

Danish Companies Miss the Mark on LGBT+ Inclusion

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LGBT+ Denmark is Denmark's oldest and largest political association for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, as well as others who break with the norms of gender and sexual orientation. LGBT+ Denmark's vision is a world with equal opportunities and well-being for all, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation. That is why the association ensures rights, safe communities, and social change - locally, nationally and globally. Since the birth of LGBT+ Denmark in 1948, the Danish LGBT+ movement has been a social and political community. A lot has happened since, but LGBT+ Denmark is still a democratic membership organization with hundreds of volunteers, solidarity, and a tireless will for change. The association is independent in terms of political parties and religion.

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Abstract

The majority of LGBT+ individuals in Denmark experience discriminatory situations at work, and say companies are not doing enough for inclusion. By focusing inclusion initiatives on relevant actions within policies, leadership, opera-

tions and people, companies can dramatically improve inclusion of LGBT+ individuals, thereby increasing well-being, job satisfaction and achievement at work.



The majority of LGBT+ employees encounter discriminatory situations at work

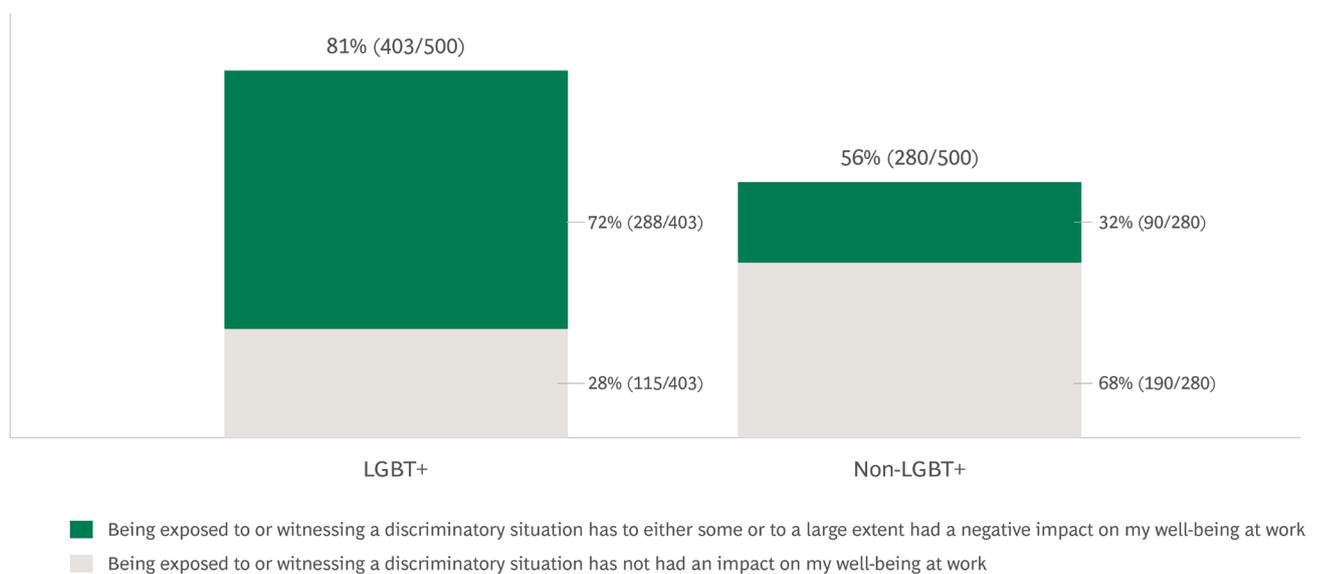
Imagine being transgender and overhearing your colleagues joke about trans people at lunch, or having a co-worker ask you inappropriate questions about your sex life at a company party because you are in a same-sex relationship. This is the harsh reality for many LGBT+ individuals in the Danish workforce. In fact, in a recent survey to 500 LGBT+^[1] and 500 non-LGBT+ individuals in Denmark conducted by BCG and LGBT+ Denmark, 81% of LGBT+ respondents (see exhibit 1) said that they had been either exposed to or witnessed at least one discriminatory situation in the workplace within the last two years (by discriminatory situation we here refer to situations of derogatory comments, prejudice and exclusion, job-related restrictions, lack of support or sexual harassment - all in relation to LGBT+ identity). Similarly, the majority of non-LGBT+ respondents (56%) had witnessed at least one discriminatory situation against LGBT+ individuals at work. With this in mind, it is not surprising that LGBT+ respondents report a lack of attention on LGBT+-related issues in the workplace: “A lot is being done regarding well-being at work, but not with a specific focus on LGBT+. There is both a lack of information on LGBT+ inclusion and a lacking desire in wanting to spend resources to achieve it” (LGBT+ survey respondent).

In fact, almost half (46%) of LGBT+ respondents in our survey said that their company is not doing enough to promote inclusion and well-being of LGBT+ individuals in the workplace.

These results make clear that many companies in Denmark are failing to create an inclusive work environment for their LGBT+ employees, in spite of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) issues being high on the agenda for many companies. The inability to foster inclusive work environments has an obvious impact on the well-being of LGBT+ individuals, with 72% of LGBT+ respondents who experienced one or more discriminatory situations stating that this had at least some negative impact on their well-being at work (see exhibit 1). Witnessing such situations at work also impacts non-LGBT+ individuals, with 32% of those who had experienced a discriminatory situation saying it had at least some negative impact on their own well-being at work. As a result, interactions with colleagues can become strained, and general motivation at work can be impacted. These circumstances can make it hard for both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ individuals to achieve their full potential on the job.

Exhibit 1: 81% of LGBT+ respondents have been exposed to or witnessed discriminatory situations at work; both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ individuals report a negative impact on well-being

% of respondents that have been exposed to or witnessed at least one discriminatory situation against LGBT+ individuals at a workplace within the last two years



Source: BCG survey to LGBT+ & non-LGBT+ respondents in Denmark (2022), n = 1000 (500 LGBT+, 500 non-LGBT+). Total sample is weighted based on age, educational level and geographic region.

^[1] LGBT+ is a common description for individuals with a gender identity and/or sexual orientation outside the traditional norms. It stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, and the + refers to anyone who does not feel included in the social norms for sexuality and gender identity, and neither captured within the LGBT categories

In our survey, we took a closer look at the inclusion initiatives that companies currently have in place to better understand the barriers that stand in the way of inclusion in Danish workplaces. We also assessed the ways in which companies might improve inclusion efforts for LGBT+

employees through initiatives that fall in four broad categories: policies, leadership, operations, and people. Taken together, these four categories point to how companies can create equal opportunities for LGBT+ employees that enable them to thrive at work.

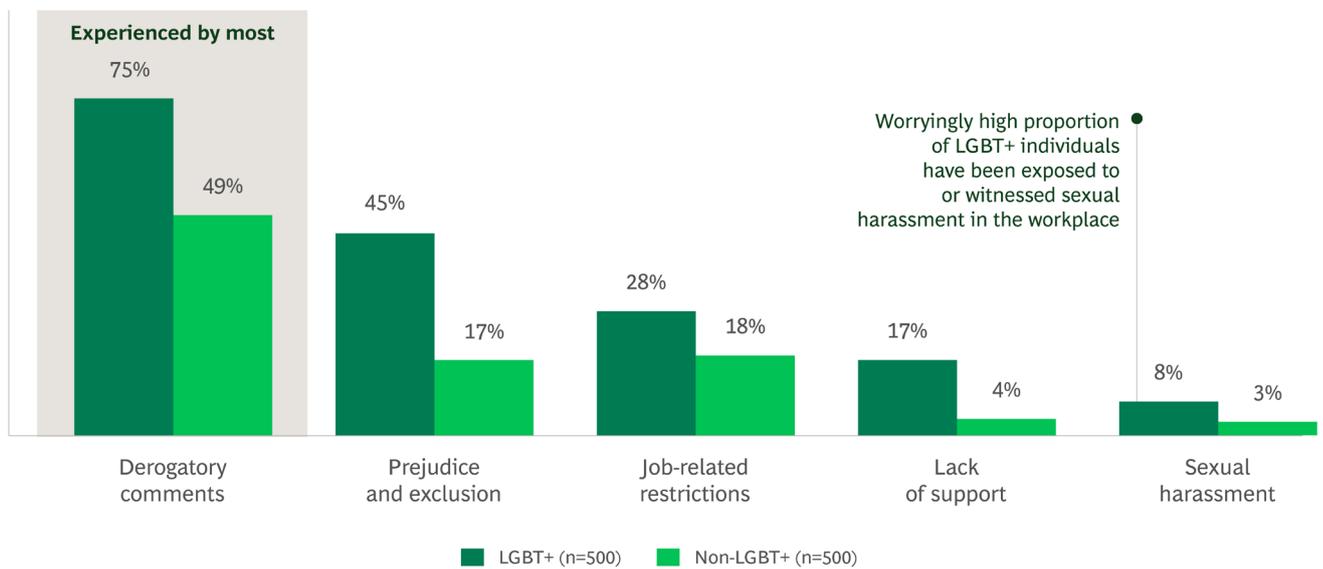
The most pressing obstacle to inclusion lies in derogatory comments

According to a previous national analysis by Als Research, people facing discrimination in the workplace due to their sexual orientation or gender identity are more prone to depression and long-term stress. Transgender employees seem to face even greater discrimination in the workplace than LGB individuals. Though serious job-related restrictions such as being denied or discouraged from career

opportunities are over-represented experiences for LGBT+ employees and must be addressed, our data illustrates that most LGBT+ people are exposed to discriminatory situations manifesting as derogatory comments, e.g., unpleasant “joking” about LGBT+ terms in the course of casual, day-to-day conversations (**see exhibit 2**).

Exhibit 2: Derogatory comments are the most common type of discriminatory situation experienced – 75% of LGBT+ respondents have been exposed to or witnessed this

% of respondents that have been exposed to or witnessed at least one discriminatory situation against LGBT+ at work in the last two years; breakdown according to type of situation



Source: BCG survey to LGBT+ & non-LGBT+ respondents in Denmark (2022), n = 1000 (500 LGBT+, 500 non-LGBT+). Total sample is weighted based on age, educational level and geographic region.

The impact of any specific discriminatory situation varies (**see exhibit 3**). According to our survey, 67% of LGBT+ respondents said that being exposed to negative remarks about gender identity, or bearing witness to others being subjected to this, had at least some negative impact on their well-being at work. As explained by an LGBT+ respon-

dent in our survey, this negative impact can also be enhanced as a result of feeling like one is not in a position to speak up: *“I witnessed inappropriate jokes about homosexuality between two colleagues, but I didn’t have the courage to speak up, and that made me feel very unsafe at my workplace”*.

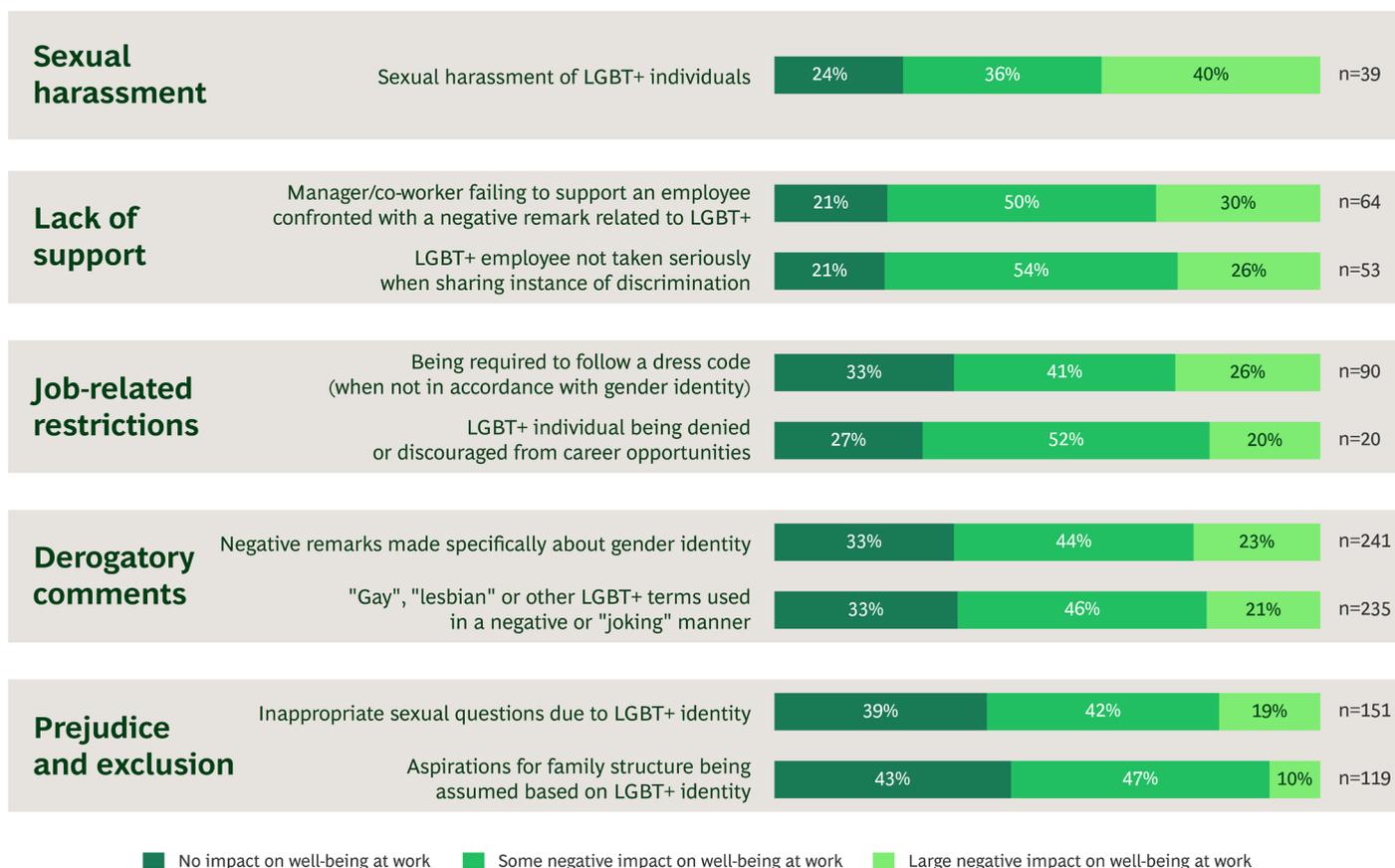
According to our survey, the situation with the most severe impact on well-being is sexual harassment of employees who identify as LGBT+. 40% of LGBT+ respondents who had been exposed to or witnessed sexual harassment of an LGBT+ employee said that it had a large, negative impact on their well-being at work. Another particularly alarming finding was that 11% of LGBT+ respondents said that a manager or co-worker did not take them seriously when they reported discriminatory incidents; “I was repeatedly sexually harassed by a colleague but when I reported it to my leader, he told me that I shouldn’t take it personally, so no actions were taken” (LGBT+ survey respondent). This adds another layer to discrimination: Firstly, when being discriminated against, and secondly, when either a manager or co-worker fails to respond to an instance of discrimination in an appropriate manner. Not being taken seriously when reporting discrimination not only fails to address the severity of the issue, it also subjects the individual to further discrimination, and creates a culture in which such behavior is tolerated. Furthermore, this lack of support could expose companies to legal problems since Danish

law requires companies to prevent and act on discriminatory events related to gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, and sexual orientation.

The bottom line is that to address the well-being of people who identify as LGBT+ effectively in the workplace, companies must work on multiple fronts: ending derogatory comments as well as prejudice and exclusion, job-related restrictions, lack of support and sexual harassment against LGBT+ individuals. The efforts needed are thorough and ongoing and require a commitment to changing a company’s culture. As one LGBT+ respondent notes: “It feels like my company is only supporting LGBT+ because it looks good from the outside - they are not doing any real work internally in the organization”. While public initiatives such as supporting the annual Copenhagen Pride parade^[2] are both valid and worthwhile, such displays of support should be followed by company efforts to secure an inclusive environment internally – among colleagues and leadership as well as in relation to customers and external partners.

Exhibit 3: Impact of discriminatory situations on well-being at work varies by situation; sexual harassment of LGBT+ individuals has the most severe impact

% of LGBT+ respondents stating that exposure to or witnessing a given discriminatory situation against LGBT+ has had **no**, **some** or a **large** negative impact on their well-being at work¹



Note: Percentages are rounded, therefore not all are exactly equal to 100%. N for each situation represents number of LGBT+ respondents exposed to/having witnessed this. 1. Selected situations, non-exhaustive. Full wording in survey not reflected here due to shortening. Source: BCG survey to LGBT+ & non-LGBT+ respondents in Denmark (2022), n = 1000 (500 LGBT+, 500 non-LGBT+). Total sample is weighted based on age, educational level and geographic region.

^[2] Pride is an annual celebration and demonstration focused on LGBT+ social acceptance, self-acceptance, achievements, and legal rights

Companies have a lot to win from driving inclusion of LGBT+ employees

Most employees don't just want to feel good at work, they want to do their jobs well. That, of course, is difficult if not impossible when the environment is non-inclusive. Ideally, LGBT+ individuals should feel comfortable being "out" and open with colleagues and managers to avoid having to hide their LGBT+ identity, for example by not disclosing the name of their partner or not using the name that they prefer for themselves.

Employees who are out at work report feeling more psychologically safe, more empowered, and more able to take creative risks on the job. In a recent BCG study, entitled **Why the First Year Matters for LGBTQ+ Employees**, 23% of respondents in Denmark actually considered being out at work an advantage that helped them thrive – this same finding is supported by our survey. As an example, one LGBT+ respondent writes: *"My husband and I have never experienced any disadvantages about being out – if anything, it has been an advantage"*. Contrarily, 20% of respondents either partially or fully out to their colleagues considered being out a disadvantage at work, worrying that it may pose a risk to their careers. Being treated differently and being restricted at work as a result of being open about one's LGBT+ identity was also a concern among participants in our survey. For example, one respondent stated: *"When I came out at my former job, my leader started giving me unsolvable and unpleasant tasks far away from my usual area of work – I was then excluded from the team, was asked to work from home and no longer had my own desk"*. This example speaks to how negative interactions with colleagues, direct managers and leadership can hinder productivity and thereby work output: employees who experience more negative interactions at work are 40% less productive and are also less innovative, as found by another BCG study, entitled **A New LGBTQ Workforce Has Arrived - Inclusive Cultures Must Follow**. In addition, LGBT+ employees who frequently experience discrimination are less empowered and feel less recognized for their potential at work relative to LGBT+ employees who have never experienced discrimination.

It is worth noting that LGBT+ individuals who are out at work are about as comfortable building friendships at work as those who do not identify as LGBT+. In contrast, fully or partially closeted employees are less comfortable building friendships. The effect this has on a company's culture, collaborative spirit, individual performance, and corporate success cannot be overestimated. Leaders pushing to create LGBT+ inclusive work environments thus have a dual opportunity for success by enabling a work environment where, 1) Employees thrive, and 2) Employees can perform to the best of their abilities – both of which can contribute to a direct, positive impact on the business.

The demographic trends make LGBT+ inclusion even more critical in attracting young talent. Previous national surveys show that ~7-9% of the Danish population identify as LGBT+ - and it skews young. Among LGB individuals, more than half are between 18 and 34 years old; among trans people (including non-binary), ~80% are between 18 and 34. Moreover, previous research demonstrates that young, non-LGBT+ employees are increasingly attuned to LGBT+ issues.

In addition, our survey results show that company LGBT+ inclusion efforts may be particularly relevant for the younger workforce. For 1 in 6 LGBT+ respondents in our survey, company inclusion efforts have at some point been a career-deciding factor, as they have either quit a job, not applied for a job or rejected a job offer because of it; respondents aged 18-34 made up 64% of this group. As stated by a young (25-34) LGBT+ respondent: *"I was once at a job interview where the CEO asked me an inappropriate question about my LGBT+ identity – that made me very certain that I no longer wanted to work there"*. One of the reasons younger people might prioritize working at a company with an inclusive, supportive environment is that many have not yet come out at work or know someone who has not yet felt comfortable being out at work. In our survey, we found that 46% of LGBT+ respondents between 18-24 have not come out at work, compared to 33% among those aged 45-54.



Securing real impact on LGBT+ inclusion requires a focus on company policies, leadership, operations and people

As mentioned, almost half (46%) of LGBT+ employees in our survey said “no” when asked whether their company was doing enough for LGBT+ inclusion and well-being in the workplace. This high proportion is not entirely surprising. A previous national study by Als Research found that only 6% of leaders and HR employees said their personnel policies addressed sexual orientation, and an even lower percentage said their policies addressed gender identity. When asked why not, most said either there was no need or they had not considered it. Worryingly, only 68% of leaders and HR employees in this study agreed that if a person identifying as trans or intersex were to “come out” at work, they would be fully accepted in the workplace. A larger proportion of the sample (85%) fully agreed that an employee would be accepted if they came out as homosexual or bisexual, however the continued incidence of respondents not agreeing with this statement further illustrates that company cultures are yet to be fully accepting and respectful of how others identify. This underlines the need for awareness and education of all company stakeholders on the topic of inclusion.

As part of our analysis, several LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ respondents highlighted that LGBT+ individuals should not be treated any differently to others nor receive special treatment, as this portrays LGBT+ individuals as a separate category of people. Some LGBT+ respondents fear inclusion initiatives may create even more resistance. That said, inclusion efforts do not provide special treatment, they provide equal treatment, which our survey results clearly demonstrate a need for: Direct efforts are needed to decrease the disproportionate prevalence of discrimination against LGBT+ employees, which is affecting the well-being of both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ individuals at work. A statement by an LGBT+ employee underlines both the resistance and the need for initiatives in spite of this: *“The topic of LGBT+ employees quickly becomes a conversation about someone being given unnecessary extra support, which breeds bitterness. Many do not believe that LGBT+ people need more support than cis/hetero people...even though discrimination is continually experienced”*.

Across Denmark, companies will be at different stages of maturity on LGBT+ inclusion efforts; for example, some may have resources explicitly dedicated to promoting inclusion, some may participate in the Pride parade, and some may only be starting to realize that LGBT+ inclusion is an important priority for a company. According to our survey results, all companies need to promote inclusion across four dimensions: policies, leadership, operations

and people. In all cases, it is critical to address basic needs before making flashy statements; for example, companies should not announce a brand-new LGBT+ inclusion strategy before having an anti-discrimination policy in place that explicitly protects the safety and rights of LGBT+ employees. The key to making a positive impact is not solely implementing initiatives, but implementing the *right* initiatives (see exhibit 4):

- **Policy initiatives** are a fundamental building block for an inclusive environment. In our survey, 35% of LGBT+ employees said that a clear code of conduct for handling discrimination against LGBT+ employees is one of the most impactful initiatives to have in place, but only 14% of LGBT+ respondents said their workplace had this. In line with this, 30% of LGBT+ respondents highlighted that an anti-discrimination policy explicitly mentioning sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression is impactful – with the same proportion considering anonymous procedures to report issues such as discrimination as an initiative with great impact. These three initiatives can help address the derogatory comments that occur during casual, day-to-day conversations in the form of negative remarks, “jokes” or misgendering, as they establish what is considered unwanted behavior and how it should be addressed. Ultimately, these initiatives can be an important step towards creating an inclusive culture.

Other important policy initiatives cited in our survey include equal parental leave (27%) and a self-identification policy (27%). Parental leave policies must be reviewed since they are often based on a heterosexual family structure, and by simply asking all employees to self-identify, LGBT+ employees don’t need to repeatedly experience others addressing them using the wrong name or pronoun.

- **Leadership initiatives** are crucial to achieve an inclusive work environment by educating managers, setting ambitions, and creating incentives to promote inclusion (e.g., leaders evaluated on their ability to promote inclusion, including of LGBT+ individuals). Our survey strongly highlights the need for leadership to take action. 35% of LGBT+ respondents said leaders should visibly communicate support and show up for events focused on LGBT+ inclusion within the workplace, while 25% said visible external support is key (just 10% said leaders actually show this type of support, both internally and externally to the company). Also, 34% said

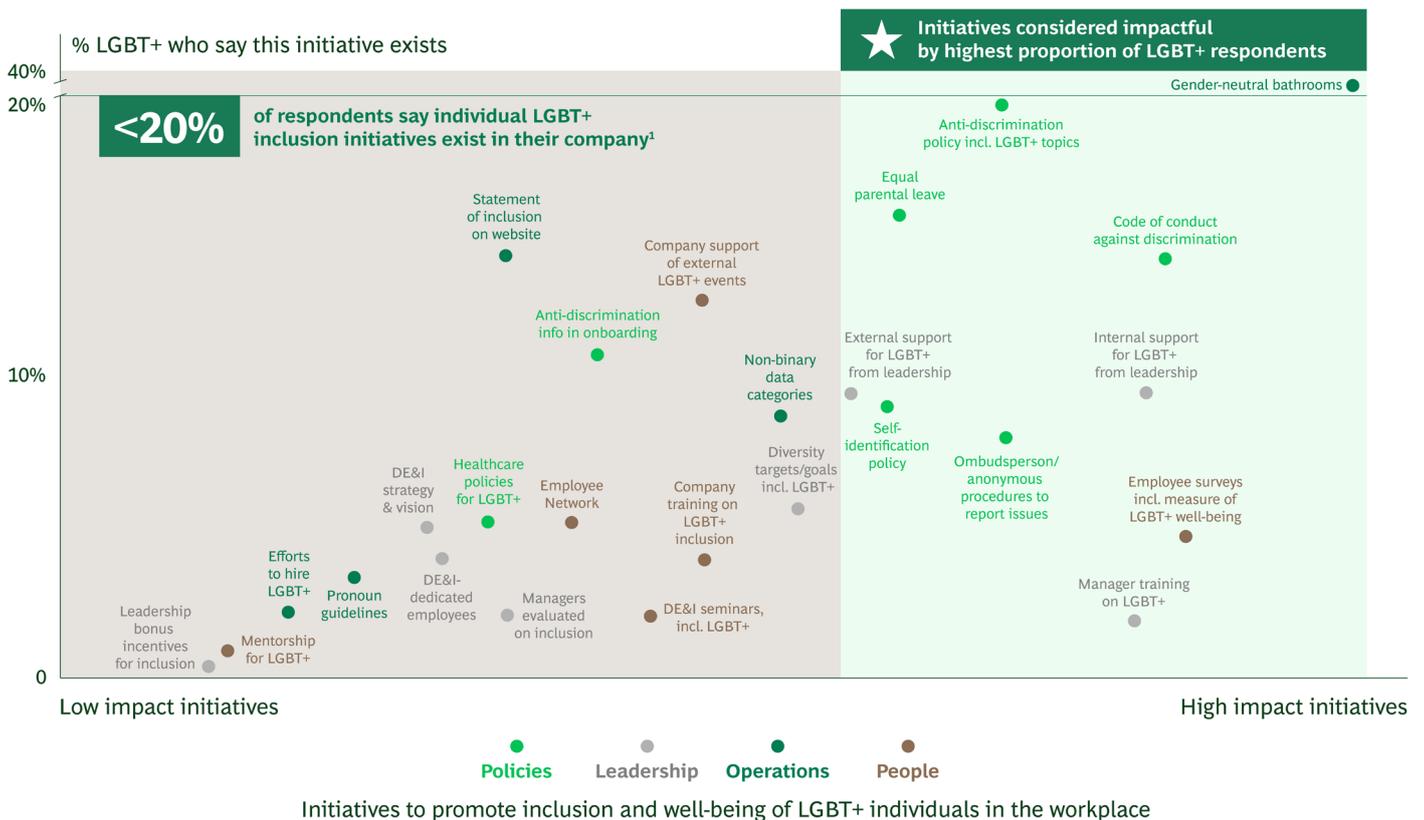
that leadership and manager trainings on LGBT+ topics is critical, but only 2% said such training takes place at their company.

- **Operational initiatives** help ensure that all employees can carry out their job functions and engage in work situations without having to fear being excluded or discriminated against, e.g., by companies not providing bathroom or changing room facilities that they feel comfortable using without others thinking strangely of - or commenting on the bathroom stall they choose to enter. 41% of LGBT+ employees said that access to gender-neutral bathrooms is critical, however 60% report that their workplace does not provide this. Another operational initiative is providing non-binary gender categories on internal forms and employee surveys, enabling employees to choose, e.g., “Non-binary” or “Other” instead of “Male” or “Female”. This was cited as an impactful initiative by 1 in 4 (23%) of LGBT+ respondents, while only 9% are aware that it exists.

- **People initiatives** promote social awareness, acceptance, and support, which can set the stage for positive, daily interactions. These initiatives can empower managers and colleagues of LGBT+ employees to contribute to building an inclusive culture at work. To this end, 36% of LGBT+ respondents in our survey said it’s important to conduct annual surveys that include a measure of LGBT+ well-being and inclusion, however only 5% said their workplace conducted such surveys.

Overall, our findings across the four dimensions illustrate a large gap between what LGBT+ respondents consider to be impactful and which initiatives actually exist. Being aware of the initiatives needed throughout a company can therefore catalyze the ability to make a real impact for promoting LGBT+ inclusion.

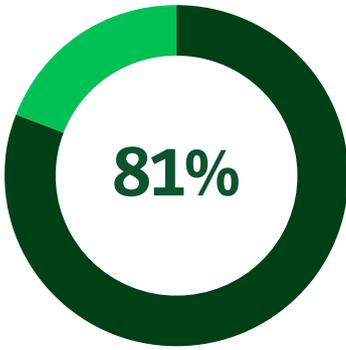
Exhibit 4: There is a clear gap in delivering what matters: 4 in 5 companies are yet to implement initiatives that drive major impact for LGBT+ inclusion



1. Except Gender-neutral bathrooms
Source: BCG survey to LGBT+ & non-LGBT+ respondents in Denmark (2022), n = 1000 (500 LGBT+, 500 non-LGBT+). Total sample is weighted based on age, educational level and geographic region.

“Many do not believe that LGBT+ people need more support than cis/ hetero people... even though discrimination is continually experienced”

(LGBT+ survey respondent)



of LGBT+ respondents have been exposed to or witnessed discriminatory situations at work in the last 2 years.



LGBT+ employees do not need **special treatment** in our workplaces - they need **equal treatment.**

Everyone has a role to play in supporting LGBT+ colleagues

Based on our survey results, we have identified specific ways that company leaders, HR representatives, and employees can advance the inclusion agenda. It is, without question, a company-wide effort.

Leaders need to make LGBT+ inclusion a priority and support the topic openly, both internally and externally. As one LGBT+ survey respondent notes: *“I think it is essential that leaders clearly state company expectations for diversity and inclusion, communicate this broadly and take discrimination very seriously”*. Authentic engagement requires understanding the complexities of the topic and being open to learning more. Leaders should have tangible inclusion goals against which they can monitor progress to promote accountability.

Those in HR need to put clear anti-discrimination processes and policies in place. In our survey, 5 of the 10 most impactful initiatives relate to policies, underlying the importance of taking action on this topic. It is also important to communicate clearly to make sure all employees understand what behavior is acceptable and what is not, and how to respond if they witness discriminatory situations. This can be part of a broader education and training on LGBT+ topics. Finally, providing access to gender-neutral facilities is vital.

Employees should strive to be true “allies” to their LGBT+ colleagues. This means taking on some responsibility for

making inclusion efforts a success, and not expecting LGBT+ colleagues to drive the inclusion agenda themselves. Employees should enthusiastically participate in training, work toward creating a safe work environment, and always speak up if they witness discrimination. True LGBT+ allies take responsibility for understanding LGBT+ issues better. They seek answers themselves, rather than putting the “burden of educating” on LGBT+ individuals. Still, they should not be afraid to ask “stupid questions” if presented respectfully and with good intentions. Being supportive and wanting to learn is both recognized and appreciated by LGBT+ employees, as illustrated by one of our LGBT+ survey respondents:

“My boss supports me a lot, makes room for activism, and asks for advice. When I started, I was able to reformulate our parental leave policy so that it encompassed all people, and I have only been met with openness, recognition and support at work. I work at a traditional company that wants to be better”.

Many companies in Denmark have sincerely tried to create a more inclusive workplace for the LGBT+ community, but our survey clearly shows that there is still work to do. The good news is that progress is possible by focusing inclusion initiatives on policies, leadership, operations and people. Everyone in the workplace—from the most senior leaders to the most junior employees—has an important role to play (**see exhibit 5**).

Exhibit 5: Securing an inclusive workplace requires a company-wide effort: everyone has a role to play as allies of LGBT+ individuals



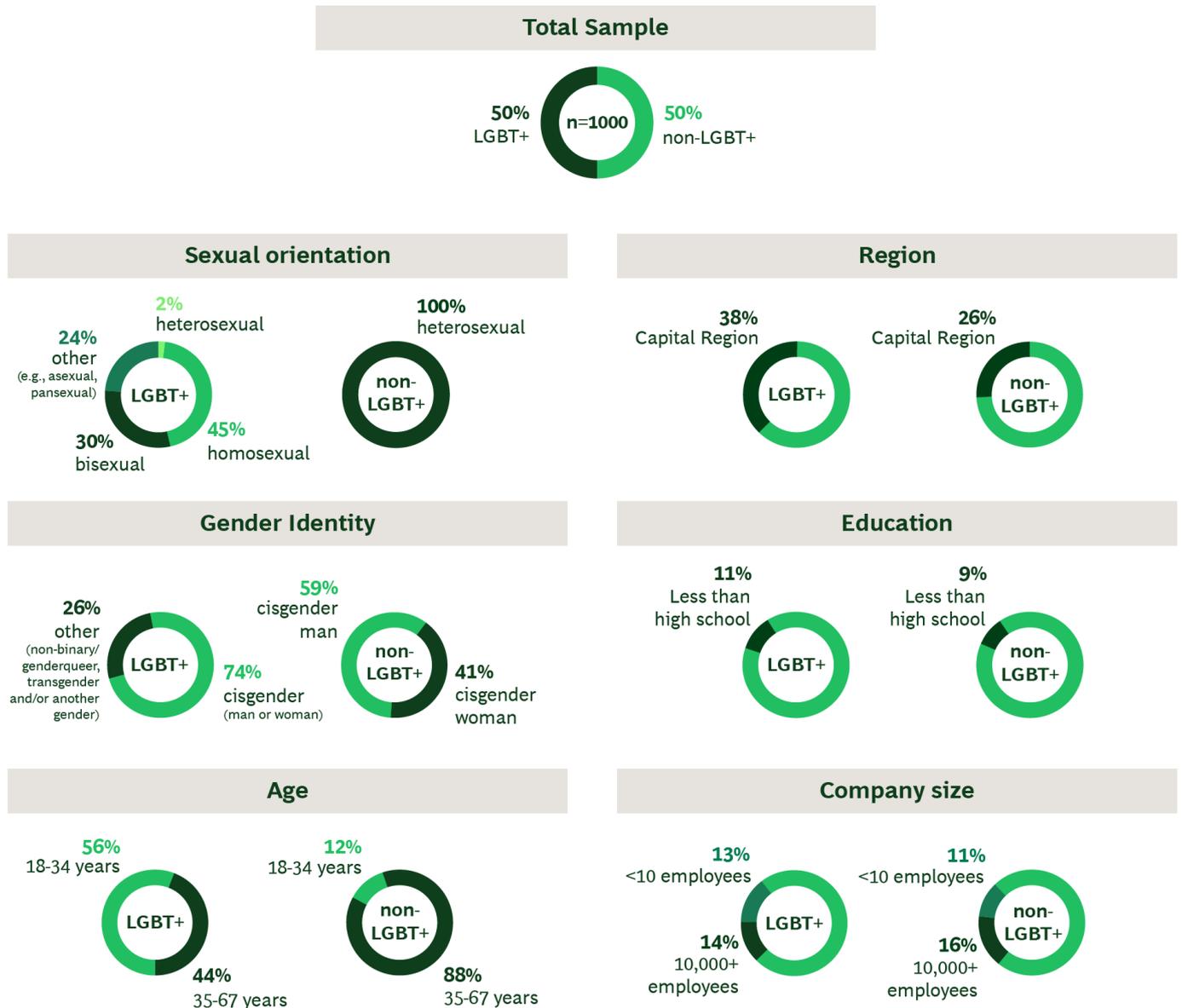
Source: BCG survey to LGBT+ & non-LGBT+ respondents in Denmark (2022), n = 1000 (500 LGBT+, 500 non-LGBT+)

Our Methodology

Our survey drew results from 1,000 respondents in Denmark: 500 LGBT+ and 500 non-LGBT+. Heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and other sexual orientations are represented in our sample, as well as transgender, cisgender (Man and Woman), non-binary/genderqueer and other gender identities. All respondents are employed and are

between 18-67 years old. Both our LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ sample includes respondents from all educational levels (from less than high school to PhD), all company sizes (from less than 10 employees to 10,000 employees or more) and all geographic regions in Denmark (see exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6: Key facts about our respondents



1. Includes respondents saying "I prefer not to answer"

The survey was distributed on social media through an external survey provider, Potloc, and was open from November 24th to December 4th 2022.

The total sample (n = 1000) was weighted against 3 variables: age, region and education level, in order to be more representative of the Danish population demographics. The LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ sample were considered separately for all calculations.

About the Authors



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