

OPEN UP YOUR WORKPLACE:

CHALLENGING HOMOPHOBIA AND HETERONORMATIVITY



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Open Up Your Workplace: Challenging Homophobia and Heteronormativity
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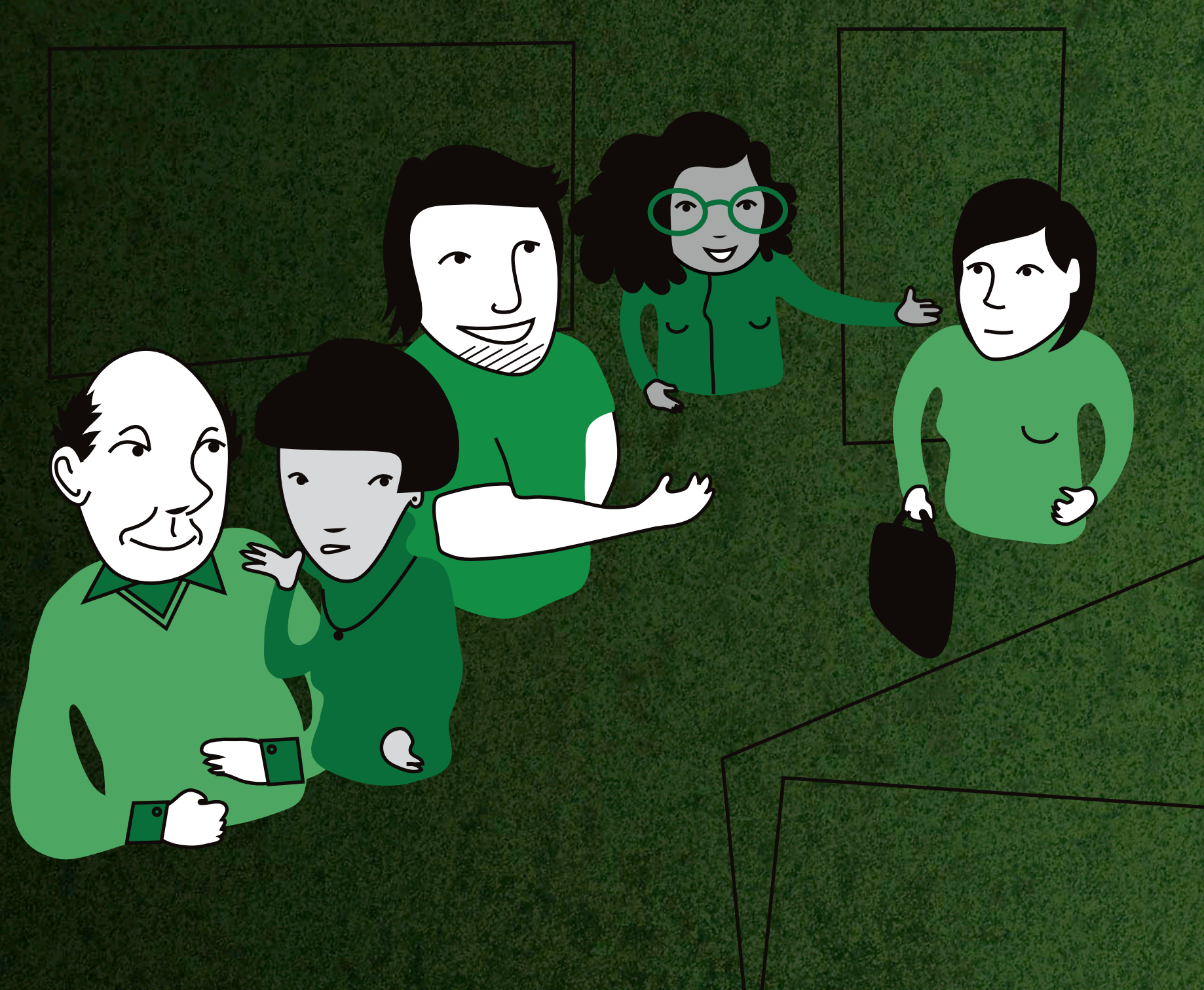
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CHAPTER 1

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Those are the first words in the first article of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even though it was adopted in 1948, there are still significantly large groups of people who have not yet been granted equal dignity and rights. One such group is lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

It is a fundamental human right to live, work and love in accordance with your true identity. Nevertheless, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is a large, and growing, problem throughout Europe. While most European countries have anti-discrimination legislation, many nevertheless provide little or no protection for gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Homophobia and harassment, even to the extent of violence, is widespread. Many non-heterosexual people feel that they must hide their sexual orientation, in some cases from their family and friends but particularly in the workplace.

Gays, lesbians and bisexuals are often made invisible in the workplace—either by their own choice as a safety precaution or because their colleagues do not want to recognize their existence. The results of this invisibility include employees that do not feel that they fit in at work and a workplace that is not the best that it can be.

Homophobia and discrimination must be fought against, and the heteronormativity that causes them must be challenged. A number of European Union guidelines specifically recognise the fundamental right to live, work and love according to one's sexual orientation.¹ There will not be a change towards openness and mutual respect unless awareness is raised by strategic work on every level of society. The responsibility to raise the issue lies not only with individuals, but also with employers, trade unions, policy makers and political institutions.

This book, as well as the *Norms at Work: Challenging Homophobia and Heteronormativity* research reports book, is a result of the collaboration between four projects in France, Lithuania, Slovenia and Sweden. All of the projects have focused on the situation in working life, with the overall objective to create a society where everyone is accepted and respected regardless of their sexual orientation. Hopefully their insights, experiences, and advice will inspire you to begin and continue working to make sure that the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights really does apply to everyone.

TRACE—The Transnational Cooperation for Equality

Deledios (France)

Open and Safe at Work.lt (Lithuania)

Partnership for Equality (Slovenia)

Beneath the Surface (Sweden)

1. Article 13 of the EC Treaty; the Employment Directive (2000/78/EC); Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights



CHAPTER 2

HETERONORMATIVITY AND HOMOPHOBIA

Basically, this book deals with the consequences of two concepts that are deeply rooted in our society. Seeming natural in all aspects of life, these phenomena are so common that most of us don't even notice them. But you can't discuss discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation without understanding them: namely heteronormativity and homophobia.

To understand heteronormativity, imagine a pair of glasses. These glasses are put on everyone when we are very young—even though our vision might be perfect. Wearing these glasses, we discover the world and through them we see and interpret it. And the world we see through these glasses is a world that consists of two separate genders—men and women. Perhaps you've heard the expression "men are from Mars and women are from Venus". The expression originates from a book with the same title, but is commonly used in a playful manner when referring to the differences between men and women. Such as when talking about communication difficulties in a relationship. As funny and harmless as it might seem, in reality the expression actually pins down one of the basic conditions for heteronormativity to exist.

With the split of the two genders comes two very differently defined roles—the gender roles. **Rather than being something we are born with, gender roles are something we are raised into.** They are not given by nature. In fact, they are instable and sensitive to change. But these normative and stereotypical assumptions of what it is to be a man or a woman are still replicated by us a lot of the time. And right now we happen to live in a world where we from the very beginning belong to either a pink or a blue world, depending on our gender. In the blue world you have to be strong, both physically and emotionally. Your communication is supposed to be very direct, and you should be competitive and reach high positions in society. Washing dishes and making sure that dinner is on the table is not your responsibility. That is the job for those in the pink world. So is taking care of the family, nurturing, and being loving and showing emotions.

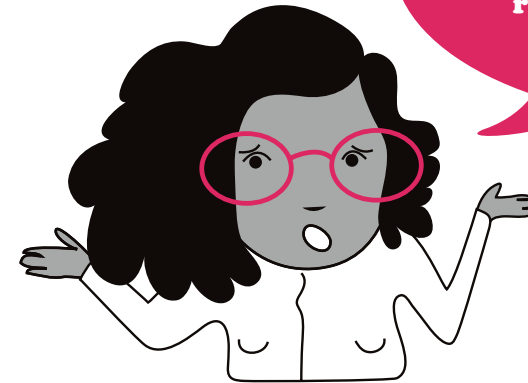
There is a general assumption that comes with the gender roles, and that is that you are supposed to feel attraction to and love for the opposite gender. Because opposites attract, right? At least this is what we are told—and what the glasses make us see. In addition to the view of gender and gender roles, heteronormativity is generally the assumption that men and women feel attraction to and love for each other—not among themselves. **Wearing the heteronormative glasses, everyone around you is perceived as heterosexual, including yourself.** This might seem like a non-problematic attitude, but in fact it is not.

Heteronormativity not only neglects to see beyond heterosexuality. It also puts heterosexuality above the other two forms of sexual orientation—homosexuality (being able to feel attraction to and love for the same gender) and bisexuality (being able to feel attraction to and love for both genders). Stereotypes of these “deviations” of the “right” sexual orientation are common, such as that gays and lesbians look and act more like the opposite gender than their own. That gay men are more feminine than other men and that lesbians are more masculine than other women.

Heteronormativity is reflected on all levels of society. It’s a structure that is found in the institutions of society as well as on the personal level. Therefore, it is not just a problem for the individual. It’s a problem for the society as a whole.

This book focuses on sexual orientation: bi-, hetero- and homosexuality. Homo- and bisexuals are obviously affected by heteronormativity. But it’s also important to understand that the heteronorm affects a lot more people. For instance, transgender people—who challenge the way we perceive gender and gender roles—are certainly affected too. In fact, the heteronorm doesn’t just exclude gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people, but also everyone who doesn’t fit into its very narrow definitions.

The core of the heteronorm is two parents—a mom and a dad—with statistically 2.5 kids. **That means that even if you’re heterosexual, and for instance single or divorced, you**



Wait a minute, I’m not sure that I understand. And I’m not even sure that I believe all of this in the first place. I mean, if it’s right in front of us, then why doesn’t everyone see the heteronorm?

will also feel the effects of the heteronorm. This experience comes from Cristina Lunghi of the Arborus organisation in France: *“We are a lot of women and men who don’t really want to speak about our personal lives because we don’t fit into the norm. I am divorced and I can definitely relate to what gays and lesbians have to face when breaking the heteronorm. I don’t want to talk about my divorce or whether I have a new man in my life.”*

So even though a lot of us don’t actually fit the heteronorm, it’s still very strong. Perhaps this is because it creates a feeling of comfort and belonging, even though it’s at the expense of those who don’t fit the norm. In fact, everyone will benefit when it’s possible to break that norm because that means that there won’t be just one way to live your life—but many.

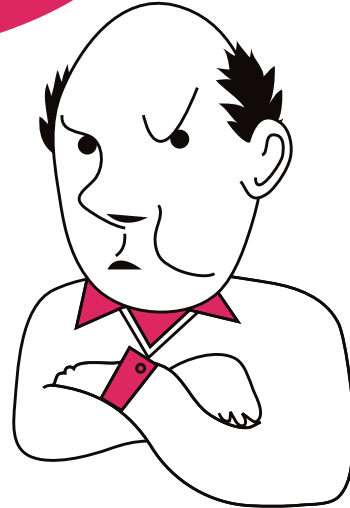
There is an old Chinese proverb that actually answers that question pretty well: “The fish is the last one to discover the water.” Metaphorically speaking you can see the water as the heterosexual norm and the fish as all of the people who belong to that norm. When you belong to a norm you get all of the advantages and benefits that come with it, and therefore you are less likely to discover it. The same way that a man might have difficulty recognizing sexist jokes because they are not aimed at him, or a non-disabled person walking unhindered through entrances that a disabled person would not be able to use. **And that is why a lot of heterosexual people have difficulty recognizing the heteronorm, because they don’t deviate from it and therefore aren’t subjected to the discrimination that comes with it.**

The second concept—homophobia—is a result of heteronormativity. One misinterpretation of homophobia is that “homo” stands for Homo sapiens, and that it means the fear of other people. That is not the case. Instead, homophobia is the irrational fear of homosexuality and homosexuals.

I'm actually finding this discussion quite revolting. Why should we talk about something that is so utterly wrong and against nature? Whether homosexuals might find this heteronormativity and homophobia, as you call it, problematic is not really the issue. The real danger is the homosexual lifestyle that is threatening our society's foundation.

A concept like “homosexual lifestyle” is purely homophobic, and this quote is actually a typical example of homophobia. Homo- and bisexuality are identities and not lifestyles. Homophobic people see homosexuality as a threat—to society, to religion, to the nuclear family, and to themselves. But this isn't an issue of plus or minus. 🗨️ **When it comes to equal rights, one group's gaining of rights doesn't limit another group's rights. And this is a question of equal rights for everyone, not just some.**

If heteronormativity usually is a passive and unconscious discrimination where gays, lesbians and bisexuals are made invisible, then with homophobia these groups are instead made visible and openly attacked. These attacks can vary from verbal to physical abuse—which is called hate crimes. Homophobia is when two women who are holding hands in a restaurant are asked to leave because they are “offending” the other customers. Homophobia is when a group of men shouts verbal insults at a gay pride parade. Homophobia is a man being beaten up outside of a gay bar.



One can be heteronormative without being homophobic, but not the other way around. So just because someone is heteronormative does not mean that they engage in active discrimination. *“Even if you are heteronormative you can be quite friendly towards homosexuals. But you still feel that your own sexual orientation, heterosexuality, is something like the upper class, something that's better than theirs. That means that you're still supporting the structure even if it's just unconsciously.”*

MARGARITA JANKAUSKAITĖ OF THE EQUALITY ADVANCEMENT CENTRE, LITHUANIA

And perhaps contrary to what one might think, everyone can be heteronormative regardless of sexual orientation. Since heteronormativity is a structure that puts heterosexuality above homo- and bisexuality, internalised homophobia is quite common among the latter groups. Internalised homophobia can come in many forms. Some more drastic examples are feelings of self-hate and denial of one's sexual orientation. There are those who spend most or all of their lives in total denial of who they really are, sometimes with quite hard and open homophobia as a result. Because if you actively declare your hate of gays and lesbians, then you can't be one yourself, right? But internalised homophobia doesn't have to be so severe. It can also be a question of rationalising in different situations, such as thinking that it isn't so important to stand up for who you are in the workplace.

SOME VOICES AROUND THE CONCEPTS OF HETERONORMATIVITY AND HOMOPHOBIA

“Heteronormativity is a norm-building system that discriminates, neglects and denies everything that is not heterosexual. So it's the system of oppression of gay people.”

ARNAS ZDANEVICIUS OF VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY, LITHUANIA

“I believe that conservative values are rising in Slovenia and I believe that homophobia is bigger now than ten years ago. There are a lot of homophobic tendencies, like violence against gays and lesbians in everyday life. It is very symptom-

atic. For me the whole system is based on this heteronorm. On every level of society it is completely integrated. And that is why so many have a problem with homosexuals and other sexual minorities, because we are something that to them is completely unacceptable, completely strange. We have to break this ideology.”

NATASA SUKIC OF ŠKUC LL, SLOVENIA

“In Sweden the attitude that we're a very open society actually hides a lot. We have a view of ourselves that we always see to the individual, regardless of the societal structures. This is very obvious if you look at teachers. They say that they don't care whether their students are boys or girls, gay or heterosexual, because they see them for who they are as individuals. That's to deny the power of the norms. They deny that they're influenced by norms, and I think that's very problematic. And I think it comes a lot from the image we have of our open society.”

EVA REIMERS OF LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

“I agree that gender equality is important, but to me it does not necessarily deconstruct heteronormativity. Gender equality work aims at equality between men and women, but the system will still be the same in terms of heteronormativity. It's a step forward, but we would still be living in a world of stereotypes. Can we even imagine not living in a heteronormative world, which is the very foundation of everything?”

CHRISTOPHE PRETRE OF L'AUTRE CERCLE, FRANCE

“The term heteronormativity is really new here, but I think it's really good and that we should start implementing it in our seminars. We were

talking about heteronormativity with some people from the social ministry and they just said, 'We don't talk about our personal life at work. We just gather and switch on and switch off our personal lives.' Of course it's not like that. It just means that it's a heteronormative environment. I think it's a hot potato—we grab something and they want to push it away."

EDUARDAS PLATOVAS OF THE LITHUANIAN GAY LEAGUE

"It's still quite an academic concept. If you talk to the general public, they don't recognize the word. But when we explain what it means and stands for, they can relate to it and they are actually not unaware. The concept just has to sink in."

CHRISTINE GILLJAM OF THE OMBUDSMAN AGAINST DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SWEDEN

OPENNESS AND INVISIBILITY



It's Monday morning and the first coffee break of the week. You and your work colleagues gather at the table and everyone starts to talk about what they did during the weekend—dinner with the in-laws, football practice with the kids, a trip to the summerhouse. The mood is cheerful and everyone is talking and interrupting each other. But you sit there silent, nervous and with a stomachache, just waiting for the question to come to you. What are you going to say this time? That you didn't do anything special, or just lie and make up a story? What you won't say is the truth that you spent the weekend with your partner. Because your partner happens to have the same gender as you. And that is why you sometimes don't take coffee breaks, or have any family portraits on your desk. That is why your work colleagues see you as a quiet, somewhat difficult type. That is why you came alone to the company New Year's Party when all of the others brought their wives and husbands. You are afraid of what might happen if you tell the truth.

THE NEVER-ENDING COMING OUT PROCESS

Because of heteronormativity, there is something that everyone who is not heterosexual has to do: come out. Come out of what, you may ask? Well, the closet, as it is popularly called. As long as there is a general assumption in society that we are all heterosexual, everyone who is not is forced to actively declare it. Usually this is seen as something you do once and for all—a single event when a person tells the family about being homo- or bisexual. But in reality coming out is a process, and it never ends because you constantly face situations where you meet new people. And since we

live with a heteronorm, everyone will think that you are heterosexual unless you ... Well, you get the picture.

“You have to constantly face this strong norm that keeps you in place, even if you are open. I know this from my own experiences. I’m totally open at work as a lesbian, but still I face new situations every week where I have to come out. And then I have to make a decision—should I be open or not? Should I make those around me uncomfortable or should I keep quiet? This is a choice that people who live inside the norm never have to face, and therefore don’t see.”

EVA REIMERS OF LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN



The workplace? I don't see what sexual orientation has to do with the workplace. That is taking things too far. My colleagues and I don't speak about what we do in our bedrooms, so why should that be so problematic to lesbians and gays?

A very common heteronormative opinion about homo- and bisexuality is that it's a private matter. A bedroom issue. And therefore it is not an issue for the workplace. But one's sexual orientation is more than just what happens in the bedroom. It's an integrated part of who we are. In addition, since we spend more and more time at our workplace, our colleagues often become our friends. And we want to get to know our friends, know what their lives are like outside of work. For

a heterosexual person, this is unproblematic because when someone who's heterosexual talks about his or her life it is not seen as private at all. But if someone with a partner of the same gender does the same, the conversation is often instead seen as being too private. Sometimes it is even thought of as an unnecessary and even provocative statement: “Just because you are gay doesn't mean you have to shout it out loud.” The norm only becomes visible when someone deviates from it. In fact, this is a perfect example of how the heteronorm functions in the workplace.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OPENNESS

The simple fact is that everyone has a right to be open about themselves and who they are. In fact, the European Employment Directive stipulates that member states should prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the workplace. Being denied the basic human right of being open means cutting off a big part of one's identity. Today this is everyday life for a lot of non-heterosexuals—a situation which that person even might consider as “normal”. And speaking of identity, openness isn't just about sexual orientation. Transgender people are also often forced to deny or hide who they really are.

Why is it important to be open, you might wonder? ● First of all, your sexual orientation is not something that you can decide to put aside when you leave your home in the morning. Because at work you are constantly being reminded of it and questioned about it. In the break room, at a job inter-

view, after coming back from your holiday and so on. And not being able to be open creates a stressful situation.

“You might feel that you have to be vague in your answers, and eventually you become this grey person in comparison to the others. You definitely don't become a member of the team this way, so the social aspect of your work is a flop. And after all, we spend one-third of our lives at work, so being a part of the team is very important.”

KAROLVIEKER OF RFSL—THE SWEDISH FEDERATION FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER RIGHTS

Secondly, less satisfactory work results could be a consequence of closeted sexual orientations and closeted gender identities. You'll never be your best at work if your mind is preoccupied with something other than your work tasks. The Swedish research project connected to TRACE focuses on how heterosexuality is made to be the norm in schools and the teacher education programs at universities. One part of this research examines how teachers are affected in their professional lives when they are not able to be open about their sexual orientation.

“One aspect of being a good teacher is being personal, being able to use your personality in the classroom. If you have to hide such an important part of your personality as whom you spend your life with, then a lot of energy is wasted on creating a distance from the pupils. And then you can't use yourself in a way that is the ideal of the perfect teacher.”

EVA REIMERS OF LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

Less satisfactory work results in turn lead to another consequence: difficulties in getting promotions and climbing the hierarchy at your workplace. Imagine that a manager at a workplace is going to pick someone to go on an important business trip. This business trip is almost like a promotion since it's a very important one. The manager has two candidates to choose from. First there's Vesna. Vesna has been at the company for many years, and has done excellent work. She's an outgoing type, always jokes and makes everyone feel at ease. Everybody likes her. Then there's Jasmina. She's been at the company as long as Vesna, and her work record is also perfect. But she's always been very secretive, always withdraws from social gatherings. Actually, no one really knows anything about her life outside of work. So, who do you think is going to get picked? It's Vesna, of course. Social contacts, networking and being a part of the team are very important when it comes to advancement in your career. **In terms of one's career, not being open can have a devastating outcome.**

Also, the constant stress of hiding the life you have outside of work can actually cause health problems. A Swedish study from the National Institute for Working Life shows that both physical and emotional health problems can be the outcome of not being able to be open about your sexual orientation. A person that's not open is actually 30% more likely to suffer from bad health than someone who has come out. *"I think that the worst thing is to be in the closet and not be able to be open about your personality and your sexual orientation. It's the biggest kind*

of discrimination because you have to hide yourself. As one woman expressed it, you have to kill yourself in a way, destroy yourself from the inside. Because every day you have to lie and pretend, to be someone else."

ARNAS ZDANEVICIUS OF VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY, LITHUANIA

Of course no one should be forced to come out at their workplace. Being open is a basic human right, not an obligation. **What is an obligation, however, is for the employer as well as the employees to create an environment in which everyone feels at ease and has the possibility to be open if they so choose.**

There are differences between the TRACE partners when it comes to openness in the workplace. The basic conditions vary and create different starting points. In Lithuania and Slovenia, the fear of homophobic consequences is so big that coming out to work colleagues is often not even an option to gays and lesbians. What many of them are focusing on are their parents, as a first step. Jolanta Reingardienė tells this about what the Lithuanian research project has found out through interviews with gays and lesbians:

"A lot of these people are not open to their families at all, and they are suffering a lot. For some interviewees, the issue of discrimination at work isn't relevant. They mean that they can't be open in general when they can't be open to their families."

In France and Sweden the situation is a bit better. In Sweden about one out of two feel secure enough to be open at their workplace, and France almost reaches up to the same level. These might seem like pretty

I can't see how coming out can be so problematic today. I mean we don't live in the Dark Ages anymore. We have all of these celebrities coming out and films like Brokeback Mountain winning Oscars. Why on earth would you choose to stay in the closet, especially when you face all of those terrible consequences?

good figures, especially if you compare them with the situation in Lithuania and Slovenia. But there are still far too many who don't feel that they can be open, and that can never be acceptable.

WHY NOT DARE TO STEP OUT?

Just as there are differences between the TRACE countries when it comes to being open, there are differences in the reasons why people choose not to be. You can describe it as a scale where you have Sweden and France on one of the ends. In these countries gays, lesbians and bisexuals rarely face real danger if they come out. Of course, homophobia in workplaces is a problem with discrimination, harassment and hate crimes, but it's probably more likely that the fear of coming out stems from a strictly heteronormative environment.

Everyone wants to feel respected for who they are, and naturally if you aren't getting any signals that that would be the case if you came out, then you won't choose to be open.



"To come out as a homosexual is often problematic. No one says: 'OK, that's great!' Instead you usually have to face a lot of follow-up questions. You have to stand up for yourself. And you might not always be up for that, so then you keep quiet instead. Not everyone feels comfortable with identifying as being part of a minority."

CHRISTINE GILLJAM OF THE OMBUDSMAN AGAINST DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SWEDEN

On the other end of the scale you have Lithuania and Slovenia. In these countries homophobia is much more visible and a real threat. Hence, a lot of people don't come

out. Urska Sterle from the Slovenian project explains the situation:

“If you compare for instance the situation for the disabled and homosexuals, people know that it’s not okay to hate somebody with a disability because they can’t help it. But it’s okay to hate someone who’s homosexual because of the misperception that homosexuality is a choice. The level of hate-speeches is very high when it comes to sexual orientation.”

It’s common that gays, lesbians and bisexuals develop coping strategies to handle the situations they face, becoming experts at making up stories about their personal lives or changing jobs quite often. **One important coping strategy is the split between the public and the private. To rationalise and start thinking that sexual orientation is not important at work, which is actually an internalisation of one of the main objections against working with these issues.**

“One woman from our interviews got worried that her work colleagues were starting to find out that she was a lesbian. So, she brought a male friend to a party. And she didn’t have to say anything about him; everyone just assumed he was her boyfriend. As she put it herself, she let the heteronorm do the work for her.”

EVA REIMERS OF LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

The internal discrimination that some gays, lesbians and bisexuals have is quite hard to bear. You are well aware of the norm and what it does to you, but still you follow it and in some ways even strengthen it. So you are actually working against yourself. Some can even become discriminatory

against others in order to hide themselves, as experiences from the French project show:

“We usually focus on employees, but it’s the same with gay employers. Some of them can be quite homophobic and would never employ someone who was gay or lesbian. This is because they don’t want to be visible and they know that it would be problematic to have an open employee at their workplace. So sometimes they act very strangely, just so that no one will know that they are gay or lesbian themselves.”

CHRISTOPHE PRETRE OF L’AUTRE CERCLE, FRANCE

INVISIBLE DISCRIMINATION

Well, actually it is your problem. The working climate is highly affected by how the employees interact with each other. And an opinion like this is definitely a bad influence. In such a case it’s not very likely that cooperation between the employees at your workplace is functioning very well. You are in fact contributing to an environment in which everyone who doesn’t match the norm perfectly will feel insecure. And this insecurity will also affect the working climate. **Not being able to fully be yourself and to feel accepted is not a good condition for good work performance.**

Your sexual orientation is not visible on the outside, unlike what is often the case with other grounds of discrimination—such as gender, age or ethnicity. With this comes the fact that discrimination against gays, lesbians and bisexuals often happens beneath the surface. And it goes without

Why should I care about this? Whether some of my work colleagues might be hiding their sexual orientation is not my problem. In fact, I think I prefer it that way.



saying that when something is hidden, it’s not so easy to discover.

“For people it’s very easy to discriminate against a person that they know is homosexual, but who’s not open to the rest of the workplace. But if everyone knows, and the manager of the company knows, then it’s more difficult for the homophobe to discriminate because the reason why becomes obvious. So visibility could stop some of the discrimination against gays and lesbians.”

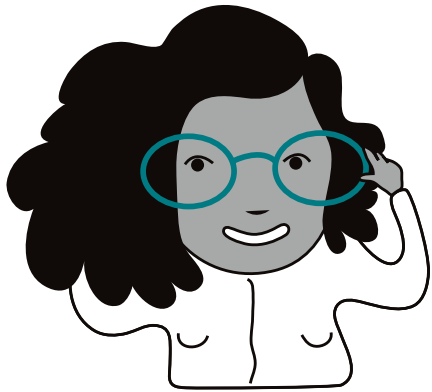
CATHERINE TRIPON OF L’AUTRE CERCLE, FRANCE

The Slovenian project has made some interesting observations from a survey they sent out to employer organisations and trade unions. Their answers showed blindness to homophobic expressions, partly because they didn’t believe that there were any gays, lesbians or bisexuals at their workplace. A study from the Swedish National Institute for Working Life backs up this observation.

“It is a goal not only with this research, but in general, that we have to educate them so that they see that homophobia exists. People who answered in both samples have high levels of conscious non-acceptability of homophobia. But in their work experience, they don’t recognize homophobia. The conviction of this heterosexual homogeneity in the working collective stems from a particular idea about how homosexuality can be viewed in the first place. Maybe they have the prejudice that gay men are mostly feminine and that lesbians are masculine. So if they don’t see this they suppose that they don’t have gays and lesbians at their workplace.”

NATASAVELIKONJA OF ŠKUC LL, SLOVENIA

My workplace is a very open one and there surely isn't any discrimination going on. I'm sure there wouldn't be any problems for a homosexual to come out here, if there were any homosexuals.



So discrimination can happen even though you are not aware that you are heteronormative. ● **Simply by assuming that everyone at your workplace is heterosexual, you aren't open to the possibility that somebody might not be.** And that is actually one kind of discrimination, because of the consequences that come from it.

Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is not only a question for those who are subjected to it. It's everyone's responsibility. You can't point a finger at the person next to you and resign yourself from responsibility.

But I still don't see what this has got to do with me. If a gay or lesbian colleague at my workplace has a problem, then it's up to them to report it I think.



● **You are just as accountable as everyone else at your workplace. And saying that the person being discriminated against should report it is like putting double weight on his or her shoulders.** The Slovenian project came across a story that really pins down what drastic consequences might arise when the working climate isn't open:
"The work collective found out that a man was gay and they started to harass him. The man complained about this to the manager, but the manager

didn't take him seriously. So the harassment continued, and then slowly this person was under such pressure that he couldn't work sufficiently. Consequently the boss fired him because his work wasn't of good quality."

TATJANA GREIF OF ŠKUC LL, SLOVENIA

AN OPEN WORKPLACE

So what characterises an open workplace? The structure of the organisation is an important factor. Generally speaking, hierarchies prevent openness whereas an open, flat structure makes it easier for gays and lesbians to come out. Another factor is female-oriented professions. Experiences from the different projects show that the openness is higher there than in male-oriented professions. In Lithuania for instance, the majority of the open gays and lesbians work in female-dominated fields. The size of the organisation may also affect the openness. Unlike what one might think, a smaller organisation where the interpersonal contacts between colleagues are closer can actually be an obstacle for gays and lesbians, according to Lithuanian research. This is because in a smaller group there are more personal contacts between the work colleagues, and one might be putting more things at risk if the group finds out about one's sexual orientation.

All four countries talk about the importance of the leadership. Christine Gilljam from The Swedish Ombudsman Against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation explains it like this:

"The leadership has to be made up of people who are strong and brave when it appears that things are not what they seem. The employees must always be treated like individuals and not like group identities. The management sends clear signals and the tasks and responsibilities are structurally divided."

An open workplace is also where you know that you have certain rights—that you are protected and that if something happens, your report will be taken seriously. All of this together equals a working climate where everyone feels respected. And that in turn will lead to more openness, more productivity and an environment where everyone feels good regardless of their sexual orientation. Again, this is everyone's responsibility, both employers and employees.



CHAPTER 4

EXPERIENCES FROM THE NATIONAL PROJECTS

No man is an island—and that goes for projects as well. Cooperation means strength. TRACE joins Sweden in the north of Europe with Lithuania in the east, Slovenia in the south and France in the west. Four countries with different backgrounds and histories, different social situations and basic conditions, but also with many similarities. Sometimes the most striking similarities are not to be found within countries, but between them. That's one of the valuable lessons to be learned from transnational cooperation.

Instead of working on the same subject scattered in different parts of Europe, the TRACE partners believe in cooperation. When working alone, it's easy to get caught in a glass bubble. In that glass bubble you might start to think that you're all alone in this fight. And that the strategies your project engage in are the only ones, and in fact the best ones. But the truth is that discrimination based on sexual orientation is not an issue to be tackled only from one point of view or with one set of tools. That's something that TRACE definitely shows.

THEY'RE QUEER—BUT THEY'RE NOT HERE

There is something that unites the TRACE countries, an experience that's shared by them all: very few of the workplaces that the projects have come in contact with are aware that they have any gay, lesbian or bisexual employees. They shake their heads and say, "This sounds like a problem you should deal with if your workplace has homosexuals. But we haven't got any." **The homo- and bisexuals always seem to be somewhere else, preferably outside one's own responsibility.** This is naturally very symptomatic, a general blindness caused by heteronormativity.

"When I studied the teacher education I noticed one clear tendency. They speak about gays and lesbians as if they are not there. One teacher was clearly a lesbian, but still the discussions were held as if there wasn't a homosexual in the room. That is because you have this opinion that everyone is one-hundred percent heterosexual. The schools invite gay and lesbian organisations so that the students can meet someone who's gay. Thereby the school is constructed as this absolutely heterosexual workplace—because clearly there's no homosexual at the school if you have to invite one."

EVA REIMERS OF LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

Another very common experience is that no workplace has problems with discrimination. This is quite interesting since prejudice on the grounds of sexual orientation is in fact widespread. And prejudice often leads to discrimination. **Figures from the Swedish National Institute for Working Life show that**

one out of two homo- and bisexual employees thinks that their work colleagues have prejudices against gays and lesbians, whereas only one out of three heterosexuals thinks the same. Again it's quite clear that the norm hardly ever looks itself in the mirror because it's actually quite blind.

"Right now there is no interest in this area and the level of awareness about the dangers of all kinds of discrimination is very low. Also people who work in trade unions and employment organisations think that there is no discrimination against gay people, that no one is affected, and actually that there are no gay people in the first place. They think that all of this is fictive."

TATJANA GREIF OF ŠKUC LL, SLOVENIA

It's not very flattering to have a self-image as prejudiced and homophobic. Instead it's quite common to deny this, and to see oneself as an open-minded person. For instance, the Slovenian project's experiences are that people in their country currently see themselves as against discrimination, but at the same time all public opinion polls show that homophobia, xenophobia and other forms of discriminations are at a very high level. This unawareness is something that all of the TRACE countries have faced, and it's not always easy to find a way to open people's eyes to this.

According to the French project's experiences of meetings with human resources managers, it's not always an issue of being unaware of your prejudices. Sometimes it's merely a facade,

"It's a problem of them sometimes being unaware, but it's also a problem of them not

being willing to become aware. Because when you're not aware then that's it. You don't have to do anything about it. Most of them don't want to become aware and that's the main problem I think. They just don't want to know."

CHRISTOPHE PRETRE OF L'AUTRE CERCLE

DIFFERENT STARTING POINTS—ONE COMMON GOAL

If you look at where the TRACE countries start off, it might seem as if they are worlds apart. As mentioned before you could divide the countries into two teams and put them on two sides of a scale. France and Sweden position themselves together, as do Lithuania and Slovenia. Both groups share common histories in some ways. Lithuania and Slovenia, for example, have both been part of the Eastern Block and are now new members of the European Union.

Sweden is the country that in a lot of ways has come the furthest. Everything is not perfect there, but still it's not uncommon to see two men or two women holding hands and being affectionate towards each other in public, at least in bigger cities. The country also has adoption and insemination laws that include gays and lesbians. And the official discourse is a politically correct one, where homo- and bisexuals are included. By contrast, in Lithuania and Slovenia it's not unusual that politicians and the media are extremely homophobic, and hate speeches have been held in both parliaments. That would not be possible in Sweden among the established parties, at least not without a

wild public debate and probably the politician's resignation.

A quick glance might make one think that it's presumptuous of Sweden and France to complain. In comparison to Lithuania and Slovenia, shouldn't they just be content with how far they have come?

"It's easy for us to start thinking like that. But you can't compare apples and oranges. You have to compare apples and apples, which is to compare how the situation is for gays and lesbians in Sweden with how the situation is for heterosexuals here. We shouldn't be satisfied until everyone really has the same rights, obligations and opportunities, regardless of sexual orientation."

KAROL VIEKER FROM RFSL—THE SWEDISH FEDERATION FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER RIGHTS

Both Lithuania and Slovenia are aware of the importance of being realistic. From where they are starting from you can't expect changes to come too rapidly. As Vladimir Simonko of the Lithuanian Gay League puts it, *"It's not a question of quantity but quality. Like with the gay and lesbian community. Of course we can't expect to have a community the size of Sweden's. Here 50 people is a lot. Because even coming to our seminars in the closed classrooms is still a coming out process, and it's not easy for some of them to take that step."*

WAYS TO GET THERE

All of the projects agree on one thing: It's important to start working from where you actually are and not from where you

want to be. You have to find the right strategies and tools for your situation. And that's exactly what the TRACE countries have done.

Natasa Sukic from ŠKUC LL in Slovenia explains their strategy, a starting point one can have when working with this issue.

“Our target group is not homosexuals at the moment, because they are invisible in the workplace. Nobody will tell you, ‘Oh, by the way, I’m homosexual.’ So we can’t expect them to come and attend our workshops. That’s why we decided to start with management structures, with people who are in leading positions who influence the policies in the organisation and who are responsible.”

The Slovenian project has partnered with the Employer Association of Slovenia and the biggest trade union federation. Together they hold workshops on anti-discrimination policies. In addition, a handbook for each of these two partners concerning discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation has been produced.

The Lithuanian project focuses on building and strengthening the gay and lesbian community. With IT-training courses aimed at homo- and bisexuals the idea is to give them a space where they can meet and feel strengthened in a safe environment. Hopefully with this strength in them, they can eventually at their own pace reclaim their rightful place as open gays and lesbians in their families and society. The training is twofold—there’s another aim with these courses as well, as Eduardas Platovas from the Lithuanian Gay League explains:

“We call it a self-support centre and a working laboratory. One task is to record their discrimi-

nation stories. We have to prove these stories actually exist because nobody believes us. These stories will then be published in a booklet.”

While one cluster of the Lithuanian project focuses on gays and lesbians, another cluster is creating an equal opportunities model. This model will work as a concrete tool on what one can do at a workplace in regards to equal opportunities on all grounds. There is also research being conducted with the focus on openness and discrimination of homo- and bisexuals in the workplace.

A common experience shared by all of the projects is that in the general discussion about equality, sexual orientation has a tendency to be left out. The main focus is on gender, ethnicity and sometimes disability; sexual orientation is often not even mentioned.

“Companies say that they are against all kinds of discrimination. Usually when people talk about equality, they say that they don’t discriminate against ethnicity, gender, et cetera. We are not an et cetera. You have to write it out—sexual orientation. That’s really the point. Pronounce it!”

CATHERINE TRIPON OF L'AUTRE CERCLE, FRANCE

The French project concerns how sexism and homophobia are connected, and the parallels that go between the two concepts. Research is being conducted about the double discrimination that lesbians face since they are both women and homosexuals. A survey will also be conducted on how sexism and homophobia are handled in the workplace in private companies in all sectors. Furthermore they have arranged meetings

with human resources organisations where best practices on equal opportunities have been discussed.

For both the Lithuanian and French projects it became quite clear early on that focusing on all grounds of discrimination could be a strategy, and also a necessity, for the project to get partners and produce results. There isn't always enough interest in projects that only focus on sexual orientation, so sometimes you might have to open up and broaden your project. For the French project, the reason has been to get partners. Christophe Pretre tells that in order to generate interest in the project their main focus is gender and sexual orientation, but they also add elements of ethnicity and disability. Eduardas Platovas in Lithuania says that the general interest in working with equality, regardless of focus, is very low. And contacting the companies with a model that only focuses on sexual orientation would have been impossible. He explains, *“Of course we are stressing the sexual orientation theme, but still the context is wider because then it’s easier to start a discussion. You know in a way this might seem like we’re just blurring things when we’re talking about equal opportunities on all grounds, but this is the reality that we can’t only speak about sexual orientation.”*

The most common obstacle for the Swedish project is ironically based on the fact that the country has come quite far with gay and lesbian rights. **Since many doors have been opened for homo- and bisexuals, on the surface things might appear to be quite good.** The project focuses on the

Swedish education system, and one part is training sessions with teachers where the focus is on heteronormativity and how that norm functions in the school system. Christine Gilljam from The Ombudsman Against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation tells that in these sessions, sooner or later someone always objects. Is this really a problem today? Isn't it even fashionable to be bisexual nowadays? She means that by having this standpoint they neglect to listen. KarolVieker, who often conducts these training sessions, agrees:

“The opinion is that the workplace is open and that everyone likes each other, so there are no problems and no need to talk about this issue. In reality, not talking about it is the problem.” The Swedish project continuously carries out training sessions in its six pilot municipalities. They have also published two books and a DVD. In addition, they conducted a survey on teachers' knowledge, attitudes and responsibility when it comes to sexual orientation and homophobia. The research focuses on the heterosexual norm in the different aspects of the school system.

All of the projects agree that personal meetings and education helps. Discussions and information with concrete examples of discrimination are almost unbeatable when it comes to opening people's eyes.

“We always insist on meetings with companies, and when they agree to this the contacts are good. The discourse at first is that they are not really concerned about this. But when we start to ask them questions based on concrete examples and give them tips on how to recognise discrimination, they are like, ‘Oh, well maybe what you are say-

ing really is true.' Once we are face to face, then most of the time it's very good."

CHRISTOPHE PRETRE OF L'AUTRE CERCLE,
FRANCE

BACKLASHES AND RESISTANCE—SIGNS OF PROGRESS

"First you are ignored, then they start to make jokes, then they start to fight with you, and finally they accept you. Sometimes I have the feeling that it's like a game—one score to us and one score to them. Sometimes they win a few steps forward, and then we win something," says Margarita Jankauskaitė from the Equality Advancement Centre in Lithuania comments on working with the issue of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. She continues: "Doing so you have to be prepared to meet with resistance because you will, whether it's open resistance or not. But backlashes can actually be seen as signs of progress. If there wasn't any progress being made, there wouldn't be any backlash."

All of the projects have experienced backlashes, resistance and obstacles, especially in Lithuania and Slovenia. It's not always easy to work with this issue even if you are part of a transnational cooperation. Margarita Jankauskaitė believes that the backlash with conservative forces that the Lithuanian project has experienced is a consequence of their project having begun to move forward.

Lithuanian researcher Arnas Zdanevicius explains that it has been a real challenge for him and his colleague Jolanta Reingardienė

to conduct their studies. A lot comes from the atmosphere in their society. "There have been media reactions: our former rector and some other officials at the university asked us if we didn't have any other more important issue to focus on. There is this struggle and it's hard to do everything by ourselves, but it's so worth it because nobody else is doing it. So we have to."

Both France, Lithuania and Slovenia have all experienced difficulties because their gay and lesbian organisations are not so established. Unlike RFSL in Sweden, they all struggle with difficulties like relying on volunteer work, and in the case of Lithuania, not having an office for the organisation. Vladimir Simonko from the Lithuanian Gay League tells this story of when their organisation was looking for an office. Something that proved to be easier said than done:

"We talked to people and looked for places, and then there were three or four cases where everything was arranged. Then when we gave our details with the name of our organisation, they said, 'Oh, sorry the office has already gone to someone else.' The last office we looked at was at a disabled people's organisation, and you would assume that they would be sympathetic since they are also a group that is discriminated against. But not even they wanted to have us. They said that no one else would like to rent from them if we were there."

The Slovenian project cooperates with the country's biggest trade union and employer organisations. One part of their project was a survey of the attitudes the employer organisations have towards homo- and bisexuals. In total, 3000 questionnaires were sent out, only twelve were received back. So it's fair

to say that the interest isn't on the highest level. But Tatjana Greif says that this does not discourage them:

"This is the first time in Slovenian history that anyone has dealt with the issue of discrimination of homosexuals in the workplace in a systematic and serious way. Before that, there was nothing. Zero awareness and no discussion of this. So being completely new in this field it's only natural that you cannot get a high level of awareness immediately. But we hope to develop this gradually, step by step."

COOPERATION DESPITE DIFFERENCES

All of the TRACE countries are unanimous about the positive outcomes of their cooperation. TRACE has been important because of the fact that it's strengthening to feel that you're not all alone. Working with the issue of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation can sometimes feel very lonely, especially in some parts of Europe. And being able to exchange thoughts, ideas and experiences has been valuable to all of the TRACE countries.

The Swedish project explains that they sometimes have found surprising similarities between the countries, despite the obvious differences, such as when working with the concept of heteronormativity. In Sweden, the project is based on discussions about the concept, something that they didn't think they would find in the other partners.

"It feels like the Swedish and the Lithuanian researchers really have found each other. And I

think it's exciting that it's possible to work with heteronormativity in two countries that are so far apart. The Lithuanian society is in some aspects today where we were in 1950 when we started to work with these issues. But for them, of course, the progress will be much more rapid."

CHRISTINE GILLJAM OF THE OMBUDSMAN
AGAINST DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF
SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SWEDEN

What partners the different projects have made contact with also works as an inspiration. For instance, the Swedes have been impressed by the fact that one of the Slovenian partners is the country's biggest employer organisation.

"Even though this is a much more sensitive discrimination area for them than for us, they are still kind of open to it and say that this might be something they have to look at. Hopefully the Swedish employer organisations can look at their Slovenian colleagues and be inspired too."

CHRISTINE GILLJAM OF THE OMBUDSMAN
AGAINST DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF
SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SWEDEN

On the other hand, the Slovenian project has been inspired by the Swedish project when it comes to their cooperation with the Swedish Teachers' Union.

"They have a really good practice. Our teacher organisation didn't answer the first time that we invited them, but now they have told us that they would like to be part of something in the future. I think that we can learn a lot from the Swedish project in this aspect."

NATASA SUKIC OF ŠKUC LL, SLOVENIA



TIPS AND TRICKS

So far you have been reading about what others have done to combat discrimination of gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the workplace. With the TRACE cooperation, thoughts and ideas, knowledge and experiences—both good and bad—have been exchanged over country borders. Now it's time to pack these experiences in a backpack, put it on your back and give yourself a push forward. Learn from them, start where the projects left off, copy strategies or find completely new ways.

Maybe all of this feels overwhelming, and that there's not much you can do. But here is where you have to think again. First of all, no act is too small or insignificant. As an individual, there's no need to feel powerless because actually a lot of change can start on an everyday basis. You just have to find your starting point.

Face it, there really are no acceptable excuses for not starting to work with this issue. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is something that concerns everyone—and something it's never too soon or too late to start working with. It is an issue you can always raise, no matter where in Europe you live, in what field of work you are, or whoever you are. Everybody can do something and start working towards equal rights for everyone. Lack of knowledge or experiences is no excuse: educate yourself. Reading this book is a good start.

ARE YOU AN EMPLOYER?

Well, then you have a special starting point. Even though everyone should do what they can to create an open environment, it's no secret that there is special importance put on your actions. The initiatives you take will affect the entire workplace. Therefore, it's essential that you dare to take a stand. Take pride in working towards a democratic, inclusive workplace. *After all, who wants to be in charge of a workplace that's not open-minded?*

"It's difficult to implement a new culture, so the first step is to start with the top and then little by little you work your way down."

CRISTINA LUNGI OF THE ARBORUS ORGANISATION, FRANCE

- **Take This Seriously**

Indicate that this is an issue you take seriously, and that you are willing to invest time and effort in. If you as an employer raise the issue, it's a clear signal that at your workplace, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is not allowed. Make room for discussions and awareness raising. Prejudices need to be addressed and answered, otherwise they'll live on unhindered.

- **What Signals Does Your Workplace Send Out?**

What image does your workplace present to your surroundings? Do people perceive it as an open-minded place where everyone is welcome? Look at your employees; are they diversified or does everyone have the same background and live the same life? If they do, then it might be a sign that diversity is

something you need to start working with. A first step is to take a closer look at your advertisements for new positions. State that you welcome all applicants regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, age or sexual orientation. That's a clear sign that your workplace is an open one.

- **Create an Open-Minded Workplace in All Aspects**

Integrate a non-heteronormative way of thinking in all aspects of the workplace. This goes for everything from the work culture to administrative details. Do you have any codes of conduct, an action plan or an anti-discrimination policy? If not, this is the time to create one. And, think in the long-term and with an integrated perspective. Don't just arrange a theme day on sexual orientation and then leave it at that. A democratic, inclusive workplace isn't created overnight; it's something you have to work with constantly.

ARE YOU A TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVE?

As a trade union representative, you play an important role in the workplace. *You are the person the employee can turn to when there's a problem in the workplace.* Therefore your actions are highly significant when it comes to creating an open workplace.

- **Don't Avoid a Burning Issue**

Sexual orientation is still a sensitive issue in a lot of workplaces, which makes it even more important that you act. If an employee comes to you with a problem concerning

sexual orientation, you must dare to take action—even if it is the first time this issue is being raised.

- **Integrate Sexual Orientation in Your Daily Work**

Just as with unserious working contracts and low wages, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation should be a natural part of what you work to improve, not an exception. This is an issue that concerns everyone, the entire workplace.

- **Encourage Employees to Report Incidents**

Or report them yourself. In any case you should take problems regarding someone's sexual orientation seriously and be an encouragement when it comes to reporting what has happened. You have an important position in the workplace, and with your support it might be easier for the employee to report discrimination.

- **Provide All the Information the Employee Needs**

The employee might not be aware of all of his/her rights. That's where you have to inform this person about what obligations the employer actually has. With information comes the strength to act.

- **Make Sure Things Are Handled Properly**

Inspect what actions the employer takes when an incident is reported. Is the employer taking this seriously, and are all necessary means being taken? Usually an investigation should start, and it's a good

idea that you monitor this procedure so that it is performed correctly. Whatever the investigation uncovers, the victim should never be negatively affected by the actions that are being taken. After all, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is often the result of a heteronormative and homophobic work climate. Therefore actions should not be aimed at the individual affected.

- **Go to a Higher Level—What Your Trade Union Can Do**

Try to get your trade union to acknowledge the issue of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. One thing you could encourage your trade union to do is to start a program that focuses on this kind of discrimination.

ARE YOU AN EMPLOYEE?

There are a lot of things that you can do at your workplace as an employee. Naturally most of these tips apply to employers and trade union representatives as well.

- **How Open-Minded Is Your Workplace?**

One aspect to focus on is the work climate and find out if it's heteronormative. How? Well, if you are a heterosexual person, here is an assignment for you. As you now know it's sometimes difficult to see the norm when you're a part of it. An effective thing to do then is to put yourself in someone else's shoes. And in this case, not very surprisingly, you should put yourself in a homosexual person's shoes. Simply pretend for yourself

that you live with a partner of the same gender and see whether you meet any obstacles—during coffee breaks, at meetings and so on. Talk about your partner without using pronouns like “he/him” or “she/her” so that you never “reveal” your partner’s gender. This is what homo- and bisexuals who are not open have to do every day.

- **How Personal Are You?**

If you still have doubts that we are all personal in our workplaces, try this: avoid mentioning anything about your life outside of work for a couple of days. Not talking about your personal life is a perfect way to see how often we actually share things about ourselves at work.

- **One Golden Rule**

If you find that the work climate in your workplace isn’t all that open as everyone thinks, there’s one first basic step to take: **never assume that everyone’s heterosexual.** In the beginning this might feel a bit strange, but in fact that’s simply proof of how rigid the heteronorm actually is—and that should just encourage you to keep on going.

- **Respect Differences**

Don’t assume that everyone’s life looks just like yours. Respect differences and see that you can learn from them. Think about your own culture, get to know and understand what kind of “cultural glasses” you have on. That will make it easier to remove them. Train your skills to be open-minded towards what you might perceive as “otherness”. **Understand that different life experiences can actually be a resource at your workplace.**

- **Neutral Language**

Use gender-neutral words like “partner” instead of boyfriend and girlfriend or husband and wife when you meet a new colleague. You’d be surprised what a difference a simple word like that can make. Karol Vieker from RFSL, The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights, puts it like this, *“If you’re homosexual or bisexual and someone asks you if you have a partner then it’s a very clear signal that ok, this person is enlightened enough to realise that I may not be heterosexual. And that means so much.”*

- **Break Room Discussions**

Listen to the way people talk during coffee breaks and at lunch. What opinions are to be found in what people are saying and joking about? Is the atmosphere inclusive? Would it be possible to sit there and talk about a partner of the same gender and feel comfortable? Dare to raise the issue. Ask your colleagues what might happen if someone put a picture of their same-sex partner on their desk. And if that person would bring his or her partner to a company dinner, what would they think?

- **React!**

When it comes to homophobic expressions like jokes, bullying, prejudiced jargon—react. React immediately and say that you don’t appreciate such language and that it’s discriminatory. It’s very important to not just sit silently, because doing so sends the signal that you agree with what has been said. Speak up. Tell the manager, someone in charge of your working unit, or your union representative. Such language is a problem

for the entire workplace, not just for the employees who may be homo- or bisexual.

- **Make Allies**

When you take this issue to a higher level it might be a good idea to first make some allies. Christine Gilljam of The Ombudsman Against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Sweden tells why this is important:

“When it comes to other grounds of discrimination it’s usually much easier to get support. For example, in the school if you raise the issue of gender or religious celebrations, there are always some students who are willing to help. But when it comes to sexual orientation, don’t expect to see any hands waving willing to help. And that’s why it’s important to seek support from your colleagues, because you will need that support.”

- **Include Different Grounds of Discrimination**

When you have done this, go to your employer and say that you think it’s about time that you raise this issue. Does the workplace have an anti-discrimination plan, and does it include sexual orientation? Depending on what your workplace is like, it might be a strategy to not only raise the issue of sexual orientation, but to raise the issue of several grounds of discrimination. That’s one lesson to be learned from the TRACE projects. It may be easier to get a response if you talk about all grounds of discrimination, and you are less likely to be turned down.

Finally, here are four tips for everyone who wants to start working against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation:

1. Have realistic expectations: Rome wasn’t built in a day, and your workplace won’t turn into an open, non-discriminatory one overnight. These things take time and even small steps forward make a difference.

2. Know your starting point: As with the TRACE projects you have to start from where you are, not from where you want to be. Some strategies and tools might be useless if they are applied to the wrong situation.

3. Wrestle with the heteronorm: Remember that it’s the norm that’s the problem—not the gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

4. Be proud of yourself: This is important and often groundbreaking work you are about to begin. You are about to make history!

To get more information and inspiration, take a look at the *Norms at Work: Challenging Homophobia and Heteronormativity* research reports book published by TRACE and visit the different projects’ web pages.

FRANCE, DELEDIOS:
www.autrecercle.org

VDLITHUANIA, OPEN AND SAFE AT WORK.LT:
www.atviri.lt

SLOVENIA, PARTNERSHIP FOR EQUALITY:
www.ljudmila.org/lesbo

SWEDEN, BENEATH THE SURFACE:
www.ytan.se

THE TRACE PARTNERSHIP

Employers, trade unions, governmental public bodies and NGOs all working together against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation—that is TRACE, The Transnational Cooperation for Equality.

The TRACE partnership, in progress between 2005 and 2007, was created and funded under the EU Equal program, a program aimed at combating discrimination in the workplace. The project involves four countries: France, Lithuania, Slovenia and Sweden. Their common interest is to abolish discrimination and the inequality of homosexual and bisexual people in the area of employment, and enable them to work under the same circumstances as their heterosexual colleagues.

The following projects are included in the TRACE partnership:

DELEDIOS

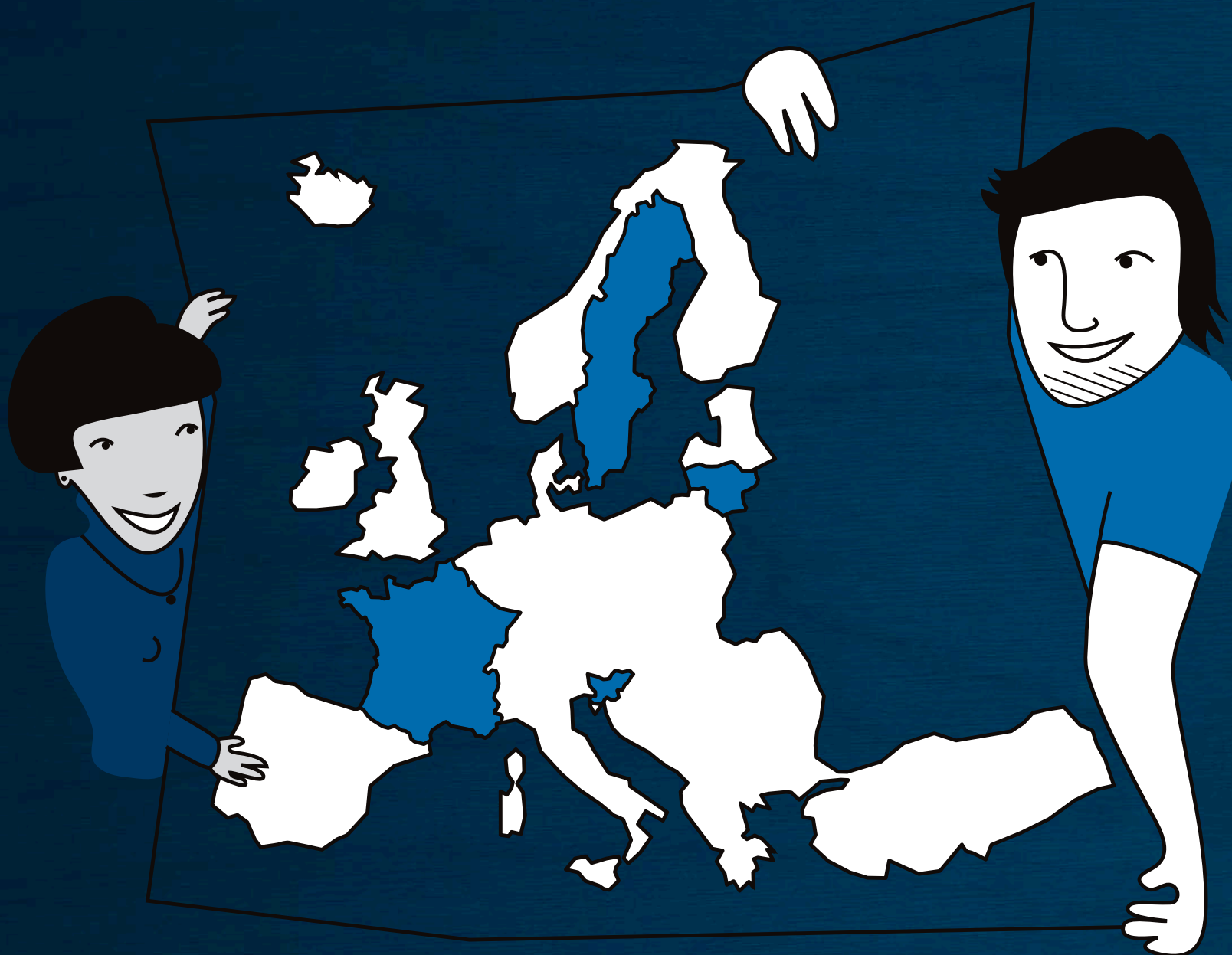
(FRANCE)

www.autrecercle.org

The “Deledios” project consists of partners fighting for equality and against gender- and sexual orientation-based discrimination in the workplace. The project is a three-year commitment to an experimental research and action-oriented programme.

Deledios is a pioneering project:

- For the first time in France, a national



project is dealing with discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of sexual orientation. It will set out to highlight the links between this type of discrimination and the mechanics of discrimination between men and women.

- A research and action programme will underscore the common—or diverging—features of these two types of discrimination. A specific focus will be on the double discrimination suffered by lesbians.

Deledios is also a project for the business world in order to:

- Raise awareness of the existence of homophobia and lesbophobia in the workplace and its impact on the company and its employees (All too often there is great hesitation in dealing with these issues and yet the problem is a very real one.)
- Identify practices in association with—or independently of—policies dealing with equality of professional opportunity and specifically aimed at heading off the existence of homophobia and lesbophobia in the workplace.
- Develop methodological tools together with a pilot group of companies, and with the aim of increasing awareness of homophobia in the workplace and the ways in which it can be avoided.

OPEN AND SAFE AT WORK.LT

(LITHUANIA)

www.atvir.lt

The goal of the “Open and Safe at Work.lt” project is to create appropriate and innovative methods for the reduction of intoler-

ance of employees on the grounds of sexual orientation in Lithuania.

The target groups of the project are employed and unemployed lesbians, gays and bisexuals of all ages, as well as employers. The practical objectives of the project are to:

- Conduct a first of its kind, thorough investigation into the situation of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the Lithuanian labour market.
- Ascertain the scope of their vulnerability, the reasons for their exclusion, and possible ways of overcoming discrimination.
- Raise public awareness in this regard as well as foster tolerance.
- Develop, test, and distribute on the basis of research and international experience a new model of equal employment opportunities (a set of methodologies, tools and measures) among Lithuanian companies willing to implement the provisions of the Law on Equal Treatment in an effective/efficient manner.

The project partners are Lithuanian activist NGOs (pro-equal opportunities, pro-queer), as well as expert consultancy and academic research organisations.

PARTNERSHIP FOR EQUALITY

(SLOVENIA)

www.ljudmila.org/lesbo

The “Partnership for Equality” project is a cooperation between ZDS—The Association of Employers of Slovenia, ZSSS—The Association of Free Trade Unions of Slove-

nia, and the nongovernmental organization ŠKUC-LL. Both the project’s partners and its target groups are trade unions and employers in Slovenia.

Because of the non-recognition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment and the labour market, such discrimination remains invisible, hidden, and statistically underrepresented. Gays, lesbians and bisexuals are still “silent victims” who are afraid to speak out. Over 50% of Slovenian gays and lesbians hide their sexual identity at work out of fear of homophobic reactions and the loss of confidence of their co-workers, as well as fear of losing their jobs. “Partnership for Equality” therefore addresses main actors in the area of employment by providing awareness raising, education and training of trade unions and employers for the development and sustainable implementation of anti-discrimination policies. The project has published two handbooks entitled “Measures for Combating Discrimination in Employment” for trade unions and employers.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

(SWEDEN)

www.ytan.se

The goal of the “Beneath the Surface” project is to raise the issue of sexual orientation and homophobia in school so that an environment is created where everyone is included regardless of sexual orientation. By clearly raising the issue as part of the systematic work of improving the working environment, a standard is created where

discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is as unacceptable as any other form of discrimination.

The project’s activities include:

- Development of educational resources, methodologies, and inspirational materials for raising awareness in a school environment.
- Working with training institutions on the issue of how norms are created and reproduced in a school environment.
- Research.
- Finding ways to support teachers in teaching and working with sexual orientation issues and homophobia.
- Offering competence-raising education for school administration and personnel.

The partners in this project represent a broad spectrum of the Swedish education system. They are researchers, employers, a number of training institutions, and three NGOs. The target groups for the project are active teachers, students in teacher training, pedagogic instructors, politicians, civil servants working in school environments, and pupils.

GLOSSARY

Heteronormativity: The assumption that everyone is supposed to feel attraction to and love for the opposite gender, and that there are specific roles and behaviour for men and women. In addition, heteronormativity ranks heterosexuality as superior to homosexuality or bisexuality.

Homophobia: Strong negative feelings, sometimes even hate, towards gays, lesbians and bisexuals. This can be manifested in both attitudes and behaviour. Society as well as individuals can be homophobic.

LGBT: Abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

Sexual Orientations:

Homosexuality: The ability to feel attraction to and love for someone of the same gender.

Heterosexuality: The ability to feel attraction to and love for someone of the opposite gender.

Bisexuality: The ability to feel attraction to and love for someone regardless of gender.

Transgender: A term that includes both transsexuals and transvestites; that is, people who identify with a sex other than the one with which they were born. Transgender people can be heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual.

Transsexual: A person who feels that they have been born with the “wrong” biological sex. Some may choose to go through gender reassignment, which includes hormone treatment and surgery.

Transvestite: A person who sometimes or always dresses in clothes and accessories typically associated with the opposite gender.

COOPERATING ORGANISATIONS

Deledios (France)

- CNIDFF, Centre National d’Information sur les Droits des Femmes et des Familles
- ARBORUS
- ANDCP, Association nationale des Directeurs et Cadres de la fonction Personnel
- L’AUTRE CERCLE

Open and Safe at Work.lt (Lithuania)

- LGKT, Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of Lithuania
- LGL, Lithuanian Gay League
- VDU, Vytautas Magnus University
- LGPC, Centre for Equality Advancement
- ESTEP, European Social, Legal and Economic Projects
- Gaumina Ltd.

Partnership for Equality (Slovenia)

- ZDS, Association of Employers of Slovenia
- ZSSS, Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia
- ŠKUC-LL

Beneath the Surface (Sweden)

- The Ombudsman Against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation
- The National Union of Teachers in Sweden
- The Swedish Teachers’ Union
- The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement
- The Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education
- The University of Linköping, Department of Social and Welfare Studies
- The University of Linköping, The program for education of teachers in Norrköping
- The Municipality of Södertälje
- RFSL, The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights
- SFG, The National Gay Student Association
- The Stockholm Institute of Education
- RFSL Ungdom, The Swedish Youth Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights



OPEN UP YOUR WORKPLACE!

Gays, lesbians and bisexuals are often made invisible in the workplace—either by their own choice as a safety precaution or because their colleagues do not want to recognize their existence. This invisibility could result in employees who feel that they do not fit in at work. It could also lead to a workplace atmosphere that is not the best that it can be.

This needs to be changed, and this book will help you get started.

In *Open Up Your Workplace* you will find experiences and practical advice gathered from the transnational partnership called TRACE, where employers, trade unions, governmental public bodies and NGOs have worked together from 2005 to 2007. Their common interest is to abolish discrimination and inequality of homosexual and bisexual people in the area of employment, and enable them to work under the same conditions as their heterosexual colleagues.

The TRACE partnership has produced the following two books:

Open Up Your Workplace reflects on experiences from practical project work. Here you will find tips and tricks on how to get started—whether you are an employer, employee, trade union representative or just someone with an interest in the subject.

Norms at Work is written by researchers who have collaborated within the TRACE partnership. The book will give you more in-depth knowledge on how norms and prejudice work, and how we can make them visible in order to change them.

THIS IS TRACE (THE TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EQUALITY):

Deledios, France (www.autrecercle.org)

Open and Safe at Work.lt, Lithuania (www.atviri.lt)

Partnership for Equality, Slovenia (www.ljudmila.org/lesbo)

Beneath the Surface, Sweden (www.ytan.se)



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