



“Assessing the State of the Workplace of Private Sector Companies and Organizations and their Ability to Become More Inclusive and LGBTI Friendly”

Drafted for the fulfilment of the project

“Enhancing the Inclusivity of the LGBTI Community in Workplaces in Lebanon”

Ralph Haddad
Research Consultant

March 2021

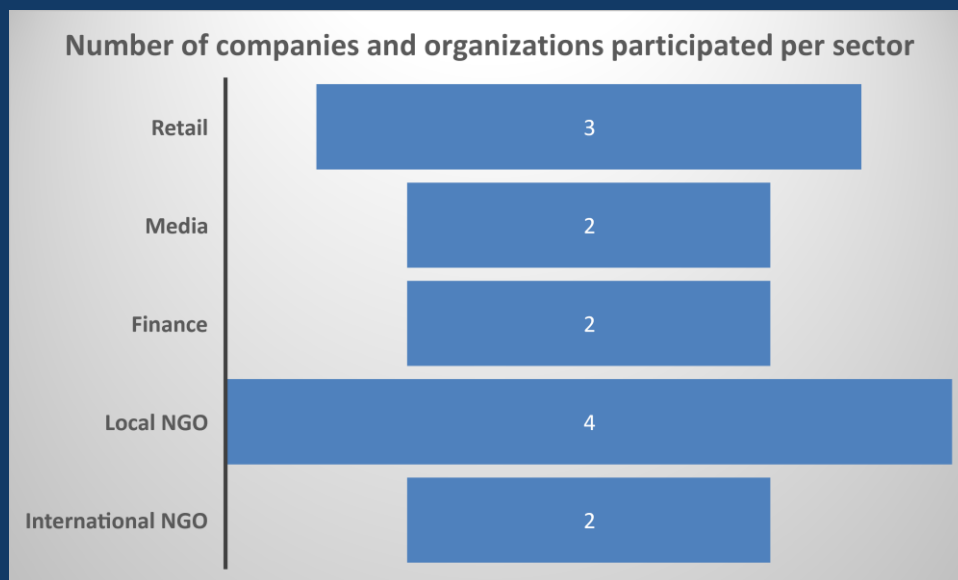


Overview

This study aimed at **assessing the attitudes towards the LGBTQI+ community within the Lebanese private sector, as well as their inclusivity as companies of the private sector.**

Following a thorough literature review and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with companies from different sectors, the scorecards were formulated based on the data gathered during the FGDs, specifically in order to better understand and address the employment issues and constraints faced by the LGBTI community in the workplace. As such, the scorecard included questions that revolved around the following indicators: hiring process, work environment, social views of colleagues and level of tolerance to LGBTQI+ issues at the surveyed workplaces, adequacy of any existing policies relating to anti-discrimination, et cetera.

7 companies and 6 local and international NGOs were identified and invited to electronically fill out the scorecards during the month of February 2021, where in total 24 employers and 136 employees across all surveyed sectors participated.



Results of the scorecards were analyzed by the consultant and below are the detailed findings from each sector with regards to key indicator questions as well as the recommendations that reflect the main issues faced by LGBTQI+ individuals within the private sector.

Scorecards Main Findings



Employees Findings

In total, 136 employees filled out the Employees' Self-Evaluation Scorecard from 7 companies and 6 local and international NGOs. The most common findings that could be gleaned across all sectors could be summarized by the fact that almost all employees who responded reported having adequate work conditions, however were still unsure about their colleagues' tolerance towards LGBTQI+ issues. And while all employees mentioned that their workplaces had established general anti-discrimination policies, they still suggest their colleagues could benefit from specific training on LGBTQI+ issues and awareness in the workplace.

Media Sector

Overall, 18 employees from the Media sector responded to the scorecard. All employees in the Media sector rated that they were very satisfied with their place of work. Across the employees that responded, the response was overwhelmingly positive.

2 out of the 18 employees answered that they would not recommend their workplace to someone who they knew belonged to the LGBTQI+ community.



7 out of the 18 employees from the Media Sector reported not feeling comfortable in their place of work based on their social identity (specifically relating to their gender and sexual orientation).

However, when asked whether any employees had encountered casual discrimination relating to sexual orientation among their colleagues, all answered No. Overall, the media

sector was the most highly rated with regards to inclusion and comfort, as well as openness towards LGBTQI+ issues and community members. Most of these respondents indicated that they did not need further awareness training of gender & sexuality issues, and that their anti-discrimination policies were pretty clear and did not need to be updated.

Retail Sector

Overall, 26 employees from the Retail sector completed the scorecard.



5 out of the 26 respondents reported only being “somewhat satisfied” with their current employers, where the rest responded that they were “very satisfied”.

2 out of the 26 employees reported being judged based on their physical appearance during the hiring process, however none reported being asked about their sexual or gender identity during the hiring process.



Specifically, within this field, 13 out of 21 employees reported that they did not feel comfortable at their place of work due to their gender and/or sexual identity.

Only 3 out of the 21 respondents reported that they would not recommend their workplace to a member of the LGBTQI+ community.



None of the employees reported having encountered casual discrimination from their colleagues regarding LGBTQI+ issues. With regards to the retail sector, most of the 21 respondents indicated that there could be a clearer complaints process within their companies, as well as indicating that their companies could benefit from a clearer anti-discrimination policy that could be more cross-cutting.

Finance Sector

Overall, 5 employees from the Finance sector completed this scorecard, specifically from the Insurance field, and all reported to be very satisfied with their employer. None of them reported any discrimination during their hiring process, however, all answered that they did not think their place of work was comfortable based on their social identity, specifically related to gender and sexuality.



One of the 5 employees mentioned that they would not recommend their place of work to someone from the LGBTQI+ community, however none of them reported ever experiencing discrimination from colleagues regarding issues the LGBTQI+ community. This sector was the only sector where the scorecard findings and the FGD findings did not necessarily align, as the FGD participants were not the same ones who filled out the scorecards within this sector, as outlined above in the FGD findings. Regarding the Financial sector, FGDs were conducted with representatives from banking institutions in Lebanon, however the Finance scorecards were filled out by insurance companies. This might explain the different results we received within this sector between the FGD and the scorecard.

Local/International NGOs

Overall, the most robust response we received was from the humanitarian sector, where overall 87 employees from that sector responded to the scorecard. Overwhelmingly, employees in this sector responded that they were “very satisfied” with their employers, with only a few responding that they were “somewhat satisfied.” This set of respondents was the most clear when they were asked whether their place of work felt comfortable to them with regards to their social identity, specifically regarding their gender and/or sexual orientation, with almost half of respondents replying that they did not feel comfortable, with one answer particularly sticking out that summarizes the sentiment of this data set: “Only among my close team, not sure about the whole staff in the organization,” with another respondent adding that they were “not sure of how much my workplace is a safe space in accepting different social identities”.



Only 5 out of the 87 respondents reported that they would not recommend their workplace to someone who was part of the LGBTQI+ community. Moreover, 6 out of the 87 individuals reported that they had encountered casual discrimination regarding LGBTQI+ issues from colleagues, which in itself is low but notable.



Employers Findings

Overall, 24 employers (from the same companies as the surveyed employees) across all sectors participated in the Employers' Scorecard. All seemed to report overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding several of the indicators such as recruitment practices, practices of retention, and guidelines & policy development relating to the issue of inclusivity more generally, and more specifically issues relating to the LGBTQI+ community. The main issue raised by all employers is that they did not need specific guidelines that protect LGBTQI+ employees, since they all had general guidelines.

One quote from an employer sums this up:

“[This issue is not] perceived as a priority or as a special case – all type of discrimination is prohibited”.

Another employer added:

“We've got global guidelines, but I don't think we have the local nuance or knowledge.”

One employer even went as far as to mention that, while there is no overt discrimination towards any social identity in the hiring process at their company, there is still a level of discomfort in hiring openly LGBTQI+ community members at the managerial level. Therefore, the main issues primarily regarded: lack of diversity in hiring practices; having gender-specific recruitment practices depending on the position; and discrimination based on the clothes a potential candidate wore, or if they openly seemed to belong to a specific religious group (as gleaned from the FGDs conducted with employers). Most surveyed employers did agree that more training (for employers and employees) regarding LGBTQI+ issues would be useful, in accordance with employee feedback as well.

Main Recommendations

While employees and employers from multiple sectors participated in the FGDs and volunteered to fill out the scorecards, the recommendations listed below are cross-cutting and can be applied across sectors. These recommendations are formulated around increasing inclusivity within any workplace, which works positively to include LGBTQI+ members as well, especially those are not “out” to their colleagues. **These recommendations are aimed at employers and HR managers:**

1. Always make sure you establish a sense of belonging for employees towards their work environment. This begins as soon as an employee signs a new contract with a company/organization, and continues as long as the employee works at the company/organization. Several steps can be taken to accomplish this
 - a. Establish a new employees’ orientation on a monthly basis as a way of onboarding a group of new employees and introducing them to their teams for bigger companies, and a case-by-case onboarding for smaller organizations
 - i. Instituting a mandatory training as part of the onboarding regarding issues of vulnerable groups, such as: issues relating to harassment, racial, sexual, and gender discrimination; a LGBTQI+ awareness sessions; and a “how to” training in dealing with members of vulnerable groups. These training sessions could make employees who are members of vulnerable groups also feel seen and heard by their management.
 - b. Constant confidential HR follow-up with each employee on a monthly basis to determine needs and wants is also good in employee’s belonging and loyalty to a company. This helps in identifying differences in employee experience and values across the organization so that change can be made relevant for each person and knowing that lasting change must activate different parts of the system — top down, bottom up, and middle out — in different ways.

2. Having department heads and managers more invested in fostering one-on-one time with their employees (either individually or as a team, depending on the size of the department/unit) is also a key step in making employees feel valued and that their work is acknowledged regardless of their social identity.
3. While general guidelines and policies do exist that tackle discrimination in the workplace more generally, it is beneficial to draft specific guidelines and policies that are geared towards more vulnerable groups as a way of making it clear to employees that this company values these specific vulnerable groups, among them LGBTQI+ groups.
 - a. This recommendation includes an in-depth look and review at the complaints process in each specific company/organization, where employee protection should be prefaced. This would allow more vulnerable employees, including LGBTQI+ identifying employees, to report any workplace incident if they feel the complaints mechanism protects them and does not put them at risk.
4. Follow-up with each department or unit on a bi-annual basis to assess their implementation of inclusivity practices and policies, a kind of “audit” or social practice within the department or unit.
 - a. This includes an annual review of the company’s own policies. The company might want to involve a third actor to overview these processes and carry them out, for example.
5. Make sure all new programming takes into account a gender and sexuality lens. This needs to be in line with guidelines and policies regarding vulnerable groups, and should also be included in the bi-annual “social” audit of departments and units. This lens is important in building inclusive programming and making more vulnerable employees feel more comfortable at their workplace.
6. Having a relaxed dress code could also go a long way, especially for companies/organizations that need to implement a dress code. Dress codes need to be de-gendered, i.e. there should not be gender-specific dress codes, and strict codes regarding physical appearance also need to be relaxed. Allowing an employee to express themselves and their individuality through their dress is also important at

helping them feel comfortable coming to work, not having to worry about wearing this or that, and as such not having to worry about conforming to gender norms they may feel do not apply to them.

7. Partnering with, and often funding if applicable, local organizations who already do the work of supporting gender and sexual rights in the field is often an open indicator that a company takes a gender positive and LGBTQI+ positive stance, and could set a precedent for other companies to follow.
 - a. Partnerships can take the form of inviting different organizations to conduct awareness sessions regarding various topics on a regular basis.
 - b. Funding initiatives by local organizations if possible, to encourage work on inclusivity and diversity outside the workplace could also be a great signal to employees who belong to the community these organizations serve.
8. Setting up gender neutral bathrooms in the office space could also go a long way in making gender non-conforming employees feel more comfortable.
9. Not requiring employees to disclose their gender identity (unless they wish to do so) on any form and during any time when paperwork is involved.
 - a. This involves also giving the option of adding a “chosen name” category next to “First name” on forms, as many genders non-conforming and trans candidates and employees might use different names than their birth names.

