

Trans Expat Guide

2025-2029



www.transexpatguide.com

So you want to leave the United States?

“You deserve and have every right to live as your true self, up to and including leaving the US.”

This guide is designed for those ready to leave or seriously exploring their options, spotlighting quickly accessible destinations known for progressive transgender rights, residency pathways, English-friendly environments, and a high quality of life. While there are many other countries to consider, these five have been selected as the best options meeting the criteria below (we hope to expand this guide in the future).

Instead of dwelling on the “why” of the current anti-trans situation in the US, our focus is on the “how” of moving abroad. **Please note that this guide is intended for those who meet the following criteria:**

- 1. You have a current US-issued passport.**
- 2. You have remote work or adequate savings to pay for the cost of relocation.**
- 3. You are seeking medium or long term residency outside of the United States of America.**

This guide is designed for working professionals or households with the financial resources and desire to pack up and move **RIGHT NOW**. This guide will spotlight quickly accessible destinations known for progressive transgender rights, residency pathways, English-friendly environments, and a high quality of life.

This is not a think piece on pushing back against the current situation in the US; rather, it is an instruction guide for removing yourself from a dangerous situation right now. Your safety and well-being are non-negotiable and you have every right to ensure them without guilt, shame, or coercion. That said, let's get started...

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If you are considering seeking Asylum or other types of refugee status: that is outside of this guide's scope. The paths to immigrating presented here are faster, more guaranteed, and easier to accomplish as long as you have the means to do so.



Canada

Inclusive and Close to Home

pg4

Close to the US in distance & culture, but costs & residency can be difficult to navigate.

A^Z **5/5**

English Fluency

\$ **2/5**

Affordability

↑ **3/5**

Residency Ease



Malta

Europe's LGBTQ+ Trailblazer

pg6

LGBT+ friendly Mediterranean charm with scarce local work & elevated costs

A^Z **4/5**

English Fluency

\$ **3/5**

Affordability

↑ **2/5**

Residency Ease



Portugal

Liberal and Laid-Back

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Affordability & residency pathways are worth learning some Portuguese

A^Z **2/5**

English Fluency

\$ **3/5**

Affordability

↑ **4/5**

Residency Ease



Netherlands

Tolerant and English-Proficient

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High English proficiency and high standards of living are matched with high costs

A^Z **4/5**

English Fluency

\$ **2/5**

Affordability

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Residency Ease



Thailand

A Special Case in Southeast Asia

pg12

HRT meds without prescription & low costs but language and legal hurdles

A^Z **2/5**

English Fluency

\$ **5/5**

Affordability

↑ **2/5**

Residency Ease



Canada

Inclusive and Close to Home

Close to the US in distance & culture, but costs & residency can be difficult to navigate.



English Fluency



Affordability



Residency Ease



LGBTQ+ Rights and Safety

Canada is consistently ranked among the most LGBTQ-friendly countries. It legalized same-sex marriage in 2005 and bans conversion therapy nationwide. **Transgender rights are well-protected: you can change your legal gender without surgery in Canada.**

Discrimination in employment and housing is illegal, and hate crimes are vigorously prosecuted. Major cities like Toronto and Vancouver have vibrant queer communities and resources (clinics, support groups) for trans folks.

Overall, day-to-day life is safe, with the Canadian government even issuing travel advisories about anti-LGBTQ laws in the U.S.; a sign of Canada's commitment to protecting LGBTQ+ people.



Residency Ease

Moving to Canada as an American isn't quite as simple as driving north, but there are accessible pathways. Canada uses a points-based immigration system favoring skilled workers.

If you have in-demand skills or education, programs like Express Entry can lead to permanent residency. Wait times can be longer than a Canadian winter, so this is not an overnight solution. For a quicker move, some trans Americans have also sought refugee status in Canada, as the country has welcomed LGBTQ+ individuals fleeing persecution.

However, refugee claims require demonstrating serious persecution and may not apply to all U.S. citizens. Alternatively, a student visa or employer-sponsored work permit can be stepping stones to staying long-term.

Americans can visit visa-free for up to 6 months, which provides a window to job-hunt or apply for other visa routes. Keep in mind Canada's bureaucracy can be slow, but once you're a resident, you have a clear path to citizenship and can sponsor a same-sex or different-sex partner with equal treatment.



A²

English & Culture

English is an official language, so day-to-day communication is a breeze. French is the other official language, but mainly in the Quebec region.

Culturally, Canada can be quite similar to the U.S. in lifestyle, making adjustment easier. You'll find healthcare providers and therapists knowledgeable about transgender health needs.

Canada's public healthcare system means basic healthcare is available to residents without ruinous costs, though wait times for specialized services (including gender-affirming surgeries) can be long. Many provinces include transgender healthcare in public coverage (for example, Ontario's health plan covers hormone therapy and surgery referrals). However, when considering hormone treatment you will have to plan. **You cannot access HRT drugs in Canada without a domestic prescription.**

There are private nurse-practitioner-led clinics that can prescribe HRT for a fee, but the wait can be long. When planning emigration to Canada you will need time to become part of your province's healthcare system which will take time and a separate set of efforts that should be planned concurrently with your move.

The quality of life is high: clean and safe cities, a strong economy, and social liberalism. The biggest downsides are the cold climate and the cost of living (Housing in LGBTQ-friendly cities like Toronto is pricey).

Still, for a quick transition to a safer society with minimal language barrier, Canada is a top pick.

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LGBT+ friendly
Mediterranean charm
with scarce local work
& elevated costs



English Fluency



Affordability



Residency Ease



LGBTQ+ Rights and Safety

Tiny Malta sits in the Mediterranean but looms large in LGBTQ+ equality. This island nation ranks #1 in Europe for LGBTQ+ rights according to ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Index.

Despite being a traditionally Catholic society, Malta transformed into a queer paradise in just a few decades. It was the first country in Europe to ban conversion therapy and one of the first to offer gender identity recognition without invasive requirements – you can legally change your gender marker without surgery or sterilization.

Broad anti-discrimination laws and constitutional protections are in place, and hate crimes (including transphobic violence) are aggressively prosecuted.



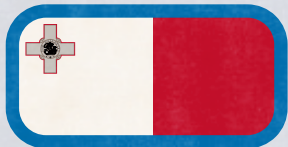
Residency Ease

For such a small country, Malta opens its doors surprisingly wide. U.S. citizens need a visa to stay beyond 90 days, but Malta offers a Nomad Residence Permit specifically for remote workers and digital nomads.

If you work remotely (freelance or for a U.S. company), you can apply to live in Malta for up to 1 year (renewable) relatively easily. This permit requires proof of income and health insurance, but it's far less complex than traditional immigration.

After 5 years of continuous residency, you could qualify for long-term resident status or even citizenship by naturalization. (Malta also has a citizenship-by-investment program, but that's a very pricey route.) Foreigners might face a few extra bureaucratic hoops compared to EU citizens, but overall Malta is used to American expats.

As an American, you will have to get HRT privately until you get into the national health care system. However, the price for treatment and consultations will be cheaper compared to out-of-pocket healthcare in the United States.



A²

English & Culture

English is an official language in Malta, alongside Maltese. Nearly everyone speaks English fluently (around 88% of the population) in this former British colony, so integration is easy on the language front.

Culturally, Malta is friendly and laid-back. You'll find a growing LGBTQ community and even an annual Pride in Valletta. The island's Mediterranean lifestyle – sunny weather, cafe culture, close-knit communities – can be very appealing. Quality of life is generally high, with low violent crime and universal healthcare for residents. Malta's public healthcare system is decent (and EU citizens can access it easily), but non-EU expats typically use private health insurance.

The country is known for LGBTQ+-inclusive healthcare policies and has clinics experienced in HRT. One thing to note: Malta's job market and economy are small. Unless you work remotely or in a specialized field (like online gaming or finance – big industries there), finding local employment might be tough. Also, housing can be expensive relative to wages – rental prices have risen to record highs in popular areas. Overall, if you're after a haven with top-tier trans rights and you enjoy island life, Malta is a gem.

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Portugal

Liberal and Laid-Back

Affordability & residency pathways are worth learning some Portuguese

A^Z 2/5

English Fluency

\$ 3/5

Affordability

🏠 4/5

Residency Ease



LGBTQ+ Rights and Safety

Portugal has surged to the forefront of LGBTQ+ equality, making it a popular haven for expats seeking a liberal European lifestyle. Same-sex marriage has been legal since 2010, and the country introduced one of the most progressive gender identity laws in the world in 2018 – **allowing transgender people to change their legal gender without surgical requirements from age 18** (and at 16 with some conditions).

Protections for employment, housing, healthcare, and goods/services are all in place for LGBTQ+ individuals. Lisbon, Porto, and coastal Algarve towns have visible LGBTQ communities and nightlife. **Overall, you can feel safe and respected as a trans person in Portugal's major cities.** Rural areas can be more conservative (as is true anywhere), but discrimination is outlawed and social attitudes continue to liberalize.



Residency Ease

Portugal stands out for its accessible immigration pathways. It actively courts foreign residents through various visas. The most famous is the D7 Passive Income Visa, a program often dubbed a “golden ticket” for remote workers, freelancers, and retirees. To get a D7, you must show a stable income from outside Portugal (such as remote job earnings, freelance work, savings, or pension) above a certain threshold (around €1,000/month for an individual, though it varies).

The D7 process is straightforward and typically takes a few months; once approved, you get a 2-year residence permit, renewable for another 3, and after 5 years you can apply for permanent residency or even citizenship.

Portugal also launched a new Digital Nomad Visa recently, which allows one-year stays (renewable) for people with higher remote incomes, and a Golden Visa program (through investment) – though that one's less relevant unless you have significant funds.

In short, for a quick relocation, Portugal is one of the easiest in Europe for Americans: **no job offer is needed, just proof you can support yourself.**



Portugal (continued from previous page)



Residency Ease (continued)

Family reunification is generous as well – you can include your spouse/partner (gay or straight, treated equally) and dependents on your residency.

It can be very difficult for a foreigner to access Portugal's National Health Service at first. It is wise to go through private practitioners to get HRT at the start of your journey to Portugal. However, the prices for medication and consultations are cheaper compared to paying out of pocket in the United States.



English & Culture

While Portuguese is the official language, English is widely understood in cities and tourist areas. Lisbon in particular has become an international hub, so many locals (especially those under 40 and in the service industry) speak some English – enough that many expats live comfortably without being fluent in Portuguese. Still, learning basic Portuguese will help, especially outside the big cities.

Culturally, Portugal is friendly but in a polite, reserved way. You won't experience the loud Pride celebrations of Canada here, but you will find a generally open-minded, "live and let live" attitude. The climate is fantastic (mild winters, sunny summers) and the cost of living is significantly lower than in the U.S. for healthcare, education, and transportation (rent in Lisbon is rising, but still cheaper than NYC or SF).

Healthcare access is a strong point: **Portugal has a national health service (SNS) that residents can use, and it's known for high-quality care.** Trans-specific healthcare, like HRT and surgeries, is available – there are informed-consent clinics and surgeons in Portugal. Overall, Portugal offers an appealing balance of quick entry, progressive rights, and a comfortable lifestyle – all in a gorgeous setting of beaches, cafes, and cobblestone streets.

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Netherlands

Tolerant and English-Proficient

High English proficiency and standards of living are matched with high costs



English Fluency



Affordability



Residency Ease



LGBTQ+ Rights and Safety

The Netherlands has a long history of LGBTQ+ acceptance – it was the first country to legalize same-sex marriage (in 2001), and social attitudes have been tolerant for decades. For transgender people, Dutch law since 2014 allows changing your legal gender on documents without sterilization (just a statement from an expert that you understand the implications; even that requirement is expected to be eased further).

Broad anti-discrimination laws cover gender identity and expression. In daily life, transgender individuals are generally accepted; big cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam have active trans and queer organizations, and healthcare providers knowledgeable in trans health.



Residency Ease

Here's a secret weapon for Americans: the Dutch-American Friendship Treaty (DAFT). **The Netherlands is notoriously difficult to immigrate to for most people – unless you're an American.** DAFT is a treaty that allows U.S. citizens to set up a small business as a self-employed person in the Netherlands with minimal hassle.

In practice, it means if you can deposit about €4,500 into a Dutch bank account for business startup funds, you can get a residence permit as an entrepreneur. However, **your business must be proven to support you in the first two years, otherwise you won't get a renewal.** You also have to show you have enough money to support yourself for the first two years without the business.

Unlike other national visas, you don't need to pass a strict points test or have a comprehensive business plan evaluated– the treaty streamlines those requirements away. The process takes a few months and must be done in-country (Americans can enter on a tourist waiver for 90 days, then apply). Once approved, you get a 2-year residency, renewable indefinitely.



Netherlands (continued from previous page)



Residency Ease

You can bring your spouse/partner and children under this permit, and they are allowed to work or study in the Netherlands as well. Beyond DAFT, Americans under age 30 can also use the Working Holiday Program (1-year visa) as a quick way in. And of course, if you have a job offer from a Dutch employer, that's another route (the Netherlands has a "highly skilled migrant" work permit with a relatively high salary requirement). **But DAFT is uniquely suited for a quick relocation if you have some savings or a remote business** – many U.S. expats have successfully used it to make Amsterdam home.



English & Culture

Nearly 90% of Dutch people speak English – often to a fluent level. You can live in the Netherlands for years getting by with English, especially in Amsterdam where sometimes it feels like everyone is speaking English around you.

Culturally, the Netherlands offers a very high standard of living and excellent healthcare. Health insurance is mandatory for residents, but the system is high-quality – and **gender-affirming care (HRT, surgeries) is covered by basic insurance with a referral**, meaning transitioning can be largely funded by the healthcare system. Wait times for some specialized care (like gender clinics) can be long due to demand, but private options exist as well.

Dutch society is quite secular and liberal; you'll find that being transgender is usually met with a shrug of acceptance. There's also a strong network of LGBTQ+ community centers and events (Amsterdam Pride is one of the biggest in Europe). Quality of life is top-tier on global indices – but note the cost: housing in popular cities is expensive and hard to find, and general expenses (groceries, going out) are on par with Western Europe.

Still, for an English-speaking trans American, the Netherlands offers a mix of safety, rights, and easy cultural integration that's hard to beat. Plus, after 5 years of residency, you can apply for Dutch citizenship or permanent residency, solidifying your long-term security.

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Thailand

A Special Case in Southeast Asia

HRT meds without prescription & low costs but language and legal hurdles



English Fluency



Affordability



Residency Ease



LGBTQ+ Rights and Safety

Thailand is often called one of Asia's most LGBTQ-friendly nations, and it has a thriving transgender community unlike anywhere else in the world. Trans women (locally known as “kathoey”) and trans men are visible across Thai society – working in offices, restaurants, media, and even starring in popular TV shows.

You can get hormone replacement medication without a prescription at most pharmacies, an important consideration for those who have to travel without a medical referral. The country is a global destination for gender confirmation surgeries and medical tourism, with top-notch hospitals in Bangkok and Phuket catering to trans patients.

Culturally, Thais are generally tolerant and accepting; you'll rarely get a second glance for presenting as your true gender in big cities. Tourists and expats who are transgender report feeling unusually welcome – in Bangkok or Chiang Mai, trans visitors commonly go about daily life without harassment. There's a palpable sense of freedom in being yourself; for example, Bangkok's Pride parade has been growing and even saw the country's Prime Minister join in 2024, signaling high-level support.

However, as of today, there is no legal gender recognition for transgender people – your official ID will still list the gender assigned at birth. So, legally Thailand is behind Western nations, but momentum for change is building.



Residency Ease

Thailand is quite welcoming to long-term visitors. Americans can enter visa-free for 30 days, and this can be extended to 60 days easily, or up to 90 days with a tourist visa.

For a more stable arrangement, Thailand has rolled out new options like the “Digital Nomad” visa (Destination Thailand Visa) in 2024, which offers a 5-year multi-entry permit for remote workers. This visa lets you stay up to 180 days at a time (essentially 6 months each year, renewable annually), which is great if you



Thailand (continued from previous page)



Residency Ease

want to split time between Thailand and elsewhere. **Eligibility requires showing about \$14,000 in the bank and a remote job.**

Other options include the Thai Elite Visa (a paid long-term visa), or the SMART Visa for certain professionals and entrepreneurs. Even without these, many expats do “visa runs” (hopping to a nearby country and back) to reset tourist visas. While that practice had crackdowns, Thailand’s immigration policy is still easier than many countries for those who plan.



English & Culture

English accessibility is moderate, but in cities, most younger Thais and virtually all medical staff and those in tourism/hospitality speak enough English. Everyday tasks in Bangkok (shopping, transit) can usually be managed with a mix of basic Thai phrases and English – signage is often bilingual.

In expat hubs like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket, you’ll find large communities of foreigners, meaning social networks and services (like clinics or support groups) that operate in English.

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Next Steps for Moving

Medication & Healthcare:

Short-term: Request an extended supply of medications from your current provider to cover the first few months abroad.

Medium/Long-term: Arrange for a transfer of your prescriptions and secure information on local healthcare providers, particularly clinics experienced with transgender care.

Tip: Keep both digital and paper copies of your medical records and prescriptions for smooth transitions.

Visa & Immigration Paperwork:

Initial Steps: Gather essential documents (passport, proof of income, insurance details, etc.) and review the visa requirements for your chosen destination.

Professional Advice: Consider consulting an immigration lawyer or local embassy for tailored advice.

Documentation: Ensure you have digital backups and notarized copies of all vital paperwork.

Housing and Accommodation:

Finding a Place: Start researching rental markets and consider joining local expat groups or forums for recommendations.

Lease Considerations: If renting, try to secure a flexible or short-term lease initially, giving you time to familiarize yourself with the area.

Property & Financial Arrangements:

Real Estate Decisions: If you own property in the U.S., decide whether to sell, rent it out, or manage it remotely. Consult a real estate agent or lawyer about selling or organizing a power of attorney if necessary.

Ending Leases: Notify landlords per your lease terms and plan for any associated move-out responsibilities.

Banking: Research local banks and international accounts that cater to expats. Open an account as soon as possible to manage day-to-day expenses and establish a credit history.

Next Steps for Moving (continued)

Other Important Considerations:

Legal Documents: If possible, ensure that your identification (e.g. driver's license, passport) reflects your current name and gender, if applicable.

Moving Logistics: Create an inventory of your belongings, plan for shipping or storage, and cancel local services or subscriptions in your home country.

Community & Support: Connect with local LGBTQ+ communities and expat networks for support and advice during your transition.

Short and Medium Term Options

Not ready to relocate permanently? There are plenty of ways to spend more than a month (but less than forever) abroad in a trans-friendly environment. These options let you test the waters of a new country without immediately navigating the full immigration process:

Digital Nomad & Remote Work Visas: Over 40 countries now offer special visas for remote workers, usually valid for 6–12 months (often extendable). For example, Spain (which doesn't require a testosterone prescription) and Portugal have one-year digital nomad visas, and Croatia offers a 1-year stay for remote employees/freelancers.

These visas typically require proof of a certain monthly income or savings (to show you can support yourself). They're great for a medium-term stay because you can live in-country legally for up to a year without the commitment of permanent residency.

Bonus: Portugal and Spain's visas can often be renewed or converted into longer residency permits if you decide to stay.

Long Tourist Stays: Some countries are very generous with tourist visas for Americans. Mexico stands out – Americans get 180 days visa-free in **Mexico** on arrival, no paperwork needed. That six-month allowance is one of the longest in the world and perfect for an extended stay (**Canada** offers a similarly generous 6-month visa-free option). Many U.S. expats in Mexico simply exit and re-enter twice a year to reset their 180 days.

Mexico also has an easy Temporary Residency visa if you have an income (\$2,600/month) or savings (\$43k) – a good intermediate step if you end up loving it there. **Thailand** (45 days visa-free, extendable to 3+ months) and **Costa Rica** (90 days) also let you stay a while as a tourist. Always check the latest rules, as visa policies can change.

Short and Medium Term Options (continued)

“Try-Out” Residency Programs: A few countries have special visas aimed at those considering relocation. Germany, for instance, has an Opportunity Card that lets you live there for 6-12 months to find a job. New Zealand and Australia offer working holiday visas (12 months) to U.S. citizens under 30, which can be a fantastic way to live and work short-term in a very LGBTQ-friendly, English-speaking country. These programs give you time on the ground to decide if a long-term move is right, all while being legally resident.

Healthcare & Prescriptions: For medium-term stays, plan how you'll get any medications (like HRT) during your time abroad. In many countries, you can bring a supply with you or obtain refills locally – Thailand allows purchasing hormones over-the-counter at pharmacies, whereas others might require seeing a local doctor. Research the specifics for your destination and consider buying travel health insurance for any unforeseen needs.

Conclusion

Each country above offers a unique mix of transgender inclusivity, easy communication in English, and feasible residency options.

Canada is ideal if you want a culturally familiar environment with strong protections and don't mind a bit of paperwork.

Malta and **Portugal** offer European charm and top-tier LGBTQ+ rights with relatively straightforward visas for those with remote income.

The **Netherlands** provides a highly tolerant, English-fluent society and a special entry route for Americans (DAFT), making the Dutch dream more attainable.

Thailand, while different in legal structure, can be an inviting haven for trans individuals – especially for those seeking a quick escape with no prescriptions required to access medicine, and an affordable, warm locale with a built-in trans community; just go in with eyes open about the legal limitations.

Ultimately, the “best” country depends on your priorities: legal recognition vs. cultural comfort, climate, cost of living, and how quickly you need to move.

The good news is that there are multiple countries happy to welcome you as a transgender American. By taking advantage of friendly visa policies and doing a bit of prep, you can find a place to live openly, safely, and authentically – no matter what's happening in the US.

Good luck on your journey!

About this Report

This guide was created to answer urgent questions that we, as LGBTQ+ community members, were hearing from our trans friends and acquaintances:

Where can I go? How do I leave? What are my options?

What began as informal research quickly grew into a full-fledged resource—a grassroots effort by and for members of the LGBTQ+ community.

We know that leaving your home behind, whether temporarily or permanently, is overwhelming. This guide is here to make that process easier to work through. It's not a political statement, just a tool to help those who need it navigate a difficult decision with clear, actionable information.

Emigration takes effort, and we want to ensure that those who need to leave have the best possible chance of success. Whether you're considering relocation now or just exploring possibilities, we hope this guide provides clarity, affirmation of your choice to live, not just survive, and a sense of personal empowerment. Now you know what you can do!

For More Information:

For more information, visit our website or reach out to us through e-mail:

Website: www.transexpatguide.com

E-mail: info@transexpatguide.com

Help for the Next Steps

Numerous nonprofits and organizations can help with relocating to a safer area, offering legal guidance, or simply providing a welcoming community. Below are resources that assist transgender individuals with relocation, legal assistance, and community support:

United States

Trans Lifeline: A 24/7 trans-led hotline offering confidential support and microgrants to help update IDs. (877-565-8860)

Transgender Law Center: Provides legal advice and advocacy for discrimination issues and document updates.

Pink Haven Coalition: Connects trans individuals with safe housing, transportation, and financial assistance for relocating.

Canada

Rainbow Railroad: Offers emergency travel and shelter to LGBTQ+ individuals escaping persecution.

Rainbow Refugee: Assists LGBTQI+ refugees with resettlement, housing, and community support.

Malta

Maltese LGBTIQ Rights Movement: Guides trans individuals through legal gender change and connects them with local support services.

Aditus Foundation: Provides legal aid and supports LGBTIQ refugees navigating the Maltese system.

Portugal

ILGA Portugal & Opus Diversidades: Deliver legal, psychological, and social support, including guidance on gender recognition laws.

Opus Diversidades: A non-profit organization that defends LGBTIQ rights, that also shelters unhoused queer individuals in Portugal.

Netherlands

COC Nederland & Transgender Netwerk Nederland: Offer legal consultations, community groups, and online guides to help with bureaucratic processes.

Dutch Transgender Info: A resource for document updates and finding local trans-friendly services. (In Dutch)

Help for Next Steps (continued)

Trans healthcare in the Netherlands: A comprehensive guide for Transgender expats in The Netherlands.

Thailand

Thai Transgender Alliance (ThaiTGA): Advocates for legal reforms and provides local community support.

Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand: Provides counseling, job training, and emergency shelter if needed.

Protecting yourself as a trans person in a hostile environment means blending practical safety habits with smart use of resources. By staying socially supported, legally informed, financially prepared, and digitally secure, you can improve your day-to-day safety and build a foundation for eventual escape to a better situation.

It's important to remember that you deserve to live safely and authentically. Take things one step at a time: secure your immediate surroundings, reinforce your support network, and make incremental moves toward greater security and freedom. Each measure – from saving a few dollars, to updating a single ID, to locking one social media profile – is an investment in your safety and future.

Even if you feel stuck now, these actions will ensure that when the opportunity to leave or change your circumstances comes, you'll be ready to seize it.

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