

# QUICK BRIEF 2023

**NBI**  
National Business Initiative



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## **Pride Significance, the Pink Economy, and the Private Sector: The role of the private sector in ensuring the social and economic participation of the LGBTQIA+ community in South Africa**

*“What the LGBT community want is [for being LGBT] to be ordinary so that you are seen to be valued on merit. When our employees don’t have to think twice about struggling for the same benefits, recognition, or are afraid of being safe, then productivity goes up.”*

*—Claudia Brind-Woody, VP & Managing Director, IBM*

### **Pride Significance in the South African Context**

Pride Month in South Africa commemorates a milestone moment in African history- where the first pride march on the African continent took place in Johannesburg, South Africa on 13 October 1990. It occurred during the apartheid regime- a period where it was illegal to be lesbian or gay in South Africa. Resultantly, the first pride march was used as a political advocacy protesting platform to emphasise the legal discrimination against the LGBT group. It also served to bring awareness to LGBT hate crimes such as the corrective rape of lesbians in townships and to remember victims thereof. It was organised by **GLOW** (Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand) and attracted a crowd of over 800 participants, who wore masks or paper bags over their heads, out of fear of being identified and targeted by the authorities.

The LGBTQIA+ community is not a homogenous group. Individuals' opportunities, risks, and the barriers to entry that they experience are largely influenced by a range of intersectional factors: where one is geographically situated (by country/ location), race, ethnicity, class, and religion amongst others. These are conditions that play a huge influencing role in whether an LGBTQIA+ individual can live, survive, and sustain themselves fully in a deeply patriarchal society and more importantly gain a sense of belonging.

Despite these conditions, those who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ are particularly vulnerable to common forms of discrimination relative to cisgender and heterosexual individuals due to their gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. These include barriers to employment; realisation of certain rights; access to services; mistreatment; judgement and bullying as well as emotional, psychological, and physical abuse.

Companies need to continuously engage with the nuances of belonging in the workplace, as this has a direct correlation to an organisation's ability to attract and retain talent, extend support, and foster an environment which recognises that diversity and equity are inextricably connected to the bottom-line.

### **Bold Leadership, Inclusivity and Solidarity is Possible: The Woolworths Pride Campaign 2023**

In the current era of social media activism, companies are gradually being challenged by clients, customers, and the public to speak out on and take a position on social issues, especially where it impacts their employees and business. This is the start of a growing movement where companies taking a stance will result in more deep and meaningful steps towards making a social impact.

Woolworths is one such company that demonstrates their transformed agenda towards inclusion and outlining inequity.

Woolworth's commitment to social transformation has since evolved into building solidarity with sidelined groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community. The group's CEO - Roy Bagattini, stated in a press release (June 19, 2023) - *"We certainly see a world characterised by rising levels of inequality, discrimination and marginalization. And we believe that we have a responsibility to use the platform we have as a business to make a broader contribution to the world around us."*

During the month of June 2023, Woolworths embarked on a bold campaign honouring International Pride Month with a campaign in its stores showcasing the LGBTQIA+ community through its merchandising and advertising. Although the campaign was positively received broadly, the company faced a backlash from a small section of society accusing them of a variety of inappropriate intentions. The company remained steadfast in their social justice commitments and responded to these misguided allegations with an air of dignity and pride. These kinds of situations reveal to us just how steep the journey towards shifting cultures and attitudes is when taking on a progressive position on social justice issues.

The Pride Month campaign was part of the broader Woolworths Inclusive Justice Initiative (IJI) campaign, which acknowledges discrimination and marginalisation of certain social groupings. The campaign also shows solidarity with these groups by raising awareness and making visible those issues normally pushed to the fringes of society, with a view to recentering a world in which everyone feels a sense of belonging.

### **NBI and Understanding the Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Employees in the Workplace**

The NBI acknowledges that discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation is hugely oppressive and unconstitutional. To help us co- create appropriate and relevant solutions, we conducted research in 2020 titled, **'Understanding the Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Employees in the Workplace'** looking into the experiences of black

LGBTQIA+ employees, and found that employees face massive hurdles and exclusionary practices that significantly impact their sense of belonging.

Based on the findings of our research, the NBI produced and publicly released a six-part video series called the **Pride in Belonging Edu-Series** serving as an educational platform, elevating the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community, while advocating for companies to make internal and external structural changes that prioritise belonging and inclusion. In addition to this, the NBI's workstream on '**Belonging@Work**' was designed to specifically address issues of belonging and inclusion in the workplace. Our support extends to addressing dominant stereotypes, microaggressions and biases, restrictive policies- all of which negatively affect how LGBTQIA+ employees navigate and succeed in the workplace. Ultimately, a culture of inclusion, diversity and equity is integral to widespread organisational culture change, benefiting all who belong to it.

In South Africa, SMMEs face a range of challenges, resulting in high failure rates. This context is further exacerbated for LGBTQIA+ business leaders, who are cognisant of deeply entrenched and systemic bias and discrimination as part of their lived realities. However, despite this fact, numerous studies highlight the economic value and contribution of the LGBTQIA+ community to the wider economy. According to findings by the LGBT Capital, the global LGBTQIA+ consumer power in 2018 was estimated to be \$3.6 trillion (est. R55,8 trillion). Closer to home, the Pink Rand study found the spending power of the LGBTQIA+ community in South Africa to be R53 billion – R204 billion. These studies consider various factors for economic measurements, and serve as a knowledge base on spending trends, consumer behaviours and the contribution of LGBTQIA+ owned and led businesses to the overall economy (called the Pink Economy)

### **Our Call to Action**

The **NBI's Social Transformation Programme**, asks that South African companies:

1. Prioritise allyship and solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community beyond pride month, which requires companies to acknowledge that a purpose-driven organisation is one that embodies the values of the society in which it operates.
2. Commitment to transformation should keep up with global standards, and emphasise the protection and belonging of LGBTQIA+ communities as a human right.
3. Contribute to societal economic development by tapping into the economic power of the LGBTQIA+ Community through the power of the Pink Rand.

One way for corporate South African to do this is by diversifying their supply chains, ensuring inclusive economic participation. To assist, we are developing the **Pink Hub Platform** as a resource for corporates, so they can access and include businesses, owned and led by people within the LGBTQIA+ community. The **Pink Hub** will delve into transformation from an enterprise supplier development (ESD) and supply chains perspective. Beyond providing technical support for LGBTQIA+ owned and led SMMEs, as previously stated, it is imperative to ensure that the private sector redefines its procurement processes to encompass broader transformation objectives.



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The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

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