

Part 2: Good practices

Bulgaria

VentureOUT for companies



VentureOUT offers practical career guidance support to LGBTQ people in Bulgaria, and a corporate benchmark index for companies offering a gender inclusive working environment

Target groups: Young LGBTQ people at the beginning of their careers;
Organisations promoting gender inclusion in the workplace.

Focus: Staff training

Single Step was established in November 2016 by Ivan Dimov. Since March 2018, the organisation has offered a free and confidential helpline for career counselling of young LGBTQ people and supporting the development of employability skills. In 2019, they launched the VentureOUT for companies initiative and a Corporate Index to serve as the benchmark for corporate inclusion policies and practices of large Bulgarian and multinational corporations in the country.

Objectives:

The VentureOut initiative was initiated by Konstantin Kunev, a volunteer in Single Step, who has a wealth of experience in the field of human resources. Based on personal experience and knowing how important it is to be recognised and accepted in your workplace, he wants to help others feel happy at work and communicate fully with their employer.

Methodology:

VentureOUT for LGBTQ people: Individuals can request and schedule a consultation either online (via Skype) or in person, filling in a short questionnaire with a few basic questions concerning education, the desired field of development, etc. The consultation takes one hour and is free; it is also possible to arrange further consultations, depending on individual needs. The online services enable national outreach and is a good option for those individuals who want to remain anonymous. The main concern of the clients has been the fear about the working environment and the lack of information about gender-inclusive companies.

VentureOUT for companies: Thus, Single Step decided to focus their efforts on working with companies to attract LGBTQ people. They created a LGBTQ-friendly Corporate Index to provide benchmark for corporate inclusion policies and practices of the companies in Bulgaria and serve as a guide for job



seekers. The ranking is aimed at both large companies and start-ups on the Bulgarian market. They can be included in the index by filling out the Single Step website enrolment form. They will then receive a questionnaire, based on which their index will be determined. The founder of the foundation says that some of the issues involved are whether they have specific policies for attracting LGBTQ people, whether they conduct in-house training, or have a channel for reporting harassment.

Impact:

Since March 2018, the anonymous helpline service was used by over 560 people in more than 85 locations across Bulgaria. 33 individuals used the career guidance services, 17 of whom found employment and 8 continued their studies in order to gain additional skills. More than 20 companies support the initiative.

Conclusion:

In the course of Single Step's mission, to offer specific resources to LGBTQ people in Bulgaria, the organisation's activity has expanded with the provision of VentureOUT initiative. Although it is a good start, it still has a long way to go. The need for such an initiative is confirmed by the latest Eurobarometer survey, according to which 49% of Bulgarians feel uncomfortable if they work with a gay, lesbian or bisexual person on a daily basis. In addition to being the highest percentage among EU Member States, it has increased in recent years. The initial intent of publicly promoting those gender-inclusive companies has not yet been realised, due to the homophobic attitudes in society.

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