

## SAWEI 2021 results show encouraging increase in participation, awareness

The South African LGBT+ Management Forum (The Forum) recently announced the results of the 2021 South African Workplace Equality Index (SAWEI). The index provides South African organisations with a means to measure their progress against independently determined and research-based best practice regarding LGBT+ inclusion. It allows companies to identify their relative strengths and areas for improvement within a clearly structured framework.



Now in its third edition, 23 companies completed SAWEI in full, with 7 companies competing for the first time. In total these companies employ 161,155 people and it was encouraging to see a wide spread of companies across sectors participating this year, particularly amongst major employers including banks and retailers.

### **Five companies that received the top Gold tiering:**

Ernst & Young, McKinsey & Company, Procter & Gamble, Unilever South Africa, and Vodacom South Africa

### **Silver tier companies include:**

Accenture, Baker McKenzie Inc, Bayer, Norton Rose Fulbright, Novartis, PriceWaterhouse Coopers, Standard Bank, SAP, and Uber Technologies

The participants this year scored higher than participants in 2018 and 2019. We are optimistic that this is indicative of a South African workplace that is becoming more LGBT+ inclusive. All companies that have been tiered can be considered leaders in their field for LGBT+ inclusion.

The structure of the SAWEI mirrors the Forum's framework of LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace, which consists of six elements that address both the 'structures' and 'behaviours' within a company - both of which are critical to workplace inclusion. The 2021 survey had 18 questions and provided a point scale as per previous surveys in order to provide participants with a useful comparison to help track and monitor progress year on year.

### **Key observations this year include:**

- The highest scoring sections were "Diverse and Inclusive thought" and "Awareness and Sensitivity"
- The lowest scoring section continues to be on "Visibility", for a third time in a row
- Nearly all companies have some form of anti-discrimination policy based on sexual orientation, but there continues to be poor clarity on the difference between gender and gender identity
- Policies that are trans-sensitive continue to be an indicator of overall performance in the SAWEI
- Explicit policies protecting LGBT+ employees in hostile regions continues to be a key differentiator of our high performing companies
- Almost all of our participants had some form of active LGBT+ network or employee resource group, with most having an "allies" programme
- Diversity training and awareness continues to be widely implemented
- We saw far less divergence on the inclusion of LGBT+ within Employment Equity (EE) Forums, which could signify the mainstreaming of LGBT+ inclusion alongside other dimensions such as race, gender and disability
- Covid-19 appears to have impacted the level of communication and general activity for some participants, which in some cases resulted in lower tiering than previous years
- We also saw some outstanding work and investments into new systems that allow for pronoun identification, LGBT+ marketing focus groups and other initiatives looking at the broader spectrum of sexual orientation and identity

The SAWEI is the continent's only index measuring levels of LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace, and sits alongside similar indices in Australia, Hong Kong, the USA, UK and Canada. All companies who participated should be commended for their willingness to participate and seek independent feedback as they progress on their inclusion journey.

Thabang Sebata, Director of the Forum, said: "As companies navigated and adjusted to a new normal within the context of the Covid pandemic, it is our hope that SAWEI will be a critical enabler to making the South African workplace a more inclusive place for all. A change in attitudes and acceptance in the workforce has the potential to create wider positive change. Moving forward, we plan to use the SAWEI as a platform to create dialogue between employers in order to share

best practice.”

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