



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

An exploration of bi+ people and work.

Buizer, I.; Hermesen, D.; Lisdonk, J. van; Toorn, J. van der

Citation

Buizer, I., Hermesen, D., Lisdonk, J. van, & Toorn, J. van der. (2024). *An exploration of bi+ people and work*. Leiden: Universiteit Leiden/Bi+ Nederland. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4109165>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4109165>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Bi+ people and work an exploration

Conclusions and recommendations

I. Buizer, MA
D. Hermesen, MSc
Dr. J. van Lisdonk
Prof. dr. J. van der Toorn

2024



Universiteit
Leiden



Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

With approximately 1 million people in the Netherlands, bi+ people constitute the largest group under the lgbtqi+ umbrella.¹ Bi+ is the overarching term for all individuals with a sexual orientation directed towards more than one gender. Research indicates that they experience less favorable outcomes in various aspects of work compared to heterosexual, lesbian, and gay people (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). However, a deeper understanding of these experiences and how these unfavorable differences can be explained is lacking.

This report is the result of an exploration conducted by Leiden University and Bi+ Nederland at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The aim of this exploration is to gain more insight into the experiences of bi+ individuals at the workplace and to identify promising approaches to improve the situation of bi+ individuals at work.

The exploration consists of two parts. The first part involves a literature review on what is already known from research about bi+ individuals at work, and what promising approaches exist to improve the situation of bi+ individuals at work. In addition to the Netherlands, the focus was on Western and Northern Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries, as research on this topic has been conducted in these areas and publications are generally in English. The second part is based on thirty interviews with bi+ employees in paid employment in the Netherlands and five interviews with national and international experts in the field of bi+ inclusion in the labor market. The interviews provided concrete examples of how a particular phenomenon or process was experienced in practice by bi+ individuals, thereby providing more detailed insight. The literature review has been conducted by Bi+ Nederland with contributions from Leiden University. The interview study was executed by Leiden University.

An external advisory group provided feedback on the approach and draft reports, consisting of Irene Hemelaar (FNV / Largest Dutch Trade Union), Fayaaz Joemmanbaks (Colored Collective), Lis Dekkers (Transgender Network), Wies Loeffen (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment), Laura Baams (University of Groningen) and Peter Mekers (Network Rainbow FNV/ Largest Dutch Trade Union).

We first provide a brief explanation of what bi+ is and what is characteristic of it. Then we present the conclusions from the literature review and interviews, followed by recommendations for various stakeholders.

¹ Bi+ Nederland maintains the estimate that there are about 1 million people in the Netherlands with a bi+ orientation. This is based on the Health Survey 2017, which shows that 9% of women and 5% of men are attracted to more than one gender. Assuming 15 million people over 15 years old in the Netherlands, this means an estimate of 675,000 women who are to some extent attracted to men and women, and just under 375,000 men who are to some extent attracted to women and men. If non-binary people were included in the calculation, it would be just over one million people because a higher proportion of them are attracted to more than one gender. All sources are listed in the [full report](#).

Bi+ and the monosexual norm

The group of bi+ individuals is highly diverse (Baams et al., 2021; Cense et al., 2021). They may identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, or fluid. Some do not label their bi+ orientation, while 30% use more than one label, depending on the context. There are also individuals with a bi+ orientation who, for example, out of fear or social pressure, identify as straight, lesbian, or gay.

In addition to the heterosexual norm, bi+ individuals also encounter the monosexual norm. This is the belief and expectation that sexual orientations are directed towards one gender (Baams et al., 2021). Gay, lesbian, and heterosexual individuals are all considered monosexual. Sexual orientations that fall outside the monosexual norm are often not seen as fully valid, serious, or stable (Cense et al., 2021; Lipperts & Oosterhuis, 2010; Maliepaard, 2018; Robinson, 2012; Van Lisdonk, 2017). As a result, bi+ individuals may experience invisibility, bi+ biases and stereotypes, micro-aggressions, as well as internalization of negative bi+ beliefs.

The additional invisibility and lack of attention and recognition of bi+ due to the monosexual norm is called bi+ erasure. All of this can make it more difficult for individuals with bi+ feelings and/or experiences to be open and visible. In everyday life and also at work, they are less likely to be open about their sexual orientation (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). Thus, there is a vicious circle (Maliepaard, 2018; Van Lisdonk, 2017).

Specific issues faced by bi+ individuals include often lacking a sense of recognition and acknowledgment. Stigma, discrimination, and exclusion come not only from heterosexual individuals but also from gay and lesbian individuals (Baams et al., 2021; Cense et al., 2021). Lgbtqi+² communities and networks are therefore not necessarily inclusive for bi+ individuals (Robinson, 2012). Additionally, monosexual (i.e., heterosexual, gay, or lesbian) partners may struggle with their partner's bi+ orientation (DeCapua, 2017; Maliepaard, 2020), which can hinder the openness and well-being of bi+ individuals.

² When referring to studies we adhere to the terminology used by the researchers, but it is important to realise that sexual orientation and gender identity are more diverse than the letters and categories suggest. In addition, many studies use lgbt or lgbti+, while the research content is mainly about lesbian and gay people (lg people). The results from these surveys therefore do not always also apply to bi+, transgender and intersex people. All sources are listed in the [full report](#).

1. Conclusions on the work experience of bi+ individuals

Below, we summarize the findings based on the literature review and the interviews for each main theme. The acquired knowledge from both parts complemented each other well. Many of the themes identified in the literature review proved relevant in the experiences of bi+ individuals in the workplace. The majority of sources in the literature review were found to be quantitative in nature. Qualitative and in-depth studies on the perspective of bi+ individuals were limited. The interview study in this exploration, focusing entirely on the perspective of bi+ individuals in the work context, helps to narrow this knowledge gap.

Inflow, flow, outflow

In the job search process, some bi+ individuals pay close attention to whether an organization signals bi+ inclusion by assessing if and what attention is given to diversity and inclusion.

Many bi+ individuals are not open about their sexual orientation during the job application process because they first want more information about an organization or because they expect a lack of acceptance and inclusion, fearing rejection based on their sexual orientation. This fear is not unfounded. Lgbt+ and bi+ candidates are more often rejected and seen as less competent than other candidates. "Not fitting within the organization" is a common explanation. This may be related to a heteronormative organizational culture or heteroprofessionalism (see explanation below).

Some bi+ individuals deliberately bring up their sexual orientation or lgbtqi+ inclusion during a job application process to gauge whether the organization is open to it and handles it well. They do not want to later discover that this is not the case.

In comparison to heterosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals, bi+ individuals slightly more often report fewer promotion and development opportunities. It proves difficult to determine the reasons behind this.

Bi+ individuals slightly more frequently report intentions to leave than other sexual orientation groups. Like lgbt+ individuals, bi+ individuals also have experience leaving an organization due to how they were treated at work because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Lack of an inclusive work culture can also be a reason for departure.

"Fit within the organization"

From literature, it is known that not 'fitting within an organization' can be a reason for an employer not to hire a lgbtqi+ person. This also came up in the interviews. Interestingly, some bi+ individuals said the opposite, that they did not find an organization to fit with them. This is thus a kind of mutual "matching process." Organizations that come across as explicitly or inadvertently heteronormative or communicate heteroprofessionalism may attract fewer bi+ employees. It may also be that bi+ employees feel little space to be open about their sexual orientation, causing them to remain invisible as bi+.

Inclusion experiences

Most bi+ employees have positive experiences at work, and their colleagues respond positively to their sexual orientation if they are open about it. However, it also appears

that bi+ employees experience various forms of prejudice, micro-aggressions, unwanted behavior, and discrimination at work more often than gay, lesbian, and heterosexual employees. The interviews reveal that inappropriate curiosity, incorrect prejudices, unpleasant jokes, and remarks mainly stem from ignorance based on having a monosexual perspective and confusing bi+ with polyamory.

Experiencing prejudice, micro-aggressions, and other forms of unwanted behavior at work can have negative effects on the well-being of bi+ individuals. The mental well-being of bi+ employees is also lower than that of other employees.

Furthermore, bi+ individuals with other marginalized identity aspects may have negative work experiences, making it difficult to determine which identity(-ies) are involved. Someone's bi+ orientation may be less visible than other identities but still play a role in the background.

For some bi+ employees, having what appears to be a heterosexual relationship may be perceived as an advantage because they experience less discrimination due to the so-called 'heterosexual privilege'. Other bi+ employees may perceive it as a disadvantage because their sexual orientation remains invisible and unrecognized, due to 'passing as heterosexual' (straight passing). As a result, they keep a part of themselves hidden. This can have negative consequences for their well-being, as evidenced in the literature. Additionally, bi+ individuals may experience both the so-called heterosexual privilege and the burden of not being able to authentically be themselves.

Complexity of openness and recognition

The experiences of bi+ individuals differ significantly from those of gay and lesbian individuals in terms of the degree of openness, considerations, and forms of expression. Quantitative studies show that bi+ individuals are much less likely to be open about their sexual orientation at work. The picture from the interviews is that there are many nuances in openness and closedness for bi+ individuals. Conversations with bi+ employees reveal that many consider it important to be (partially) open about their sexual orientation at work. They strive to be authentic and show their true selves without having to hide parts of their identity. However, the extent to which they do this often depends on the safety and comfort they experience in their work environment. While some bi+ employees have positive experiences in a supportive work environment, others indicate being more reserved in professional contexts, even if they are normally open about their sexual orientation. This may be due to the feeling that it is not relevant to the work or the fear of negative reactions and/or job security. Additionally, the prevailing monosexual norm poses an obstacle; revealing the gender of a potential partner is often not enough to be recognized as bi+, while bi+ individuals may feel hesitant to disclose their bi+ orientation if it is assumed that they are monosexual (heterosexual, gay, lesbian). In the workplace, it is common to talk about partners but not about their bi+ orientation. For gay and lesbian individuals, discussing a (desired) partner is enough to provide information about their sexual orientation, but this does not apply to bi+ individuals.

Organizational culture

In many organizations, heterosexuality is still considered the norm. As a result, employees are often automatically assumed to be heterosexual until they indicate otherwise. In the context of work, bi+ individuals, like gay and lesbian individuals, encounter heteroprofessionalism, where heterosexuality is seen, whether implicitly or explicitly, as

professional and neutral. This can pose a barrier to openness. Additionally, bi+ individuals face stereotypes that emphasize (hyper)sexuality and sex-focused imagery, which inherently conflicts with heteroprofessionalism.

Furthermore, bi+ is sometimes associated or confused with polyamory (i.e., being open to having more than one relationship partner), which can also be negatively perceived. The imagery often focuses on sex and infidelity, while polyamory is actually a consensual relationship style. Among bi+ individuals in relationships, 6% are in polyamorous relationships (Baams et al., 2021). Moreover, being strongly sexually oriented, polyamorous, or bi+ says nothing about someone's actual professionalism or collegiality

For bi+ employees, these types of stereotypes and anticipated stigmatization may contribute to them being less open in the workplace. According to the literature, an informal, safe, inclusive, and open work climate contributes to people feeling comfortable being themselves and being open about their bi+ orientation at work. For bi+ individuals, general statements about diversity and inclusion are not sufficient to feel that an organization is inclusive for them. They feel more assured when an organization explicitly mentions sexual orientation, and this is even more pronounced when an organization explicitly addresses transgender individuals. No research has been found on explicitly mentioning and addressing bi+. Interviews revealed that formal diversity and inclusion policies or codes of conduct can help bi+ individuals feel safe in the organization. Some bi+ interviewees also experience and perceive discrimination and inclusion from an intersectional perspective. They see racism or sexism as indicators that the organization may also not be bi+ inclusive.



Finally, three overarching conclusions emerged from the entirety of the literature review and interviews.

Bi+ underrepresented in research, despite bi+ employees' unfavorable situation

The literature review confirmed our expectation that there is much less research on bi+ individuals in the context of work compared to gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals. However, this is also striking, as comparative research shows that bi+ individuals exhibit more unfavorable experiences in the work context compared to gay and lesbian individuals: less openness about sexual orientation; fewer promotion and development opportunities; more insecure employment situations; more intentions to leave; more discrimination and bullying; feeling less safe; experiencing more unequal opportunities; experiencing more unwanted behavior from colleagues; experiencing more negative social interactions with colleagues; and experiencing more burnout symptoms.

Bi+ men stand out negatively

The literature revealed that bi+ (or bisexual) men are more vulnerable than other bi+, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual individuals in the work context. They are by far the least open about their sexual orientation, are most frequently not hired or dismissed because of their sexual orientation, and most frequently leave an organization due to perceived unequal treatment. Their greater degree of closedness may have contributed to our limited success in recruiting bi+ men for an interview. Relatively few interviews were conducted with bi+ men.

Bi+ and intersectionality

The interviews revealed that various identities can intersect for some individuals in such a way that colleagues' reactions are not only about being bi+, but about their multiple identities. This intersectionality can also result in more complex forms of prejudice, micro-aggressions, and discrimination. For example, this was the case for bi+ non-binary and binary trans individuals who often couldn't separate their experiences of sexual orientation and gender identity at work. It also emerged that some individuals with a bi+ orientation and non-Dutch migration background find it difficult to navigate openness at work, which can lead to less authentic self-expression in the workplace. One interviewee couldn't separate being bi+ and polyamorous in their own life. At the same time, there were also bi+ individuals who were affected by the persistent stereotype that all bi+ individuals would be polyamorous, which did not apply to them. Sexual orientation (e.g., heterosexual, bi+, gay, lesbian) and relationship orientation (e.g., monogamy, polyamory, open relationships) are two different characteristics. Interviewed bi+ employees who were comfortable with non-monogamy also struggled with the stereotype because it stigmatized them.



2. Conclusions about promising approaches

Various promising approaches emerged from the literature and during interviews with bi+ employees. Often, these approaches are also applicable to other marginalized or underrepresented groups because the underlying mechanisms are broader and generally relevant to bi+ inclusion as well (Broekroelofs et al., 2022). However, an important conclusion is that approaches targeting gay and lesbian employees, broad lgbtqi+ inclusion, or even broader diversity and inclusion, often have limited effects on bi+ employees and their inclusion. Bi+ employees do not feel addressed, and there is insufficient attention to bi+ biases, the negative experiences bi+ individuals face, and their recognition and visibility in the organization. This is because the underlying monosexual norm, along with its associated stigma, perpetuates the lack of recognition and visibility, contributing to bi+ erasure. Therefore, it is also necessary to apply specific content, messages, and language targeting bi+ individuals and their inclusion.

We discuss promising approaches at various levels, from approaches that employees can implement at a personal level to suggestions for collective labor agreements and national policies. By mentioning promising approaches at a personal level, we do not intend to imply that the responsibility lies solely with the individual. Additionally, we note that organizations have the most influence in promoting improvement focused on organizational culture, employer/HR, and interpersonal approaches. When the environment feels safe and inclusive, bi+ individuals will be more successful in implementing personal approaches in the workplace. Therefore, we do address personal approaches but emphasize other levels in our recommendations. Furthermore, it is important to note that whether specific promising approaches for promoting bi+ inclusion are mentioned by interviewees does not necessarily prove their effectiveness. Individuals have limited insight into what works and what doesn't, and the experiences and opinions of the interviewees represent only a part of the broader spectrum of possible approaches. Effectiveness may vary based on various factors, and the absence of mention does not automatically mean that a particular approach cannot be successful in other contexts. However, the similarities between the approaches mentioned by bi+ employees and the available literature lend additional credibility to their potential effectiveness.

Personal approaches

These approaches focus on what bi+ individuals can do themselves.

Self-development and compassion

- Self-development and self-acceptance (self-compassion) are positive coping strategies to effectively deal with (anticipated) stigma.
- Bi+ individuals can leverage their lived experiences positively in the workplace if they feel comfortable doing so.

Being open about a bi+ orientation

- Bi+ individuals who are confident and positive about their sexual orientation are more likely to be open about it. It helps if they notice or expect that a bi+ orientation is considered valid, serious, and positive in the workplace.
- A reason for bi+ individuals to be open is their desire to educate others and promote social change.
- The belief that a bi+ orientation leads to a unique perspective and that openness can help other marginalized individuals can be a motivation to be open.

Opportunities to promote openness

- For bi+ individuals, personal stories from colleagues about their personal lives can provide an opportunity to share something about their sexual orientation.
- Some bi+ individuals create space for bi+ in the workplace as a starting point for a conversation, increased visibility, or awareness. They do this, for example, through visual recognition in the form of pins, flags, and rainbow accessories, or by highlighting theme days.

Development opportunities

- In soft-skills training, bi+ (and other lgbtqi+) individuals can learn how to deal with discrimination and where to report it. It appears that transgender individuals benefit from this. It is unknown whether this also applies to bi+ individuals and whether it matters if they undergo such training with only bi+ individuals or in a broader lgbtqi+ group.

Interpersonal approaches

These approaches focus on improving ignorance, knowledge, and awareness and reducing stigma and discrimination by colleagues, supervisors and managers. For all approaches, it applies that bi+ employees can play a role as experts if they feel comfortable and safe to be open about this and to be vulnerable.

Knowledge transfer

- Factual knowledge about bi+ and the issues faced by bi+ individuals in the workplace, including the monosexual norm, micro-aggressions, and heteroprophalism, are important to reduce biases and negative attitudes among monosexual colleagues.
- Knowledge transfer is less effective for increasing tolerance or moral acceptance of bi+. For this, it is important to increase empathy and that works through encounters or contact.

Encounters and contact

- Personal stories from and meeting bi+ individuals help to increase empathy and understanding. This type of encounter can be live, but also through film, theatre, reading, or podcasts, as long as people are captivated by a story and the bi+ person or character. There is much known about the conditions under which this works better or less effectively. Encounter and contact are only effective when they are not threatening.

Trainings/workshops

- A general lgbtqi+ or diversity and inclusion perspective does not automatically work for increased bi+ inclusion. Also, mentioning the 'b' in lgbtqi+ does not automatically contribute. This is because most people primarily associate lgbtqi+ with homosexuality. Bi+ then doesn't stick for monosexual people, it remains unclear what bi+ inclusion is, and how it can be promoted. It is necessary to truly pay attention to what bi+ is, what the consequences are of the monosexual norm for bi+ individuals, and to provide examples where bi+ individuals are central.
- Some bi+ employees indicate that they benefit from a general training, workshop, or attention to diversity and inclusion or lgbtqi+. They may feel supported by this.
- The target audience is not only heterosexual people but also gay and lesbian people.
- Monosexual language use and bi+ erasure make bi+ invisible and exclude bi+ individuals. This is also common in lgbtqi+ offerings. Therefore, in trainings and workshops, attention should be paid to what is truly bi+ inclusive language with many examples.
- It is counterproductive to pay attention to stereotypes and then refute them, and this also applies to bi+. A better approach is to emphasize the diversity within bi+ and to provide a positive image of different bi+ individuals.

Role of colleagues

- To effectively reduce discrimination, it helps if monosexual colleagues convey a positive social norm about bi+. They can be allies in this way. Examples include a monosexual individual speaking positively about being friends with a bi+ individual or about the inclusion of bi+ individuals in lgbtqi+ communities and/or networks. This contributes to a sense of safety and belonging for bi+ individuals.
- Monosexual colleagues can effectively address bi+ prejudices, stigma, lack of attention, or inclusion, or intervene when a bi+ colleague experiences micro-aggression or discrimination. Bi+ individuals feel supported and understood as a result.

Managers/supervisors

- Bi+ and also lgbtqi+ supervisors and managers can serve as role models by demonstrating that they can openly be lgbtqi+ and bi+ in a high position within the organization. They can thereby convey authenticity and confidence, which can contribute to an inclusive work environment, a sense of support, and inspiration.
- From their position of power, it can have a normalizing effect when supervisors and managers convey a bi+ inclusive social norm by speaking positively about bi+ and showing support for bi+ individuals to be openly themselves at work and to provide support when needed. This also applies to gay and lesbian supervisors and managers because bi+ employees may not always perceive their support as automatic.
- Supervisors and managers can actively promote the inclusion of bi+ and also gay and lesbian people by removing the often poorer access to informal networks and information. This can help them develop better and make fuller use of their potential (less likely to work below their level).

Employer and HR

Diversity and inclusion policy

- Having diversity and inclusion policy can be an important signal for bi+ individuals to know that they are (will be) welcome and accepted. It can help lgbtqi+ individuals feel comfortable at work and be open about their orientation or identity.
- Although other research shows that bi+ individuals appreciate it when sexual orientation is mentioned in diversity and inclusion policy, especially if transgender issues are also addressed, interviews reveal that bi+ individuals may feel that their challenges at work are not recognized when there is no explicit attention given to bi+. It seems that this latter scenario rarely occurs. It is essential that this policy is clearly communicated to all employees so that it is known, and a social norm can be established.
- If organizations carry a certification mark or sign a charter, it shows that they value lgbtqi+ inclusion, which can also send a positive signal to bi+ employees.
- There are several certification marks and charters in the Netherlands for an inclusive organization and labor market. These are usually not yet optimally bi+ inclusive. For example, language is not fully bi+ inclusive, and there is rarely attention given to the specific problems faced by bi+ individuals, and examples are lacking. Some other groups have already made progress in this area, which could also be done for bi+.

Inclusive organizational culture and positive social norm

- Promoting an inclusive and open work environment for everyone is important for factors such as job satisfaction and a sense of fair and unbiased treatment. Furthermore, it can make bi+ individuals feel more comfortable being themselves at work. Focusing on invisible differences and characteristics, such as bi+, contributes to this.
- Countering the monosexual norm and heteroprophessionalism helps with bi+ inclusion.
- A portion of the bi+ job seekers, who constitute a fairly large group in the Netherlands, pay attention to how diverse and inclusive organizations are in their policies and expressions. As a result, employers can attract more labor potential and talent.

Human resources

- Promoting inclusive recruitment and selection without bias can also benefit bi+ candidates and employees. For bi+ individuals, it's preferable if their sexual orientation is not implicitly inferred based on the gender of their current partner during job interviews and HR meetings, as this often does not apply to them. After hiring a bi+ employee, it's important not to see them as a representative of 'the bi+ group' in the form of tokenism, as this can lead to pressure and isolation for that individual.
- In HR partner policies, employers can explicitly embrace relationship diversity, allowing people in non-normative relationship forms to feel no pressure to

conform. Additionally, for bi+ individuals, this can signal that an employer genuinely embraces diversity and is bi+ inclusive.

- HR training focused on LGBTQI+ inclusion should explicitly address bi+, the monosexual norm, and heteroprophism.
- Codes of conduct contribute to an inclusive climate when they are applied, communicated, and consistently enforced.
- Having a confidential advisor and a reporting and complaint procedure can be important for bi+ individuals. These should be present and clearly communicated to employees. Additionally, existing procedures should function effectively in practice; otherwise, they may contribute to feelings of exclusion. An anonymous reporting platform can encourage bi+ individuals who feel unsafe or are not open to still report negative behavior or treatment in the workplace.

Bi+ representation, visibility and communication

- Bi+ employees have a need for visibility and recognition of their sexual orientation. Representation of LGBTQI+ individuals does not necessarily encompass them. Therefore, it's important for LGBTQI+ issue and awareness days to consider bi+ representation and that attention is paid to bi+ issue and awareness days. If this focus is solely outward-facing, it may come across as 'rainbow-washing', where organizations promote themselves but bi+ employees do not experience any improvement.
- Providing space for visual symbols gives employees, including bi+ employees, the feeling that they can be themselves at work.
- Explicit attention to bi+ in internal and external communications can occur by highlighting the representation, stories, and experiences of bi+ individuals in a similar manner as other groups within the LGBTQI+ community. If attention to bi+ starkly contrasts with attention to homosexuality and transgender identity, it can indicate a monosexual norm in the organization. This can discourage bi+ people to be themselves and to be open about their sexual orientation.

Ambassador and diversity networks

- Organizations can encourage networking or group formation among marginalized or underrepresented groups by allocating time and resources. This can also contribute to a sense of inclusion, connection, and support for bi+ individuals.
- Encouraging ambassador and diversity networks to explicitly address various identities and exchange knowledge and experiences can be beneficial for less visible groups. This prevents subgroups within these networks from feeling marginalized. Bi+ individuals may also feel empowered to share their sexual orientation, fears, and experiences with stigma and discrimination.
- Bi+ employees who are comfortable being open about their sexual orientation can be asked to be role models or ambassadors. Bi+ individuals often lacked such role models in their formative years.

Dutch national government, policy, programs and collective labor agreements

- Research has shown that legislative norm setting is related to perceptions of social norms and behavior in society. Sexual minorities also experience less discrimination as a result. Since early 2023, Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution

states that discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited. This establishes a social norm.

- The Equal Treatment Act (“AWGB”) already provides protection against discrimination on the labor market for heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, transgender, and intersex individuals. Through a minor legislative change, this protection can also be extended to bi+ individuals.
- There is a need among bi+ employees for organizations to be legally obligated by the government to implement anti-discrimination and inclusion policies. This is not legally required in the Netherlands.
- The government has a role model function and can lead by example in providing a diverse, inclusive, and safe workplace.
- National and, to our knowledge, local programs, policies, reports, and tools aimed at an inclusive labor market, lgbtqi+, diversity and inclusion, and discrimination are often not adequately inclusive of bi+. Rarely is there genuine attention given to bi+, inclusive language is lacking, and examples of bi+ people's experiences are absent. An exception is the national Equality Policy Note 2022-2025 from the outgoing Minister of Education, Culture and Science, which addresses the unfavorable situation of bi+ individuals in the workplace. There has also been national research (Netherlands Institute for Social Research/ SCP, Netherlands Statistics/CBS) on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual employees, which revealed this unfavorable situation.
- To our knowledge, collective labor agreements (CLAs) do not explicitly address bi+ individuals. However, partners and/or parents are discussed in terms of leave and arrangements. The Rainbow Checklist for CLAs, developed by FNV (the largest Dutch trade union), recommends allowing employees to determine who their partner(s) and parent(s) are and making additional agreements focused on all parents, regardless of legal parents and guardians. Attention to relationship diversity in CLAs can signal that employers are bi+ inclusive, which can sometimes benefit bi+ individuals themselves.
- In the FNV Personnel Regulations, it is advised to document matters related to anti-discrimination, safety, and the well-being of lgbtqi+ employees as long as they are not yet anchored in law or CLAs.



3. Recommendations

This exploration confirms the growing understanding that lgbtqi+ people are not one homogeneous group and that lgbtqi+ is not an identity, but rather an overarching term encompassing various groups with their own needs and issues. Attention to lgbtqi+ inclusion therefore does not necessarily contribute to bi+ inclusion and may even perpetuate the invisibility, disregard, and stigmatization of bi+ people. In short, to achieve greater bi+ inclusion in the workplace, more targeted attention to bi+ inclusion is necessary. Below are the recommendations based on insights from the literature review, interviews, a focus group meeting, and reflections from the researchers.

Recommendations for the Dutch government:

- Make the Equal Treatment Act ("AWGB") bi+ inclusive by replacing "heterosexual and homosexual orientation" with "sexual orientation", so that bi+ individuals also receive legal protection against discrimination in the labor market. Legislation for this purpose is currently underway.
- Following the constitution, Article 1 on anti-discrimination, and based on the insights from this report, it is recommended that the national government and local authorities explicitly acknowledge and address the need for improvement in the situation of bi+ individuals in the labor market. This can be achieved by providing concrete attention to bi+ inclusion in equality, diversity and inclusion, and labor market policies, accompanied by measures and interventions focused on safety, anti-discrimination, and bi+ inclusion in the workplace. This will also lead to increased bi+ recognition, visibility, and positive social norms.
- As a developer or funder of programs and tools aimed at an inclusive labor market and employers, set the requirement that funded or financed organizations of programs become bi+ inclusive and ensure this is checked, reported, and accounted for.
- Facilitate opportunities to promote awareness and knowledge among employers about this issue. Programs, policies, and tools that require improvement, and which have an international scope, are The Diversity Charter, their meetings, and the knowledge files on lgbti+ and the workplace from SER Diversity in Business ("Diversiteit in Bedrijf") as well as Workplace Pride Global Benchmark.
- To take on a leadership role as a national government and local authorities in providing an inclusive and safe workplace, it is advisable to provide training and advice to civil servants on bi+ inclusion, the monosexual norm, and heteroprofessionalism.

Recommendations for research:

- The attention to bi+ individuals in research is still very limited compared to gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals. Although this exploration has provided more insight into understanding the adverse experiences of bi+ individuals in the workplace, we still know little about factors that can explain differences in experiences at work among bi+ individuals (and in comparison to heterosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals). Therefore, in-depth explanatory quantitative research is also needed. For example, more insight can be gained into when and how

openness at work is conducive to the work experience and well-being of bi+ individuals and when it is not.

- More research is also needed on attitudes towards bi+ in the Netherlands. The literature review shows that bisexual individuals experience distrust from their lesbian and gay colleagues and are seen as unreliable, leading their superiors to deem them unsuitable for promotion (Green et al., 2011). Research is needed to substantiate these findings with the perceptions of heterosexual, lesbian, and gay individuals about bi+ and how these perceptions may influence their perspective on bi+ individuals as colleagues and on their work evaluation.
- Have Statistics Netherlands (CBS) include sexual orientation as a background characteristic in the National Working Conditions Survey ("Nationale Enquête Arbeidsomstandigheden") again, so that developments regarding the work situation, job satisfaction, inclusion, and discrimination of bi+, lesbian, and gay employees can be monitored. Ensure that this question and the respective answers are bi+ inclusive and that the outcomes are reported by sexual orientation.
- Bi+ men were found to be particularly vulnerable in several aspects in the context of work. They were also more difficult to recruit. This was also the case in previous research (Baams et al., 2021; Cense et al., 2021). This group needs explicit attention in further research and interventions.
- Interviews reveal that bi+ individuals, due to intersectionality (e.g., with gender identity, relationship form, or migration background), face more complex forms of prejudice, micro-aggressions, and discrimination. The impression is that this also has more severe consequences for them. Research among women of color, who also have multiple stigmatized identities, points in that direction (Chaney et al., 2021). This should also be investigated for bi+ individuals with multiple stigmatized identities.

Recommendations for employers and organizations:

- As organizations, both externally and internally, demonstrate and promote that everyone is welcome and encouraged to be themselves regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Ensure explicit attention to all groups within the lgbtqi+ umbrella, including bi+, and acknowledge relationship diversity, as it signals that the organization is open to bi+ and unconventional lifestyles.
- Based on these findings, medium and large organizations with few or no openly bi+ employees – where this group is significantly underrepresented in terms of numbers – may consider this as a signal that bi+ individuals do not feel the space or safety to be open about their bi+ orientation. Since there are more bi+ individuals than gay and lesbian individuals seeking employment and already employed, a comparison of the number of openly bi+, homosexual, and lesbian employees could be food for thought. We emphasize here that it is unethical to involuntarily 'out' individuals who are closed or selectively open (i.e., forcing disclosure because someone else has made their sexual orientation known).
- Offer employees and managers a training or workshop on lgbtqi+ inclusion, with explicit and comprehensive attention to bi+, the monosexual norm, and heteroprophesism to promote a safe and bi+ inclusive work environment.
- Organizations can offer bystander intervention training, where employees are trained on how to effectively respond in cases of discrimination and stigmatization.

A case study about bi+ individuals can help communicate a positive social norm regarding bi+.

- Encourage ambassadors or diversity networks within the organization to also focus on bi+ and the inclusion of bi+ individuals. Even in lgbtqi+ networks, this is not always the case. If there are few or no openly bi+ participants, it may indicate that bi+ individuals do not perceive these networks as safe or inclusive, or that they do not feel addressed.
- In organizations with a works council ("OR"), this body can play a role in agenda setting and promoting positive social norms regarding bi+.

Recommendations for stakeholders aimed at diversity and inclusion or lgbtqi+ inclusion:

- Ensure that offerings aimed at lgbtqi+ inclusion or rainbow communities are bi+ inclusive.
- Target interventions about sexual diversity or lgbtqi+ inclusion to all monosexual people, including gay and lesbian people.
- Expand anti-bias and safety trainings with attention paid to heteronormativity, mononormativity and heteroprophesalism.
- Involve bi+ advocacy organizations, interest groups and bi+ experts.

Recommendations for advocacy organizations

- Ensure that lgbtqi+ programs or offerings for other organizations, and as an employer, to explicitly address bi+ inclusion, the monosexual norm, heteroprophesalism, bi+ representation, and promote a positive bi+ inclusive social norm.
- Utilize knowledge transfer and encounters. Use storytelling to promote both a positive attitude and empathy.
- Offer organizations that want to work on bi+ inclusion your own bi+ expertise, be visible to organizations, and promote bi+ representation.
- Update the Bi+ Self-Assessment tool for organizations with the insights from this exploration and encourage organizations to use this tool.



All sources are listed in the [full report](#).

colophon

Authors: Iris Buizer, Daphne Hermesen, Jantine van Lisdonk and Jojanneke van der Toorn
English translation: ChatGPT, edited by Knowledge Team Bi+ Nederland, Daphne Hermesen
& Jantine van Lisdonk
Design: GJ Wielinga

This exploration was carried out by Leiden University and Bi+ Nederland and is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. All sources are listed in the full report.



Universiteit
Leiden



2024