

Letter of the Dutch minister to Parliament about bi+ equality

This [Parliamentary Letter](#) was translated from Dutch to English by Bi+ Nederland in order to share this information with our international network.

Date: 28th of June 2023

Subject: Results of research and ongoing activities regarding the equality of bi+ people

During the Equality Policy legislative consultation of December 5th 2022, I made a commitment to Member of Parliament Mutluer (PvdA) on the equality of bi+ people. The term bi+ people refers to the group of people who are attracted to more than one gender. It is an umbrella term which includes multiple labels, such as bisexual, pansexual or non-monosexual.¹ The commitment concerns an inventory of the results of the already conducted studies, which measures I am able to take as coordinating minister of equality and where, if any, additional insights are needed.² With this letter, I inform you about this inventory.

Introduction

The equality of bi+ people does not stand alone but is part of a broader LGBTIQ+ equality. Where possible, therefore, it is aligned with the general equality policy and, where necessary, specific bi+ policies are formed. This requires an understanding of both the well-being of the LGBTIQ+ community in a general sense as well as the position of bi+ people specifically. The LGBT monitor has revealed that the position of bi+ people lags behind the position of lesbian women and gay men (LG group)³. For example, bi+ women were found to be more likely to experience physical violence, have fewer opportunities on the labour market and bi+ people are more likely to have poor mental health.

My predecessor therefore provided Bi+ Nederland a subsidy during the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022, in order to work on the equality of bi+ people in the Netherlands. Among the regular activities, besides community building and developing tools and campaigns to advance bi+ equality, conducting a number of studies are also included. The aim of these studies is to gain more insight into the possible challenges that bi+ people face, the possible underlying causes, the areas where these challenges take place and the impact on the well-being of bi+ people.

General research results⁴⁵

The group of bi+ people is very diverse and is less visible as a group than lesbian women and gay men. In addition, many bi+ people do not always identify themselves as such but use other labels for

¹ In this report, the term 'bi+ people' is defined as: people who experience sexual and/or romantic attraction to multiple genders and/or people who (recently) have (had) sexual and/or romantic experiences with people of multiple genders. Also, people who self-identify as bisexual, bi+, pansexual, heteroflex, or queer are part of the bi+ group.

² House of Representatives, session 2022-2023, 36 200 VIII, no 183.

³ Social and Cultural Planning Office, LGBT Monitor 2022, 05-07-2022.

⁴Bi+ survey research, 'Not in one box: experiences and well-being of bi+ people in Netherlands', March 2021, <https://biplus.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Rapport-%E2%80%93-Niet-in-een-hokje-maart-2021.pdf>

⁵ Bi+ qualitative research, 'I never was the default: qualitative research into the perceptions of bi+ adults', October 2021, <https://biplus.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ik-was-altijd-al-niet-standaard-Beleving-Bi.pdf>

their sexual orientation. Despite the fact that it is not easy to define this group, it is a large group of about one million people who, as mentioned above, still remain relatively invisible.⁶

Both inside and outside the Netherlands, there is still often the expectation that people are only attracted to one gender. As a result, a bi+ orientation is often not seen as full-fledged and seen as something temporary. One of the surveys conducted by Bi+ Netherland revealed that 45% of bi+ people have experienced that people do not believe that their orientation is real and 83% of bi+ people would want their sexual orientation to be taken more seriously.

This combination of unfamiliarity, diversity and invisibility can lead to prejudice about bi+ people and lead to their exclusion in both the straight and the LGBTIQ+ community. At the same time, research shows that bi+ people feel at home in the bi+ community and also increasingly in the wider LGBTIQ+ community. This is positive yet does not detract from the fact that bi+ people's well-being lags behind in at least some areas.

Results and policies in different areas

Health

The studies reveal that the mental health of bi+ people lags behind compared to people who are attracted to one gender. For instance, they experience more depressive moods and general anxiety: 33% of bi+ persons are mentally unhealthy, compared to 13% of the LG group and 11% of heterosexual people. This can be explained by the lack of recognition and acknowledgement experienced by bi+ people, which can result in internalized stigma and lack of self-acceptance.

Within the alliance '*Gezondheidszorg op Maat 2* (Tailor-made healthcare 2) with which I have a five-year strategic partnership is paying attention to this. This alliance is committed to ensuring that women and LGBTIQ+ people have equal opportunities for good mental health. They do this by conducting research, creating products that help healthcare providers and people who need care, launching campaigns and by advocating for policies and regulations in the field of healthcare. In my role as coordinating minister for equality, I will continue to talk to them about the situation of bi+ people in the Netherlands.

Workplace

Research also reveals that bi+ people are less satisfied with their working conditions, more often experience unequal opportunities and experience undesirable behavior more often than people with a monosexual orientation. For example, 27% of bi+ people have had experience in the past year with undesirable behavior of colleagues, compared to 17% of heterosexuals people.

It is not yet sufficiently known what exactly the experiences of bi+ people are and how the unfavorable differences can be explained and understood. There is therefore an exploration of the experiences of bi+ people on the labour market, carried out by Bi+ Nederland in collaboration with Leiden University. The results of this research are expected in 2024 and will be shared. The results will be used to provide insights and tools spread about improving the position of bi+ people on the labour market.

School

In schools, less attention is paid to bisexuality than to homosexuality. Research collected by Bi+

⁶ This large group also includes people who do not call themselves bisexual, but based on attraction, behaviour and relationships, do show a plurisexual orientation.

Nederland shows that in secondary education 86% of schools pay attention to bisexuality compared to 100% of schools paying attention to homosexuality. In senior secondary vocational figure is lower, with 20% of schools paying attention to bisexuality compared to 60% who pay attention to homosexuality.⁷

Schools in primary and secondary (special) education are required by law to pay attention to sexuality and diversity within 'the key objectives'. This includes paying attention to dealing respectfully with sexual diversity. Schools are also legally obliged to teach their pupils knowledge of and respect for the basic values of the democratic constitutional state and to enable them to acquire the social and civic competences needed to do so. In addition, schools are obliged to ensure a socially safe environment. The Education Inspection monitors the implementation of these statutory duties. Teachers and schools are allowed to fulfil this legal task. For secondary vocational education, the topic of (sexual) diversity is part of the generic qualification requirements for citizenship.

To encourage respectful treatment of sexual diversity at schools, I support several initiatives. One example is a grant to the alliance "Colourful and Free (Kleurrijk en Vrij)" (COC, TNN, NNID and Bi+ Nederland) which works, among other things, on promoting LGBTIQ+ equality in education through gender and sexuality alliances (GSA's) and education in schools. An important development is that Bi+ Nederland has joined the alliance this funding round. Another example is the signpost website www.jouwveiligeschool.nl where pupils, carers and education professionals can go to with concerns and questions about social insecurity at school.⁸ One example is Gendi from the School and Safety Foundation, where teachers can go to for inspiration, information and advice in making space for gender and sexual diversity in the classroom.⁹

Furthermore, I will engage with parties in the social field to see where it is necessary to include the equality of bi+ people more specifically in their activities and what is needed to do so. I will inform your Chamber in the Equality Progress Report.

Physical sexual violence

When it comes to the issue of sexual violence, there is still a world to be won for bi+ people. Bi+ people are significantly more likely to experience physical sexual violence and non-physical sexual harassment. For example, 25% of bi+ men have ever experienced physical sexual violence compared to 14% of gay men and 5% of heterosexual men. Among women, the difference is even greater. As many as 52% of bi+ women have experienced physical sexual violence compared to 27% of lesbian women and 21% of heterosexual women.

The National Action Programme (NAP) tackling sexual transgressive behavior and sexual violence, is currently working hard to tackle these problems. It is being examined whether, and if so which, targeted attention is needed for vulnerable groups, such as bi+ people.

In addition to this, I am working with the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, the Minister of Legal Protection and the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment to tackle gender-based violence as announced in the coalition agreement. Gender-based violence is an umbrella term which includes several forms of violence. This concerns violence inflicted on someone because of gender, biological sex, gender identity or gender expression, and violence that affects people of a particular biological sex or gender identity which is disproportionately affected. As such, this approach therefore also

⁷ Bi+ Knowledge Synthesis Dutch research on bi+ people and themes, 22 September 2020, <https://biplus.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Kennisynthese-Nederlandse-onderzoeken-over-bi.pdf/>

⁸ Your Safe School, <https://www.jouwveiligeschool.nl>

⁹ Gendi, gender and sexual diversity in education, <https://www.gendi.nl>

targets bi+ people who, because of their sexual orientation, are disproportionately affected by physical sexual violence.

The approach builds on existing efforts and connects and strengthens these efforts. It is an integrated approach that focuses on prevention, protection, prosecution and policy. Through this approach, I want to guarantee the right to a life free from violence, the right to physical and mental integrity and the right to non-discrimination guarantee for bi+ people, among others.

Other policies

Bi+ equality, as mentioned earlier, does not stand alone. Wherever possible I therefore try to stimulate the equality of bi+ people within the general policy. Below I give some examples of this.

Alliance Colourful and Free (Kleurrijk en Vrij)

As mentioned, I provide an institutional grant to the alliance 'Kleurrijk en Vrij' (Colourful and Free) who is committed to LGBTIQ+ equality in the Netherlands. In addition to its commitment to education, the alliance focuses on media, labour, safety, care and welfare, and asylum. The alliance is committed to community building among and visibility of bi+ people. They do this by easy-to-find information about bi+ people through campaigns on social media and their website. In addition, they initiate innovative research in cooperation with (scientific) partners and ensure that this knowledge is made accessible to their constituencies. The alliance is also focused on more bi+ inclusive media by supporting and educating networks of ambassadors and collaborations with people working in the media landscape.

'Colourful and Free' increases the visibility of bi+ people and reduces the prejudices of this group, resulting in embedding bi+ within the LGBTIQ+ community.

LGBTIQ+ monitor

I am currently tendering for the new LGBTIQ+ monitor. In doing so, I am also looking at where updating and broadening is possible so that we can gain more insight into the group of bi+ people.

We are looking at the possibility of working with the bi+ umbrella term instead of 'bisexual'. The monitor will also look at whether and how the social attitudes towards the bi+ group can be distinguished from gay and lesbian people. And where this is not yet the case, the aim is to specify data about the living situation of bi+ people in the research as much as possible. To what extent and in what way figures will actually become available, still depends on the precise possibilities that the researchers see later in the elaboration of the assignment.

International

At the international level, policy focuses on the entire LGBTIQ+ community. Equal rights of LGBTIQ+ persons are one of the priorities of the current Dutch human rights policy. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science supports the European umbrella organizations ILGA-Europe, Transgender Europe and IGLYO. Outside Europe, the Netherlands is also one of the largest funders of projects to support the LGBTIQ+ community. We also advocate for the succession of EU Equality Commissioner Dali, who is committed to the acceptance of and equal rights for bi+ people, among others.

Specifically for the bi+ group, the Netherlands is the first country to fund an interest organization dedicated specifically to this group. Bi+ Netherland has in recent years organized several international meet ups for bi+ activists and these meetings are internationally appreciated and well attended. From the 'Colourful and Free' alliance, this will be continued in the coming years.

Intersectional approach

As included in the Equality Memorandum, not all women and LGBTIQ+ people face the same grounds for exclusion or prejudice. To develop and deploy more effective policy interventions, I am working on an intersectional approach. Where relevant and possible, the issue of bi+ people will be included in this.

In conclusion

With this letter, I have given you an overview of the results of the research conducted in recent years and the activities I am undertaking from my Ministry. I want to continue my commitment to the equality of bi+ people, within the broader LGBTIQ+ policy where possible and specifically for bi+ policy where necessary.

Minister of Education, Culture and Science,

Robbert Dijkgraaf