

# Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation covers a range of non-heterosexuals. The acronym LGBTIQ+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, and asexual individuals.

Sexual minorities are an important source of talent. Supporting LGBTIQ+ workforce participation is a key equality, diversity and inclusion strand.

## DISCLOSURE

Despite legislation in many countries that prohibits discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, sexual minorities' status may not be recognised due to their lack of disclosure. This is relevant because this diversity characteristic is not always readily observable. Support for sexual minorities can be given more appropriately if disclosure takes place.

Revealing sexual identity can

be a difficult and even dangerous decision. 'Coming out' may lead to acceptance and support but it can also result in discrimination, harassment, marginalisation, even exclusion. The alternative of hiding one's sexual identity creates stress from living a double life, in fear of discovery. This will affect individuals' happiness and productivity.

## DIFFERENT IDENTITIES

The experiences of sexual minorities differ. For example, research shows that bisexual men experience more workplace bias than bisexual women. This affects bisexual men's willingness to 'come out' and has negative health/work consequences for them.

Individuals undergoing gender reassignment cannot choose whether to disclose their sexual identity. The changes are clear to see. Transgender people suffer, in particular, from harassment, bullying, and exclusion.

It is also important to consider the implications of intersectionality – sexual minorities bring other minority characteristics (such as ethnicity, religion, disability) into the workplace.

## ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

An organisational culture, management actions, and policies supportive of sexual minorities are all helpful in encouraging disclosure.

To support sexual minorities in the workplace, organisations should adopt a strategic approach to fostering a strong diversity climate. Top level leadership and line management support for this is necessary. Diversity training for all in the workplace is recommended.

Research has shown that networks and support groups are particularly valuable for the inclusion of sexual minorities. These may include participation by

supportive allies. Networks can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. They also act as a channel for employee voice.

## THE GLOBAL MOBILITY CONTEXT

Employers have a duty of care for all international assignees' safety and well-being. This may mean that an international assignment is not suitable for sexual minorities, for example, in countries where homosexuality is illegal, punishable by death. Notwithstanding this, to determine what a dangerous location is, a sound knowledge of real and perceived threats is needed. Risks can be moderated by the provision of organisational support.

It should also not be assumed that sexual minorities do not wish to go on an international assignment or are precluded from doing so. They should have equal access to the selection process and an equal share of international career opportunities.

All potential assignees should have sufficient information to ensure that they can make a wise decision about the implications of going to work abroad. In this way sexual minorities who may not have disclosed their identity are not forced to 'come out' and be differentiated from heterosexuals in the selection and preparatory stages of global mobility.

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