



How to Support Your LGBTQ+ Employees on International Business Trips: 5 Tips for Employers

Insights

6.12.24

A business trip abroad can be an exciting experience for your employees, but it also requires careful planning to ensure a smooth and safe journey. This is particularly true for your LGBTQ+ employees who may have more obstacles or safety risks during international travel. For instance, while many countries have become more inclusive and supportive in recent years, more than 60 countries still criminalize same-sex relationships – and the penalties can be dire. So, how can you proactively support your LGBTQ+ workers during the travel planning process and while they're away? Here are five tips for creating an inclusive and safety-focused travel program.

1. Create a Comprehensive Travel Resource Kit

As a starting point, you should consider creating a travel guide for all employees that includes links to resources that meet the diverse needs of your workforce. This not only includes LGBTQ+ employees but also women, older employees, those who are traveling with children, workers with disabilities, and workers from underrepresented communities.

Notably, [the U.S. State Department has a page](#) dedicated to information for LGBTQ+ travelers. The page includes tips for planning travel and staying safe while abroad, as well as specific guidance for travelers with an X gender marker in their U.S. passport.

Additionally, organizations like [IGLTA](#) (the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association) provide a wealth of resources on LGBTQ+ rights and travel safety, as well as detailed guides on marriage equality and travel tips for transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary individuals. They also offer information on LGBTQ+ friendly accommodations, transportation operators, and other travel services. Other useful tools include apps to find gender-neutral bathrooms and apps with information on traveling abroad with medication.

The length, location, and type of assignment may all be factors in how detailed your travel action plan and resource kit will be. Generally, lengthier assignments and those in higher risk countries will call for more detailed protocols and resources. You may want to consult with your risk management partner for additional resources and tips.

2. Do Your Research on the Specific Destination

In addition to providing general resources for business travelers, you should ensure your managers and employees are aware of each destination's laws, cultures, and practices, as these can vary widely from country to country. While many jurisdictions legally and socially welcome LGBTQ+ individuals, some are neutral, some are culturally unwelcoming, and others legally prohibit and prosecute consensual same-sex activity. Some countries also prohibit people from being "disguised" as another gender, which creates additional risks for transgender employees.

You should note that challenges can go beyond legal status and extend to cultural perspectives, and you should recognize that laws and attitudes frequently change. So, be sure your toolkits, trainings, and action plans are regularly updated as needed.

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA) issues [a global report](#) mapping laws around the world that impact the LGBTQ+ community.

In addition to checking [the U.S. State Department's country-specific pages](#), it's a good idea to provide your workers with the appropriate contact information for the U.S. Embassy. The Embassy can provide support in emergency situations, including when an employee feels unsafe, is threatened, or experiences a health or legal issue. The Embassy can also connect your employees with local resource for healthcare or legal help.

3. Make Travel Arrangements in Advance

When possible, allow your employees to book accommodations and restaurants, arrange for transportation and activities, and make other travel plans before the trip begins. This way you can better ensure they are booking with reputable companies and selecting LGBTQ+ friendly options.

You'll also want to consider additional safety measures in advance. While employers will typically provide medical and security protection for all employees traveling abroad, you may also want to provide legal support and develop a specific game plan in case any issues arise stemming from legal or cultural concerns. For example, in some locations it may be safer for an LGBTQ+ individual to contact their employer's legal counsel or travel risk manager before reaching out to local authorities.

Be sure employees know where the Embassy is and take general travel precautions, too, such as keeping a different credit card at their accommodations in case their bag or wallet is stolen and having a digital copy of their passport stored separately from their phone.

4. Account for Individual Circumstances and Respect Privacy

Remember that each employee is unique, and their own individual risks will vary. You may or may not know the particular circumstances impacting their travel plans and experiences. So, it's important to give employees as much information as possible, refrain from making assumptions about their personal lives, and give them an opportunity to ask questions.

As part of any travel briefing or discussion with an employee prior to travel, you should take appropriate steps to ensure their concerns are addressed and they are comfortable with the assignment. For longer term assignments, you may also need to take steps to support the employee's family.

Allow them the opportunity to raise reasonable objections to the assignment. While international assignments may be viewed as an excellent path for career development, an employee may not want to accept the assignment if they are made aware of an environment that is unwelcoming or potentially unsafe.

You should approach these conversations with professionalism and respect for the employee's privacy — and be careful not to unintentionally discriminate against employees based on sexual orientation or gender identity by being overprotective. Even if you have the best intentions, you shouldn't restrict opportunities because of an employee's protected status under U.S. anti-discrimination laws, such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

If an employee declines an assignment due to safety concerns, perhaps you have alternative opportunities in different international locations that may be acceptable to the employee. Have an open dialogue, and don't make assumptions about an individual's work preferences or ability to handle the assignment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Let them lead the conversation in this regard.

You may want to reach out to your attorney to help build an international travel action plan. Your Fisher Phillips attorney can help you assess your legal obligations and what legal issues may arise as your employees take on international assignments.

5. Train Your Employees and Managers

Depending on the international assignment, you may want to provide safety and cultural training to employees prior to departure.

- Offer the training to all employees who will be traveling, rather than selecting specific individuals for participation. Make employees aware of what obstacles may exist, particularly if their destination has laws that differ from the U.S.
- Managers should be prepared to respond to employee concerns or point them to the appropriate contact in your organization. They should also be trained to understand the risks associated with international assignments and the situations employees may encounter abroad.
- Cultural training is also a helpful tool and can involve a review of local customs, etiquette, communication style, language skills and common phrases, and social attitudes.
- During training, you can remind employees of your travel policies and procedures, as well as the company's expectations while employees conduct business abroad.

- Remember to focus on a safe and successful journey and ensure employees have all the appropriate contact information and a game plan in case they encounter issues. Let employees know you are there to support them.

Conclusion

We will continue to monitor international employment law developments and other workplace law updates, so make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight System](#) to get the most up-to-date information directly to your inbox. Please contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, the authors of this Insight, or any attorney in our [International Practice Group](#) to learn more.

Related People



Nazanin Afshar
Partner
818.230.4259
Email



Nan Sato, CIPP/E, CIPP/C
Partner
410.230.2149

610.230.2140

Email



William D. Wright

Partner

610.230.2137

Email

Service Focus

International

Employment Discrimination and Harassment