

Conference Summary

Poland: Open For Business Summit 2022



Open
For
Business

Partners:



Deloitte.



Google



PARADA RÓWNOŚCI

replika
JEDYNE CZASOPISMO LGBTOWA W POLSCE

300GOSPODARKA

Introduction

The „Poland: Open For Business Summit,” took place on June 21, 2022, and the main topic of conversation and discussion was the cost to the Polish economy of discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in the country. The event was organized as part of the Equality Month of the Warsaw Equality Parade by Open For Business, with support from partners: Google, Deloitte, Responsible Business Forum (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu), Natwest Group in Poland and Rainbow Network.

During the meeting, three debates were held with the participation of economists, local government officials, representatives of business and NGOs who implement the values of diversity and inclusion through specific actions in the professional and personal areas. There was also a conversation about how open Polish companies are towards LGBTQ+ women and whether the national economy gives them a chance to fully realize their unique potential.

The experiences and insights of the panelists helped bring solutions to the problems and difficulties faced by the economy, business and local communities in Poland concerning discrimination to a wider audience. As the talks showed, **discrimination against LGBTQ+ is more than a moral imperative. It's a concrete cost that no company, organization, or local government institution can afford anymore.**

Brain drain and loss of talent are just a selection of costs that are difficult to estimate because they involve an incalculable asset - human beings and the values they expect from places to work and live, and which they themselves represent.

During the discussions and talks, concrete actions and good practices were presented, which are worth introducing both in large corporations and small. With even small changes, small steps towards preventing discrimination against LGBTQ+ people - to quote one of the panellists - it is worth trying to make this world a little better. Big numbers from economic statistics may not appeal to everyone, but for all people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, religion or political views, openness and sensitivity to the other person is important and relevant.

CONTACT:

✉ info@open-for-business.org

FIND OUT MORE:

🌐 open-for-business.org

FOLLOW US:

📷 [@OFB_LGBT](https://www.instagram.com/OFB_LGBT)

Highlights from opening remarks

“Although Warsaw is a cosmopolitan city and everyone can feel comfortable in it, Poland, as a country, is not LGBTQ+ friendly. LGBTQ+ people cannot form legal partnerships and there is no possibility for them to adopt children. The so-called „LGBT-free zones“ have also been created here - an embarrassment for a country as wonderful as Poland.



Photo: George Perlov, Interim Executive Director Open For Business

A recent European Union study found that in Poland, **one in four LGBT people were discriminated against at work**. What is the cost of this to the LGBT community? The cost of this is expressed in stress, in being treated as second-class citizens, and that is why a great many talented people are leaving this country, moving to other countries in the European Union and around the world. **Poland deserves better, it deserves a better reputation.**

That's why, together with many committed people here in Poland, we created the Report, „The Economic Case for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe: Hungary, Poland, Romania and Ukraine,“ which was released last year. With it, we are building interest among people in Poland and the region. We know and believe deeply that it is possible to bring change in Poland through the business community and with the involvement of NGOs. Today we are starting a public discussion about getting companies to speak out on the fact **that such treatment of LGBT people is not only wrong but is also associated with a huge economic cost to Poland**. Let me just remind you of selected findings from our research: **discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community each year leads to losses of between PLN 4.6 billion and PLN 9.5 billion in the Polish economy, which translates into about 0.21% - 0.43% of GDP and companies demonstrating inclusivity towards LGBTQ+ people outperform their competitors, both globally and in the CEE region**”.

George Perlov
Interim Executive Director Open For Business

„The UK is very supportive of the values of tolerance and non-discrimination and is committed to supporting LGBT rights and freedoms. There has been tremendous progress in the UK when it comes to the rights of same-sex couples, adoption, and entering into relationships. I think it is an extremely important moral imperative to guarantee personal dignity and personal rights. On the other hand, it is important to remember that there is also an economic imperative here. And this Report opens up a discussion about the economic costs, of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. **Taking away personal rights or creating an atmosphere where individuals cannot fulfil themselves personally at work limits productivity and creativity.**



Photo: James Hughes, Minister-Counsellor for Economic Affairs at the British Embassy joined the event online

By promoting inclusivity and diversity in business and society, **a business can benefit most through creativity and productivity, which in turn will contribute to economic growth. By promoting inclusivity and diversity in business and society, a business can benefit most through creativity and productivity, which in turn will contribute to economic growth. This is a huge opportunity.** The British government has known this for a long time. The coalition of British businesses is promoting diversity. This is a powerful tool that can change the perception of critical issues. I hope this discussion will move forward. **We want to make a real difference to LGBT people around the world.** We know that the UK does not have a perfect history. There is still a lot of work to be done here on LGBT rights. On the other hand, if we engage and work together for LGBT people, it will lead to improvements.”.

James Hughes,
Minister-Counsellor for Economic Affairs at the British Embassy in Poland

„Cooperation is one of the cornerstones of responsible business. As coordinators of the Diversity Charter in Poland, we are glad that there is more and more interest from employers on the topic of inclusion and diversity.

We are also pleased that there are more and more initiatives and data to help employers focus even more on creating workplaces that are open to diversity, that is inclusive, and that are conducive to harnessing all the diverse talents that lie dormant in society. It's also important that such extensive collaboration has produced a range of important, relevant economic data, especially for, but not only for, employers, that argues for inclusion to be even higher on the list of priorities for responsible employers.

Because those employers who do not focus on diversity, who do not focus on inclusion, who do not consider diversity management as one of the elements of their organisational management strategy, will simply lose out. As the Open for Business report shows, they will lose strictly in the economic sense, which at the end of the day, or in quarterly terms, is very important for most companies. It is also important from the point of view of social cohesion, which we, as the Responsible Business Forum, also talk a lot about. Because, unfortunately, we face many inequalities in our country, with unequal access to many services, products or jobs, it is all the more important to talk about why it is worth focusing even more on strategic diversity management. An opportunity to speak even more often and to emphasise the role of diversity management is on the anniversary of the Diversity Charter in Poland. This initiative is already in place in 26 countries of the European Union, so we are happy to also meet its signatories, who are very active in not only improving, managing diversity in their organisations but also promoting these values externally”.

Miłosz Marchlewicz
Responsible Business Forum (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu)

„What is missing in Poland is a substantive discussion about what the real costs of discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community are, and these are costs that we all bear, not just the LGBTQ+ community. And today, I suspect that although we will, in the company of such fantastic experts gathered here, talk a lot about bar charts, numbers and effectiveness, it is not statistics related to the effectiveness of businesses that bring us together here today. I believe we are here for other reasons. And I say this as someone who spends half his life in front of Excel spreadsheets. I also believe that we are here today because of other statistics.

We are here because 50 per cent of the LGBTQ+ community in Poland has severe symptoms of depression. We are here because a similar proportion of the LGBTQ+ community in Poland has dealt with hate and hate-motivated violence. We are here because one in four LGBTQ+ students in Poland has had an episode of homelessness. Finally, we are also here because 10% of LGBTQ+ youth have been thrown out of their homes, in the last two years alone.

And we as business representatives and we as people do not agree that in Poland, that in our country, such statistics should continue. In a country which, for the third year in a row, was ranked last and became the least LGBTQ+-friendly country in the entire European Union. At the same time, we are not here to end our activism simply by bending to the fate of a group that is in a difficult situation. We are here because we believe that, as a business, we have something more to do than just generate profit. And I am not saying that profit is not important. Someone once said that profit for companies is like breathing for human beings, that is, we don't live without it. But it's not the purpose for which we wake up every morning, and I think we all understand that. And it's amazing for us as businesses, as people who are involved in the economy, what an impact we have on the reality in this country”.

Rafał Dembe,
Co-Chairman of Rainbow Network Poland, NatWest Group's employee network in Poland



Photo: Miłosz Marchlewicz, representative of Responsible Business Forum



Photo: Rafał Dembe, Co-Chairman of Rainbow Network in Poland

How much does discrimination against LGBTQ+ people cost us? A broad economic perspective

The conversation, moderated by Daniel Rząsa Editor-in-Chief of 300gospodarka.pl, featured:

- **Ewa Balcerowicz** - Vice President of the Board of the Association of Polish Economists
- **Witold Orłowski** - Chief Economic Advisor at PwC Poland, former Economic Advisor to the President of Poland;
- **James Hughes** - Minister-Counsellor for Economic Affairs at the British Embassy in Poland
- **Marcin Tomaszewski** - Economist at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, who presented selected findings of the Report „Economic Arguments for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe. Hungary, Poland, Romania and Ukraine”.



Photo: Participants sited from left to right – Daniel Rząsa, prof. Witold Orłowski, Ewa Balcerowicz, Marcin Tomaszewski

The economists' discussion opened with **Marcin Tomaszewski** presenting data from the Open For Business 2021 report showing that Central European countries are losing opportunities for foreign investment due to systemic discrimination against minorities. There is also a correlation between LGBTQ+ rights and the economic performance of countries and regions. Indicators such as the Global Innovation Index or the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index conclusively show that open, diverse societies foster economic growth. *"Today we speak the language of economics and show that discrimination costs money. In the case of Poland, it is between 0.2 and 0.4 per cent of GDP; regionally, the costs are as high as 1.75 per cent of GDP. In the case of Poland, it is the cost of maintaining all secondary education, and in the case of Romania, it is the cost of all health care, while in the case of Hungary it is the budget of the public media. And these are only the calculated direct costs"*, added Marcin Tomaszewski during the presentation of the Report's results.

Ewa Balcerowicz, Vice President of the Board of the Association of Polish Economists, said that the report is pioneering. *"We are blazing a trail when it comes to economic research involving the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the economy," she said. "This is extremely important because, in addition to the moral imperative, there is also a financial imperative,"* she stressed.

A similar view was held by Professor **Witold Ortowski**, former economic advisor to the President of the Republic of Poland and currently the chief economic advisor at PwC Poland. *"One should not discriminate, it is not allowed and it is not worth it,"* he said, pointing out the differences between morality, applicable law and the measurable economic effects of discrimination. And these last ones, according to the Open For Business Report, are mainly related to the phenomenon of the so-called 'brain drain'. *"The key challenge of today is to retain talent because real talent is the rarest resource in the economy. If we give them up ourselves, we will lose a lot concerning the competition,"* Professor Ortowski pointed out. Other panellists also focused on the need to retain highly qualified staff and the link between this topic and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. *"Policies that promote discrimination are stealing talent from the Polish economy,"* said Marcin Tomaszewski, an economist at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. He stressed that many skilled workers leave to work in more open societies. James Hughes, Minister-Counsellor for Economic Affairs at the British Embassy in Poland, agreed, referring to Polish-British relations and stressing that creating a climate for inclusion and diversity, including the promotion of rights for LGBTQ+ people, *is linked to economic gains across the economy and therefore this type of transformation is highly desirable.*

Participants in the discussion agreed that the current situation is not conducive to stopping the 'brain drain' of discrimination in our country. Nevertheless, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. *"It is optimistic that companies are starting to recognise the importance of talent. Initiatives such as Open For Business are very important because thanks to them I see good changes, which do not yet come out in surveys, but create cultural changes in Poland,"* said Ewa Balcerowicz. Professor Witold Ortowski, in turn, declared that he is a 'disillusioned optimist'. *"Many things are going in the right direction, but too slowly,"* he said.

Urban and regional development in the face of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people

The conversation, moderated by **Michał Giersz** of CD Projekt RED, featured:

- **Karolina Zdrodowska** - Director of the Coordinator for Entrepreneurship and Social Dialogue from the Warsaw City Hall;
- **Jolanta Niezgodzka** - City Councillor from Wrocław,
- **Marek Szolc** - City Councillor from Warsaw,
- **Nina Gabryś** - Plenipotentiary for Equality Policy under the Mayor of Krakow.

The discussion was introduced by video comments from Robert Biedroń - Member of the European Parliament and Mayor of Slupsk from 2014 to 2018.

"The Open for Business report very aptly describes the development prospects of urban hubs and the region in the shadow of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in economic and social fields. The economic arguments support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in Central and Eastern Europe. The study not only includes an analysis of economic data related to the private sector and the correlation with queer rights in the region but also describes economic opportunities and statistical surveys of regional businesses.

Poland is considered to be the most successful country among the Central and Eastern European countries that have joined the European Union and has taken many measures to strengthen its industry, especially the ICT sector and the food industry, which allows Poland to compete with EU member states and other countries. However, Poland will face several key economic and development challenges in the coming years. One of them is the reduction of the workforce due to brain drain and also the ageing population.

This problem is worsened by the lack of practices to foster employment inclusion. Poland also falls into the trap of a mediocre product. Despite the expansion of many new and promising industries, Poland is failing to develop world-class enterprises and innovations. All this does not look optimistic. This is why it is so important to consider the needs of LGBTQ+ people to be treated with dignity, fairness and freedom from discrimination in the labour market.

More and more companies, especially local ones, are accepting more diversity, making LGBTQ+ employees less afraid to be open about their psychosexual orientation at work. However, despite this, there is still much work to be done.

Local authorities have a major role to play, as they have specific tools to implement equality policies and influence the development of the social awareness of their residents from an early age. These tools are the introduction of anti-discrimination and sexuality education in schools, in line with World Health Organisation standards and guidelines, and support for NGOs working on diversity and acceptance.



Photo: Robert Biedroń, Polish MEP gave the speech online

Local authorities can also implement by-laws or a diversity charter in their subordinate institutions and the local authorities themselves, creating good role models and good practices in the workplace. They can also promote LGBTQ+ friendly employers and actively implement equality policies by working with them and spreading positive models of employer and employee attitudes in cooperation with contractors and businesses. Local authorities can also introduce good standards such as mandatory anti-discrimination clauses in contracts, with specific penalties for breaches. All these tools do not require any particular financial outlay, and their implementation will certainly bring very tangible financial benefits from overcoming inequalities.”

Robert Biedroń,

Member of the European Parliament and Mayor of Slupsk from 2014 to 2018



Photo: Participants sited from left to right – Michał Giersz, Karolina Zdrodowska, Jolanta Niezgodzka, Marek Szolc and Nina Gabryś (online)

At the beginning of the discussion, the panellists related the situation in local government to business, the practices and activities which are implemented in companies concerning diversity management and the benefits that this approach brings. The Warsaw Diversity Policy was given as an example of such initiatives. „This is a project that has been two years in the making, a very long preparation in collaboration with NGOs, so that it does not create the appearance of action, but that it introduces real changes in this local government and some other actions that will affect all projects, programmes and activities of institutions in our city,” said Karolina Zdrodowska, Director of the Coordinator for Entrepreneurship and Social Dialogue from the Warsaw City Hall. „We look at diversity as a huge potential and as a value with real economic returns behind it.”

In turn, **Jolanta Niezgodzka**, City Councillor from Wroclaw, referring to the words of Professor Witold Orłowski from an earlier panel, stressed that if a company plans to be competitive, wants to attract talent and retain it, it will also look for such a place, region, the country that will allow employees to fully realise themselves, to provide them with security and comfort. „Local governments, especially big cities, are more liberal centres and can take all sorts of actions, although I think we can as local governments do a lot more *because we have an incredible influence on these social changes*. In terms of education, we can do a lot, especially now that our national government is completely unsupportive of LGBTQ+ people, who seem to be their enemy.

Because of what is happening in Poland on a national scale, when headlines from our country reach people in the West, it may make them reluctant to take up employment in Poland, even if the local government creates good conditions, creates all kinds of programmes that will make LGBTQ+ people feel safe,” added Jolanta Niezgodzka. This view was agreed with by Marek Szolc, a Warsaw Councillor, who referred to his own professional experience, as a recruiter in a company, talking to potential employees. „For new employees, especially younger ones, it is very important that this diversity is accepted. It is a factor that influences the decision to work for a company. Today, the standard in Europe is marriage equality, the possibility to adopt children, and full protection against hate speech. This is something that both people from abroad coming to Poland and Polish LGBTQ+ people expect. And this is what we should all be striving for,” concluded Marek Szolc.

Nina Gabryś, Plenipotentiary for Equality Policy under the Mayor of Krakow, spoke about local government as an employer that should set a good example in terms of equal treatment and anti-discrimination. „We need to invest a lot in building internal awareness about what we define as discrimination, what we define as hate speech, what we define as bullying. These are issues that exist in every workplace at every employer. We have to counteract them, not only at the level of intervention but also at the level of prevention for education. Here we are dealing with a gap of several years of absence of these threads in the public sector.”

All panellists, referring to the current situation in Poland and the climate for LGBTQ+ people, stressed that to build places where it is good and safe to live and thrive, courageous and strong community leaders are needed who will communicate their support for diversity management, also in conservative regions.

LGBTQ+ women in the polish economy.

Fireside chat

Interview with **Danuta Sowińska**, President of the Diversity Poland Foundation, conducted by **Martyna Maciuszek** of 300gospodarka.pl.

Why do we need to talk separately about LGBT women in the Polish business? How is their situation different from that of non-heteronormative men?

This is because we women are treated less well. Although in Poland we have 52% women and 48% men, as a gender we are discriminated against. So, if we talk about the premise of gender discrimination, the focus here is largely on women. However, the moment we add the second premise, which is LGBTQ+ women, we are talking about cross discrimination or multiple discrimination. **Why is it so crucial to pay attention to precisely this combined discrimination? If only for the reason that we have to break through two ceilings.** Women, apart from the fact that they have issues asking for promotions at the workplace, are afraid to admit their homosexual or bisexual orientation, because this can be all the more likely to reduce their chance of promotion.

So, are there statistics, e.g., how many women in business are coming out? What does this look like at different levels of the business hierarchy?

Yes, such as the Accenture Report carried out in the UK, which addressed the visibility of LGBT women in business. It found that **73% of women are afraid of coming out in the workplace, 51% believe that being a woman can be a hindrance to their career progression and 29% believe that same-sex sexual attraction is a hindrance to career progression.** A survey I conducted on LinkedIn asked LGBT women whether they had come out in the workplace - 47% answered in the affirmative.

What can we do in the workplace, at different levels, to make the environment more inclusive?

Here I would like to use the words of Krzysztof Janiak from IKEA, that this process already starts when we write a job advertisement that includes inclusive language because it includes both genders. It also shows that a small change, such as an underscore between words [she/her, he/his, they/them], is enough for non-binary people.¹ It's also about creating a networking space for LGBTQ+ people, which gives them a chance to be themselves in the workplace. Such initiatives are emerging in global corporations and are being implemented in Poland and are completely cost-free. For LGBTQ+ customers, on the other hand, company activities such as presence at the Equality Parade, rainbow staff badges or special rainbow products are important, too.

What do you think schools or youth organizations could learn from a business on this issue? Do you think that any visibility of women: actresses, businesswomen, and sportswomen can help young LGBT girls?

As much as possible. I think **some people say it's just a symbol.** No, it is not just a symbol, a pin on a jacket lapel, rainbow socks, rainbow shoelaces or a pin on a backpack - they save lives. It's not a slogan I'm throwing around, it's the real statements and experiences of young people. **It gives them a sense of security. The more such messages are promoted, the more these so-called life-saving symbols there are, the more kids will live safely.**



Danuta Sowińska, President of the Diversity Poland Foundation

¹ In Polish, some nouns denote the gender of people regardless of the type of job or position they hold, e.g., a female engineer is an inżynierka and a male engineer is an inżynier.

Discrimination-driven brain drain vs. Business. Inclusivity and openness as weapons in the war for talent

The conversation, moderated by **Michał Giersz** of CD Projekt RED, featured:

- **Magdalena Kotlarczyk** - Country Director at Google Poland;
- **Rafał Dembe** - Co-President of Rainbow Network Poland;
- **Maja Zabawska** - Partner, Tax&Legal and Diversity & Inclusion Leader at Deloitte;
- **Cezary Żelaźnicki** - Legal Poland Managing Partner, CEE Inclusion & Diversity Leader at PwC
- **Karolina Koprianiuk** - Culture and D&I Director at CD Projekt RED.



Photo: Participants sited from left to right – Karolina Koprianiuk, Cezary Żelaźnicki, Maja Zabawska, Rafał Dembe, Magdalena Kotlarczyk

The final panel of the conference 'Poland: Open For Business Summit' began with a discussion on company values and their DNA. Is it possible for D&I to be the foundation of a modern, contemporary company, especially in the tech sector? „It has to be, because if an engineer has an offer from Google, then Warsaw's Google is competing with Google from Zurich or Munich. And my job is to convince that person to choose not Zurich, Munich or London, but precisely Warsaw as the place where it would be nice to develop their career here and now. That is why this is so important,” said **Magdalena Kotlarczyk** from Google Poland. **Rafał Dembe**, co-chairman of Rainbow Network Poland, spoke similarly, adding that it is not just about attracting talent, but also retaining it, and this ability of companies is their huge competitive advantage. „But let's also remember that as a business we have a unique role when it comes to shaping attitudes. If we're talking to our employees, we're educating them, because after all, these people are or will be parents who may have young transgender people around them, for whom such an educated parent or adult is a huge support.”

Maja Zabawska from Deloitte referred to leadership and role models in the promotion of activities for the LGBTQ+ community, as an example for the whole company team. „For an LGBTQ+ employee, it's very important that his/her boss has a similar story with them and supports this diversity in the organisation. It's very important and gives a sense of security.” Cezary Żelaźnicki of PwC was of a similar opinion, stressing that the main goal of the company he works for is to create an environment where LGBTQ+ people feel comfortable. „For example, when they come back from a holiday, they won't be embarrassed to say they were on it with their same-sex partner. We do an annual survey where we ask employees how we address diversity, and in that context, we influence people and business, and by doing that we achieve our mission,” he added.

Referring to the values of D&I, **Karolina Kopraniuk** of CD Projekt RED, pointed out that if a company like CD Projekt, operating in an environment of gamers from all over the world, employs people from different cultures, with different beliefs, professing different religions, this is reflected in their games, in all their products. A company like this needs to be able to deal with diversity because it also shows young people that there are values in this world and that there are companies or organisations worth applying to because you can feel safe there. „We have this power to educate and share what we have already developed and invented ourselves through consultation. And these good practices are necessary, they need to be spread, and I think with such small steps we will make the world a little bit better.”

Conclusions

During the meeting 'Poland: Open for Business. Summit 2022', two Reports prepared by experts from the organisation Open for Business were presented. The first concerned the economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe, examining countries economically close to Poland - such as Hungary, Romania and Ukraine - as well as Poland itself. The second report, entitled '**Inclusive cities. Dynamic economies. Better lives. Open For Business City Ratings 2022**', is a rating of cities on both LGBTQ+ indicators and economic viability. The results of these reports contributed to the discussion, both on the real costs of discrimination against sexual minorities, at the macro and micro level, and on the provision of safe and open inclusion places for investment and development by companies with D&I as one of their values or priorities.

Among the conclusions from the discussions, those most important or most clearly highlighted were:

- the need for regular studies and reports that recognise the real costs to economies of discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people;
- a need to monitor the implementation of recommendations from these studies on the costs of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people;
- creation of platforms for the exchange of good practices implemented in diversity management, both in business and in local government;
- promoting good places to live (cities) and to grow (companies) that are guided by D&I values, perhaps through joint communication and promotional activities;
- using the potential in cities and in companies, to educate widely on diversity and the effects of discrimination;
- identifying and strengthening formal and informal leaders who support and promote diversity and discrimination prevention activities.

