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Progressive cash for the anti-LGBTQI backlash?

How aid donors and 'feminist'
governments have funded backers of
Uganda's deadly Anti-Homosexuality Bill

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Summary

With Uganda on the verge of introducing an extreme anti-LGBTQI law including the death penalty, international aid donors have serious questions to answer. Their funding flows connect taxpayers in Europe and North America to conservative religious organisations in the east African country that have long opposed LGBTQI rights and called for harsher legislation. Millions have come from donors that have committed to feminist foreign policies and to supporting LGBTQI rights globally; some of this money has even been unexpectedly coded as support for feminist organisations and gender equality. Recipients include the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) that previously lost US aid over its anti-LGBTQI activities.

This report analyses up-to-date information published by aid donors themselves, including to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), and reveals the scale of development partners' connections to anti-LGBTQI religious groups in Uganda – which since 2014 have been involved in dozens of aid-funded projects, with total values over \$75 million (at least \$40 million of which appears to have been directly transferred to these organisations).

Introduction

About a decade ago, influential conservative religious groups in Uganda including the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) helped push for and succeeded in getting a new anti-homosexuality act introduced and then passed by parliament. This law had made international news as the ‘Kill the Gays bill’ because initial drafts of the legislation included the death penalty. It was later ruled invalid by the country’s constitutional court.¹ In 2014, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) ended funding to the IRCU over its anti-LGBTQI activities, including its advocacy for this legislation.² This funding cut reportedly led the organisation to downsize and fire staff.³

But the IRCU and the bill are back. In February 2023, the organisation vowed to do everything possible to have the anti-homosexuality bill returned to Parliament. That happened shortly after (on 28 February 2023), when Ugandan MP Asuman Basalirwa introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023. Again, it includes the death penalty in some cases, as well as life sentences, and criminalises speech about LGBTQI rights as well as non-heterosexual identities. Three weeks later, on 21 March, the bill was passed and sent to President Yoweri Museveni to sign into law (which as of writing, has not yet happened). Local and international NGOs have condemned it – as have governments of countries including the United States and the United Kingdom.⁴ “The passing of this discriminatory bill – probably among the worst of its kind in the world – is a deeply troubling development,” said the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁵

¹ “Uganda court annuls anti-homosexuality law”, BBC News (August 2014)
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28605400>

² Spencer Kimball, “US reviews relations with Uganda,” Deutsche Welle (March 2014)
<https://www.dw.com/en/us-attempts-to-strike-balance-in-ties-with-uganda/a-17522469>

³ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “Anti-gay group fires all staff,” The Observer, Uganda (August 2014)
https://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33371:anti-gay-group-fires-all-staff

Aid from both the US and from European governments was found – in an investigation published in late 2022 with CNN – to have gone to anti-LGBTQI groups in Ghana that have been pushing for another repressive bill in that country.⁶ Funding flows also connect development partners to such groups in Uganda – on a large scale, involving many bilateral and multilateral donors – raising questions about their complicity in the bill, whether their funding practices may undermine their rights commitments, and what should be done now to protect LGBTQI rights and lives in Uganda and beyond.

The role of US evangelicals in supporting the anti-LGBTQI backlash in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa has been increasingly covered by the media.⁷ But so far there has been little attention to funding coming from supposedly more progressive sources. Unlike a decade ago, there is now a powerful source of such information in the data that aid donors themselves have published to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). This research report leverages this data source to shine light on an extraordinary number of connections between development partners and religious supporters of the anti-homosexuality bill – including those that are ongoing and budgeted to continue.

⁴ Patience Atuhaire, “Uganda Anti-Homosexuality bill: Life in prison for saying you’re gay,” BBC News (March 2023) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65034343>

⁵ “Uganda: Türk urges President not to sign shocking anti-homosexuality bill,” UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (March 2023) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/uganda-turk-urges-president-not-sign-shocking-anti-homosexuality-bill>

⁶ Claire Provost and Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah, “Exclusive: Millions in Western aid flowed to churches in Ghana despite years of campaigning against LGBTQI+ rights,” CNN (December 2022) <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/13/africa/us-europe-aid-lgbtqi-ghana-churches-investigation-as-equals-intl-cmd-dg/index.html>

⁷ Caleb Okereke, “How US Evangelicals Helped Homophobia Flourish in Africa,” Foreign Policy (March 2023) <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/19/africa-uganda-evangelicals-homophobia-antigay-bill/>

Methodology

This research primarily uses data published by international aid donors and agencies themselves to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) data standard, complemented by other sources including their disclosures to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and other information published on their own websites.

These sources were searched for references to the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) that previously lost US aid over its anti-LGBTQI activities, and for references to the church members that constitute the IRCU. Founded in 2001, the IRCU says it is “an indigenous, national faith-based organisation uniting efforts of religious institutions to jointly address issues of common concern”. It “is constituted by” members including the Church of Uganda, the Uganda Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the National Alliance of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches.⁸

We extracted figures from identified IATI records for the total value of projects including these groups, as well as direct disbursements to them. In cases where receiver fields for transactions were left blank but an organisation was listed as the relevant project's only “implementing partner,” we interpreted it as the recipient of the disclosed disbursements (consistent with the methodology used in the Country Development Finance Data portal for IATI data).⁹ In some cases where funding was spent through intermediaries, data on final recipients was not available; in other cases where projects involved multiple partners, it was not always clear how much money each of them might have received. In these cases we made no assumptions about direct transfer amounts.

For projects that are closed, we used total disbursements as their total value. For ongoing projects, we used the total of what has been committed to them. We focused on spending after 1 January 2014 (ie. that which happened after the Anti-Homosexuality Act was last tabled in December 2013). For projects that began before this date, but continued afterwards, we extracted figures for transactions from

2014 only. As the records were in different currencies, we used current (at the time of writing) exchange rates to also be able to compare and sum all of the identified funding flows in US dollars.

This data analysis was then supplemented by additional desk research into donors' LGBTQI rights commitments on the one hand, and the anti-LGBTQI activities of the Ugandan organisations involved in their projects on the other hand. Again, we used sources in the public domain for this research, including local news reports.

We sought input at various stages from Ugandan and international experts on LGBTQI rights and donor practices. This report is a product of rapid cross-border and cross-disciplinary collaboration between journalists, researchers, students, and queer activists. Aid agencies identified in this research were also contacted prior to publication; their comments will also be posted on the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy website.

Note that there are other ways in which aid funding may connect taxpayers to the current crisis in Uganda; for example, many donors also give money directly to the Ugandan government. These flows are not covered by this research, which focuses specifically on funding for conservative religious civil society organisations that have loud and long track-records of anti-LGBTQI activities and support for harsher laws.

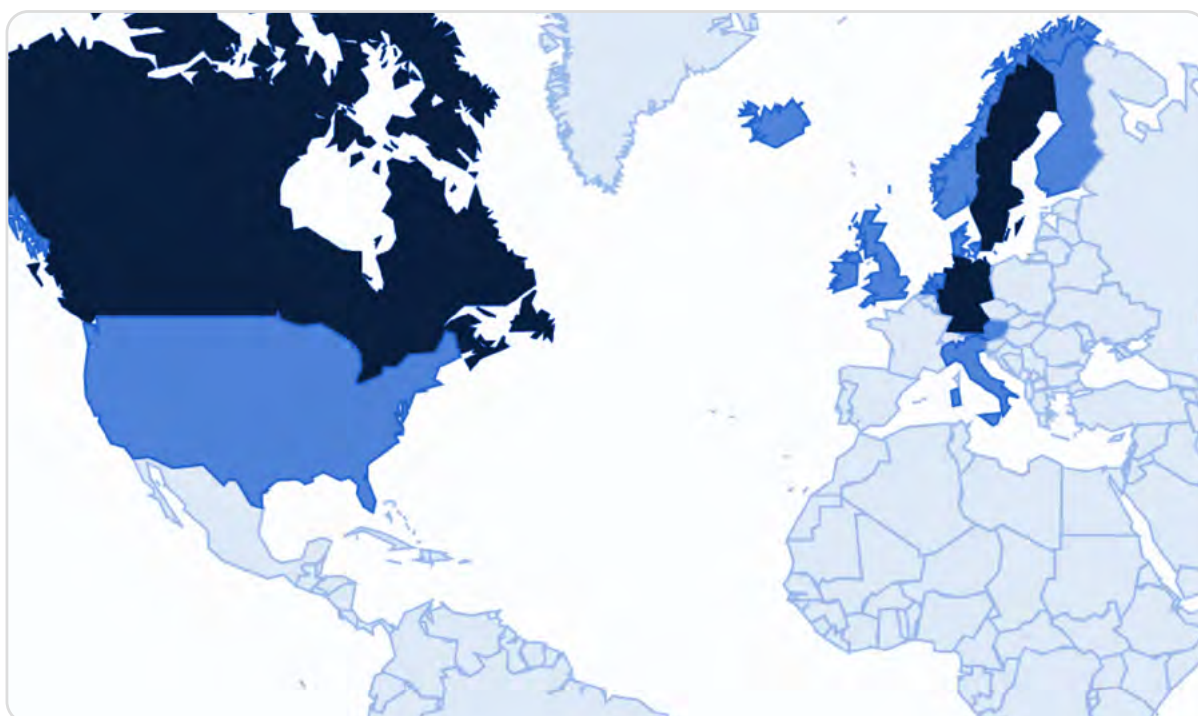
Because of gaps in available data, the figures in this report should not be interpreted as being comprehensive; it is likely that there are other flows and partnerships not captured in this research. Where they have been identified, other inquiries could usefully unearth additional information about them. There is currently limited detail in the published data about the decision-making processes involved in the funding and partnerships identified. We stop short of making concrete recommendations as to what should happen as a result of this information, because of such lacking detail – and as a series of serious conversations, led by the needs and demands of LGBT people whose rights and lives are at threat, are needed to shape those recommendations.

⁸ "Who we are," Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, via Internet Archive (February 2013)
<https://web.archive.org/web/20230201121800/https://www.ircu.or.ug/who-we-are/>

⁹ "Methodology - Receiver organisation", Country Development Finance Data (updated October 2021)
<https://countrydata.iatistandard.org/methodology/#receiver-organisation>

Results

Anti-LGBT religious groups in Uganda are named in dozens of aid-funded projects – involving total values of more than \$75 million over the last decade (at least \$40 million of which appears to have been directly transferred to these groups). Several of these projects are unexpectedly coded as support for women’s rights and say they are focused on gender equality. There is a long list of donor governments involved (all of which are also members of the global Equal Rights Coalition), as well as UN agencies. The flows identified include some ongoing funding and relationships between backers of the anti-LGBTQI bill and governments from Norway and the Netherlands to the United States – despite its previous aid cut – and the United Kingdom. (Details on all of the identified funding as well as other connections and sources are in Annexes: Table 1).



Donor countries involved (Bright blue = the government is member of the global Equal Rights Coalition, Dark blue = it also has a feminist foreign policy)

There is not currently evidence that any of this money specifically paid for anti-LGBTQI activities. Funded projects involve a range of different activities including education and healthcare – but many include support to develop the capacity of the groups involved. Having aid funding and prominent development partners can boost groups’ credibility, their reputations, and their access to power and other finance. It can also be complicated to separate certain activities from others, especially if some of the same staff work on both. In late 2013, a USAID Office of the Inspector General report into the IRCU’s PEPFAR funding said some “salary expenses” were billed to USAID improperly”.¹⁰

Ongoing funding and relationships

An ongoing UK aid-funded programme entitled “Uganda - Open Society” lists the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda as an “implementing partner” and direct recipient of funding. The IATI open aid data published by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) shows that, so far, the IRCU has received £134,900 (more than \$160,000) under this programme (which began in 2021 and is open until spring 2024, with upcoming spending increases projected).¹¹ One sub-project, with a budget of over £2 million (more than \$2.4 million), is unexpectedly coded as “support for feminist, women-led and women’s rights organisations and movements, and institutions”.¹²

DATE	DESCRIPTION	PROVIDER	RECEIVER	VALUE
2022-09-13	Aid to civil society organisations / NGOs <small>REF 9638147</small>	UK - Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) <small>REF GB-GOV-1</small>	INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGNADA	72,473 GBP

Example of direct disbursement of UK aid from the FCDO to the IRCU. (Screenshot)

¹⁰ “Agreed-Upon Procedures Review of USAID Resources Managed by InterReligious Council of Uganda Under Cooperative Agreement AID-617-A-10-00002 (Report No. 4-617-14-001-S),” USAID Office of the Inspector General (October 2013) <https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/4-617-14-001-s.pdf>

The IRCU is also listed as a “partner” for an ongoing \$5 million project with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) called “Strengthening Electoral Processes”. The IATI record for this project says that it’s also an initiative of UN Women, OHCHR and UNESCO, and also funded by Austria, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.¹³ According to the Project Document attached to this record, UNDP and UN Women are jointly responsible for action “3.2.1 Support capacity strengthening of insider mediators (TEFU, IRCU, NCF and WSR) for dialogue and mediation”, with a sub-budget of \$130,000 assigned for “planning and training workshops on mediation, high-level dialogue facilitated by UN, shuttle diplomacy, documentation” with these groups.¹⁴

An ongoing \$1.2 million Dutch aid-funded project, “Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA) Uganda” (which began in 2021 and is open until 2025, and is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through an intermediary called *Mensen met een Missie*) meanwhile lists the Church of Uganda as an implementing partner. Under this project, the record says that in August 2022, €29,770 (over \$32,000) was disbursed to “Church of Uganda Teso Dioceses planning and development office”.¹⁵

The Ugandan Episcopal Conference, which is the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy in Uganda, is meanwhile listed as the recipient of \$9.3 million of PEPFAR funding under an ongoing agreement that began in 2020 and runs through fall 2025.¹⁶

¹¹ IATI ID: GB-GOV-1-301310 (parent) <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=GB-GOV-1-301310> and <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=GB-GOV-1-301310-101> and <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=GB-GOV-1-301310-102> (siblings), reported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)

¹² IATI ID: GB-GOV-1-301310-101, reported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK) <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=GB-GOV-1-301310-101>

¹³ IATI ID: XM-DAC-41114-OUTPUT-00120695, reported by the United Nations Development Programme <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=XM-DAC-41114-OUTPUT-00120695>

¹⁴ UNDP Project Document for “Strengthening Electoral Processes in Uganda Project” [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/UGA/Project%20Document%20Strengthening%20Electoral%20Processes%20in%20%20%20Uganda%20\(SEPU\)%20Final.doc1.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/UGA/Project%20Document%20Strengthening%20Electoral%20Processes%20in%20%20%20Uganda%20(SEPU)%20Final.doc1.pdf)

Other recent funding and relationships

More than \$1.3 million of Finnish aid was spent since 2014 on projects describing Pentecostal Churches of Uganda (PCU) as a partner. This aid, spent through the Finnish NGO Fida International, includes more than \$300,000 spent in 2019 on a project that was “partnering with Pentecostal Churches of Uganda (PCU) who will benefit from the Programmes capacity building and will have improved visibility in the community.”¹⁷

A 2016-2020 Dutch aid-funded “civic engagement” programme listed the Church of Uganda as well as the Pentecostal Assemblies of God as “local partners” in a “strategic Partnership with the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs”.¹⁸

Between 2018 and 2020, nearly \$400,000 of Danish aid also went to a project entitled “Contribution to the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda National Dialogue”, for which the IRCU appears to be the direct recipient.¹⁹

A UNFPA Uganda flyer (which appears to be from 2018) meanwhile lists the IRCU among its “implementing partners” above a list of its donors, including the governments of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the UK.²⁰

¹⁵ IATI ID: NL-KVK-41149831-JISRA MM UGANDA, reported by Mensen met een Missie <http://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=NL-KVK-41149831-JISRA%20MM%20Uganda>

¹⁶ https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_NU2GGH002289_7523

¹⁷ IATI ID: FI-3-2019-2011115601, reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=FI-3-2019-2011115601>


¹⁸ IATI ID: NL-KVK-56484038-110004-12, reported by Foundation ICCO <https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html#view=act&aid=NL-KVK-56484038-110004-12>

¹⁹ IATI ID: XM-DAC-3-1-271019-33199, reported by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=XM-DAC-3-1-271019-33199>

²⁰ “About Us: Supporting Uganda to live her dream,” UNFPA <https://uganda.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/About%20Us%20EDITED%202.10.18-1.pdf>


Implementing Partners

Ministry of Health	Communication for Development Foundation
Ministry of Education	Office of the First Lady
Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development	Reach a Hand Uganda
National Population Council	BRAC Uganda
Uganda Bureau of Statistics	Aids Information Centre
Makerere University School of Public Health	Inter Religious Council of Uganda
Uganda Health Marketing Group	International Rescue Committee
Reproductive Health Uganda	Agency for Cooperation in Research and Development
Straight Talk Foundation	Care International



Donors

Government of Denmark
Department for International Development (DFID-UKaid)
Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)
Irish Aid
Government of Norway
Government of Sweden



United Nations Population Fund
Plot 12A Baskerville Avenue, Kololo
P.O. BOX 7184, Kampala, Uganda
Tel: +256-4177-44500
<http://uganda.unfpa.org/>

UNFPA flyer listing IRCU as an implementing partner. (Screenshot).

In late 2021, UN Women, the IRCU and other groups co-organised an event “with support from the Embassy of Sweden” as part of activities to mark the annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, according to a news release from the time from another co-organiser, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU).²¹

The IRCU was also budgeted to receive \$212,000 of EU money via the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in the September 2021 update of the ‘Uganda Country Programme Document’ of the international Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. That document’s budget tables list the IRCU three times, saying that \$80,000 would go to “Support the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda to expand engagements with faith leaders on SRHR/HIV/GBV integration”; that another \$60,000 would be a “transfer to IRCU for community mobilisation”; and that another \$72,000 were “transfers to Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) as IP for community social mobilisation” (where “IP” is believed to represent “Implementing Partner”.) These funds are listed in the tables under “Spotlight EU Contribution”.²²

²¹“Ending violence against women and girls: Can cultural and religious leaders collaborate?” Cross-Cultural Foundation Uganda (December 2021) <https://crossculturalfoundation.or.ug/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-can-cultural-and-religious-leaders-collaborate/>

²²“Country Programme Document: Uganda,” Spotlight Initiative (updated September 2021) https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/40000/spotlight_initiative_uganda_country_programme_document_and_budget_phase_i_ii.pdf, p.134

Additionally, there is evidence of some private foundation funding. A 2017 IKEA Foundation funded project of Oxfam Novib in the Netherlands listed the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Uganda as its “implementing” partner (on a WASH and shelter project supporting refugees from South Sudan), and the direct recipient of €34,480 (nearly \$38,000) that year, for the total amount budgeted for the project.²³ Under a previous 2016-2017 Oxfam Novib project that was also funded by the IKEA Foundation, this religious group received another €29,000 (or nearly \$32,000), again for the total project budget).²⁴ Between these projects, about \$70,000 was transferred to the group.

LGBTQI rights support and opposition

In February 2023, when the IRCU vowed to do everything possible to return the anti-LGBTQI bill to parliament (which happened soon after), it argued: “The tendency these days is to normalise every life’s struggle into a right. This is wrong!” it argued in a statement that month, condemning the promotion of “the LGBTQ agenda”.²⁵

Also in February, Bishop Joseph Antony Zziwa, the Chairman Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC) – which is the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy in Uganda – reportedly said: “it is high time the government, cultural and religious leaders, teachers, parents and other stakeholders waged a fight against homosexuality in this country”.²⁶ The next month, the Catholic Archbishop of Kampala called homosexuality “evil”.²⁷ He also said that it is a mental illness and it should be a crime to “entice” others into it.²⁸

²³ IATI ID: NL-KVK-27108436-A-04725-15:UG, reported by Oxfam Novib <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=NL-KVK-27108436-A-04725-15:UG>

²⁴ IATI ID: NL-KVK-27108436-A-04725-11:UG, reported by Oxfam Novib <https://d-portal.org/savi/?aid=NL-KVK-27108436-A-04725-11:UG>

²⁵ Christopher Kisekka “IRCUC Advocates for Centers to Help People Struggling with Homosexuality,” (February 2023) <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/ircu-advocates-for-centers-to-help-people-struggling-with-homosexuality>

²⁶ Ben Musanje, “Religious leaders raise voices on homosexuality promotions,” Radio Sapientia (February 2023) <https://www.radiosapientia.com/news/religious-leaders-raise-voices-on-homosexuality-promotions/>

²⁷ Sylvia Katushabe, “Catholics mark ten years of Pope Francis, condemn gays,” The Monitor, Uganda (March 2023) <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/catholics-mark-ten-years-of-pope-francis-condemn-gays-4178372>

²⁸ “Catholic church to give its position on anti-homosexuality bill” NTVUganda (March 2023) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3b_dft-pVbE

The Church of Uganda meanwhile recently called on Museveni to join the church in condemning homosexuality and legislating against it.²⁹ A leader in the Pentecostal church wrote an opinion article for a local newspaper saying³⁰

“ We urge all Pastors in Uganda to preach against this vice and pronounce themselves against it. As we use our pulpits to preach the word of God against sodomy and LGBT activities, we shall restore the fear of God in our churches, schools and country at large.

”

These organisations have long and loud track-records of opposition to LGBTQI rights and support for harsher legislation. The initial passing of the 2013 Anti-Homosexuality Act by parliament in December that year was dubbed a ‘Christmas gift’ to Uganda’s Pentecostal churches, because of their support for it; Catholic bishops in Uganda have previously called on followers to “free the land of gays” and “put them to death”; several of these organisations were also involved in pushing the government to ban all sex education materials in schools as they were ‘spreading homosexuality’. (Table 2 in the Annexes gives examples of each group’s anti-LGBTQI activities).

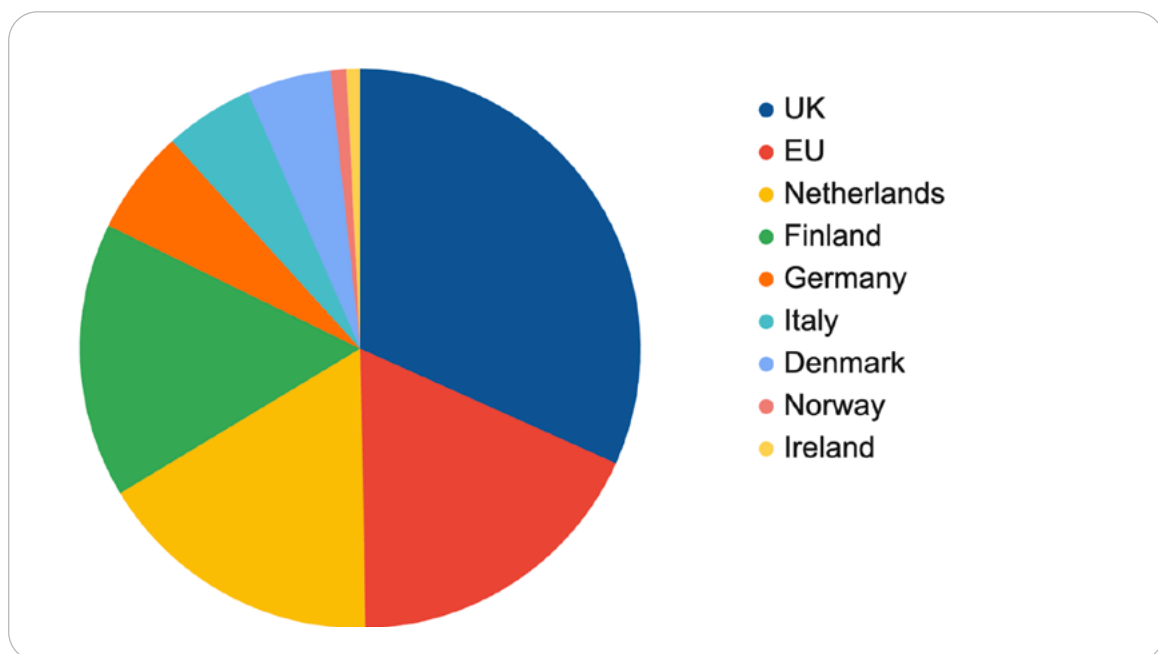
In contrast, all of the government donors covered in this research are members of the global Equal Rights Coalition (ERC) for LGBTQI rights internationally. The UK became co-chair of this coalition in 2019 (with Argentina), until 2022 when Germany and Mexico took over. Several donors also have official feminist foreign policies (e.g. Canada, Sweden, and Germany) or generally good reputations on sexual and reproductive rights issues (e.g. other Nordic countries Denmark, Norway, and Finland).

²⁹ Zadock Amanyisa, “Surging population in boarding schools breeding ground for homosexuality- cleric”, The Monitor, Uganda (February 2023) <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/-surging-population-in-boarding-schools-breeding-ground-for-homosexuality-cleric-4136638>

³⁰ “Pentecostal churches join the fight against homosexuality,” The Monitor, Uganda (January 2023) <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/commentary/pentecostal-churches-join-the-fight-against-homosexuality-4099630>

³¹ “ERC statement on the nexus between democracy and the human rights of LGBTI persons,” Equal Rights Coalition (December 2021) <https://equalrightscoalition.org/publications/erc-statement-on-the-nexus-between-democracy-and-the-human-rights-of-lgbti-persons/>

In 2021, many of these donor countries signed an ERC statement on the “nexus between democracy and the human rights of LGBTI persons” that warned of “persistent criminalisation of LGBTI status and ongoing violence and discrimination [that] undermine the possibility of LGBTI persons to fully participate in democratic and political processes”.³¹ The Netherlands is additionally a co-chair of what is called the ‘UN LGBTI Core Group’ – an informal cross-regional group of UN Member States (also including many of the other donors covered in this research) that supports the rights of LGBTI people.³² (Table 3 in the Annexes gives examples of donors’ rights commitments).



Europe’s contribution to projects involving anti-LGBT groups in Uganda

³² “Members,” UN LGBTI Core Group <https://unlgbticoregroup.org/members/>

Conclusion

The scale of the connections, funding and other relationships between international donors that have pledged to support LGBTQI rights and anti-LGBTQI groups in Uganda is staggering. The picture that emerges is not about an isolated mistake or rare oversight – but about what appear to be systematic failures to make top-line rights commitments meaningful, to align funding decisions and ensure they don't undermine those promises. Ongoing funders have urgent questions to answer, but so do other providers of recent funding, about how they may have bolstered the capacity and influence of organisations involved in fomenting homophobia and advocating for the current anti-LGBTQI bill that includes the death penalty and could push many people to have to escape Uganda.

Further investigations and inquiries are required to understand how it has been possible for these funding flows and partnerships to happen – whether there are insufficient donor regulations, for instance, or a lack of due diligence to enforce them. There are gaps in publicly-available data – for instance, it's not always clear how much money intermediaries disburse to their partners – and it's possible that there are other connections that have not been identified by this research. Organised opposition to women's and LGBTQI rights is generally under-scrutinised and often underestimated, while groups involved can be very sophisticated in their fundraising as well as other strategies. Lawfare targeting universal rights is a tactic we've seen around the world.

At the same time, there are some precedents for donors taking action to ensure their values and other objectives are not undermined by organisations they fund. One example is when the US cut aid to the IRCU about a decade ago, described above. After that happened, in 2016 the US introduced policy/rules for nondiscrimination including on the basis of sexual orientation clauses to be inserted into contracts and subcontracts for service delivery. Meanwhile, last year the European Union restricted funding to certain organisations in Hungary under what is called the “rule of law conditionality mechanism regulation”. This regulation, which was introduced in 2021, holds that the rule of law is a founding value of the EU and essential to the effective use of its funding. (Human rights are also a foundational EU value, including “the right to be free from discrimination” on the basis of sexual orientation).

In 2013, donors including Norway, Denmark and Sweden, had also cut some of their direct support to Uganda’s government, or redirected it to civil society organisations, in response to the anti-homosexuality bill at that time. In 2014, the Devex website reported that the Netherlands was also reviewing its support for civil-society organisations that had backed that bill. It is unclear however what actions were taken as a result of that review – and what actions donors may be considering now. In April 2023, some Ugandan LGBTQI rights activists called on the EU to cut its aid, or use its influence to help protect rights, amid a backlash “calling for our extinction.”

The connections revealed by this research show that even progressive and feminist funders need watchdogs. They show how aid donors have connected their taxpayers to religious organisations that have been campaigning for an extreme, discriminatory law including the death penalty – starkly at odds with their commitments to support human rights and inclusive development. We hope that this report provides useful information for urgent conversations about what should happen next.

³³ “Nondiscrimination for beneficiaries: Frequently Asked Questions,” USAID (Updated: December 2016) <https://www.usaid.gov/inclusivedevelopment/nondiscrimination-faq>

³⁴ “Council implementing decision (EU) 2022/2506 of 15 December 2022 on measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary,” Official Journal of the European Union <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D2506>

³⁵ “Aims and values,” European Union https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/aims-and-values_en

³⁶ Philippa Croome, “Sweden suspends some aid to Uganda over anti-gay law”, Reuters (March 2014) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-aid-sweden-idUSBREA2509720140306>

³⁷ Jenny Lei Ravelo, “Netherlands to review support for CSOs backing Ugandan anti-gay bill,” Devex (February 2014) <https://www.devex.com/news/netherlands-to-review-support-for-csos-backing-ugandan-anti-gay-bill-82910>

³⁸ Giulia Carbonaro, “‘They’re calling for our extinction’: Ugandan activists call on EU to cut aid over anti-gay law”, Euronews (April 2023) <https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/12/theyre-calling-for-our-extinction-uganda-activists-call-on-eu-to-cut-aid-over-anti-gay-law>

<https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/12/theyre-calling-for-our-extinction-uganda-activists-call-on-eu-to-cut-aid-over-anti-gay-law>

Annexes

Table 1: Summary of identified projects and funding

START	END	DONOR	DONOR AGENCY	INTERMEDIARIES	GROUP IN UGANDA	TOTAL SINCE 2014 (ORIGINAL CURRENCY) ³⁹	IN USD	DIRECT SINCE 2014 (ORIGINAL CURRENCY)	IN USD	SOURCE
2021	Dec 2025	Netherlands	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Mensen met een Missie	Church of Uganda	€1,160,370	\$1,264,803	€29,770	\$32,449	IATI
2020	Sept 2025	US	Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	-	Catholic Church - Uganda Episcopal Conference	\$9,251,920	\$9,251,920	\$9,251,920	\$9,251,920	USAspending.gov
2021	Mar 2024	UK	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	-	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	£107,817	\$133,693	£62,427	\$77,409	IATI
2021	Mar 2024	UK	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	-	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	£2,026,416	\$2,512,766	£72,473	\$89,867	IATI
2020	Dec 2023	UNDP + Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark & Austria	An initiative of UNDP, UN Women, OHCHR and UNESCO	UNDP	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	\$5,126,173	\$5,126,173	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2021	Unclear	EU	UNFPA	-	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	\$13,036,207	\$13,036,207	\$212,000	\$80,000	Spotlight Initiative
2019	2022	Norway	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation	-	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	809,046 NOK	\$76,859	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2016	2021	US + UK	USAID + DFID	Malaria Consortium	Church of Uganda	\$10,918,087	\$10,918,087	\$104,007	\$104,007	IATI
2021	2021	Sweden	Embassy of Sweden	-	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Other
2021	2021	Italy	Earmarked fiscal flows to NGOs & religious organisations	-	Catholic Church - Uganda Catholic Television	\$428,937	\$428,937	\$428,937	\$429,000	OECD CRS
2018	2021	Germany	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)	Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe e.V. (EZE)	Orthodox Church of Uganda	€449,038	\$489,451	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2016	2020	Netherlands	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Foundation ICCO	Church of Uganda	€100,765	\$109,834	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2020	2020	Germany	Federal Foreign Office	-	Church of Uganda	€5,919	\$6,452	€5,919	\$6,452	IATI
2018	2020	Denmark	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	-	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	2,700,583 DKK	\$405,087	2,700,583 DKK	\$405,087	IATI
2009	2019	US	State department + USAID	-	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	\$5,757,705	\$5,757,705	\$5,757,705	\$5,757,705	IATI
2019	2019	Germany	Federal Foreign Office	-	Church of Uganda	€8,178	\$8,914	€8,178	\$8,914	IATI
2011	2019	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€292,343	\$318,654	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2012	2018	US	Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	-	Catholic Church - Uganda Episcopal Conference	\$16,203,289	\$16,203,289	\$16,203,289	\$16,203,289	USAspending.gov
2012	2018	US	Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	-	Catholic Church - Uganda Episcopal Conference	\$7,528,845	\$7,528,845	\$7,528,845	\$7,528,845	USAspending.gov
2016	2017	Private foundation	IKEA Foundation	Oxfam Novib	Pentecostal Assemblies of God	€29,000	\$31,610	€29,000	\$31,610	IATI

START	END	DONOR	DONOR AGENCY	INTERMEDIARIES	GROUP IN UGANDA	TOTAL SINCE 2014 (ORIGINAL CURRENCY)	IN USD	DIRECT SINCE 2014 (ORIGINAL CURRENCY)	IN USD	SOURCE
2017	2017	Private foundation	IKEA Foundation	Oxfam Novib	Pentecostal Assemblies of God	€34,480	\$37,583	€34,480	\$37,583	IATI
2013	2016	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€100,407	\$109,444	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2011	2016	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€114,877	\$125,216	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2011	2016	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€179,465	\$195,617	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2013	2016	Canada	Canadian International Development Agency	Africa Community Technical Service	Church of Uganda	1,300,229 CAD	\$975,172	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2015	2015	Ireland	DFAT / Irish Aid	-	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	€60,000	\$65,400	€60,000	\$65,400	IATI
2011	2015	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€51,571	\$56,212	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2011	2015	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€95,892	\$104,522	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2013	2015	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€300,000	\$327,000	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
2011	2014	Finland	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Fida International	Pentecostal Churches of Uganda	€81,880	\$89,249	Unclear	Unclear	IATI
							\$75,694,692		\$40,077,088	

³⁹ “This “Total since 2014” column captures the total value of projects involving the religious groups in Uganda. It does not mean that these groups received all of this money. The “Direct since 2014” column captures direct disbursements. See the methodology section for more information.

Table 2: Examples of organisations’ anti-LGBT activities

Organisation	Anti-LGBT activities and support for the bill
Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU)	<p>In February 2023, the IRCU reportedly vowed to do everything possible to return the anti-LGBT bill to parliament (which happened soon after); it also expressed “great concern over [the] growing spread of homosexuality and the LGBTQ agenda in Uganda,” and its effect on children, and said “the tendency these days is to normalise every life’s struggle into a right. This is wrong!”</p> <p>In 2016, the IRCU called on the government to ban all sex education materials in schools, concerned that they were ‘spreading homosexuality’. Previously, the IRCU lost US aid funding over anti-LGBT activities and its support for the Anti-Homosexuality Act. In 2014, as a result of this funding cut, the organisation reportedly had to downsize and fire much of its staff.</p>
Catholic Church in Uganda	<p>In March 2023, the Archbishop of Kampala called homosexuality “evil”. He also said it is a mental illness and it should be a crime to “entice” others into it.</p> <p>In February 2023, Bishop Joseph Antony Zziwa, Chairman Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC) – which is the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy in Uganda – said: “it is high time the government, cultural and religious leaders, teachers, parents and other stakeholders waged a fight against homosexuality in this country”. The UEC is the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy in Uganda.</p> <p>In 2019 this church was also involved in opposing sex education. In 2014, a bishop in the Tororo diocese urged every citizen who supported the anti-homosexuality law to “put them to death and let generosity rise up within us and flow out in abundance”. Another bishop in the Jinja Diocese asked for Christians who helped ‘free the land of gays’ to be blessed. In 2019 it was also involved in a religious “Task Force Against Homosexuality”.</p>
Church of Uganda (Anglican)	<p>In April 2023, Archbishop of the Church of Uganda called on Museveni to assent to the anti-homosexuality bill. In February 2023, he had also urged the government to join the Church in condemning homosexuality and legislating against it; and he condemned the decision of the Church of England to bless same-sex unions, and warned that “well-funded Gay organisations that are recruiting our children into homosexuality”. Last year, he also urged religious and political leaders to fight such “agents” of homosexuality from the West.</p> <p>In 2019, Church of Uganda protests reportedly succeeded in delaying a bid to introduce comprehensive sexuality education in schools, because it would discuss same-sex relationships. Previously, it had supported the 2013 Anti-Homosexuality Act, with its archbishop at the time saying: “I appeal to all God-fearing people and all Ugandans to remain committed to the support against homosexuality.” In 2012 it urged MPs to enact this legislation – as it had in 2010, in order to “Ensure that homosexual practice or the promotion of homosexual relations is not adopted as a human right.”</p>

<p>Orthodox Church of Uganda</p>	<p>In 2019, its protests (along with those of the Church of Uganda) reportedly succeeded in delaying a bid to introduce comprehensive sexuality education. It prevented the programme from being taught in Orthodox schools and put pressure on the National Sexuality Education Framework to change the framework to remove education on same-sex relationships.</p> <p>In 2009 it was also involved in the above-mentioned religious “Task Force Against Homosexuality”.</p>
<p>Pentecostal Churches</p>	<p>In January 2023, a leader in the National Fellowship of Born-Again Pentecostal Churches called on pastors to fight against homosexuality, saying “As we use our pulpits to preach the word of God against sodomy and LGBT activities, we shall restore the fear of God in our churches, schools and country at large.”</p> <p>In a local March 2023 news article about two men fired from their jobs “after they were allegedly caught red-handed practising gay a few days ago,” Bishop Bagonza Charles, the General Overseer of Pentecostal Churches of Uganda, reportedly condemned their actions against God and African culture.</p> <p>In 2021, a Pentecostal Assemblies of God Uganda pastor explained that: “The Pentecostal Assemblies of God sees homosexuality as one of the immoral and ungodly acts that the Church needs to preach against and discourage.”</p> <p>In 2015, the LGBTI group Out and Proud launched a petition against a visit to Buckinghamshire in the UK from the General Superintendent of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) in Uganda as he had been involved in a “crusade”, including for the Anti-Homosexuality Act, “[that] caused incalculable damage as it labelled homosexuality as ‘a vice’ and incited people to fight against it.”</p> <p>The initial passing of the 2013 Anti-Homosexuality Act by parliament in December that year was dubbed a Christmas gift to Uganda’s various Pentecostal churches, because of their support for it.</p>

Table 3: Examples of donors’ global LGBT rights commitments

Donors	LGBT rights commitments
Canada	<p>In March 2023, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he wanted to “condemn in the absolute strongest terms the despicable law put forward by the Ugandan government” and that Ottawa “stands against” it.</p> <p>Canada says that, to promote the rights of LGBTQI people internationally, it uses “bilateral and multilateral channels to: call on states to decriminalise same-sex conduct, support the work of grassroots LGBTQI organisations abroad and condemn violence and discrimination that target individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity”.</p> <p>In 2022 the Canadian government launched the first Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan, in which it pledged to “continue to advance and strengthen 2SLGBTQI+ rights at home and abroad.” In 2017, Trudeau apologised for “the systemic oppression, criminalisation, and violence against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit communities.”</p>
Denmark	<p>In 2018, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a plan to promote security, well-being and equal opportunities for LGBTI people, in which it stated: “We not only have a duty, but also a very strong desire to state our unequivocal position on this matter. We will not accept any infringement whatsoever on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people.”</p> <p>In 2014, over the anti-homosexuality act that was last passed by Uganda’s parliament, Denmark said it would redirect some aid that was intended for the government to civil society and the private sector.</p>
EU	<p>In a March 2023 statement, an EU spokesperson said it is “deeply concerned by the passing of an anti-homosexuality bill” and that “The EU is opposed to the death penalty in all circumstances.”</p> <p>Its 2020 “LGBTIQ Equality Strategy” says: “The European Commission, the Parliament and the Council, together with Member States, all share a responsibility to protect fundamental rights and ensure equal treatment and equality for all.” EC Vice President for Values and Transparency said at a news conference, criticising the adoption of anti-gay legislation: “Too many people cannot be themselves without fears of discrimination, exclusion or violence.”</p>
Finland	<p>“The goals of Finland’s international human rights policy – the eradication of discrimination and increased openness and inclusion – are mainstreamed into all our foreign policy activities,” says the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Finland advocates the elimination of all forms of criminalisation as well as other discriminatory legislation and official measures based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Finland supports every person’s right to define his/her gender and sexuality on his/her own terms.”</p>
Germany	<p>In March 2023, Germany’s Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance Commissioner Luise Amsberg said the current bill “would be a grave violation of human rights”, and appealed to the Ugandan president not to sign it. Germany’s commissioner for LGBTIQ+ equality, Sven Lehmann, called the legislation “draconian” and a “declaration of war on queer people.”</p> <p>The Federal Foreign Office says it works to “liaise regularly with human rights defenders on the situation of LGBTQI people in partner countries and provide them with political support.” In 2022, Germany took over from the UK as co-chair of the global Equal Rights Coalition. In 2021, the government pledged to do more to uphold the rights of LGBTQI people abroad, and it adopted an official Inclusion Strategy “to promote the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in foreign policy and development cooperation”.</p>

<p>IKEA Foundation</p>	<p>The IKEA Foundation is listed as a member of and voluntary contributor to the Ariadne network of European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights, which brings together philanthropic institutions working on a range of issues including LGBT rights. The IKEA Foundation was established by the Swedish billionaire founder of the IKEA chain that has made many LGBT inclusion pledges.</p> <p>“At IKEA, we are committed to building a world where people of all sexual orientations and gender identities can feel at home, wherever they are,” says the furniture company’s website. In 2021, for example, it launched a toolkit “for creating a trans-inclusive workplace”, and it started a “Progress Is Made” campaign, to “push for greater progress toward LGBTQ+ inclusion.” The previous year, it became a member of Open for Business, “a business coalition” to respond “to the growing backlash against LGBT+ inclusion in many parts of the world.”</p>
<p>Ireland</p>	<p>In 2019 Ireland published its LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy and said it would “support engagement with human rights and civil society organisations working globally and in partner countries to promote and protect the rights of LGBTI+ people.”</p> <p>In 2012, the government had already committed that: “The work of Ireland to promote the rights of LGBTI people is a key element of our international human rights policy which is focussed on ensuring individual human rights and non-discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation.”</p>
<p>Netherlands</p>	<p>“Everyone should have the right to be themselves. It doesn’t matter who you are or whom you love. That is why the Netherlands promotes equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people worldwide,” says the government. “The Netherlands is committed to: abolishing the criminalisation of homosexuality; fighting anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination; promoting the social acceptance of LGBTIQ+ persons.”</p> <p>The Netherlands became one of the first co-chairs of the Equal Rights Coalition the year it was founded (in 2016, holding that position until 2018). In 2014 it also cut some aid to Uganda over the anti-homosexuality act. It also reportedly decided to review at that time support for civil-society backers of the act.</p>
<p>Norway</p>	<p>A March 2023, Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement said it is “deeply concerned by Ugandan Parliament’s decision to pass Anti-Homosexuality Bill. If passed into law, it would threaten the human rights of all Ugandans and lead to increased discrimination and persecution. Norway stands firmly against capital punishment under any circumstances.” Also this year, Norway said that it launched an Action Plan for Gender and Sexual Diversity, with “measures aimed at reinforcing the efforts to safeguard LGBT+ people’s human rights and inclusion internationally.”</p> <p>In a 2022 statement Norway said: “To advance the equal rights and opportunities for LGBTI persons, we have to take an LGBTI focused approach in our broader foreign and development policy. Norway is committed to do so.”</p> <p>In 2014, Norway said it would hold back some aid to Uganda over the anti-homosexuality act that was passed by parliament at the time, while increasing its support for “human rights and democracy defenders.”</p>
<p>Sweden</p>	<p>The Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and European Commission hosted an April 2023 “high-level conference on LGBTIQ people’s equal rights”. Last year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it’s “committed to standing up for human rights irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.”</p> <p>In 2014, Sweden suspended some of its aid to Uganda’s government after the last anti-homosexuality bill was passed. Also in 2014, Sweden introduced the world’s first official ‘feminist foreign policy’.</p>

UK	<p>“The UK is deeply disappointed by the Ugandan Parliament’s decision to pass the Anti-Homosexuality Bill”, said Andrew Mitchell, Minister of State for Development and Africa, on Twitter in late March 2023.</p> <p>In 2022, the UK pledged to support LGBTQ+ rights globally, including in its new aid strategy published in June of that year, and said that it had committed £11 million to promote and protect LGBT rights since 2018. From 2019 through 2022 it was co-chair of the global Equal Rights Coalition.</p> <p>In 2018, then Prime Minister Theresa May apologised for British colonial anti-LGBT laws and said the UK would help countries wanting to reform discriminatory legislation. In 2016, the government had also published a policy paper saying that it would take its work to protect the human rights of LGBT people globally “into the next phase” as “a core development issue”.</p>
UNDP	<p>At a 2022 event to promote action among parliamentarians to advance LGBTI+ rights, this UN agency said: “The needed reforms to laws, policies and social norms do not come about by chance – they occur when we have strong parliamentary leaders who are committed to ending stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity...UNDP is committed to supporting parliamentarians to reach these goals.”</p>
UNFPA	<p>“As head of the sexual and reproductive health agency of the United Nations, UNFPA, I am deeply troubled by the attempts to criminalise same-sex relationships in some parts of the world, exposing millions of individuals to the risk of arrest, imprisonment or even death,” said the UN population agency’s Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem in a March 2023 statement.</p> <p>“In its commitment to leaving no one behind, UNFPA works toward a world where LGBTQIA+ people are afforded the same rights as others,” the agency says on its website. “In addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ people, we’ve come some distance with further yet to go. We vow continued commitment to not straying from the path, eyes fixed on the horizon, true and lasting equality our destination.”</p>
US	<p>In March 2023, a statement from the White House condemned the current bill and called it “one of the most extreme anti-LGBTQI+ laws in the world”; it also said it was considering sanctions against Uganda if it does proceed with the bill.</p> <p>“It shall be the policy of the United States to pursue an end to violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation”, said a 2021 Presidential Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of LGBTQI Persons Around the World, issued by President Biden. In 2016, new USAID rules began to require nondiscrimination clauses including language about sexual orientation to be inserted into service delivery contracts and subcontracts using its funding. The US appointed its first Special Envoy for LGBT Rights in 2015.</p>

