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THE INTERNATIONAL
PLATFORM FOR LGBTIQ+
INCLUSION AT WORK



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Breakout # 10

Safe Space, Brave Business: Navigating the Global Pushback

14:15 - 15:15 | Verwey Kamer

Breakout 10 Report



1. Executive Summary

The session explored the critical relationship between **civil society and business** in advancing LGBTIQ+ inclusion across different global legislative, political and social environments.

A central theme was that businesses do not operate in isolation. In countries where LGBTIQ+ rights and protections are limited, progress often depends on collaboration between civil society, lawmakers, employers and other local stakeholders. The experiences shared from Japan, Taiwan and Spain demonstrated that there is no single pathway towards inclusion. Progress can be driven by advocacy in the absence of strong legal protections, accelerated through legislative change, or strengthened through a combination of comprehensive legislation and active corporate support.

The session also explored the impact of political pushback, particularly in relation to US-headquartered companies. While some organisations have softened their public language or withdrawn from certain DEI initiatives in response to political and commercial pressures, local branches often continue to demonstrate strong commitment to LGBTIQ+ inclusion and collaboration.

The discussion highlighted the importance of balancing global corporate commitments with local realities. Multinational companies need to understand the legislative and social context in which they operate while maintaining clear principles around dignity, safety and inclusion.

The overall message was that **business can play an important role in advancing LGBTIQ+ inclusion, particularly when it works in partnership with civil society and remains engaged even in challenging environments.**



2. Key Findings

Finding 1 — Civil society and business are strongest when they work together

The session highlighted the importance of collaboration between civil society organisations and businesses. Civil society can provide local knowledge, lived experience, advocacy and insight into the specific challenges facing LGBTIQ+ communities. Businesses can contribute influence, resources, visibility and the ability to create more inclusive workplaces.

This partnership becomes particularly important in countries where legal protections are limited or where LGBTIQ+ inclusion is not widely supported at a political or societal level. The discussion demonstrated that corporate action can help create momentum, but sustainable progress often requires engagement across multiple parts of society.

Finding 2 — Progress does not always depend on a strong legal framework

The example of Japan demonstrated that progress can still take place where comprehensive LGBTIQ+ legal protections are limited. Advocacy, engagement with lawmakers and collaboration with private businesses can help drive awareness and change. Large corporations can play a particularly important role by supporting local initiatives and using their influence to encourage more inclusive practices.

However, the session also highlighted that this approach can be more difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises, which may have fewer resources and less capacity to invest in inclusion initiatives. The key lesson is that **the absence of a strong legal framework does not remove the ability of businesses to act**, although the available pathways and level of risk may differ.

Finding 3 — Legislation can act as a catalyst for corporate change

Taiwan demonstrated how legislative progress can accelerate business engagement. The introduction of marriage equality in 2019, supported by democratic institutions and active civil



society, created an important turning point. Legislative change required companies to review and update internal policies and helped create greater corporate attention to LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

This illustrates how legal change can move inclusion from voluntary commitment towards organisational implementation. However, the discussion also reinforced that legislation alone does not complete the work. Businesses still need to translate legal requirements into practical policies, workplace practices and employee experiences.

Finding 4 — Strong legal protection can be reinforced through practical corporate support

Spain was presented as an example of a more comprehensive approach combining legislative progress, visibility and corporate support. The country's LGBTIQ+ inclusion landscape has been strengthened through legislative developments, increased public visibility and specific protections for transgender people.

The hosting of World Pride in 2017 also contributed to greater visibility and public engagement.

Importantly, the discussion highlighted the availability of active support programmes designed to help companies build and maintain inclusive workplaces. This demonstrates the value of creating an ecosystem in which legislation, civil society, public visibility and practical business support reinforce one another.

Finding 5 — Political pushback can influence corporate language and visibility

The session explored the changing approach of some US-headquartered companies in response to political pushback and wider debate around DEI. Some organisations have reduced the visibility of particular initiatives or adjusted their corporate language. In some cases, terminology such as **DEI** has been replaced with alternatives such as **belonging**.

This raises an important question for organisations: **Does changing the language also change the commitment?** Language may evolve in response to local political or organisational



pressures. However, the discussion suggested that organisations should distinguish between changes in terminology and changes in practical commitment.

Finding 6 — Local branches can remain committed despite global corporate pressure

Despite broader corporate pullback in some US-headquartered organisations, local and international branches can continue to demonstrate strong commitment to LGBTIQ+ inclusion. These local teams often remain collaborative and actively engaged with community initiatives.

Their continued involvement may be influenced by local expectations, partnerships, employee demand and specific business or contractual requirements. This highlights the importance of avoiding a single interpretation of a multinational company's position. Corporate approaches may differ significantly between headquarters, regions and individual countries.

Finding 7 — Global consistency requires local understanding

Multinational organisations face a complex challenge: maintaining a clear commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion while operating in environments with very different legal, political and social conditions. A global approach cannot simply ignore local realities. Equally, local complexity should not become a reason to abandon core principles.

The discussion suggested that organisations need to understand:

- The legal environment.
- The level of social acceptance.
- The role and capacity of local civil society.
- The specific risks facing LGBTQ+ employees.
- The opportunities for local partnerships.
- The practical limits and opportunities facing businesses of different sizes.

The objective is not identical implementation in every country, but **consistent principles supported by locally relevant action**.



3. Key Takeaways

- **Partner with civil society:** Local organisations can provide essential knowledge, credibility and insight.
- **Understand the local landscape:** Legal rights, social attitudes and workplace realities vary significantly between countries.
- **Business can act without waiting for legislation:** Companies can support awareness, workplace inclusion and local change even where legal frameworks are limited.
- **Use legislation as a catalyst:** Legal progress can create momentum for reviewing and strengthening corporate policies.
- **Look beyond policy compliance:** Legal requirements establish a minimum standard, but workplace inclusion requires practical implementation.
- **Expect political pressure:** Corporate language and public positioning may change in response to political or commercial conditions.
- **Focus on practical commitment:** Changes in terminology should not automatically mean a reduction in meaningful action.
- **Recognise local leadership:** Country and regional teams can continue to drive progress even when global corporate messaging changes.
- **Balance global principles with local action:** Maintain clear values while adapting implementation to local circumstances.
- **Build long-term partnerships:** Sustainable progress depends on continued relationships between business, civil society and other stakeholders.

4. Implications for the Organisation

The session suggests that multinational organisations need a more nuanced approach to global LGBTIQ+ inclusion. A single global policy may establish expectations, but its implementation must reflect significant differences in legal protection, political conditions and social acceptance.



Four areas deserve particular attention:

1. Local context and risk

Organisations should understand the environment in which employees operate. This includes legal protections, societal attitudes, potential safety concerns and the availability of local support networks. Local LGBTIQ+ employees and civil society organisations can provide important insight into these realities.

2. Civil society partnerships

Organisations should build meaningful relationships with relevant local organisations rather than relying exclusively on internal corporate expertise. These partnerships can provide guidance, education, employee support and a better understanding of emerging risks or opportunities.

3. Consistent principles, flexible implementation

Global organisations should establish clear principles around employee dignity, safety and inclusion. However, implementation may need to differ depending on the local environment.

The challenge is to adapt the **approach** without compromising the underlying commitment.

4. Local ownership and leadership

Local leaders and employee networks can play an important role in sustaining momentum. Organisations should create space for country and regional teams to develop appropriate partnerships and initiatives while remaining connected to the broader organisational strategy.



5. Recommended Actions

Priority	Action	Owner / Level	Timing
High	Map the legal, political and social context affecting LGBTIQ+ employees across key operating locations	Global DEI / Legal / HR	Immediate
High	Establish clear global principles for LGBTIQ+ employee dignity, safety and inclusion	Executive Leadership / HR / DEI	Immediate
High	Identify and strengthen partnerships with relevant local civil society organisations	DEI / Local Leadership	Short term
High	Review whether changes in corporate language or messaging affect practical inclusion commitments	Leadership / Communications / DEI	Short term
Medium	Develop country-specific implementation approaches based on local opportunities and risks	Local Leadership / HR / DEI	Medium term
Medium	Share successful approaches and lessons between countries and regions	Global DEI / ERGs	Ongoing
Medium	Support local branches and employee networks to continue appropriate LGBTIQ+ inclusion initiatives	Leadership / HR / ERGs	Ongoing
Medium	Provide guidance for managers operating in restrictive or politically challenging environments	HR / Legal / DEI	Medium term



Medium	Include civil society perspectives when reviewing global LGBTIQ+ strategy	Leadership / DEI	Ongoing
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Medium	Monitor political and legislative developments that may affect employees or corporate inclusion activity	Legal / Public Affairs / DEI	Ongoing
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6. Conclusion

The session demonstrated that the path towards LGBTQ+ inclusion differs significantly across countries. Japan, Taiwan and Spain each illustrate different relationships between civil society, legislation and corporate engagement. Together, they show that progress can begin through advocacy and business engagement, accelerate through legislative change, and become more sustainable when strong legal protections are supported by practical workplace action.

The current political pushback also creates new challenges for multinational organisations. Changes in language, visibility and corporate positioning can affect how employees and communities experience organisational commitment.

However, the continued engagement of local teams demonstrates that progress does not depend solely on decisions made at corporate headquarters.

Bottom line: In challenging environments, businesses need to combine clear global principles with local knowledge, strong civil society partnerships and practical action. Safe spaces require more than policy—they require organisations willing to remain engaged when inclusion becomes difficult.