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THE INTERNATIONAL
PLATFORM FOR LGBTIQ+
INCLUSION AT WORK



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Breakout 7

EPBN

Business Impact of LGBTIQ+ EU Legislation

14:15 - 15:15 | Administratiezaal

Breakout 7 Report



1. Executive Summary

The session explored the relationship between LGBTIQ+ legislation, business strategy, talent participation and economic competitiveness across Europe. Hosted by the European Pride Business Network (EPBN), a consortium of 28 organisations from 24 countries, the discussion examined how legal protections have evolved and what this means for businesses seeking to create genuinely inclusive workplaces.

Kees Waaldijk outlined the historical development of LGBTIQ+ rights within the European framework and highlighted the shift from a focus on non-discrimination towards a broader expectation of active inclusion. While legislation establishes an essential minimum standard, he stressed that businesses should not view compliance as the end goal. Organisations need to measure, report and actively manage inclusion as part of their wider business strategy.

Julaine Marie Neiiendam focused on the connection between inclusion and Europe's competitiveness. Equality creates the opportunity to participate, but it is participation itself that unlocks talent, innovation, productivity and economic value. Legal, structural, cultural and personal barriers can prevent people from fully contributing to the labour market, resulting in wasted talent.

The overall message was that **inclusion should move from compliance to strategy and from intention to design**. Legislation creates the foundation and predictability businesses need, but organisations that go beyond the legal minimum can use inclusion to strengthen talent, innovation, competitiveness and resilience.

2. Key Findings

Finding 1 — European legislation is moving from non-discrimination towards active inclusion

The discussion highlighted the evolution of LGBTIQ+ rights within Europe, from early engagement at European level to today's increasingly comprehensive legal framework.



Protection is provided through multiple layers, including EU legislation, Council of Europe standards and national laws. However, the direction of travel is increasingly moving beyond simply preventing discrimination towards creating conditions in which people can actively participate and thrive.

At the same time, legislation generally follows social and business developments rather than leading them. This creates an opportunity for businesses to demonstrate leadership by going beyond the legal minimum.

Finding 2 — Legal recognition and economic development are interconnected

The session examined longitudinal data through the Global Index on Legal Recognition of Homosexual Orientation (GILRHO), which maps legal recognition over time alongside economic indicators.

The discussion identified a clear relationship between legal recognition and GDP, while acknowledging the complexity of determining causality. The broader point is that inclusion and economic development are interconnected rather than separate agendas.

Lee Badgett's economic model further illustrates how inclusion can influence economic development through interconnected pathways involving law, national policy, business practices, education, talent and participation.

Finding 3 — Legislation creates the floor, not the ceiling

Legal requirements establish minimum protections and create predictability for businesses, but compliance alone does not deliver an inclusive workplace.

The session challenged organisations to consider whether they are simply meeting legal requirements or actively creating environments where LGBTIQ+ employees can participate and contribute fully.

Business leadership therefore requires organisations to move beyond compliance and treat inclusion as an intentional strategic priority.



Finding 4 — Participation is the link between equality and competitiveness

Julaine Marie Neiiendam emphasised that people represent Europe's greatest competitive advantage. Equality creates the conditions for people to participate, but participation is what converts opportunity into economic value. When people can contribute fully, organisations benefit through greater access to talent, innovation and productivity.

Conversely, discrimination and exclusion create wasted talent. Legal, structural, cultural and personal barriers can prevent people from reaching their potential and participating fully in the labour market.

Finding 5 — Inclusion is a business capability, not a one-off initiative

The discussion positioned inclusion as an organisational skill that needs to be continuously developed rather than treated as a standalone project.

Creating inclusive workplaces requires ongoing collaboration between businesses and civil society, supported by effective policies, leadership, data and organisational practices.

This approach shifts inclusion from a programme with an end date towards a capability embedded within how an organisation operates.

Finding 6 — Data and reporting can become business intelligence

Reporting and data collection should not be viewed solely as compliance activities.

Used effectively, data can help organisations understand where inclusion is working, where barriers remain and where talent may be at risk. This turns inclusion reporting into a potential source of business intelligence that can support better decision-making and growth.

The discussion noted that the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) has the potential to support greater transparency, although momentum around the directive has changed.



Finding 7 — Inclusion by design can unlock talent and innovation

The session concluded with a call to move towards **"inclusion by design"**.

Rather than identifying and correcting exclusion after it occurs, organisations should build inclusion into workplace systems, policies and decision-making from the outset.

This approach can help transform anxiety and fear into greater participation, innovation and growth while reducing the risk of losing valuable talent.

3. Key Takeaways

- **Compliance is the starting point:** Legislation establishes a minimum standard, not the definition of an inclusive organisation.
- **Move from equality to participation:** Creating equal opportunity is essential, but enabling people to participate fully is what generates economic value.
- **Inclusion supports competitiveness:** Removing barriers allows organisations to access more talent, innovation and productivity.
- **Treat inclusion as strategy:** Inclusion should be integrated into business decisions rather than managed solely as a compliance or HR issue.
- **Use data as business intelligence:** Measurement and reporting can help organisations identify barriers, understand talent risks and make better decisions.
- **Build inclusion by design:** Organisations should prevent exclusion by embedding inclusion into systems, processes and workplace practices from the beginning.
- **Look beyond legal minimums:** Businesses have an opportunity to lead where legislation has not yet caught up with social and workplace expectations.
- **Ask the talent question:** Can the organisation afford to lose the talent that is excluded when effective inclusion protections are not in place?



4. Implications for the Organisation

The session suggests that organisations should reconsider how they position LGBTIQ+ inclusion within their broader business strategy.

A compliance-based approach provides essential protection but may not be sufficient to attract, retain and fully engage diverse talent. Organisations that actively remove barriers to participation can strengthen their ability to access skills, encourage innovation and improve competitiveness.

This requires inclusion to be integrated across the employee lifecycle and wider business ecosystem, including recruitment, workplace culture, policies, leadership, reporting and talent development.

The role of data is particularly important. Organisations should move towards more professional and systematic approaches to measuring inclusion and understanding where barriers exist. This can provide leadership with a clearer picture of risk, opportunity and potential talent loss.

The concept of **inclusion by design** provides a useful strategic framework: rather than addressing exclusion after it occurs, organisations should consider inclusion at the point where policies, processes, products and workplace systems are designed.



5. Recommended Actions

Priority	Action	Owner / Level	Timing
High	Assess LGBTIQ+ inclusion practices against applicable EU and national legal requirements	Legal / HR / DEI	Immediate
High	Identify where organisational practices go beyond compliance and where gaps remain	Leadership / HR / DEI	Short term
High	Establish meaningful measures for LGBTIQ+ inclusion, participation and talent outcomes	HR / People Analytics / DEI	Short term
High	Integrate inclusion into broader business and talent strategy	Executive Leadership / HR	Short term
Medium	Identify legal, structural, cultural and personal barriers that may prevent full employee participation	HR / DEI / Employee Networks	Medium term
Medium	Use inclusion data as business intelligence to identify risks and opportunities	Leadership / People Analytics	Ongoing
Medium	Build inclusion considerations into recruitment, talent management and workplace design	HR / Business Functions	Ongoing
Medium	Strengthen collaboration between business, civil society and employee networks	Leadership / ERGs / External Partners	Ongoing
Medium	Adopt an "inclusion by design" approach when developing new policies, systems and workplace initiatives	Leadership / HR / Business Functions	Ongoing



6. Conclusion

The session demonstrated that LGBTIQ+ inclusion is increasingly connected to Europe's broader economic and competitiveness agenda. Legislation provides essential rights, protection and predictability, but the greatest value comes when organisations translate those foundations into genuine participation.

Businesses that remove barriers to participation can unlock talent that might otherwise be lost, while creating conditions that support innovation, resilience and growth. This requires moving beyond compliance towards a strategic approach in which inclusion is measured, managed and designed into the organisation.

Bottom line: Equality creates the opportunity to participate; inclusive organisations turn that participation into talent, innovation and competitive advantage.