

Group 1 recommends replacing the definition of a Diverse Family as a “relative relationship” with a “nurturing or close or blood relationship”, with a strong recommendation of using “nurturing relationship”.

* Lesbian and Equalitarian Marriage

Group 1 agrees with the definition of these words in the dictionary.

**Group 2**

Group 2 consists of representatives from the Government (MOLISA), UN agencies (UNAIDS) and social organizations (Lumi Queer, It’s T Time, ISEE), and is moderated by Ms. Luong Nhu Oanh, Programme Analyst of UN Women.

Group 2’s conclusion covers the structure of the draft dictionary as well as the specific words for the group discussion.

Overall, Group 2 commends the Embassy of Spain in Viet Nam’s effort for producing an inclusive dictionary with a large amount of vocabulary and well-researched translation, even with words that are academically and socially associated with gender or gender equality. However, they also see room for improving the structure to make it more user-friendly when navigating for words. The current outline in alphabetic order does not guide the contextual usage of words. To that end, Group 2 recommends reconstructing the dictionary into two categories, official use (in official documents) and daily use (societal terms). In addition, they think it would be more convenient for users if footnotes underneath selected words are added, to remind the official/unofficial or sensitive nature of these words.

Selected words assigned for group discussion:

* Queer

The current Vietnamese translation of “Queer” limits the meaning of this word and somehow, makes it less inclusive. When “Queer” was “imported” to Viet Nam, it was perceived as an umbrella term to mean anyone who did not feel part of the social norms. In English, “Queer” is defined as “not fitting traditional ideas about gender or sexuality”, and during the process of social evolution, “Queer” is replaced by LGBTQI+ themselves.

In the context of Viet Nam, the usual so-called “bê đê/bóng/cong” (meaning, people who do not conform to social norms) is not a completely accurate definition of “Queer”. “Queer” carries in itself a cultural, historical and symbolic meaning as well as a sense of freedom that should be “felt” by users, and not restricted to the sexual orientation of expression. Organizations such as Hanoi Queer or Lumi Queer where “Queer” is part of their organizational names keep “Queer” in its original English language (without any attempt to translate). For such reasons, Group 1 recommends not translating the word “Queer” into Vietnamese, as slang should not be used in official documents. An explanation of the word can be provided, instead.

* Cisgender vs. Cissexual

“Cisgender” is a commonly used term while “Cissexual” is rarely seen. Group 2 recommended removing the word “Cissexual” from the dictionary, considering its unpopular use; keeping the word “Cisgender” and using the definition and translation of the word “Cissexual”, based on the sexual characteristics and gender origin that this word implied.

* Cisheteropatriarchy

The translation is closely accurate. However, a gender-driven definition is not enough, because the “bearer” has to meet the social expectations based on his gender. Group 2, therefore, recommends adding a historical and cultural context to the definition.

* Criminalization LGBTQI+

The translation does not reflect the true meaning, nor provide a full interpretation of the words (here, the translator gave examples and pieces of evidence, but not a complete definition). In addition, “Criminalization” should be translated into “Hình sự hóa”, instead of “Tội ác chống lại” in Vietnamese. “LGBTQI+” should be referred to an individual, not a community (in Vietnamese, “người LGBTQI+, not “cộng đồng” LGBTQI+).

* Bisexual vs. Pansexual

No comments on the inclusion and translation of “Bisexual”.

* Nonbinary

Group 2 cannot locate the word in the draft dictionary, therefore, cannot discuss the definition, but “Non-binary” should definitely be included.

**Group 3**

Group 3 consists of representatives from social organisations in Ha Noi (ISDS, SCDI, It’s T Time and Hanoi Queer), and is moderated by Ms. Mia Nguyen, Sex Educator and Advisor and Founder of Ladies of Vietnam.

Selected words assigned for group discussion:

* Gender

Group 3 agrees that there was a huge need in their works for a precise and usable definition of this word. At present, the term “Gender” is still non-inclusive, in both English and Vietnamese, because it keeps referring to men and women whereas our understanding has gone beyond the definition of these two genders. Participants find it challenging to come up with a solid definition for this word, and therefore propose a “temporary” definition, “Gender refers to social expectations of the role, responsibility, and expression of a person based on biological sex and that person’s feeling about him/herself and one’s belonging to any gender”. In addition, since gender is a collection of social expectations (and the feeling of a person about him/herself), which were changing over time, it is important that the dictionary highlighted this trait, either in the footnotes or in a description.

* Trans

According to Group 3, the usage of the word “Trans” is not frequently used in the context of Viet Nam and is considered difficult to understand by normal people (both Spanish and Vietnamese definitions). Group 3, therefore, recommends revising the “Trans” definition to reflect “an individual whose perception of their gender(s) is different from that of social expectations.”

* Transvestido

Recommends revising the translation as “Giả trang”, instead of “Người cải trang” to differentiate it from “Transformista”. This word reflects a personal preference and does not affect one’s gender identity.

* Transformista

Referred to a masquerade effort for performance purposes, but not related to one’s hobby.

* Despatologización trans

The current translation is an explanation of the context where the word was born which is more applicable in the Western culture. In Viet Nam, there have been changes in the process of understanding and perception that transgender is not a “disorder” and no cure is needed.

To commensurate Group 3’s discussion, Dr. Khuat Thu Hong, Founder and Director, Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) emphasizes the importance of “creating” a Vietnamese LGBTQI+ dictionary which was responsive to the cultural, social, and political developments of Viet Nam. We are all constrained by our languages, as a result, how to make the terms understandable, acceptable, and embraceable by all people is a real challenge. She also adds that language is not statistics. It keeps evolving, so a dictionary needs to be aware of that.

Ms. Mia Nguyen wraps up her Group’s reflection by expressing the honour to partner with the Embassy of Spain in Viet Nam and the translator to fit the closest definitions into the dictionary. She expects that the Embassy of Spain would take the contribution and feedback from the working session seriously to fine-tune the draft dictionary. She hopes the dictionary, once finalized and published, would become a source of useful information for her and her peers and would inspire more genuine efforts from LGBTQI+ advocates, supporters and communities, researchers, and policymakers to continue their great works toward building a more inclusive society for people of all genders.

The Working Session concludes with closing remarks from Ambassador Pillar and Ms. Elisa Fernandez, UN Women in Viet Nam Representative. Ambassador Pillar highly appreciates the active participation and meaningful discussion of representatives from the Government, international community, and LGBTQI+ community. The Ambassador of Spain explains this is the dictionary created by the Spanish Civil Society Organisations (FELGTBI+) and by translating it into Vietnamese, the Embassy wished to use it as a tool to ignite a meaningful discussion among Vietnamese Social Organizations, Government agencies and the International Community as a way to accompany their efforts in their evolution into the shared goal of not leaving anyone behind. The Embassy of Spain will include the conclusions of this discussion in the dictionary. Ambassador would feel pleased if the discussion today would inspire Viet Nam to build its own LGBTQI+ dictionary one day, seeing Vietnamese Civil Society Organisations and government produce their own dictionary, as suggested by Dr. Khuat Thu Hong, Founder and Director, Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) as Vietnamese Social Organisations would be the best outcome of this Working Session as they should be the protagonists of their own dictionary.

In closing the working session as a co-host, Ms. Elisa Fernandez acknowledges three groups’ reflections, having taken into account socio-cultural contexts, the power of words, and their evolvement over time. She also emphasizes the timely of the session, coinciding with the constant discussion and final review of the draft Gender Affirmation Law in Viet Nam. She hopes today’s meeting has provided food for thoughts and insights to inspire participants for better actions in their activities, laws and policies, and programming that they are driving in Viet Nam. Last but not least, on behalf of co-hosts, she thanks GED-MOLISA and MOH for their open dialogues with social organizations that are present.

**ANNEX**

**Final agenda**

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| **Event order**  | **Time allocation** | **Description / Responsible person(s)**  |
| Registration | 8.30 – 9.00 | **All**  |
| Welcome  | 9.00 – 9.20 (20 mins)  | **Embassy of Spain**, welcoming words including an introduction of the Spanish LGTQIB+ dictionary and the Spanish experience explaining why we are hosting this and why this event is important for Spain.(2 mins, in Spanish with translation into Vietnamese) **UN Women and technical** representatives of Vietnamese official institutions, introduce the GAL work underway.(3 mins, in English with translation into Vietnamese)  **Vietnamese Social Organizations** representatives introduce themselves and their work. (10 mins, in Vietnamese) **Ladies of Vietnam**, introduction as coordinator of the exercise and explanation of the rules of the exercise.(5 mins, in Vietnamese)  |
| Group discussion   | 9.20 – 10.20 (1 hour, 4 words – 15 mins per word) (in English and Vietnamese) | GROUP 1 – Facilitated by EMBASSY OF SPAIN (Dr.Oriol Solà, Cultural Counsellor of the Embassy of Spain in Hanoi) | CSAGA UNAIDS #1 MOLISA #1MOH  | * NORMAL vs ABNORMAL / DIVERSITY / Any FOBIA and specificaclly SEROFOBIA
* LESBIAN
* EQUALITARIAN MARRIAGE / DIVERSE FAMILIES
 |
| GROUP 2- Facilitated by UNWOMEN (Ms. Luong Nhu Oanh, Programme Analyst) | IT'S TIME #1 ISEE UNAIDS #2 MOLISA#2LUMI QUEER | * QUEER was selected 4 times CISGENDER vs CIS-SEXUAL / CISHETEROPATRIARCHY
* NON BINARY GENDER/BINARISM / BISEXUAL / vs PANSEXUAL CRIMINALIZACION LGBTQI+
 |
| GROUP 3- Facilitated by LADIES OF VIETNAM (Ms. Mia Nguyen, Sex Educator and Advisor) | ISDS SCDI IT’S TIME #2 HANOI QUEER | * GENDER / GENDER vs SEX / GENDER EXPRESSION / DISFORIA DE GÉNERO / GENDER ROL / GENDER BIAS
* TRANS was selected 4 times; TRANSVESTIDO was selected 2 times; TRANSFORMISTA was selected 1 time; DEPATOLOGIZACIÓN TRANS
 |
| 10.30 – 12.00(90 mins - 30 mins per group, 10 mins buffer)  | Regroup and Recap by Group Rapporteurs (in English and Vietnamese) | All  |
| Closing remarks  | 12.00 -12.30(30 mins) | Embassy of Spain UN Women  |
| Group photo  | 12.30 – 12.35  | All  |
| Lunch  | 12.30 – 13.30/14.00(1 hour or 90 mins)  | All  |

**Social media coverage**

**The Embassy of Spain in Viet Nam Facebook page:**

<https://www.facebook.com/EmbajadaEspVietnam/videos/416459977111932/?extid=NS-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C-GK2T>

**UN Women Facebook page:**

<https://www.facebook.com/519716588197902/posts/pfbid02C1K1PF4Nsk9DTH1snLQZEX5GyuSAvwYzagRbxbia67zsHJzym3hwmg8o8f72eWP1l/?d=n>

<https://www.facebook.com/519716588197902/posts/pfbid0263mckmSMgFjhnfXbom8eWTbVou4a5JiaAonDf6rkvUtTjQu6YyDDFhoTZXtMTfMtl/?d=n>

<https://www.facebook.com/519716588197902/posts/pfbid0eSx29J4XZZHSgjnPd5UChMvo8dUZnHFK55JQNvuRCiDxV2ghHt5pBnMM7AMTQNgyl/?d=n>

**Photo library**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1V0jiiXmk3NHwdSOEIT9Sma15K338rMPA?usp=sharing>

1. Date at time of writing is May 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)