



LGBTQ+ Inclusion: Gauging Progress in the Workplace

Study by AXA Asia – June 2021



Introduction

Much of the world celebrates Pride Month in June.

AXA is a proud ally of the LGBTQ+ community. Being part of this global community is core to our global Inclusion and Diversity (I&D) strategy, as AXA is committed to fostering a culture that enables every employee to bring their whole selves to work.

For Pride Month 2021, AXA Asia commissioned a study among select groups of self-identifying LGBTQ+ members in Hong Kong SAR and the Philippines about the mental health challenges they face in the workplace. At the same time, we incorporated the opinions of five leading LGBTQ+ influencers in Japan and Thailand to provide a rounded viewpoint on progress on LGBTQ+ issues over the past 12 months.

We wanted to understand the personal experiences of people at work who self-identify as LGBTQ+, so we can ensure that AXA can better meet the needs of our own people. Through our study we looked at the importance of companies taking a leadership role in educating on LGBTQ+ acceptance, the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in the workplace, and whether LGBTQ+ acceptance has faltered against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

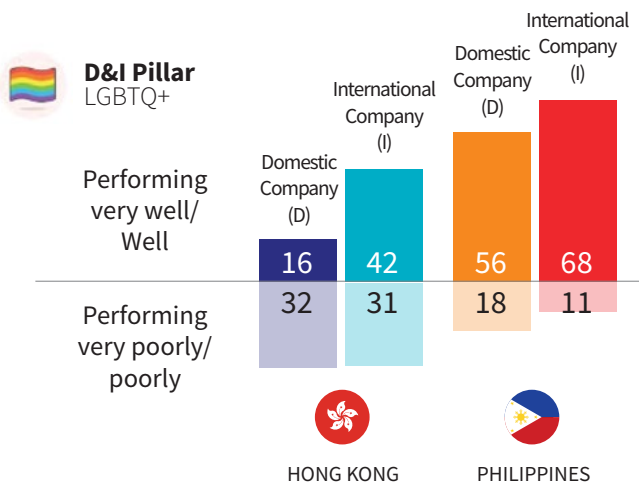
Companies play a vital role in creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for employees, demonstrating leadership in education on both LGBTQ+ and broader I&D topics. I, therefore, hope you find the outcomes of our study interesting and inspiring as you develop your own LGBTQ+ and I&D policies.

Gordon Watson
CEO, AXA Asia



Uneven progress on LGBTQ+ and I&D Policies at Work

Overall, the study found a mixed picture, with companies in several markets underperforming on LGBTQ+ and I&D education. Notably, companies in the Philippines perform better than those in Hong Kong SAR. Furthermore, international companies fare better than domestic companies in both geographies. Corporates in Japan have been more visible in supporting LGBTQ+ causes and communities in recent years, such as joining Rainbow Pride Parades, but those in Thailand are less active.

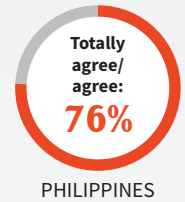


The Value of an Equal Workplace Culture and I&D Education

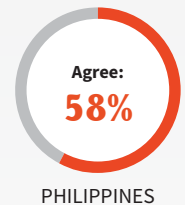
Two-thirds of the companies in which our respondents work in Hong Kong and the Philippines do not provide LGBTQ+-related benefits. However, our respondents are more concerned that organisations have an overall equal I&D workplace culture, with 70% of respondents believing this to be true.

Companies that focus on LGBTQ+ acceptance in the workforce and have I&D Education fare better when it comes to staff retention and having people be their true selves in the workplace.

Having proper education/promotion on I&D in the workplace is important



I'm less willing to stay in a company that does not have proper education/promotion on I&D



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I am really grateful that more companies are showing support for LGBTQ+ by joining Rainbow Pride Parades, and media is covering LGBTQ+ topics in TV commercials and news programmes to emphasise LGBTQ+ are just ordinary people, who deserve the same level of respect as all other people.

Kanato Ito
Vice-president of LGBT Alliance,
Osaka, Japan

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Some traditional companies or even the government require staff to wear a uniform to work. There are strict guidelines for males and females, respectively. This is a hard time for transgender people. We are women, so why do you require me to dress like a man!

K. Doy
Director of Sisters Foundation,
Thailand

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Lessons We Can All Learn

Fostering an environment that promotes overall respect for all people, whatever their gender identity, sexual preference, ethnicity, or ability or disability can directly impact a company's retention rate, influencing their long-term success.

Barriers Still Constrain LGBTQ+ Employees From Being 'Out' in the Workplace

In the Hong Kong SAR, respondents generally feel that being identified as LGBTQ+ is a career hindrance, impacting their prospects and development. In the Philippines, it is the other way around, with respondents saying that they feel more able to be 'out', helping their careers in terms of their perceived ability/performance and relationships with colleagues.

Overall, our respondents also said that it is easier to 'come out' in the Philippines than it is in the Hong Kong SAR. Self-identifying LGBTQ+ employees in the Philippines said that they are more able to be their true selves, while the majority of respondents in Hong Kong believe being LGBTQ+ carries a social stigma. While experts in Japan and Thailand stated that societal acceptance of LGBTQ+ people has improved with greater representation, individuals can still feel constrained in the workplace by expectations of adhering to traditional gender roles and that they can struggle with feeling included.



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The workplace is also a place where we belong. In the past, I felt that I could not be a part of the team. It's hard for me to join them as a group. They would talk about their family, but I couldn't say anything about that.

Maki Muraki

Representative of Nijiirō Diversity,
Japan



In the know

In the Philippines, more than 60% of LGBTQ+ respondents said their family members, friends and colleagues are aware of their status. In comparison, only 40% of Hong Kong LGBTQ+ respondents said their family and friends are aware. Almost one in five of respondents from Hong Kong choose not to reveal their sexual orientation in the workplace at all.



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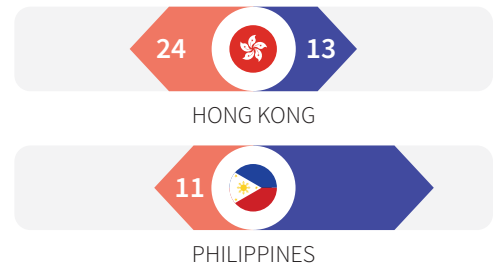
Sadly, for people in some sectors such as the police or the military, when their LGBT+ identity is disclosed, they are at risk of being bullied or even attacked by their fellow colleagues.

K. Thissadee

Director of Health and Opportunity Network (HON),
Thailand

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Hindrance Overall Help



Lessons We Can All Learn

Being 'out' can be an asset for staff, helping them to be their true selves which, in turn, can facilitate career development and workplace relationships.

Sometimes a Joke Isn't Funny

Jokes and making fun, though seemingly harmless, can have a negative emotional impact on LGBTQ+ employees. At least half the respondents from the Hong Kong SAR and the Philippines have experienced some form of discrimination or exclusion in the past, most commonly in the form of fun or jokes made by colleagues.

More than two-thirds of respondents in Hong Kong SAR and the Philippines agree that harmless fun or jokes directed at them regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity can be hurtful. In Thailand, experts noted that persistent stereotypes can overlook the diverse backgrounds and personalities of LGBTQ+ people.

Harmless fun or jokes directed at me regarding my sexual orientation/ gender identity can be hurtful

HONG KONG

Totally agree/ agree:
64%

PHILIPPINES

Totally agree/ agree:
66%

It's clear that organisations need to educate staff on the importance of being non-discriminatory and being aware of their organisation's LGBTQ+ and I&D policies.



Many people think that gay men are fun, they should be good looking, and good at make-up. But in reality, there are so many different lifestyles a gay man can adopt.

K Tor
Director, M Plus Foundation,
Thailand

Lessons We Can All Learn

Companies must be watchful for toxic behaviour in workplace environments, ensuring that staff understand that what some may see as harmless is in fact hurtful and contributes to an unwelcoming atmosphere for colleagues.

COVID-19 has not eroded LGBTQ+ Progress in the Workplace

The overwhelming feedback from our respondents is that while COVID-19 has brought many challenges globally, the majority believe that it has not impacted the acceptance level of LGBTQ+ in the workplace.

WFH has made it easier to be my true self



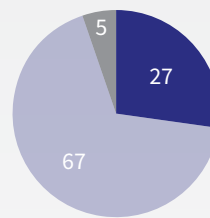
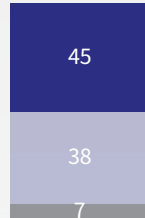
In fact, respondents from the Philippines believe Covid-19 has actually been of benefit to the LGBTQ+ cause. For example, one respondent said, “Working from home with virtual meetings and communications makes it easier for me to be my true self at work.”


HONG KONG

A lot more accepting /
a little more accepting

No difference

A lot less accepting /
a little less accepting



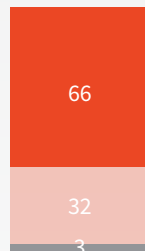
■ Progress is still being made
■ It has come to a standstill
■ It is stepping backwards


PHILIPPINES

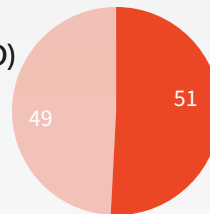
A lot more accepting /
a little more accepting

No difference

A lot less accepting /
a little less accepting



(I&D)



■ Progress is still being made
■ It has come to a standstill
■ It is stepping backwards



For sure, COVID-19 has impacted all of us in one way or another. For the LGBTQ+ community, the work around awareness and education has stalled a little bit due to many Pride events across the globe being cancelled or postponed. However, I am not sure if the pandemic has affected LGBTQ+ acceptance in the workplace one way or the other.

Benita Chick
Founder and CEO,
Encompass HK



Lessons We Can All Learn

Social progress on LGBTQ+ issues has a lasting impact, and natural or manmade disasters need not be seen as eroding gains in LGBTQ+ acceptance

Summary

This study reveals that many companies in the region are still falling short when it comes to fostering an LGBTQ+ friendly working environment through I&D initiatives. The findings underline key areas where action can help to tackle factors that affect the mental health of LGBTQ+ employees, including acceptance, working culture and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies in Asia seeking to thrive in a post-pandemic world must enable staff to bring their whole selves to work if they are to attract, nurture and retain the best talent during times of change.

Workplaces, in general, tend to be a place where people are more selective about whom they 'come out' to. The perceived potential negative impact on career prospects and development is a common concern that might prevent people from 'coming out' and, in turn, be their true selves at work, which companies need to address if they are to get the best from their people. This requires companies, especially domestic or smaller-scale ones, to devote time and energy to promote and educate their staff on I&D culture.

Positively, the workplace is overall seen as having become more accepting of LGBTQ+ in recent years. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic having disrupted work arrangements and experiences across communities, the sense of progress in acceptance among self-identified LGBTQ+ employees remains, demonstrating that tangible progress can endure even major societal disruptions.

Study Methodology

To understand how corporations can provide a better and more accepting workplace for employees who self-identify as LGBTQ+, AXA Asia conducted an study among 145 white-collar employees in the Hong Kong SAR and the Philippines who self-identify as LGBTQ+. The study, via a 10-minute online questionnaire, took place between 28th March and 19th April 2021, and included LGBTQ+ males and females, aged 22-65, who are working full-time.

We also talked to five LGBTQ+ influencers in Japan and Thailand via one-hour Zoom calls to gauge their opinions on the key issues discussed in this report.



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AXA Asia would like to thank the following organisations for their participation in developing this study:

Hong Kong:



Japan:



Philippines:



Thailand:

