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LGBTQIA+ inclusive workplace climate in Portugal: Sexual minorities employees' perspectives

Clima organizacional inclusivo para LGBTQIA+ em Portugal: perspetivas de trabalhadores pertencentes a minorias sexuais

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Abstract

Background: Despite growing efforts to promote workplace diversity, many LGBTQIA+ employees still face discrimination, exclusion, and challenges in fully expressing their identities at work. The literature indicates that perceptions of inclusive organizational climate are closely linked to LGBTQIA+ employees' well-being, job satisfaction, and engagement. **Objective:** To examine perceptions of LGBTQIA+ inclusive organizational climate among cisgender sexual minority workers in Portugal, and to test their associations with self-reported workplace discrimination. **Method:** Seventy-nine cisgender, non-heterosexual participants ($M_{age} = 31.59$, $SD = 10.13$) completed a questionnaire assessing LGBT-inclusive workplace climate and a sociodemographic questionnaire in a cross-sectional online survey. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank-order correlations, Mann-Whitney U tests, hierarchical regression, and regression-based moderation analyses. **Results:** Respondents indicated that their organizations often had formal LGBTQIA+ inclusion policies, but these were often perceived as only partially or inconsistently implemented. Participants reported experiences of discrimination, with women perceiving less discrimination and indicating greater openness about their identities. Perceived supervisor and coworker support were strongly associated with a less discriminatory climate, and identity disclosure/outness was positively associated with perceptions of an inclusive workplace climate. The moderation analysis indicated that the interaction between supervisor support and disclosure was not significant; instead, supervisor support predicted lower discrimination consistently across all levels of disclosure. **Conclusions:** These findings underscore the critical role of both organizational culture and support mechanisms in fostering an inclusive climate for LGBTQIA+ individuals in the workplace.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+; Sexual and gender minorities; Inclusive organizational climate; Workplace discrimination; Supervisor support.

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Resumo

Contexto: Apesar dos esforços crescentes para promover a diversidade no local de trabalho, muitos trabalhadores LGBTQIA+ continuam a enfrentar discriminação, exclusão e dificuldade em expressar plenamente as suas identidades no contexto laboral. A literatura indica que as percepções de um clima organizacional inclusivo estão estreitamente associadas ao bem-estar, satisfação profissional e envolvimento das pessoas LGBTQIA+ no trabalho. **Objetivo:** Examinar as percepções do clima organizacional inclusivo para pessoas LGBTQIA+ entre trabalhadores cisgénero pertencentes a minorias sexuais em Portugal e testar as suas associações com a discriminação autorrelatada. **Métodos:** Setenta e nove participantes cisgénero não heterossexuais ($M_{idade} = 31,59$, $DP = 10,13$) completaram um questionário de avaliação do clima organizacional inclusivo para pessoas LGBT e um questionário sociodemográfico, num inquérito *online* de natureza transversal. Os dados foram analisados recorrendo a estatísticas descritivas, correlações de postos de Spearman, teste *U* de Mann-Whitney, regressão hierárquica e análise de moderação baseada na regressão. **Resultados:** Os participantes indicaram que as suas organizações dispunham frequentemente de políticas formais de inclusão LGBTQIA+, embora estas fossem muitas vezes percecionadas como apenas parcialmente ou de forma inconsistente implementadas. Foram reportadas experiências de discriminação, sendo que as mulheres percecionaram menos discriminação e indicaram maior abertura relativamente às suas identidades. O suporte percecionado por parte de supervisores e colegas associou-se fortemente a um clima menos discriminatório, e a divulgação/assunção da identidade (*outness*) associou-se positivamente a percepções de um clima organizacional inclusivo. A análise de moderação indicou que a interação entre suporte do supervisor e divulgação não foi significativa; em vez disso, o suporte do supervisor previu níveis mais baixos de discriminação de forma consistente em todos os níveis de divulgação. **Conclusões:** Esses resultados destacam o papel crítico da cultura organizacional e dos mecanismos de suporte na promoção de um clima inclusivo para indivíduos LGBTQIA+ no contexto laboral.

Palavras-Chave: Apoio do supervisor; Clima organizacional inclusivo; Discriminação percebida; Minorias sexuais e de género; Pessoas LGBTQIA+; Revelação da identidade sexual.

Introduction

In recent years, workplace inclusion for LGBTQIA+ individuals has become a key issue due to organizations' growing commitment to diversity and equal opportunities. A workplace that fosters inclusion is a key organizational asset that promotes innovation, employee engagement, and performance (Foster et al., 2020). Although gains have been made on legislative and social fronts, studies indicate that many LGBTQIA+ individuals still face discrimination, harassment, and exclusion in the workplace (Ellsworth et al., 2020; Oliveira et al., 2024), as well as greater difficulty in reaching leadership positions, which can be seen in the lower representation of this population in organizational leadership roles (Della Torre & Pereira, 2024). Chronic exposure to violence stemming from sexual prejudice, including microaggressions, has a significant impact on mental health and undermines job satisfaction and career progression (Della Torre & Pereira, 2024; Oliveira et al., 2024).

Organizational climate is defined as employees' shared perceptions of workplace norms, policies, and practices within the organization (Mathew & Selvi, 2007). It constitutes a major determinant of employees' overall work experiences and well-being (Fletcher & Everly, 2021). It is a major factor in employee experience and well-being. An LGBTQIA+ inclusive climate can help employees feel valued and respected, whereas biased environments are associated with adverse psychological and occupational outcomes (Lardier et al., 2020). LGBTQIA+ individuals assess workplace inclusion not only through their own experiences but also by observing those of other sexual minority employees (Ueno et al., 2020). This indicates that when individuals witness acts of prejudice or discrimination at work, they may experience negative psychological effects even when they are not the direct targets of

such behavior. Data suggest that environments like these can create a sense of anxiety, distress, and lack of safety for LGBTQIA+ employees (Sheridan et al., 2017). Additionally, the perpetuation of these acts sends implicit messages to all employees that this conduct is tolerated, potentially perpetuating discrimination and weakening institutional efforts to promote diversity and inclusion (Ng et al., 2024). To support this assertion, Oliveira et al. (2024) underscore the significant influence of organizational climate on occupational health for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Their narrative review indicates that harsh, unwelcoming environments can lead to psychological distress, identity concealment, and job dissatisfaction. In contrast, inclusive climates with supportive leadership, diversity policies, and a sense of emotional safety serve as protective factors for well-being and belonging at work.

Recent research has elucidated how leadership, psychological safety, and human resource (HR) practices shape LGBTQIA+ employees' workplace experiences. Lathabhavan and Mishra (2024) found that inclusive leadership and psychological empowerment enhance job satisfaction and overall well-being among LGBTQIA+ employees. Similarly, Maji et al. (2023), based on a systematic review of 101 studies on the LGBTQIA+ community at work conducted in 18 countries, documented the persistence of discrimination, microaggressions, and unsafe workplace climates. Moreover, inclusion and experiences of discrimination are strongly influenced by perceptions of organizational justice and fair treatment, including the extent to which employees view anti-discrimination policies as legitimate and effective protections (Le et al., 2020).

In the model proposed by Roberge et al. (2021), an inclusive organizational climate requires a common in-group identity, weak fault lines, inclusive HR policies and practices, functional communication, and inclusive leadership. Although this may not constitute an exhaustive framework for workplace inclusiveness, their conceptual model highlights key antecedents that are crucial for promoting inclusivity in organizations. Inclusive practices such as anti-discrimination policies, gender-neutral restrooms, and LGBTQIA+ employee resource groups can significantly reduce prejudice and simultaneously enhance organizational commitment (Opall, 2021). In contrast, the absence of such practices keeps pathways to exclusion open and undermines employee satisfaction, thereby reducing productivity across the organization (Reetu et al. 2020). Moreover, Cruz-Zuniga et al. (2022) show that an unsupportive work environment hinders personnel adjustment, with negative consequences for workers' occupational, physical, and psychophysiological well-being. Altogether, these findings underscore the importance of fostering an inclusive organizational climate to enable employees to thrive both personally and professionally.

In the Portuguese context, growing academic attention has been devoted to the occupational health and working lives of LGBTQIA+ employees. Oliveira et al. (2025) highlight that psychosocial risks such as discrimination, identity concealment, and lack of support are salient predictors of negative occupational health outcomes, whereas inclusive settings function as protective factors. Similarly, Baptista and Costa (2024) highlight the structural barriers faced by trans individuals when entering and integrating into the labor market, reaffirming the importance of institutional support and anti-

discrimination measures in professional integration efforts. In addition, Saleiro (2021) identifies a gap between Portugal's progressive legislation and the everyday workplace realities of LGBTQIA+ individuals, emphasizing that legal rights alone do not eliminate daily experiences of exclusion and prejudice. These observations underscore the importance of investigating organizational climate not only in structural terms but also with regard to how inclusion is perceived and experienced in everyday work life.

With this background, the current study aimed to explore the associations between perceived organizational climate and LGBTQIA+ inclusion by analyzing employees' reports of discrimination, support, and organizational practices. Drawing on minority stress and inclusive climate perspectives, the study focused on how formal policies, everyday practices, and interpersonal support jointly shaped workplace experiences of safety and belonging (e.g., discrimination, psychological distress, and concealment). In doing so, the study responded to calls for context-sensitive, empirically grounded research on LGBTQIA+ employees' occupational health in settings where progressive legislation coexists with persistent exclusionary practices.

This study addressed two underexplored gaps in the literature: (1) the lack of empirical data on how LGBTQIA+ employees perceive inclusion in national contexts such as Portugal, where progressive legislation coexists with exclusionary workplace experiences (Saleiro, 2021); and (2) the limited understanding of how formal organizational policies translate (or fail to translate) into everyday inclusive practices that affect perceived support, psychological safety, and performance outcomes (Hur, 2020; Maji et al., 2023). By examining specific dimensions of LGBTQIA+ inclusive climate—supervisor support, coworker support, grievance procedures, and disclosure/outness—alongside experiences of discrimination, harassment, and bullying, the study sought to clarify how different facets of organizational climate jointly contribute to LGBTQIA+ employees' workplace experiences.

The general objective of this study was to examine the characteristics of the organizational climate related to LGBTQIA+ inclusion and their associations with workplace prejudice (discrimination, harassment, and bullying) reported by LGBTQIA+ employees. In addition to describing the overall frequency of prejudice, the study tested theoretically informed expectations regarding gender differences, perceived support, and the moderating role of supervisor support.

Specifically, the study pursued the following aims: (a) quantify the frequency of prejudice experienced by LGBTQIA+ employees in the workplace; (b) examine gender-based differences in workplace prejudice; (c) investigate associations among discrimination, harassment, and bullying; perceived supervisor support; perceived coworker support; the grievance process; and identity disclosure (outness); (d) identify organizational climate variables that predict discrimination, harassment, and bullying targeting LGBTQIA+ employees; and (e) test whether perceived supervisor support moderates the association between disclosure/outness and experiences of discrimination, harassment, and bullying, with higher supervisor support expected to attenuate the association between disclosure/outness and adverse experiences.

Method

Study Design

This was a cross-sectional, exploratory quantitative study that assessed variables related to perceptions of LGBTQIA+ inclusive organizational climate among individuals living and working in Portugal. This research was funded by RESTART, a program of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (grant No. 2023.00018.RESTART).

Sample and Procedures

A power analysis was conducted with G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the minimum sample size necessary for a multiple regression with two predictors (Supervisor Support and Coworker Support). Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), an alpha level of .05, and a power of .80, the required minimum sample size was 68 participants.

Individuals younger than 18 years or not currently employed (e.g., retired or on temporary leave from work) were deemed ineligible. Because eligibility questions were not used as a screening tool before survey completion, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during data cleaning. After data collection, 13 individuals were excluded because they did not have an employment relationship at the time of completing the questionnaire, and six were excluded because they did not identify as cisgender.

The study included a sample of 79 cisgender, non-heterosexual individuals aged 18 years or older, all residing in Portugal, proficient in Portuguese, and with a minimum of six months of formal affiliation with an employer or educational institution. This was a nonprobability convenience sample. Given the specific focus on the LGBTQIA+ community, three recruitment methods were used to reach participants: direct outreach through relevant organizations, engagement with formal and informal LGBTQIA+ groups and associations (ILGA-Portugal, Dezanove, and Opus Gay), and targeted online recruitment via social media and email lists. Data were collected online between April and July 2024 using platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Participants completed the survey in approximately 20 minutes.

Data quality was evaluated for range and consistency; missing data were handled with pairwise deletion at the item level, and per-item *N*s were reported in tables.

Measures

Questionnaire Assessing LGBT-Inclusive Workplace Climate

A 50-item questionnaire developed by Carreiro (2014) was used to assess LGBT-inclusive workplace climate. The instrument was developed for organizational research and is not a standardized published scale. It was based on Waldo's (1999) conceptual framework and informed by Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 1995), Identity Management Theory (Cupach & Imahori, 1993), and the Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Items were adapted from established measures assessing workplace sexual identity management and LGBT-related climate, including the Workplace Sexual

Identity Management Measure (Anderson et al., 2001), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Climate Inventory (Liddle et al., 2004), and the Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (Waldo, 1999). For brevity, this instrument is hereafter referred to as the LGBT-Inclusive Workplace Climate Questionnaire. The instrument comprises five sections: (1) Workplace Climate for LGBT People (divided into three factors (Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate, Supervisor Support, and Coworker Support), (2) LGBT-Inclusive Human Resources Policies and Practices, (3) Job-Gender Context, (4) Disclosure and Outness, and (5) The Grievance Process. All Likert-type items are evaluated on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The LGBT-Inclusive Human Resources Policies and Practices section uses a checklist format, with *Yes/No* responses to each item. Full item wording is provided in Appendix A. Internal consistency was acceptable for all subscales (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77-.88$). The overall internal consistency of the scale for the present sample was $\alpha = .84$. Although the scale does not have a cutoff point, higher scores on Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate reflect lower perceived discrimination, whereas higher scores on the remaining factors denote greater support, openness/visibility, and a more effective grievance process.

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

The sociodemographic questionnaire included questions addressing the following variables: age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, place of residence, educational level, and socioeconomic status. It also included the following work-related variables: employment status, employment relationship, occupation, shift work, and organizational size. For the variable occupation, due to the high variability of the responses, occupational categories were grouped as follows: the administrative and financial categories included office and management workers, as well as those in accounting; the education and research category included professors and researchers; the healthcare group consisted of doctors, pharmacists, psychologists, and physiotherapists; the customer service category included salespeople, call center agents, and bartenders; additional participants with diverse professional backgrounds were categorized as "other."

Statistical Analysis

Data analysis began with descriptives analysis and Shapiro–Wilk tests to the main variables. Due to violations of the normality assumption ($p < .05$), non-parametric procedures were used for bivariate comparisons and associations to ensure robust inferences. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, theoretical midpoints, and minimum and maximum scores) were computed for all continuous variables. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize endorsement of HR Policies and Practices items and Job-Gender Context indicators.

Spearman's rank-order correlations were computed to examine associations among Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate, Supervisor Support, Coworker Support, the Grievance Process, and Disclosure/Outness. Correlation strength was classified as 0–.30 (weak), .30–.70 (moderate), and .70–1.00 (strong). To enhance interpretability, 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for Spearman's ρ were estimated using bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrapping (1,000 resamples). The Mann–Whitney U test was performed to assess group differences between women and men. The r coefficient was calculated

to index the effect size of group differences, using the formula $r = Z / \sqrt{N}$, where Z represents the standardized Mann–Whitney test statistic and N is the total sample size; values of $r \approx .10$, $.30$, and $\geq .50$ were interpreted as small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

To examine multivariate predictors of perceived discrimination, we conducted hierarchical linear regression analyses with Supervisor Support (Step 1) and Coworker Support (Step 2) predicting Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate. Assumptions of linear regression and moderation (normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity) were examined using residual plots and diagnostic indices and were judged to be adequately met. To report standardized coefficients with confidence intervals, the dependent variable and predictors were z -scored prior to estimation so that unstandardized B s corresponded to standardized coefficients (β). We report β with 95% CIs, R^2 , adjusted R^2 , ΔR^2 , and the F change (p) for each step, along with multicollinearity diagnostics (tolerance and variance inflation factors [VIFs]).

Moderation was tested using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1; Hayes, 2022), with mean-centered predictors and an interaction term (Supervisor Support \times Disclosure/Outness); conditional effects were probed at -1 SD, the mean, and $+1$ SD.

All statistical procedures were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29; IBM Corp., Armonk, NY). Bootstrap estimators used 1,000 bias-corrected and accelerated resamples and a fixed random seed (12,345).

Ethical Considerations

All ethical guidelines were strictly followed, and the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Beira Interior, Covilhã, Portugal (Protocol No. CE-UBI-Pj-2024-022). Participants provided informed consent after receiving comprehensive information about the study's goals, procedures, potential risks, and expected benefits. Confidentiality and privacy were rigorously safeguarded, with all data handled securely. Participant selection was conducted impartially and equitably, ensuring no form of discrimination. The study also upheld transparency in communicating its findings, in accordance with ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association [WMA], 2013).

Results

Sociodemographic Information

The sample consisted of 79 participants (Table 1), with a mean age of 31.59 years ($SD = 10.13$) and an average tenure of 6.1 years in their current role ($SD = 7.75$). The sample was predominantly female, with a diverse range of sexual orientations, the majority identifying as bisexual or gay. Most respondents reported being single, either with or without a partner, were highly educated (most had a master's degree or above), and lived in urban locations (small towns or large cities) with low-middle to middle socioeconomic status. In terms of employment, most respondents were either employed or student-employees, with a majority having a permanent position. The majority of the sample worked in education and research or in health-related professions. Most were not employed in shift work and worked in medium or large organizations.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 79)

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender (n = 79)	Female	46	58.2
	Male	33	41.8
Sexual orientation (n = 79)	Gay	24	30.4
	Lesbian	10	12.7
	Bisexual	35	44.3
	Pansexual	7	8.9
	Asexual	1	1.3
	Queer	2	2.5
Marital status (n = 79)	Single without a partner	30	38.0
	Single with a partner	24	30.4
	Married	11	13.9
	In a domestic partnership	13	16.5
	Divorced/Separated	1	1.3
Educational attainment (n = 79)	Up to 12 years of schooling	14	17.7
	Graduate degree	18	22.8
	Master degree	34	43.0
	Ph.D. degree	13	16.5
Place of residence (n = 78)	A small rural area	7	9.0
	A large rural area	6	7.7
	A small town	28	35.9
	A large city	37	47.4
Socioeconomic status (n = 79)	Low	4	5.1
	Low-middle	25	31.6
	Medium	35	44.3
	Upper-middle	14	17.7
	High	1	1.3
Employment status (n = 79)	Student-employed	23	48.1
	Self-employed	5	6.3
	Employee	51	45.6
Occupation (n = 79)	Administrative and Financial	15	19.0
	Education and Research	31	39.2
	Healthcare Professionals	18	22.8
	Customer Services Roles	10	12.7
	Others	5	6.3
Employment contract (n = 79)	Permanent	35	44.3
	Fixed term	18	22.8
	Temporary	3	3.8
	Independent contractor agreement	9	11.4
	Not applicable	11	13.9
	Other type	3	3.8
Shift work (n = 77)	Yes	14	18.2
	No	63	81.8
Organization Size (n = 77)	Up to 10 persons	14	18.2
	11-250	21	27.3
	251-500	9	11.7
	More than 501	33	42.9

Note. Percentages are based on valid ns for each variable. Employment status percentages were recalculated from the raw frequencies.

Psychosocial Workplace Variables and Gender Differences

Significant gender differences emerged for Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate and Disclosure/Outness (Table 2). Women scored higher on both variables, indicating lower perceived discrimination and greater identity disclosure than men (small effects, $r = .23-.25$).

Table 2

Gender Differences in Psychosocial Workplace Variable Scores

Variables	Possible Score	Total (n = 79)		Female (n = 46)		Male (n = 33)		U	p	r
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
LD & A-H Climate	10–50	35.21	6.18	36.45	6.00	33.40	6.08	517.00	.02*	.25
Supervisor Support	3–15	9.88	2.37	10.26	2.39	9.36	2.27	612.00	.13	.16
Coworker Support	7–35	16.69	3.96	17.04	3.74	16.21	4.27	691.50	.16	.16
Grievance Process	5–25	15.86	3.78	16.40	3.21	15.22	4.34	462.00	.20	.17
Disclosure/Outness	6–30	19.64	5.48	20.80	5.07	18.06	5.63	544.00	.04*	.23

Note. LD & A-H Climate = Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment. Higher scores on LD & A-H Climate indicate lower perceived discrimination. $r = \frac{Z}{N}$

* $p < 0.05$.

Table 3 shows the Spearman correlations among the key psychosocial variables. Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate were positively associated with supervisor support ($\rho = .74$, 95 % CI [.62, .83], $p < .001$) and Coworker Support ($\rho = .72$, 95 % CI [.59, .81], $p < .001$), and the Grievance Process ($\rho = .68$, 95 % CI [.52, .79], $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived support and more effective grievance procedures co-occurred with lower perceived discrimination.

Disclosure/Outness was strongly associated with Coworker Support ($\rho = .80$, 95 % CI [.70, .87], $p < .001$), Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate ($\rho = .75$, 95 % CI [.63, .83], $p < .001$), suggesting that employees who felt comfortable being out about their identities reported higher levels of support and lower discrimination. Supervisor and Coworker Support were themselves highly correlated ($\rho = .68$, 95 % CI [.54, .80], $p < .001$), indicating that multiple forms of support tended to co-occur.

Table 3

Correlations Between Key Psychosocial Variables (N = 79)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. LD & A-H Climate	—			
2. Supervisor Support	.74**	—		
3. Coworker Support	.72**	.68**	—	
4. Grievance Process	.68**	.72**	.56**	—
5. Disclosure and Outness	.75**	.67**	.80**	.59**

Note. LD & A-H Climate = Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment. All coefficients are Spearman's ρ . Higher scores on LD & A-H Climate indicate lower perceived discrimination.

** $p < .001$.

To further investigate these relationships, a hierarchical regression was conducted with Supervisor Support and Coworker Support as predictors of Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate. In Step 1, Supervisor Support was a strong positive predictor, $\beta = .69$, 95%CI [.53, .85], $p < .001$, accounting for $R^2 = .50$ (adjusted $R^2 = .49$) of the variance. Adding Coworker Support in Step 2 improved model fit, $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $F\text{-change}_{(1, 73)} = 12.74$, $p = .001$; both predictors remained significant (Supervisor Support $\beta = .42$, 95% CI [.21, .63], $p < .001$; Coworker Support $\beta = .38$, 95% CI [.17, .60], $p = .001$). Regression diagnostics were conducted to address model assumptions, given that several study variables showed non-normal univariate distributions. Analyses of standardized residuals indicated approximately normal residual distributions, with histograms and normal P–P plots showing no substantial deviations from normality. Homoscedasticity was supported by the scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values, which displayed no funneling or other systematic patterns. Multicollinearity was low (Tolerance = 0.50; VIF = 2.02 for both predictors), indicating unique contributions.

We also evaluated whether Disclosure/Outness moderated the association between Supervisor Support and Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate. Predictors were mean-centered prior to computing the interaction term (Supervisor Support \times Disclosure/Outness). The overall model was significant, $F_{(3, 73)} = 46.02$, $p < .001$, explaining $R^2 = .65$ (adjusted $R^2 = .64$) of the variance. Supervisor Support ($\beta = .38$, 95% CI [.20, .55], $p < .001$) and Disclosure/Outness ($\beta = .48$, 95% CI [.30, .66], $p < .001$) showed positive main effects, whereas the interaction term was not significant ($\beta = -.10$, 95% CI [–.22, .03], $p = .12$), indicating that the strength of the supervisor-support association did not differ reliably across levels of disclosure.

Job-Gender Context

As shown in Table 4, most participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that personnel of their gender typically do not hold their job (74.7%) or are uncommon in their workplace (70.9%). Nevertheless, a minority endorsed some degree of gender underrepresentation. Regarding leadership, 55.7% reported a female direct supervisor, 36.7% a male supervisor, and 7.6% did not know or preferred not to answer.

Table 4

Perceptions of Gender Representation and Supervisor Gender in the Workplace (N = 79)

Item	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)
Few people of my gender hold my job	38 (48.1)	21 (26.6)	13 (16.5)	5 (6.3)	2 (2.5)
People of my gender are uncommon here	40 (50.6)	16 (20.3)	11 (13.9)	8 (10.1)	4 (5.1)
Item	Category		n (%)		
Gender of direct supervisor	Female		44 (55.7)		
	Male		29 (36.7)		
	Do not know/do not want to answer.		6 (7.6)		

Note. Item labels are abbreviated; full wording and response options are provided in Appendix A. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neither disagree nor agree, A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

The data suggest generally adequate gender representation, with some notable limitations. Nearly half of respondents strongly disagreed that personnel of their gender typically do not hold their job, indicating that many feel represented; however, a minority expressed neutrality or agreement, suggesting that some roles may still lack balanced visibility for all genders. A similar pattern emerged for the statement that personnel of their gender are uncommon, indicating that, although gender inclusivity appears present overall, specific departments or positions may still face underrepresentation. This interpretation is consistent with the distribution of supervisor gender, where a slight majority reported a woman supervisor and a substantial proportion reported a man supervisor, suggesting a relatively balanced leadership distribution. The 7.6% who did not disclose their supervisor's gender may reflect some sensitivity around gender dynamics in leadership.

LGBTQIA+ Inclusive HR Policies and Practices

The data in Table 5 indicate gaps in workplace inclusivity and support for LGBTQIA+ employees. Although 64.1% reported that diversity is included in their organization's mission or core values, only 32.9% indicated receiving information about anti-discrimination policies, and 19.0% reported access to information about an LGBT network, suggesting limited communication and reinforcement of stated values. While many workplaces offered equitable spousal (81.6%) and parental leave (78.9%) benefits for LGBT employees, more everyday inclusive practices were less common: 38.5% reported social events involving LGBT partners and families, and around one third reported LGBT-inclusive language in internal (30.4%) or external (31.6%) communication.

Resources specific to transgender employees (inclusive health benefits, 28.2%; gender-neutral restrooms, 27.8%; gender-neutral dress codes, 32.9%) and broader structural supports (e.g., LGBT diversity strategy, 31.6%; LGBT employee satisfaction surveys, 7.6%; diversity audits, 10.4%; on-site counseling, 17.9%) were reported by only a minority of participants. Notably, 34.5% of those responding to the "None of these" option indicated that none of the listed policies, practices, or resources were available.

Taken together, 46.2% of respondents agreed that their employer had done enough to create an environment where LGBT people are comfortable being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, whereas 53.8% disagreed. In addition, endorsement of several specific policies and resources was relatively low, including LGBT employee satisfaction surveys (7.6%), diversity audits (10.4%), on-site counseling for LGBT employees (17.9%), and accessibility to LGBT networks and groups (26.6%).

Table 5*LGBT-Inclusive Policies, Practices, and Resources in the Workplace*

Items	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)
1. Diversity in mission/core values (<i>n</i> = 78)	50 (64.1)	28 (35.9)
2. Information on anti-discrimination policy (<i>n</i> = 79)	26 (32.9)	53 (67.1)
3. Information on LGBT network (<i>n</i> = 79)	15 (19.0)	64 (81.0)
4. Equal spousal benefits for LGBT staff (<i>n</i> = 76)	62 (81.6)	14 (18.4)
5. Equal parental leave for LGBT staff (<i>n</i> = 76)	60 (78.9)	16 (21.1)
6. Social events include LGBT partners/families (<i>n</i> = 78)	30 (38.5)	48 (61.5)
7. LGBT-inclusive language in internal communication (<i>n</i> = 79)	24 (30.4)	55 (69.6)
8. LGBT-inclusive language in external communication (<i>n</i> = 79)	25 (31.6)	54 (68.4)
9. Inclusive health benefits for transgender staff (<i>n</i> = 78)	22 (28.2)	56 (71.8)
10. Gender-neutral language (<i>n</i> = 79)	11 (13.9)	68 (86.1)
11. Gender-neutral restrooms (<i>n</i> = 79)	22 (27.8)	57 (72.2)
12. Gender-neutral dress codes (<i>n</i> = 79)	26 (32.9)	53 (67.1)
13. Employer does enough to support LGBT openness (<i>n</i> = 78)	36 (46.2)	42 (53.8)
14. Available policies, practices and/or resources		
14.1. LGBT diversity policy/strategy (<i>n</i> = 79)	25 (31.6)	54 (68.4)
14.2. LGBT employee satisfaction surveys (<i>n</i> = 79)	6 (7.6)	73 (92.4)
14.3. Diversity audits (<i>n</i> = 77)	8 (10.4)	69 (89.6)
14.4. Access to LGBT networks/groups (<i>n</i> = 79)	21 (26.6)	58 (73.4)
14.5. LGBT information readily available (<i>n</i> = 77)	24 (31.2)	53 (68.8)
14.6. On-site counseling for LGBT staff (<i>n</i> = 78)	14 (17.9)	64 (82.1)
14.7. Formal grievance process for LGBT staff (<i>n</i> = 79)	10 (12.7)	69 (87.3)
14.8. Spousal benefits for LGBT staff, partners, and families (<i>n</i> = 78)	27 (34.2)	51 (65.4)
14.9. Parental leave for LGBT staff (<i>n</i> = 77)	41 (53.2)	36 (46.8)
14.10. Other benefits for LGBT staff (<i>n</i> = 77)	19 (24.7)	58 (75.3)
14.11. None of these (<i>n</i> = 55)	19 (34.5)	36 (65.5)

Note. Total sample *N* = 79. Item-level *n*s reflect pairwise deletion at the item level because each question was answered independently; respondents with missing data on a given item were excluded from that item only. Item labels are abbreviated; full wording and response options are provided in Appendix A.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how organizational climate impacts LGBTQIA+ employees' experiences, focusing on discrimination, support, and inclusive measures. The findings reinforce that an inclusive organizational climate is of paramount importance in promoting equality and improving the experience

of LGBTQIA+ employees. Study participants reported moderate to high scores on the Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate, indicating relatively lower levels of perceived discrimination overall. We found that perceived support from both supervisors and colleagues was strongly correlated with higher scores of Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate (i.e., less perceived discrimination), thus creating a less hostile environment and allowing greater openness to LGBTQIA+ people about their gender identity and sexual orientation. For our sample, women reported lower levels of perceived discrimination and higher perceived support. Finally, one of the most important findings is that although most organizations have guidelines on diversity and inclusion, only a minority have mechanisms for implementing these guidelines and promoting a more equal environment. This finding has both theoretical and practical implications: it reinforces existing models that emphasize the importance of perceived support in shaping inclusive climates, and highlights the limitations of formal policies when they are not matched by daily relational practices. In practical terms, the results suggest that organizations should invest not only in written guidelines, but also in concrete actions that foster psychological safety and reduce discriminatory behaviors in the workplace.

Gender Dynamics in the Experience of Discrimination

The women in the study reported less discrimination and greater ease in being open about their sexuality in the workplace. This pattern can be explained in a multifactorial way, influenced by social, cultural, and organizational issues.

Women may feel more comfortable and accepted because organizational environments are already better prepared for women, due to gender equity programs that began to be implemented before inclusion initiatives based on sexual orientation. In addition, gender equity programs often include nonheterosexual women. Studies such as Mills and Oswin (2024) have found that in environments where the female presence is already well accepted and more strongly represented, lesbian and bisexual women are less afraid to be open about their sexuality. On the other hand, the expectation that men follow traditional norms of masculinity means that any deviation from this norm is punished, leading men to hide their sexual orientation more and suffer greater discrimination when they reveal it (Sibande & Gobind, 2024).

Nonheterosexual women may not be immediately perceived as sexual minorities and are sometimes sexualized or fetishized, which can lead to a perception of greater acceptance that, however, does not represent respect and equality, but an objectification (Chowdhury & Brooks, 2024). The study by Rivero-Díaz et al. (2020), when analyzing the organizational climate for LGBTQIA+ people, concluded that lesbian and bisexual women also find it easier to find female support networks within the organization, while gay and bisexual men are more isolated. This underscores the important role that support plays in shaping climate. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that our convenience sample was heavily concentrated in education and health sectors, and these sectoral and role distributions may have partially shaped the gender differences observed.

Organizational and Social Support in Building an Inclusive Environment

Our findings suggest that, in this sample, organizational support plays an important role in reducing perceived discrimination and harassment among LGBTQIA+ employees. Supervisor Support emerged as a consistent predictor of reduced perceived discrimination, even after Coworker Support was included in the model, highlighting its broad protective value. Moreover, Supervisor Support and Disclosure/Outness both showed significant main effects on Low Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Climate, whereas their interaction was nonsignificant, indicating that the association between Supervisor Support and lower perceived discrimination did not depend on employees' level of disclosure. This pattern is consistent with Eisenberger's theory of perceived organizational support, which states that when workers feel that their organization values them and cares about their well-being, they are more likely to feel safe, treated equitably, and less vulnerable to discrimination (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In addition to fostering comfort and security, feeling supported by the organization can engender trust and contribute to psychological safety, especially for individuals who belong to historically marginalized groups.

Recent studies support this pattern. For instance, Webster et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis showing that supportive relationships in the workplace, especially with coworkers and supervisors, are closely linked to better job satisfaction, lower psychological stress, and fewer experiences of discrimination. Notably, interpersonal support had a stronger impact than formal policies alone, highlighting the role of everyday interactions in shaping workplace climate.

Social support is also thought to mitigate the mental health effects of discrimination. Cabral and Pinto (2023) conducted a cross-sectional study and reported that LGBTQIA+ individuals who experienced discrimination were more likely to report shame, anxiety, and depression, all of which were less severe among those with strong social support. This highlights the protection that emotional support provides in a hostile environment. Social support from coworkers is arguably even more powerful. According to Markovic et al. (2022), being aware of the support and acceptance of one's coworkers decreases feelings of isolation and increases feelings of belonging, which subsequently decreases the perception of vulnerability to discrimination.

Finally, when LGBTQIA+ employees feel their identities are valued and respected, rather than merely tolerated, they are more likely to perceive opportunities for advancement and less discrimination. A study by Lathabhavan and Mishrashowed (2024) showed that LGBTQIA+ employees who felt that their employers valued their unique perspectives reported higher career satisfaction and less marginalization. Overall, these insights converge on the same conclusion: having the right policies in place is not sufficient to create an inclusive workplace. A truly inclusive workplace relies on the development of authentic, supportive relationships throughout the organization, in which formal policies are complemented by everyday practices of care and inclusion.

Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusion Policies

Our results mirror what many LGBTQIA+ workers report in practice: a discrepancy between discourse and implementation in organizations. Many organizations have diversity policies in their statutes, but in practice they often lack effective mechanisms to implement actions that translate into genuine inclusion. This means that LGBTQIA+ employees may not feel supported, even when the organization has an official policy stating that it supports them (Nowack & Donahue, 2019).

The use of equality rhetoric without meaningful implementation can also be linked to so-called *pinkwashing*, in which inclusion discourse is used primarily to enhance the organization's public image but does not translate into egalitarian measures within the organization itself. The study by Dutta and Srinivasan (2024) analyzed the impact of multinational diversity programs and found that the implementation of these policies was often superficial and did not translate into substantive changes in organizational culture or LGBTQIA+ employees' perceptions of climate. Overall, these findings suggest that, while some workplaces have taken steps to support LGBTQIA+ employees, inclusive provisions remain fragmented and unevenly distributed across organizations in this sample.

One of the main reasons for limited implementation of inclusion policies is the lack of leaders and managers prepared to enact them. Without appropriate training, inclusion initiatives remain largely theoretical or have little practical impact, because policies are only effective when leaders are trained to apply them actively and consistently (Lathabhavan & Mishra, 2024). Such training should include recognizing and addressing microaggressions experienced by LGBTQIA+ employees in their daily work, as well as developing skills to intervene constructively and to model inclusive behavior.

Furthermore, if organizations implement policies and even create mechanisms to enforce them but do not monitor their impact, they may fail to detect structural problems. By monitoring effectiveness and allowing employees to provide feedback and suggestions, organizations can be more effective in promoting equality (Gosar, 2023). To create a truly inclusive organizational climate, organizations need to go beyond symbolic commitments and adopt measures that have a concrete impact on employees' daily lives. Managers should be trained to ensure that equality policies are applied and that a safe environment is guaranteed for everyone; effective whistleblowing channels should be created so that employees can report situations of discrimination without fear of retaliation; and the wider workforce should be engaged so that diversity is not viewed solely as a human resources responsibility but as a shared organizational commitment.

Best Practices for LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

The results of this study suggest several actionable strategies that organizations can implement to foster a more inclusive, respectful, and equitable workplace for LGBTQIA+ employees. Inclusion must extend beyond policy documents and be integrated into the organizational culture, day-to-day practices, and interpersonal relationships. Based on our data and the broader research base, we outline the following best practices.

Train Leadership to be Active Allies for Inclusion

Supervisors and managers should be prepared to act as inclusive allies. Our findings, and those of other studies (e.g., [Yu et al., 2024](#)), show that supportive supervisors diminish experiences of discrimination and help create a safer environment. Leadership training should therefore include instruction on recognizing and responding to microaggressions, practicing allyship, and promoting psychological safety.

Enable and Model Support Between Colleagues

Peer support is also decisive. Being accepted by colleagues diminishes feelings of isolation and vulnerability among LGBTQIA+ employees. Organizations can encourage inclusive team-building practices and facilitate authentic dialogue about diversity. Informal support and employee resource groups are essential for building community and fostering a sense of belonging ([Theriault, 2017](#)).

Create and Disseminate Tangible, Enterprise-Wide Policies

Policies that support LGBTQIA+ inclusion, namely nondiscrimination policies, all-gender restrooms, inclusive language, and equitable parental and spousal benefits, need to be easily accessible and consistently enacted ([Dagar & Shrotiya, 2025](#)). In line with our findings, a disparity persists between policy and practice: many organizations have established official policies, yet concrete implementation mechanisms are often lacking. Policies must therefore be clearly communicated, operationalized, and regularly reviewed to ensure that they are effectively put into practice.

Develop a Culture of Openness and Authenticity

Employees who feel they can be open about their identity report lower levels of perceived discrimination and higher levels of support. Creating an environment of respectful disclosure—rather than disclosure under pressure—requires trust, confidentiality, and visible organizational commitment, such as representation in leadership and the inclusion of diverse narratives in institutional communication ([Lathabhavan & Mishra, 2024](#)).

Implement Effective Grievance and Feedback Mechanisms

Only a modest number of participants reported access to formal channels for lodging grievances relating to LGBTQIA+ incidents. Having clear, anonymous, and responsive grievance procedures allows employees to report discrimination, without the threat of retaliation. Likewise, feedback mechanisms allow organizations to assess inclusion efforts, and monitoring the performance of inclusive practices over time is vital to evaluating and improving these efforts ([Hur, 2020](#)).

Evaluate Inclusion Continually, Not Periodically

Diversity audits, employee satisfaction surveys, and structured conversations with LGBTQIA+ employees should be incorporated into a regular review process. Inclusion is not a fixed outcome but an ongoing commitment. Striving for influence and measuring impact over time ensures that assessments of inclusion remain responsive, relevant, and grounded in employees' experiences ([Hudson & Bruce-Miller, 2022](#)).

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the current study sheds light on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workplace, it is important to note some limitations. First, the study utilized a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to make causal claims or consider how perceptions of workplace climate and support may change over time. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to capture shifts in inclusion dynamics and organizational culture.

Second, the sample did not include any transgender participants, which is a notable limitation. Trans individuals often experience different—and, in many cases, more severe—discrimination and exclusion in workplaces. Their absence in the study indicates that the results do not reflect the full range of experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community. Future research should focus on the inclusion of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse participants to gain an intersectional understanding of workplace inclusion.

Additionally, the small sample size and the absence of subgroup representation, combined with the use of a nonprobability convenience sampling strategy focused on LGBTQIA+ employees in Portugal, limit the generalizability of the findings. Larger and more diverse samples are needed to enable more detailed examination of the heterogeneous experiences of individuals across sexual orientations and gender identities. The present study also did not consider external contextual variables that may influence perceptions of inclusion and discrimination, such as geography, organizational size, or sector. Future studies could, for example, compare perceptions of inclusion and discrimination in traditionally conservative sectors (e.g., finance, law, manufacturing) with more progressive sectors (e.g., technology, education, arts and cultural industries) to explore contextual variation and to inform tailored inclusion interventions.

Moreover, measurement relied on a questionnaire adapted from several existing instruments, which, although showing acceptable internal consistency in this sample, has not been extensively validated in large, diverse populations. The use of self-report measures also raises the possibility of social desirability and common-method bias. Future research should further examine the structural validity, measurement invariance, and criterion validity of these subscales and, where possible, combine self-report data with additional sources (e.g., HR indicators, observational or qualitative data).

Finally, this study focused on perceptions of inclusion and did not systematically examine whether or how formal organizational policies were implemented or their effectiveness. Future studies should rigorously assess organizational-level data (e.g., policy audits, HR practices, leadership behaviors) to bridge the gap between formal organizational inclusion efforts and employees' lived experiences. Addressing these limitations will be vital for developing a more comprehensive and evidence-based agenda to promote LGBTQIA+ equity in the workplace.

We did not conduct robustness checks controlling for age, sector, or organization size, as the sample size limited the inclusion of additional covariates. This should be considered when interpreting the findings. While the results offer valuable insights into LGBTQIA+ workplace experiences, they do not allow for broad generalizations beyond the study sample. Instead, they provide an initial empirical basis for future, larger-scale investigations with more diverse and representative samples.

Conclusion

Findings from this exploratory study suggest that organizational climate may significantly influence the workplace experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Portugal, although further research with broader samples is needed. While many organizations tout inclusive policies, our data reveal a disconnect between strategic intent and support in practice. Discrimination, harassment, and experiences of invisibility remain part of the employment context for a considerable proportion of LGBTQIA+ professionals. Support from supervisors and peers was identified as a key protective factor and was significantly correlated with lower levels of perceived discrimination and greater openness regarding sexual and gender identity. Furthermore, an inclusive workplace environment enhanced the perceived quality of support, cultivating conditions in which LGBTQIA+ individuals can flourish personally and professionally. In terms of gender representation, the findings point to modest improvements in the visibility of participants' gender in their roles and leadership, while also revealing persisting gaps in inclusivity in specific positions and contexts. Overall, these findings suggest that, although some workplaces have taken important steps to support LGBTQIA+ employees, inclusive provisions remain fragmented and unevenly implemented across organizations. This study indicates the need for organizations to move beyond symbolic statements of diversity and to implement intentional, measurable actions toward inclusion and equity. Training for leadership, peer support structures, effective grievance processes, and ongoing reflection on inclusion practices are important steps toward creating truly inclusive workplaces. The promotion of psychological safety and authenticity must become core values of organizational culture—only then can diversity and inclusion efforts be both effective and just.

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