Guide Inclusion of bi+ people at work
Insights and recommendations on what is needed and what works

Purpose of this guide

Bi+ people experience more challenges in the workplace than heterosexual, lesbian and gay people. This guide identifies these obstacles and offers insight into the causes of their disadvantaged position in the labor market, as well as promising approaches for professionals, employers, and HR to promote bi+ inclusion at work.

What is bi+?

Bi+ is the umbrella term for all people with a sexual orientation focused on more than one gender. They are the largest group within the lgbtqi+ community. Some call themselves bisexual, pansexual and/or queer. Others do not name their sexual orientation.

What do we see in organizations?

Bi+ people in the Netherlands experience more undesirable behavior at work and are less likely to be open about their sexual orientation than lesbian and gay people.

Openness at work

![Bar chart showing openness at work by sex and orientation.](chart)

Experienced undesirable behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of bisexual people</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of lesbian/gay people</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of straight people</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% that experienced undesirable behavior from colleagues in the last year

General lgbtqi+ and D&I approaches do not promote bi+ inclusion

When lgbtqi+ or D&I approaches, policies and labels are actually mostly about homosexuality, bi+ people often do not feel represented or addressed. The same applies to broader initiatives wherein the needs of bi+ individuals are not specifically addressed and wherein inclusive language is lacking.
Barriers and experiences of bi+ people at work

Disadvantageous experiences

Compared to heterosexual, lesbian, and gay people, bi+ people experience more problems with being open about their sexual orientation, conflicts, undesirable behavior, and lack of acceptance from colleagues. They are also more likely to experience unequal opportunities and lower job satisfaction.

Openness is complex

Many bi+ employees strive to be (partially) open about their sexual orientation at work in order to show their true self and to not have to conceal it. The extent to which they are actually open depends on the safety and support they experience at work; in the absence of this, they are more reserved, even if they are open elsewhere. Some feel it is not relevant to the job or fear negative reactions. These portrait stories (in Dutch) offer insight into how bi+ people navigate this in the workplace.

Prejudice, microaggression, and discrimination

Bi+ people may face inappropriate curiosity, incorrect assumptions about their sexual orientation based on their relationship partner(s), lack of being taken seriously, and inappropriate jokes and sexualization in the workplace. They experience this from both heterosexual as well as gay and lesbian people.

Monosexual norm

Bi+ employees experience unique challenges at work due to the monosexual norm, that is the belief and expectation that sexual orientations are focused on one gender; in other words, that a person is either heterosexual or gay/lesbian. As a result, bi+ is often not seen as a serious and stable sexual orientation. Bi+ people may also be mistakenly seen as heterosexual or gay/lesbian. This might have the advantage that they may have to deal with fewer microaggressions, but most find it annoying because they do not feel acknowledged and thus cannot be themselves at work.

Heteroprofessionalism

Bi+ specific challenges at work arise from heteroprofessionalism, where only heterosexuality is considered professional and neutral. In work contexts with a norm of heteroprofessionalism, sexual diversity is not embraced. Trust and respect for bi+, gay or lesbian employees is less obvious. Bi+ employees experience, for example, uncomfortable reactions when their sexual orientation is brought up, unlike heterosexual employees. Another factor is that bi+ is more often connected to sex, which creates an additional obstacle for bi+ people to be open at work.
Visible and representation

» As an organization, pay explicit attention to recognition, visibility, and representation of bi+ people, similar to what is done for gay and lesbian people.

» Examine how many openly bi+ employees there are in the organization (without unintentionally outing them). A lower number of bi+ people compared to gay and lesbian employees may be a sign that bi+ people do not feel safe to be open about their orientation.

» Pay attention to special days, such as Bi Visibility Day (Sept. 23), Pan Visibility Day (May 24), and Coming Out Day (Oct. 11). The symbolic value of being named and being recognized should not be underestimated.

» Encourage ambassadors or diversity networks in the organization to also pay attention to bi+ inclusion. Even within LGBTQI+ networks, this is not always obvious.

Knowledge

» Offer employees and managers a training or workshop on LGBTQI+ inclusion, with explicit and comprehensive attention to bi+, the monosexual norm, and heteroprofessionalism to promote a safe and bi+ inclusive work environment.

» Outsource your training and don’t just ask any bi+ employee from the organization.

Communication

» Explore and question what is meant by professionalism within the organization, and encourage the inclusion of diversity within this definition.

» Use bi+ inclusive language in HR and D&I policies, training, and programs, among others.

» Check that descriptions and policies dealing with partners, relationships, marriage, parents, and sex do not make incorrect assumptions about a person’s sexual orientation.

Not this | But this
---|---
Whether you’re straight or gay | Regardless of your sexual orientation
Are you into women or men? | What genders are you into? To whom are you attracted?
Gay Pride; gay marriage; lesbian relationship | Pride; open marriage; relationship between women
Heterosexuality and homosexuality | Straight, gay, and bi+; sexual diversity
Bisexuals, bi+ people, Bi+ people | bi+ people

For more examples, check the Bi+ Inclusive Language Guide (Bi+ Netherlands, 2022, in Dutch).
**Promising approaches**

**Norm setting and culture**

» **Encourage policies, leadership, and interpersonal interactions** that make all sexual orientations, including bi+, a matter of course. This promotes an inclusive social norm and reduces the monosexual norm and heteroprofessionalism.

» **Communicate internally and externally as an organization** that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity, is welcome and allowed to be themselves. Explicitly naming bi+, gender identity and relationship diversity is crucial because it gives bi+ people a signal that the organization is actually open to bi+ orientations and non-normative lifestyles.

» **Offer active bystander training** in which employees are trained to effectively respond in the event of discrimination and microaggression. A case study on bi+ helps to communicate a positive social norm about bi+.

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**Want to know more and get tips?**

» **Bi+ Inclusive Language Guide** (in Dutch)

» **10 Questions about bi+** (in Dutch)

» **Guide Working effectively to reduce bi+ discrimination** (in English)

» **10 tips on bi+ inclusion for professionals and volunteers** (in English)

Read the full report [here](#) (in Dutch)
Read the summary and recommendations [here](#) (in English)

Interested in further advancing bi+ inclusion?

» **Bi+ Self-Scan for organizations** (in Dutch)

» For advice, training, collaboration, ambassadors, and updates, contact Bi+ Nederland.

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**Colophon**

This guide is based on the *Exploratory study about bi+ people and work* of Leiden University and Bi+ Nederland and is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. All sources are listed in the report.

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