



10 FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SEXUAL DIVERSITY AT WORK



LGBT AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT

01 Do not assume that everyone is heterosexual.

Since the majority of people are heterosexual, diversity regarding sexual orientation and gender identity remains hidden. We assume that the majority means the totality or the norm.

This has several effects:

- Many tend to think that in their different life spheres, such as the workplace, there are **NO** homosexual, bisexual, transgender or intersex people and therefore, that there are no problems of discrimination or abuse.
- People LGBTI hide their sexuality for fear of the consequences this might have if it becomes visible. They are not able to express freely their identity, which at the same time means that they cannot access the rights and benefits other workers have (like pensions, permits, etc).

This is why visibility is such an important tool for social normalization; in other words, it allows for a better understanding that diversity is the rule, as well as providing for respect and combating discrimination.

To do this we must create safe working environments that are free of discrimination, where everyone can express their identity freely and without fear.

02 Do not assume that someone is gay, lesbian or transgender

There are a number of stereotypes about LGBTI people that are often spread by the media. As a result many people often assume that someone is a lesbian, or gay, or transsexual by the way they dress, talk, gesticulate, etc. Sometimes it is even verbalized in the form of statements like "she does not look like a lesbian".

These type of comments and prejudices makes it very hard for LGBTI people to freely express themselves and even challenge the author of such observations.

The reality is that there LGBTI people come in all ages, shapes and sizes. They can belong to any race, ethnicity and religion (or lack thereof), and like anyone else, they can have physical or mental impairments.

A firm stance against prejudice is the best way to eliminate them and it will help LGBTI people gain the confidence they need to express themselves freely.

03 LGBTI and Gay are not synonymous

LGBTI stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual people."

In different cultures other terms can be used to describe people who establish relationships with other people of the same sex and who exhibit nonbinary gender identities (ex: hijra, meti, Lala, skesana, motsoalle, mithli, Kuchu, kawein, farce, muxe, fa'afafine, fakaleiti, hamjensgara and Two Spirits).

To eliminate prejudices we should begin by understanding that "LGBTI" is a heterogeneous group of people, with divisions within them, living with their own experiences and problems.

04 Sexual orientation and gender identity are not a choice

Human beings cannot choose their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity, even if they can choose to act in accordance to it or not (usually because of the weight of social conventions).

This means that a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity cannot be changed. What must change is the negative social attitudes that stigmatize LGBTI people, which contribute to violence and discrimination against them.

There are those who try to change the sexual orientation of people through "methods" involving violations of basic human rights and causing these group of people severe trauma.

05 Discrimination because of sexual orientation is not a private matter

People who are, or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex suffer from social stigma, exclusion and discrimination at work, at home, at school, in health institutions and in many other aspects of their lives. They can be fired from their jobs, bullied at school and expelled from their homes. They are denied proper medical treatment, disowned by their parents, forced into psychiatric institutions, forced to marry or become pregnant, and can be subjected to attacks on their reputation.

Particularly at work, the impact of "coming out" can range from not achieving a promotion, to being the subject of jokes and offensive comments, to exclusion, and the non-renewal of an employment contract or unfair dismissal.

This is why this is a problem that concerns the whole of society as well as all organizations that compose it. The basic human rights of this group are at stake.

06 "In my work no one discriminates." Are you sure?

Homophobic jokes are so integrated into the everyday that we are not even aware of them many times. The continued existence of these type of jokes, the use of derogatory terms or expressions that denigrate the integrity of others because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, naturalizes and reinforces these attitudes and social patterns, which also generate violence and discrimination.

To be sure that we are creating equal and safe environments for all we must first review our own attitudes.

- Avoid jokes, expressions or sexist, homophobic or xenophobic gestures.
- When you are present in a situation where there is discrimination or harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, don't remain silent, do something!
- If homosexuality and transsexuality are unknown to you, inform yourself and do not accept stereotypes.

07 What actions are considered discriminatory?

Anyone who is treated unfavorably over another because of their sexual orientation or gender identity is being discriminated against. Harassment and violence can be verbal, physical, psychological and even institutional. These types of situations have important implications on people who suffer from them: low self-esteem, psychosomatic or physical symptoms, dissatisfaction, anxiety and depression, reaching, in extreme cases, suicide.

08 Can a company take any decision regarding workers because of their sexual orientation?

No. Any decision the company takes regarding workers must be based on job skills and never on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

09 If someone in your work (or you) is being discriminated against or harassed because of sexual orientation or gender identity:

- Find out about the complaint procedures and equality policies in your workplace to know how to file a complaint.
- Keep a log of events related to discrimination.
- Contact your union representative to raise the issue and seek advice.
- Find out about social or community organizations that address these issues
- Contact your supervisor and pose the problem

10 Learn more about the activities carried out by your union regarding equality

Ask your union representative on the organizational structures that address this issue.

You can also contact the headquarters of your union. Many unions have equality offices, committees or structures where LGBTI issues can be addressed accordingly.

Every May 17th we observe the International Day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia (LGBTphobia). It was on this day back in 1990 when the World Health Organization excluded homosexuality from its list of pathologies.

We are all equal before the law, and we are all unique and different as individuals.
True belonging does not mean we must be like everyone else.

We are diverse.

We are equal.

And we are organized.

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