

HOW TO START WITH FAIRNESS AT WORK

A practical guide for building workplaces where everyone is treated equally and feels valued



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WHAT IS THIS GUIDE?

This guide was developed as a guiding document for anyone who is interested in working to create meaningful, respectful, diverse, and inclusive workspaces for LGBTQ+ people. The document should be seen as an initial approach to the subject, covering both theoretical and practical examples related to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace.

A FAIR ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE

We spend much of our lives at work, so it should be a place where we feel comfortable and free to be ourselves.

This guide offers both inspiration and practical steps to help create such an environment. It is designed for everyone — HR professionals, managers, and anyone who wants to create a respectful and safe workplace.

A truly inclusive workplace is built through everyday actions: the words we choose, the way we listen, and the space we give to different experiences and perspectives. Each of us has a role to play.

WHY START

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in companies starts from a simple truth: each of us has a unique life experience. The goal is to balance inequalities and remove barriers. When companies put DEI initiatives into practice, they send a clear message — their workplaces are open, respectful, and free from discrimination.

While HR often leads these efforts, they can also grow from other places — through employee resource groups, leadership initiatives, or even as a response to market expectations.

There are many reasons to embrace DEI. Most can be grouped into two main categories: the ethical argument and the business argument.

ETHICAL REASONS

Research

Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics are natural parts of who we are. No one should face discrimination, hatred, or violence at work because of them. Yet LGBTQ+ people still encounter these issues. Take some of the following data examples:

According to FRA (2024):

- 9% of LGBTQ+ people experienced discrimination while looking for a job.
- 18% felt discrimination directly at the workplace.

According to a report carried out by the OECD (2020):

- Across the EU, more than ¼ of LGBTQ+ people in 2019 declared having concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity out of fear of being discriminated against.
- 1/5 of LGBTQ+ people declare feeling discriminated against by the job market because they're part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- LGBTQ+ people have a 7% lower chance of being employed than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts.

According to research carried out by L'Autre Cercle in France (2022):

- 3 out of 6 LGBTQ+ employees have reported being victims of violence at work.
- 1 out of 2 LGBTQ+ employees have reported listening to queerphobic insults and slurs.
- 1 out of 6 LGBTQ+ employees has reported being discriminated against by their direct superior.

According to research carried out by Fulcrum in Ukraine (2023):

- Only 38% of companies include an SOGI-ESCC approach in their policies.

According to research carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs of Baden-Württemberg (2022):

- 75% of gay and lesbian respondents have reported facing some form of discrimination in the workplace.
- This situation increases to 83% among trans people.

According to *Being LGBTQ+ in Czechia 2022* (Pitoňák & Macháčková, 2023):

- 44% of LGBTQ+ people encountered negative comments.
- 22% hide their identity due to fear of harassment or assault.
- 14% experienced workplace discrimination in the last year.

"My colleagues teased me with inappropriate remarks," says an anonymous man from Prague who shared his orientation at work. "It escalated when I came to the office one day and found about six vibrators and various sex toys around my desk." A colleague then told him to take a vacation because "you won't manage to try them all over the weekend."

Across the EU, 30% of LGBTQ+ people hide their identity at work — most often bisexual men (56%) and transgender people (46%). The most open situations are in the Netherlands and Denmark (only 12% hide), while people disclose the least in Romania (58%), Lithuania (58%), and Cyprus (54%).

Hiding one's identity increases stress, harms relationships, and reduces the sense of safety. As one Czech respondent put it:

"At first, I decided to keep work and personal life separate, but it turned out harder than I expected. We were constantly in contact at the office, and it was difficult to keep a distance. So you'd rather avoid personal topics like family or a partner just not to get tangled in them."

International Documents

Support for LGBTQ+ equality stems not only from our values but also from international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

BUSINESS REASONS

In preparing this chapter, we drew inspiration from *Leading Through Bias: 5 Essential Skills to Block Bias and Improve Inclusion at Work* by Poornima Luthra and Sara Louise Muhr, a book that offers a practical perspective on how to recognize and reduce bias in the workplace.

Research

Many studies show that DEI has a positive impact on business results. Supporting DEI is not only about values — it is also a smart business strategy.

According to Korn Ferry:

- 87% of the most admired companies say diversity and inclusion positively affect their results.
- Diverse and inclusive organizations are 70% more likely to enter new markets successfully.

Their core principles are:

- **Equality and human dignity** — Everyone has the right to equal treatment and respect, regardless of identity.
- **Justice and non-discrimination** — No one should be disadvantaged for who they are.
- **Remedying past harms** — LGBTQ+ people have faced (and in many places still face) discrimination. We must actively oppose it and work for change.
- **Support for authenticity and mental health** — When people can be themselves, they feel better, which benefits them and workplace relationships.

McKinsey's global study (2020) analyzing 1,000+ companies in 15 countries found:

- Companies with the highest gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to have above-average profitability.
- With gender-diverse boards, the likelihood rose to 28%.
- Organizations with ethnically and culturally diverse leadership were up to 36% more likely to outperform on profitability.

Benefits of Diversity

Supporting diverse groups at work brings many positives — for employees and for the company as a whole.

Preventing discrimination:

A welcoming environment reduces negative reactions to non-cis-heterosexual identities and creates safe conditions for everyone.

Higher loyalty and productivity:

People who feel respected and accepted are more satisfied, perform better, and collaborate more willingly.

Lower turnover:

LGBTQ+ employees are more likely to stay where they feel welcome, saving costs on hiring and onboarding.

More innovation and performance:

Diverse teams bring different perspectives and experiences, which support creativity and lead to better business outcomes.

Stronger employer reputation:

A friendly environment improves public perception, attracting strong talent and new customers.

Sector-specific value:

For example, in healthcare, diversity leads to higher quality of care and better patient experience.

A hiring criterion:

LGBTQ+ people actively look for employers who openly support equality and respect diversity.

Legal Commitments

In 2023, EU member states adopted the **CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive)**, which requires larger companies to publish detailed sustainability reports regularly. These must cover not only environmental topics but also social and governance areas — including initiatives supporting DEI.

From fiscal year 2024, the obligation applies to all companies with more than 500 employees.

From 2025, it expands to companies that meet at least two of the following:

- More than 250 employees,
- Annual turnover of at least 41,036,000 euros.
- Balance sheet assets over 20,518,000 euros.

SMEs listed on a stock exchange must start CSRD reporting from 2026.

The **ESG** framework helps companies meet CSRD requirements across three areas:

- **Environment** (environmental impact),
- **Social** (approach to people),
- **Governance** (company management).

Thus, companies can track not only financial results but also their broader impacts — e.g., energy use, working conditions, or equal opportunities. ESG supports sustainable, transparent, and fair conduct.

Supporting LGBTQ+ employees — and diversity overall — is therefore not only an ethical matter but also a strategic business advantage. It's wise to start these steps early so the company is ready for CSRD reporting without stress.

HOW TO BUILD A SAFE AND FAIR WORKPLACE

A safe and open workplace is built step by step across several key areas. This chapter presents the “puzzle pieces” to focus on. Every company should start where it is most natural and add steps over time.

DOCUMENTS, DECLARATIONS, AND BENEFITS

Strategy and Values

For LGBTQ+ inclusion to be effective and firmly embedded, it must be part of the company’s strategy and values. That ensures long-term leadership support and makes it a natural part of operations, not a one-off activity.

In practice:

Most companies declare values like respect, belonging, equality, or openness. Build on those and show how LGBTQ+ inclusion supports business — diverse teams lead to better decisions, innovation, and higher engagement.

Recommended steps:

1. Review the company strategy and find the people-related pillars.
2. Identify values that link to inclusion.
3. Prepare arguments showing how LGBTQ+ inclusion drives growth, innovation, and a better workplace.
4. Secure leadership support and show concrete benefits and market examples.

Examples:

“We want everyone to feel welcome and respected. Diversity and inclusion are part of our DNA.”

– **Vodafone**

“We want everyone to feel welcome and be able to be themselves at work. Discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability is unacceptable.”

– **Dr Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz**

Internal Policies

Why it matters:

To make equality, safety, and respect lasting parts of culture, they must be clearly anchored in official documents. This protects LGBTQ+ colleagues and the whole company — building trust and enabling safe resolution of difficult situations.

In practice:

The foundation is a clearly written anti-discrimination policy that explicitly protects LGBTQ+ people and describes forms of

misconduct such as homophobia, transphobia, harassment, or microaggressions.

A reliable, easy-to-use reporting mechanism that protects anonymity and explains what happens with a report is essential, as are clear rules and consequences for violations.

Recommended steps:

1. Review current policies and add what's missing.
2. Update the code of ethics and other key documents.
3. Train employees so they understand the rules.
4. Link principles to company values in communications.
5. Check effectiveness regularly and update as needed.

"Our Code of Ethics and anti-harassment policies help create a safe and respectful workplace for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We also provide an anonymous reporting tool for policy violations and misconduct. This ensures that our rules are taken seriously and properly enforced."

– *Dr Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz*

Prescribed Processes and Recommendations

Why it matters:

LGBTQ+ topics may bring situations people haven't handled before (e.g., workplace transition or responding to inappropriate remarks). Without a clear plan, confusion and inconsistent responses undermine trust.

In practice:

Policies set the rules; simple procedures make them work daily. Create easy guides for specific situations — how to support a colleague

during transition, how to respond to microaggressions, how to address bias. This protects LGBTQ+ people and gives HR and managers confidence to act consistently.

Recommended steps:

1. Prepare guides for topics like workplace transition, parental leave for same-sex couples, bias, and microaggressions.
2. Select key people (HR, managers) and train them.
3. Make the guides easy to find and understand.
4. Validate them with experts or LGBTQ+ organizations.
5. Update regularly based on company experience.

"At Sandoz, we identified a gap in our existing policies. While our Code of Conduct, non-harassment policy, and other key documents address discrimination in the workplace, they did not specifically support transgender associates who transition at work.

To address this, we developed a practical framework to guide transgender associates, their managers, colleagues, and HR teams through the transition process. The guide was created and refined based on lived experience. This validation through real experiences is essential to ensure the document is meaningful, practical, and truly usable."

– *Dr Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz*

Fair Benefits

Why it matters:

Not all employees can access benefits equally, and in many EU countries, LGBTQ+ people still face legal disadvantages, especially regarding family. If you operate in multiple markets, check whether rules limit access to benefits, parental leave, or health insurance.

In practice:

Internal regulations should include same-sex couples and their families so they have equal access to all benefits — from parental and paternity leave, partner health insurance, company discounts, and family allowances, to leave for a wedding or registered partnership.

Recommended steps:

1. Map benefits and check LGBTQ+ access; set changes if needed, and consult experts.
2. Where differences exist, level the playing field; involve unions or legal counsel if needed.

3. Clearly communicate that benefits are for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or family status.

4. Track legal changes and employee needs and adjust benefits accordingly.

Example from practice

“As a lawyer specialized in Employment law, I have come across a positive effort of some companies actively making their employee benefits equal to all of their employees, regardless of identity and sexual orientation — even though the local legal system does not recognize everyone’s entitlement.”

– **Daniel Weiss**

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Recruitment

Why it matters:

Recruitment is the first step where you can win or lose LGBTQ+ talent. People want to work where they can be themselves. If a company seems closed or hostile, many strong candidates will opt out.

In practice:

An open culture lets people realize their potential — communicate this clearly already in job ads. For managerial roles, also assess candidates’ stance on diversity. Inclusive leaders foster a friendly team climate and strengthen the company’s commitment to inclusion.

Recommended steps:

1. Broaden channels. Work with LGBTQ+ organizations, post on inclusive platforms, and attend diversity career fairs.

2. Use inclusive language. Adjust ads and materials to speak to diverse candidates; communicate values already in hiring.

3. Train HR and managers to remove bias and ensure fair selection.

4. Track results, measure effectiveness, collect feedback, and improve the process.

Example from practice:

“I wouldn’t join a company that doesn’t support LGBTQ+ diversity or is dismissive of it — it would feel like I’d have to pretend at work.”

– **Matějová, 2024**

“In my remote interviews via Microsoft Teams, I use a corporate background that includes our Pride visuals and my pronouns. Showing openness to diversity during interviews is an important first step in successfully attracting and recruiting talent from the LGBTQIA+ community.”

– **Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz**

LGBTQ+ Employee Group

Why it matters:

Internal initiatives or ERGs provide space for mutual support and networking. Community building strengthens belonging and helps employees feel part of the company. These groups also bring valuable know-how on diversity and inclusion.

In practice:

ERGs are officially supported groups of employees who connect around shared identity, experience, or interests. They amplify community voices, educate others, and advise internally.

For success, the company should formally recognize them and provide conditions — leadership sponsorship, cooperation with HR/DEI, and dedicated work time.

Recommended steps:

1. Find an executive sponsor to back the group.
2. Create conditions for the group to form and thrive.
3. Help launch the group, recruit active members, and kick-start activities.
4. Make ERG participation part of work time, not unpaid extra.
5. Support regular activity and integration into company life.
6. Make sure the ERG has enough funding to invite external speakers, join Pride parades, and organise activities.

Example from practice:

An example of a bottom-up initiative is **Škoda Proud**. Several employees were inspired by Volkswagen's "We Drive Proud" and proposed a similar community at Škoda. HR supported the idea and, within a short time, the group had a name, logo, email, and meeting space, becoming the company's first official ERG.

Travel Abroad

Why it matters:

Employees in international firms often travel to countries where conditions for LGBTQ+ people differ greatly. In some places, they face discrimination; elsewhere, their identity is even criminalized.

Without clear rules, some will decline travel rather than risk it — which is putting them at a disadvantage. True equality means mobility must be safe and available to all.

In practice:

Set clear safety rules and recommendations for travel to higher-risk countries, offer alternative relocations where risk exists, and prepare managers to understand and support people appropriately.

Recommended steps:

1. Map countries where stays may be unsafe for LGBTQ+ staff (criminalization, lack of protection, hostile culture).
2. Allow people to refuse travel/relocation to risky countries without career penalties.
3. Educate managers and HR on specific mobility challenges and support.
4. Create internal contacts in risky locations or partner with organizations offering legal/psychological help.
5. Ensure people have clear info on protections and support during travel.

Example from practice:

"Our product was successful, and we planned launches in new African markets. Everyone was excited. Then I realized I probably couldn't go, as a trans person, with my passport details, I wouldn't be able to enter safely. I raised it with my manager the next day. In the end, they went without me."

– **Anonymous employee**

“Our external travel provider repeatedly offered me routes via the UAE and Qatar and did not take my concerns seriously, despite the significant safety risks for me as a transgender woman travelling through those hubs. My manager consistently supported me in arranging safer routes that avoided these locations.

There should be a mechanism in place that does not require employees to disclose personal information to a third party, such as a travel provider, in order to ensure their safety. A recent case in which a transgender woman was detained during transit in the UAE — without even entering the country — confirmed that these concerns are real. Travel risks for LGBTQIA+ associates must be included in corporate travel security and risk assessments.”

– *Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz*

Recommended steps:

1. Ask how people rate LGBTQ+ activities, what’s missing, and the feedback they hear.
2. Track feelings of safety, well-being, and engagement; compare LGBTQ+ responses with others.
3. Phrase questions neutrally and offer full response ranges.
4. Choose about three areas to focus on next.

“At Sandoz, we run regular anonymous surveys that include DEI topics. Associates can choose from ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’ and add comments. The comments are especially important because they help us better understand how people feel and what they are experiencing.”

– *Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz*

Surveys and Feedback

Why it matters:

Employee surveys show how different groups — including LGBTQ+ colleagues — feel at work. They also help track how DEI measures (e.g., equalized benefits or value statements) affect culture, showing what works and what needs improvement.

In practice:

If you don’t run surveys yet, start now. Keep anonymity (use an external provider, make questions on sex/gender/sexual orientation optional). Respect local laws — e.g., in Czechia, employers may not require sexual orientation, but employees may share it voluntarily.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Internal Communication

Why it matters:

A culture of respect and belonging benefits the company. To build it, you must communicate openly. If the company doesn't explain why and how it supports LGBTQ+ equality, misunderstandings or tension may arise.

In practice:

Everyone should be aware of open and regular communication. Explain that diversity and inclusion are not buzzwords but conditions for success.

Recommended steps:

1. Inform staff about updates to anti-discrimination policies.
2. Share information on fair benefits for all via the intranet/email.
3. Allow preferred names and forms of address in forms and systems where legal data isn't required.
4. Allow preferred names on emails, signatures, badges, and name tags.
5. Include values, zero-tolerance for bias, and info on ERGs/contacts in onboarding.
6. Around key dates (e.g., IDAHOBIT, 17 May), invite leadership to express public support.
7. Keep articles, a glossary, and links to DEI policies and training on the intranet.

Example from practice:

"A colleague showed photos from a wedding with a gay couple. Some people smirked — not in insult, but in ignorance and uncertainty. It showed how important open communication is."
– Matějová, 2024

Trainings and Webinars

Why it matters:

The world changes quickly, and people need ongoing learning on diversity and inclusion to act respectfully toward colleagues and clients and avoid unconscious bias, bullying, or inappropriate behavior.

In practice:

Include LGBTQ+ diversity in the training plan so people meet the topic at different career stages.

Recommended steps:

1. Include LGBTQ+ topics, discrimination, and harassment prevention with practical tips in onboarding.
2. Offer soft-skills courses to leaders to handle bias and problems sensitively and fairly.
3. Include LGBTQ+ rights and diversity in ongoing training.
4. Provide HR with courses on inclusive hiring and retention.

Example from practice:

"We discussed which jokes to avoid because they may hurt someone. It changed how we communicate a bit. People still joke, but they think more about what they say."
– Matějová, 2024

Rainbow Items and Symbols

Why it matters:

Symbols matter. They show support for equality, strengthen culture, and open dialogue on inclusion. They should be a complement to a broader diversity strategy, not the only action.

In practice:

Symbolic gestures can take many forms — from a CEO video message on a key day, through leadership joining national and European Pride, to visible elements like rainbow lanyards, flags on buildings, or office décor.

Recommended steps:

1. Offer staff the option to wear rainbow items (lanyards, pins, stickers).
2. Place symbols in the workplace (flags, artwork, office design).
3. Encourage leadership to show support actively (video messages, Pride, sharing stories).
4. Show support on corporate social media.

Example from practice:

“Even a small symbol can have a big impact. When newcomers see rainbow lanyards, their eyes often light up. It’s simple but shows the company takes equality seriously.”

– **Matějová, 2024**

“Raising the Pride Flag at the beginning of Pride Month and keeping it displayed throughout the year is a strong symbol of commitment. At Sandoz Austria, we also raise the Transgender Pride Flag in November as a visible sign of support.”

– **Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz**

VISIBILITY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

External Communication

Why it matters:

Show support externally as well as internally. Sharing experience strengthens culture, helps other employers, and sends a clear signal to society. It also supports NGOs with long-term expertise.

In practice:

Work with other companies and organizations, join non-profit activities, and take part in public events such as Pride, coming-out day, or international anti-discrimination days. Visible support helps your employees and the community.

Recommended steps:

1. Join employer platforms that support LGBTQ+ inclusion; share best practices.

2. Present publicly on the web, social media, and professional forums.
3. On key dates (e.g., IDAHOBIT, Pride Month, Transgender Awareness Week), show support — fly a rainbow flag or light your building.
4. Include LGBTQ+ topics among grant and funding priorities.
5. Create a working group or advisory board with NGOs to provide expertise and prevention.

Example from practice

“My last employer supported inclusion by joining organizations such as Pride Business Forum and the Diversity Charter, campaigning and showing support online. They even made an Instagram post about me as a legal professional doing drag, which received many positive reactions and strong engagement.”

– **Daniel Weiss**

“Joining Pride Biz Austria and actively promoting this membership increases the visibility of these organisations and their work. Use corporate influencers and role models to communicate your commitment in an authentic and credible way.”

– *Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz*

Recoloring Logos and Products

Why it matters:

Rainbow colors are a global symbol of the LGBTQ+ community. Using these signals internally and externally can attract talent who appreciate an open environment.

In practice:

Rainbow recoloring can take many forms — changing the logo on social media, limited product editions, rainbow branding on the website, or in offices. It should not be only symbolic; link it to real actions supporting LGBTQ+ staff.

Recommended steps:

1. Adjust the logo on the web, intranet, and social media during Pride Month and explain why.
2. Create limited rainbow products and donate part of the proceeds to LGBTQ+ organizations.
3. Offer rainbow elements in email signatures or business cards.
4. Recolor logos only as part of broader support, not as the sole activity.

Example from practice:

“If the local branch decided alone, the logo might not change. But when it’s done globally, the world sees it — and even here the impact is bigger than if we did it alone.”

– *Matějová, 2024*

Inclusive Language

Why it matters:

Words influence how people feel at work. Inclusive language strengthens the feeling that everyone is seen and taken seriously. Choosing a language that includes everyone shows people matter and belong.

In practice:

It’s not about complex changes but small steps with a big impact. In both internal and external communication, avoid generic masculine forms and look for neutral options (e.g., “legal team” instead of just “lawyer (m.)”). Such wording supports a culture of respect. These actions need to be adjusted for the local language.

Recommended steps:

1. Update your comms manual with inclusive language rules.
2. Offer training for comms teams and frequent writers, so they feel confident.
3. Ensure changes appear both internally and externally (web, social, press).

“In German, the masculine form is often used in communication. By introducing an inclusive language guide at Sandoz Austria, we go beyond simply replacing masculine forms with mixed forms — we actively encourage the use of gender-neutral language.”

– *Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz*

LGBTQ+ People and Their Topics in Marketing

Why it matters:

Marketing strongly shapes public perception. An authentic representation of LGBTQ+ people reflects customer and societal diversity, builds credibility, loyalty, and attracts talent.

In practice:

Don't treat it as a one-off. Make it an ongoing commitment. Representation in ads, inclusive language, collaboration with LGBTQ+ creators and influencers — all can be part of the strategy. The key is honest and consistent communication.

Recommended steps:

1. Show LGBTQ+ people as natural parts of stories, not symbols.
2. Use gender-neutral language where possible; respect pronouns.
3. Work with LGBTQ+ influencers who can authentically introduce your brand.
4. Support LGBTQ+ people beyond marketing (e.g., donate part of campaign profit).
5. Avoid pinkwashing — showing support only on the surface. Communicate support year-round and ensure real internal inclusion.
6. Prepare crisis comms in case of backlash.

Financial and In-Kind Support for LGBTQ+ Organizations

Why it matters:

NGOs provide essential services — from education and legal help to psychological support. Companies that support them create real positive change. It also shows their diversity commitment is backed by action.

In practice:

Support can be financial (donations, grants, matching), in-kind (technology, space), or expert know-how. Ensure alignment with company values and communicate transparently.

Recommended steps:

1. Create an internal grant program for LGBTQ+ projects.
2. Offer long-term partnerships to chosen organizations.
3. Support employee fundraisers and match donations.
4. Donate products, services, or space.
5. Allow volunteering time for LGBTQ+ initiatives.
6. Communicate who and how you support.

“We partnered with local community members as speakers at our events. Communicating in the local language creates a stronger impact than global events held in English. We also chose to support smaller Pride events rather than larger ones, focusing on the communities in the regions where we recruit our workforce.”
– **Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz**

Engaging CSO

Why it matters:

Culture change doesn't come only from leadership decisions but also from personal stories and broad engagement. Here, **CSO — Corporate Social Opportunity** comes in. Unlike CSR's risk-reduction focus, CSO looks for opportunities to create positive change.

When LGBTQ+ employees see visible role models, can access mentoring, or meet at networking events, they feel the company's support through real actions.

In practice:

CSO activities include mentoring programs connecting LGBTQ+ staff with experienced colleagues, sharing inspiring stories internally, engaging leaders as allies, and organising panels and informal meetups where employees can openly share and support each other.

Recommended steps:

1. Build an internal mentoring program for LGBTQ+ staff.
2. Invite LGBTQ+ colleagues, if they wish, to share professional stories internally.
3. Train leaders in LGBTQ+ inclusion and encourage open support.
4. Host panels and networking for LGBTQ+ professionals.
5. Partner with LGBTQ+ mentoring orgs to connect with external role models.

“If you have an outspoken communicator or role model from the LGBTQIA+ community within your organisation who is willing to support your engagement, make use of this support. It brings greater authenticity to your campaigns. Regular meetings for ERG members help maintain connection and momentum.

Mentoring is a powerful tool, but it should be implemented professionally and in close cooperation with HR. Have you considered reverse mentoring? In this model, LGBTQIA+ members mentor senior executives — such as the CEO, CHRO, CFO, board members, and leaders one or two levels below — to raise awareness of the community’s needs, challenges, and concerns. This enables leaders to act as informed advocates and allies, even when no LGBTQIA+ person is present in the room.”

– **Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz**

Participation in Events

Why it matters:

Joining events like national role models ceremonies, diversity awards events, DEI conferences, or the Pride Festivals lets a company show support and also bond teams through shared experiences. Publicly, the company appears as a modern employer, can build

new partnerships, and support local LGBTQ+ organizations (like EPBN members).

In practice:

Support can mean official partnership and sponsorship, a company group in the Pride parade, or employee engagement in workshops, debates, or volunteering.

Recommended steps:

1. Organize a company group for the Pride parade (shirts, banners, visual identity).
2. Support the event financially or in-kind if feasible.
3. Allow participation during work hours if possible.
4. Offer expertise in workshops/panels (HR, workplace inclusion).
5. Share your engagement internally and externally — authentically, with real stories.

Example from practice:

“Our LGBTQ+ ERG sometimes meets in queer bars. We’re from different divisions, countries, and ages — that’s why it’s so enriching. A remote colleague who seemed very reserved still came, mostly listened, and later joined Prague Pride because he knew a safe group was around him.”

– **Matějová, 2024**

“My former colleagues regularly come to my events (e.g., Out at work panel discussion) or drag shows.”

– **Daniel Weiss**

“We sponsor Kufstein Pride as a key local employer and ensure we have a visible booth at the event. Our volunteers are equipped with branded shirts and materials to clearly represent our corporate identity.”

– **Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz**

WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT

Support for LGBTQ+ inclusion can start from different places — all equally important:

- **Individuals** — Open the topic via a personal story, a question, an article, or a discussion.
- **HR or DEI team** — Embed the topic into hiring, education, and benefits.
- **Leadership** — Set clear internal and external stances, support partnerships and public events.

Ideally, personal, systemic, and public levels connect. In practice, change often starts with individuals or HR — never underestimate small first steps.

LEVELS OF SUPPORT

Individual

Often, leadership support is missing at first, so look for allies (HR, leadership, colleagues).

A group carries more weight than an individual — team up.

First steps can be informal (meetups, sharing articles, etc.).

HR or DEI team

The HR/DEI team has the mandate but needs leadership support and budget; it seeks allies inside and outside (ERGs, external orgs) and connects staff with leadership.

Company leadership

Leadership has the authority to drive change and set the tone; impulses can also come from the global level.

HOW TO START WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS

Many people who want to support LGBTQ+ diversity are alone at first. They lack an official mandate, are not part of HR or DEI, and may get no response. Still, starting can be easier than it seems.

Sometimes it's enough to:

- send a colleague an interesting article,
- suggest an intranet update to list LGBTQ+ benefits,
- ask HR about creating an employee group,
- propose a small symbol of support (e.g., rainbow keychains),
- share your view in a safe setting (e.g., at a teambuilding).

This may inspire others and lead HR or leadership to take over. Don't be discouraged if nothing big happens — try again, more systematically.

Later you can:

- gather colleagues and set up an ERG,
- ask HR for fair benefits,
- propose supporting a chosen LGBTQ+ organization.

Expect some misunderstanding. Keep calm, persist, and prepare different arguments — personal stories and data-based facts.

The Power of Personal Story

One of the most effective ways to open a safe space for change is sharing personal stories — from LGBTQ+ people, their parents, or carers. Personal testimony makes the topic relatable, shows its human side, and invites dialogue.

Companies can use stories in education, internal comms, and leadership programs. When a company creates a safe environment for sharing, it opens doors to sensitive topics and strengthens a culture of respect.

Data and Facts

Not everyone responds to stories; some prefer numbers and clear links to business. Keep data-based arguments ready and study DEI literature and EU and national research. Cooperation with expert organizations also helps.

EMPLOYEE GROUPS AS SPACES OF SAFETY AND CHANGE

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) connect colleagues around a diversity area. Led by employees on a voluntary basis, they provide sharing, support, and concrete ideas for moving the company toward openness. They're for LGBTQ+ people and for allies who want to support inclusion actively.

ERGs can:

- help shape HR policies and diversity topics,
- partner with internal comms and education,
- Bring an internal view of what feels natural vs. forced,
- strengthen psychological safety through community.

They're not "activist add-ons" but practical tools that help companies grow culture naturally and respectfully — and can save costs (e.g., replacing some external training/consultancy).

HR AS A KEY TO CHANGE

HR plays a crucial role: recruitment, onboarding, education, benefits, and policies meet here. HR has tools and responsibility, but needs leadership, allies, and a budget.

HR can:

- survey employee needs (e.g., anonymous questionnaires),
- find allies in HR, ERGs, and among individuals,
- work with external experts for training/audits,

- propose concrete steps and show company-wide benefits,
- bring inspiration from other firms and research.

HR can systematize diversity (inclusive job ads, preferred names, procedures for issues, etc.).

LEADERSHIP AS THE MAIN DRIVER

Leadership (CEO, board, top management) sets the tone. When they clearly communicate that inclusion and respect are core values, they inspire others.

Leadership can:

- speak about respect and inclusion in speeches and reports,
- model inclusive language,
- share LGBTQ+ stories year-round (not just in June),
- create safe spaces for sharing,
- support the topic across HR, comms, compliance, and CSR.

“Reverse mentoring can be used to raise awareness among corporate leaders about the needs, fears, and challenges of the LGBTQIA+ community. In this model, the CEO becomes the mentee of a community member. To make this initiative successful, identify LGBTQ+ employees who are willing to share their experiences and feel comfortable engaging in open dialogue with senior executives.”

– *Dr. Tamara Scheidl, Sandoz*

What If Leadership Is Silent?

Not every company has leadership that embraces diversity immediately. In such case, change is still possible. Sometimes one manager with a genuine interest can get things moving.

Helpful actions:

- training in inclusive leadership,
- inviting leaders to events and conferences for inspiration,
- sharing data and stories showing positive impact.

BACKING FROM A GLOBAL STRATEGY

If the organization or company is part of a global group, use support from HQ and other branches. Many global companies have detailed diversity plans, including LGBTQ+ topics. A common approach is the “embassy model” — applying high global standards even where local laws or debates lag. This shows that equality and respect are core values everywhere.

This can bring:

- strong arguments for internal debate,
- easier policy rollout in sensitive contexts,
- an international ally/ERG community,
- discrimination prevention where legal protection is weak.

WORKING WITH EXPERT PARTNERS

You don't have to handle LGBTQ+ inclusion alone. In every country, there are organizations (like all EPBN members) with long-term expertise, data, and practical tools. Collaboration helps you avoid starting from scratch.

Local and International Partners

Local partners know the environment, laws, and hot topics and can give practical, sensitive advice. Across different countries, firms can build long-term partnerships with local LGBTQ+ organizations¹.

Such cooperation offers:

- tailored trainings, workshops, and consulting (for HR, management, staff),
- ways to involve employees in events (Pride, Fun&Run),
- expert materials for internal comms (e-learning, intranet, internal campaigns),
- joint projects, panels, and campaigns (e.g., coming out, equality).

International partners provide proven tools, data, and research for informed decisions and sharing across markets, strengthening your case with leadership, HR, and compliance.

Corporate Partners

Every company is different, but similar people and teams play roles in supporting LGBTQ+ diversity. Together, they create a network that keeps change visible and long-term.

Besides individuals, ERGs, HR, and leadership, focus on:

• Work teams

Daily atmosphere is built here: language, humor, relationships. Each team's

"micro-culture" can be developed by training, discussion, and campaigns.

• Managers

The relationship with a supervisor often decides whether LGBTQ+ staff can be themselves. Managers need tools and training for truly inclusive leadership and psychological safety.

• Comms & Marketing

They shape the company's voice and external visibility. To be credible, it must match internal reality. They can also connect the company to public events (Pride Month activities, parades).

• Legal

Ensures policies comply with law and prevent discrimination/misconduct. They manage reporting channels and solutions, and help refine processes (name changes, benefits, reporting).

• IT

Ensures systems support inclusion (e.g., pronouns, preferred names) and handles data with diverse identities in mind.

• Facilities

Can provide gender-neutral restrooms or safe changing rooms and support inclusive workplace design as part of the DEI strategy.

• Unions

Strong in collective bargaining on benefits and care; can be key allies for equalizing benefits for same-sex couples. They also need inclusion knowledge.

¹ Please review the list of useful international LGBTQ+ contacts below.

WHO LEADS LGBTQ+ DIVERSITY IN A COMPANY

Successful integration is not the task of one person or team. It needs clear roles and shared responsibility. Anyone, regardless of orientation or gender identity, can support inclusion.

Shared Responsibility and the Role of Allies

People often expect change to be led by LGBTQ+ employees themselves, but many have long faced pressure to hide and adapt. Asking them to be ambassadors can be too demanding. That's why allies, teams, supervisors, HR, and leadership are so important.

Inclusion is not a minority topic — it's for everyone. Many of us have someone in our lives who has LGBTQ+ diversity concerns. A truly fair culture arises when responsibility is shared across the company, not placed solely on the community.

A Contact Person or Group

In many companies, one key person is at the start — formally (DEI manager, HR Business Partner) or organically from the workforce.

Often, an ERG forms around them and becomes the main contact point for LGBTQ+ topics.

Key tasks include:

- coordinating activities and cross-functional cooperation,
- communicating with leadership,
- supporting staff and developing learning opportunities,
- ensuring alignment with values and strategy.

This role cannot be isolated — it works best when strongly connected to other actors in the company.

Fairness Is a Team Effort

Support for LGBTQ+ diversity must be firmly rooted internally. If it appears only in external communication — campaigns, visible gestures, marketing partnerships — there is a risk of **pinkwashing**.

Pinkwashing happens when a company presents itself as supportive of LGBTQ+ people externally, while no real change happens inside. Real inclusion requires patience, courage, and cooperation. It's about finding allies, taking small steps that lead to big shifts, and a willingness to keep learning.

ABOUT PINKWASHING

Pinkwashing is when a company uses LGBTQ+ symbols (rainbow flag, logo) as a marketing tool without truly supporting equality or improving conditions for LGBTQ+ people inside. It creates a false image of social responsibility or tries to boost sales/talent attraction rather than offering authentic support.

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE IT?

Pinkwashing is common during Pride Month when companies change logos to a rainbow but make no internal changes. For example:

- no internal trainings or workshops, unequal benefits for same-sex couples, missing rules against discrimination based on orientation or identity.

Another case: a “rainbow product” with no proceeds going to LGBTQ+ organizations. In both scenarios, the community is used rather than supported.

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

Pinkwashing undermines trust — even towards organizations that genuinely support inclusion. It breeds cynicism and the impression that companies “only recolor logos.” Sometimes decisions are made globally beyond a local branch’s control.

Avoid it by asking two questions:

1. Did your company support LGBTQ+ people in the past year?

Yes — Great, a rainbow logo reflects real work.

No — Start now and link the logo to concrete action (donation, ERG creation, equalized benefits).

2. Why are we recoloring the logo?

If it expresses support, draws attention to inequality, or starts change, it makes sense.

Still unsure? Ask LGBTQ+ people within your company if the rainbow branding is deserved — they’ll advise best.

Some may object to visible support. That makes it even more important to explain why support is still needed. A recolored logo is a strong symbol against stigma and discrimination — but it should go hand in hand with concrete steps that make the workplace safe and open for everyone.

USEFUL LGBTQ+ CONTACTS

Below is an overview of organizations and platforms that can help you support DEI — reliable sources of inspiration, data, and tools from international to the Czech context.

INTERNATIONAL HELP

AGPRO

AGPRO is the Austrian network of gay entrepreneurs, managers, and people in responsible positions. They have contributed to the empowerment of LGBTI people in business and the world of work since 1998.

Website: <https://agpro.at/>

Berufsverband V.K.

Berufsverband V.K. is a German professional organization working and committed to a discrimination-free working and living environment for LGBTIQ people.

Website: <https://www.vk-online.de/>

Blom ASBL

LGBTQIA+ organization based in Luxembourg, creating spaces for peer support and collaboration within the queer communities. Its mission is to foster autonomy and personal growth through a range of community-driven projects.

Website: <https://blom.lgbt/>

Çavaria

Çavaria is the Flemish advocacy group for LGBTI+ people and the umbrella organization for LGBTI+ organizations in Belgium.

Website: <https://cavaria.be/>

Copenhagen Pride

Copenhagen Pride organizes activities and events for and with the LGBTQIA+ community, and actively participates in contexts that can help create visibility, understanding, and concrete results.

Website: <https://www.copenhagenpride.dk/>

Common Zone

Common Zone is a Croatian civil society organisation founded in 2005 that advances LGBTIQ+ equality with a focus on youth, women, and trans and non-binary people. Since 2015, its Work Equality for All programme has promoted LGBTIQ+ workplace equality by combining research and training with Workplace Equality Index benchmarking and certification for employers, dedicated training for trade unions, and cross-sector cooperation. Common Zone also offers legal and psychosocial support and, through Queer Beez—Croatia's first LGBTIQ+ entrepreneurship network and awards, supports socially impactful, innovative businesses.

Website: <https://ravnopravnost.lgbt/category/english/>

Council of Europe — Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Works on LGBTQ+ rights at the city, regional, and national levels; provides campaigns and practical guides.

EDGE

The Italian organization EDGE is a network for personal and professional growth through the exchange of experiences, a conscious group of LGBTI+ people, and a proactive force for the improvement of Italian civil society.

Website: <https://www.edge-glb.it/>

EPBN — European Pride Business Network

Connects European companies and ERGs; offers international networking and best practices.

Website: <https://epbn.eu/>

LGL

LGL is a national LGBT+ rights organization based in Lithuania working in favor of the interests of the LGBT+ community through advocacy, awareness raising, and community building actions.

Website: <https://www.lgl.lt/en/>

Federacja Znaki Równości

It is the first Polish federation that brings together organizations that work for the LGBTQ+ community. They aim to build an open and diverse society, free from any sort of discrimination, in particular discrimination on the grounds of sexuality and gender.

Website: <https://znakirownosci.org.pl/signs-of-equality/>

Fulcrum

Fulcrum is an organization based in Ukraine working to break down stereotypes around stigmatized groups as well as working to expand the circle of allies who support equal rights for all people, including those in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Website: <https://www.t-o.org.ua/>

GLAS Foundation

GLAS Foundation is an organization based in Bulgaria that aims to ensure full equality and robust protection against all forms of discrimination for the LGBT+ community.

Website: <https://workitout.bg/>

ILGA and ILGA-Europe

Global network of LGBTQ+ organizations. Provides research, legislative overviews, and national contacts; strong voice at the UN.

Website: <https://ilga.org/> and <https://www.ilga-europe.org/>

Legebitra

Legebitra is a non-partisan LGBTI+ civil society organization based in Slovenia, active in the field of human rights, education, mental, physical, and sexual health, and advocating social and systemic changes based on the respect for sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression.

Website: <https://legebitra.si/>

Mozaiq

MozaiQ is a community organization for LGBTQIA+ people living in Romania. It aims to develop the LGBTQIA+ community in Romania through solidarity and mutual trust resulting from social activities, presence on the alternative cultural scene, as well as paying extra attention to various groups within the community, including: Roma LGBTQIA+ people, trans people, HIV+ people, sex workers, and others.

Website: <https://www.mozaiqlgbt.ro/en/about-mozaiq/>

Open for Business

Coalition of major companies supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion also for economic reasons; publishes studies on how diversity benefits business.

Website: <https://www.open-for-business.org/>

L'Autre Cercle

Leading French organization working on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workplace through different actions, including research, networking events, advocacy and communication efforts, and consulting and training.

Website: <https://autre Cercle.org/english-version/>

Network

Network is a Swiss organization engaging with LGBTI issues in the political, cultural, business, and social sectors. Network is actively working to help and support LGBTI people feel empowered to openly and confidently express their identity at work and achieve career success.

Website: <https://www.network.ch/en/>

Pride at Work

Pride at Work is the largest LGBTQIA+ focused Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, training and partnership program in Ireland.

Website: <https://prideatwork.ie/>

Pride Biz Austria

Pride Biz Austria is an LGBTQIA+ organization consolidating LGBTQIA+ activities in the business sector. Pride Biz Austria advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people in the economy and workplace and serves as Austria's first point of contact for companies and policymakers.

Website: <https://pridebiz.at/>

Queer Business Women

Queer Business Women (QBW) is a network that connects and empowers lesbian and queer women in Austria professionally.

Website: <https://qbw.at/>

REDI

REDI is a Spanish organization working towards a more equal and inclusive Spanish society, by promoting inclusion, diversity, and equal access to opportunities. REDI does so by supporting its partners by promoting workspaces that are respectful, inclusive, and safe for all; valuing talent, regardless of the sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sexual characteristics of an individual.

Website: <https://www.redi-lgbti.org/>

Stonewall

One of Europe's largest LGBTQ+ organizations offers training, audits, and benchmarking for companies.

Website: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/>

WeAreOpen

WeAreOpen is a non-profit organization, providing professional services that help companies build open and inclusive corporate cultures in Hungary and beyond.

Website: <https://www.nyitottakvagyunk.hu/>

Wirtschaftswеiber

Wirtschaftswеiber is a German professional organization working and committed to a discrimination-free working and living environment for LGBTQ people.

Website: https://wirtschaftswеiber.de/?doing_wp_cron=1734876043.6189799308776855468750

Workplace Pride

Workplace Pride is an LGBTQ+ organization based in the Netherlands, working in favor of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the workplace through awareness raising, measurement research, training, and network building, and more. Website: <https://workplacepride.org/>

WyberNet

WyberNet is a business network helping and supporting lesbian women in Switzerland. Website: <https://www.wybernet.ch/>

European Union

Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA): research, data, and tools for monitoring discrimination.

LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (European Commission): framework for equality and recommendations for member states.

European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT Rights: a political group monitoring LGBTQ+ rights developments in Europe.

Pride Business Forum

A platform for companies and organizations that want to create fair and safe workplaces for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sexual characteristics. Besides an annual conference, it offers training, a year-round calendar of networking and educational events, and a foundation program supporting LGBTQ+ projects across the Czech Republic. It also recognizes employers who actively work on diversity and inclusion.

Website: <https://www.pridebusinessforum.com/en/>

Prague Pride, z. s.

The largest Czech LGBTQ+ organization, running the Prague Pride Festival, the “Jsme fér” campaign, the counseling service Sbarvouven.cz, and the education portal Učímolgbt.cz. Companies can join the festival, campaigns, and staff education.

Website: <https://www.praguepride.com/en/>

Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsperson)

Monitors equal treatment, offers recommendations, and training materials useful for HR and legal teams.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEO — Chief Executive Officer

The most senior executive of an organization.

CSO — Civil Society Organization

Organization of civil society, often a non-profit.

CSR — Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate activities that support sustainability and social good.

CSRD — Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive

EU directive on sustainability reporting.

CZ (ČR) — Czech Republic

EU and UN member state.

DEI — Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

In Czech, it is often mistranslated as “Equality”; “Equity” is closer to “fairness.” Refers to programs supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

EPBN — European Pride Business Network

European network connecting companies and ERGs focused on LGBTQ+ topics.

ERG — Employee Resource Group

Employee group uniting people with shared interests/experience (e.g., an LGBTQ+ ERG).

ESG — Environmental, Social, Governance

Criteria assessing environmental and social impact and company governance; often used as a sustainability framework.

EU — European Union

The political and economic union of 27 European states.

FRA — European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

EU agency collecting data and giving recommendations on human rights.

HR — Human Resources

Personnel department or team.

IDAHOT / IDAHOBIT — International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

Marked on 17 May.

ILGA — International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association

International association advocating LGBTQ+ rights.

LGBTQ+ — Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning +

Umbrella term for various sexual orientations and gender identities.

LGBTQIA+ — Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual +

Expanded version including intersex and asexual people (and others).

UN (OSN) — United Nations

International organization promoting peace, security, cooperation, and human rights.