



On July 11th Out & Equal partnered with [Pride Circle](#), India's premier diversity and inclusion organization, to host the [2023 LGBTQI+ APAC Forum: A Day of Transformation](#) in Bangalore, India. Bangalore, also known as the "*The Silicon Valley of India*," is situated in the heart of South India and boasts the country's [highest concentration of IT companies](#). With an average [economic growth rate of 8.5 percent](#), it's among the world's [top 10 fastest-growing cities](#)—and home to Out & Equal's first-ever, in-person APAC (Asia-Pacific) Forum.

The inaugural LGBTQI+ APAC Forum united nearly 300 change agents from ten countries: India, Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States. Participants included influential leaders with roles in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB), Human Resources (HR) and, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)—making for an epic day of transformation.

The Forum is a true celebration of representation, authenticity, and change making in real-time. Highlights from this year include inspirational keynote remarks from the two leading petitioners in the marriage equality case before the Indian High Court, practical guidance and best practices on transgender and nonbinary inclusion, and cross-cultural highlights of both corporate social responsibility (CSR) and social impact marketing in the region.



About Out & Equal's LGBTQI+ APAC Forum

With some of the largest populations and economies in the world, the Asia-Pacific region has a significant influence on public policy as well as global business priorities and goals. In 2017 Out & Equal began collaborating with corporate and community partners in China and India to create workplaces where everyone truly belongs. This effort has since expanded to work in tandem with organizations across the Asia-Pacific region to address timely issues specific to LGBTQI+ equality inside the workplace and beyond.



- **Marriage equality brings great economic benefits:** The United States saw an estimated \$3.8 billion boost in state and local economies within the first five years of nationwide marriage equality. The economic impact of marriage legalization in India could create a similar compounding effect on India's \$130 billion wedding industry.
- **Diversity spurs innovation and profitability:** A 2020 McKinsey Study tracked six years of data and found that more ethnically and culturally diverse businesses are as much as 36 percent more profitable than the least diverse companies. The profitability gap widens to 48 percent between the most and least diverse businesses according to gender alone.
- **APAC businesses are embracing LGBTQI+ inclusion programs:** A recent APAC diversity and inclusion study shows that more than 40 percent of companies have an LGBTQI+ inclusion program. Additionally, many leading companies in the region participate in the India Workplace Equality Index and the Hong Kong LGBT+ Inclusion Index, the first benchmarks of their kind in Asia.
- **Issue-based advocacy is rising across APAC:** Across Asia, the population is active in advocacy, with 84 percent noting that they advocate for at least one issue. A recent study surveying APAC consumers found that 51 percent of respondents agreed in the importance of "making people with different backgrounds more included in society" versus 11 percent who preferred to keep the current societal structures.



(Left to Right): Akriti Rana (She/Her), Deena Fidas (She/Her), Corina Hendren (She/Her)

Designed to celebrate diversity, foster inclusion, and drive change, the 2023 LGBTQI+ APAC Forum was a welcomed addition to Bengaluru's month-long Pride celebration and has been hailed as one of the year's most inclusive and empowering Out & Equal events. In fact, Out & Equal has spent the last six years building networks, nurturing relationships, and developing resources that speak directly to the unique needs of countries across the APAC region.

Out & Equal senior leadership was honored to share personal stories and best practices alongside trailblazers from across the region as LGBTQI+ couples awaited India's Supreme Court marriage equality decision—five years after the decriminalization of same-sex relations. And celebrated together as Nepal made history, becoming the first country in South Asia to legally recognize marriage equality in a major victory for LGBTQI+ rights.

The theme, *A Day of Transformation*, was woven throughout the day-long forum, which served as a hub and welcome safe space enabling advocates to unite across cultures, languages, beliefs, and politics. Aligned in a proactive push toward truly transformative LGBTQI+ policies and approaches to inclusion, attendees embraced their differences and remained keenly focused on shared goals of workplace advocacy, equity, and belonging.

Welcome And Kickoff

Deena Fidas (She/Her), Managing Director & Chief Programs and Partnerships Officer, Out & Equal, and **Ramkrishna Sinha** (He/Him), Co-Founder, Pride Circle & Rainbow Bazaar, began the day with an enthusiastic welcome and brief history on the uniqueness of our work in the APAC region.

“The hunger for thought leadership, collaboration, and celebration of the LGBTQI+ community is at an all-time high across the region, validating our increased investments in people and partnerships here. With India’s seminal marriage expected to be handed down very soon, we are not witnessing history; we—collectively—are shaping it.”

Deena Fidas (She/Her), Managing Director & Chief Programs and Partnerships Officer, Out & Equal

Sinha, the self-professed dreamer, believer, and changemaker, echoed Deena’s sentiment.

“It has been an absolute pleasure partnering with Out & Equal for the APAC Forum. To have delegates from 10+ countries gives me hope for the future of LGBTQI+ inclusion in APAC. We are particularly optimistic in India as we await the verdict of the Supreme Court on the marriage equality case.”

Ramkrishna Sinha (He/Him), Co-Founder, Pride Circle & Rainbow Bazaar



Deena Fidas (She/Her)



Ramkrishna Sinha (He/Him)

Keynote Remarks

Following the opening remarks, **Zainab Patel** (She/Her), Petitioner for the Indian Supreme Court NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) case on transgender rights and for the Indian Supreme Court marriage equality case, spoke on her 20+ years of experience as a DEIB advocate, including her groundbreaking work on behalf of marriage equality and transgender rights.

“The Out and Equal APAC summit enables us to welcome and help lift our community in a way we can’t do as individuals. The summit curates leadership and convenes conversation that doesn’t happen in our daily lives or at work. It brings together individuals, activists, allies, corporations, and stakeholders to exchange views and foster partnerships and synergies to make things happen.”

Zainab Patel (She/Her), Petitioner for the Indian Supreme Court NALSA Case on Transgender Rights and for the Indian Supreme Court Marriage Equality Case



Zainab Patel (She/Her)



Utkarsh Saxena (He/Him)

Utkarsh Saxena (He/Him), Petitioner & Lawyer for the Indian Supreme Court marriage equality case, delivered the second keynote address. The attorney and development economist spoke candidly about the evolving state of LGBTQI+ rights, stressing the importance of leaders and allies leveraging shared knowledge to expand LGBTQI+ civil rights.

“APAC is having a moment for LGBTQI+ rights, even as many other parts of the world seem to be regressing. India, Nepal, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, and South Korea are all moving forward in their quest for marriage equality. In such times, getting important stakeholders of these movements on a common platform is an incredible opportunity to reflect and learn from each other’s experiences.”

Utkarsh Saxena (He/Him), Petitioner & Lawyer for the Indian Supreme Court Marriage Equality Case



Opening Plenary: Glocalizing LGBTQI+ Inclusion: An APAC Case Study



(Left to Right): Erik Day (He/Him), Mukesh Batra (He/Him), Jeiz Robles (She/Her), Zahara Fernandes (She/Her)

The keynotes were followed by a powerful, four-person panel outlining the importance of using a *glocalized* (“global” + “local”) approach to LGBTQI+ inclusion. In this framework, companies reject “one-way street” approaches to exporting headquarter-based DEIB practices and instead engage in “two-way street” interactive approaches to make these practices resonant at the local level as well as fuel global policy refinements from local knowledge and insights.

Panel Excerpts:

“Diversity is already a fact. Inclusion is how we are choosing to deal with this fact. While global practices provide a helpful foundation in shaping inclusive strategies in the workplace, they need to be localized to the various conditions of the different countries in Asia. Convening leaders who take this approach scales the impact we are making in our respective spaces.”

Jeiz Robles (She/Her), Asia Pacific Marketplace Diversity Leader, IBM

“Each of us in the region is on our unique path of acceptance and collaboration. Learning from each other is not optional. I am looking forward to this day of transformation as a great space for sharing ideas, best practices, and learning from countries across APAC as we continue to move forward in the path of inclusive action to create belonging.”

Zahara Fernandes (She/Her), Managing Director Global Delivery & India Pride Sponsor, Accenture

“I couldn’t be more thrilled to join Out & Equal, colleagues, community members, and allies around the APAC region to discuss the importance of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workplace. Specifically for APAC, it is important we take a multidimensional approach that includes infusing both global and regional solutions on inclusion to help give businesses a competitive edge in the marketplace.”

Erik Day (He/Him), Senior Vice President, Global Small Business, Dell ,Chair, Out & Equal Board of Directors

“The world we live in is changing fast. It is important that we play an active role to influence the pace and direction of these changes and are not just invisible observers. Collaboration amongst us at a local, regional, and global level empowers us. It means a better understanding of the issues, appreciation of diverse perspectives, and access to a vast repository of best practices and solutions. Glad to join #APACForum2023, where the best minds from across the region will get together and help take the LGBTQI+ workplace inclusion agenda forward.”

Mukesh Batra (He/Him), Senior Vice President, Bank of America



Weena Ekid (He/Him)

Storytelling Series: Trans & Nonbinary Inclusion

Building and scaling inclusive policies, practices, and programs, which can include inclusive healthcare, hiring and retention practices, and establishing name and pronoun-sharing practices, can sometimes face resistance. The most impactful solutions often involve cultivating empathy and understanding through the power of personal narrative sharing. **Weena Ekid** (He/Him), Vice President, Corporate & Investment Bank, JPMorgan Chase & Co., spoke on his experience as a trans and nonbinary executive, while offering guidance and actionable steps toward full inclusion.

"Now more than ever, the conversations on workplace inclusion and belongingness are very important around the world. Out & Equal's APAC Forum enables us to come together and have these discussions within the region. We are fortunate that #APACForum2023 has provided proper platforms to share best practices, hear stories, and draft meaningful impacts to our respective organizations and communities."

Weena Ekid (He/Him), Vice President, Corporate & Investment Bank, JPMorgan Chase & Co.

LGBTQI+ Women in Leadership

In recent decades, countries around the world have made significant advancements toward reducing gender and LGBTQI+ inequalities. While women, including LGBTQI+ women, have achieved greater participation in the labor market and political spheres, a wide gap remains. [A recent APAC Gender Equality study reports that women make up just 4 percent of CEOs and 5 percent of board chairs.](#)

Charlene Liu (She/Her), Co-Founder, Diversity & Inclusion Consulting (DNIC), concluded the storytelling series by sharing her experience as an LGBTQI+ woman in leadership, including strategies for advancement and for building inherently inclusive work cultures.



Charlene Liu (She/Her)



The Breakout Sessions

From Inception to Change Agents: ERG Phases of Development

The initial phases of creating and maintaining a well-integrated and impactful ERG—building a business case to attaining buy-in, cultivating active participation, and formalizing a budget—can be a whirlwind. During this interactive workshop, attendees explored different ways to develop and refine the vision, mission, and actions of ERGs, including strategies for positioning ERGs as valuable DEIB resources and critical business assets.

Panel Excerpt:

“Finally, the time is here for our APAC Out & Equal family to come together, listen, learn, and lead throughout our Day of Transformation and beyond! Out & Equal has an amazing way of bringing companies and people together in a true intersectional way. The understanding of inclusion, equity, and transformation is as vast as the colors of the rainbow for our LGBTQI+ employees, our allies, and more. What Out & Equal continues to do is bring together senior decision-makers, global and regional leaders, and allies from all over this vast region while creating a space for community, connection, collaboration, and transparent communication.”

Curtis Baker (He/Him), Regional Inclusion & Diversity and Employee Experience Lead, Asia, Dow Chemical International Pvt Ltd

Panel Members:

- **Curtis Baker** (He/Him), Regional Inclusion & Diversity and Employee Experience Lead, Asia, Dow Chemical International Pvt Ltd
- **Preksha Bothra** (She/Her), Sr. Program Manager–DEI, Pride Circle
- **Jeiz Robles** (She/Her), Asia Pacific Marketplace Diversity Leader, IBM
- **Arunabh Singh** (He/Him), Chief Compliance Officer & Co-Chair of Citi India Pride Inclusion Network, Citi



(Left to Right): Preksha Bothra (She/Her), Curtis Baker (He/Him), Jeiz Robles (She/Her), Arunabh Singh (He/Him)



Ramkrishna Sinha (He/Him) and Zainab Patel (She/Her)

Building Bridges: Corporate-Community Partnerships

Building bridges between marginalized communities and businesses is a vital best practice for holistic DEIB strategies to tap under-leveraged talent pools while engaging in authentic knowledge-building of local communities where businesses operate. Attendees of this interactive session joined **Zainab Patel** (She/Her), Petitioner for the Indian Supreme Court NALSA case on transgender rights and for the Indian Supreme Court marriage equality case, and **Ramkrishna Sinha** (He/Him), Co-Founder, Pride Circle & Rainbow Bazaar, in a thought-provoking conversation rooted in the importance of building authentic relationships with community organizations, with each emphasizing how important LGBTQI+ inclusion is for both companies and communities.

Diversifying the Supply Chain: Strengthening Your Commitment to LGBTQI+ Inclusion

Establishing supplier diversity initiatives creates opportunity and demand for minority-owned businesses within corporate supply chains. Partnering with organizations that support LGBTQI+ entrepreneurs and businesses or collaborating with certifying bodies, such as local chambers of commerce, facilitates access to LGBTQI+ owned businesses, in addition to the economic benefit of creating greater competition among suppliers. This dynamic panel delved into the unique challenges and opportunities that exist and are created when corporations remain intentional about leveraging inclusivity and innovation to transform their supply chains.

Panel Members:

- **Kanishka Chaudhry** (He/Him), Co-Founder, Samavesh Chamber of Commerce
- **Jayant Parte** (He/Him), Lead-Logistics Procurement (Indian Subcontinent), Dow Chemical International Pvt Ltd.
- **Priyanka Shetty** (She/Her), Associate Director-Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Pride Circle
- **Priyank Asha Sukanand** (He/Him), LGBTQI+ Rights Activists & Entrepreneur, Bangalore Connection 1888



(Left to Right): Priyanka Shetty (She/Her), Jayant Parte (He/Him), Kanishka Chaudhry (He/Him), Priyank Asha Sukanand (He/Him)



Leveraging Your Brand: The Power of Visibility

Throughout recent years, through the power of brand visibility, we have witnessed more and more corporations demonstrating support for the LGBTQI+ community, especially during Pride Month. While inclusive representation is critical, in this candid conversation, panelists delve into why authentic relationship building is best, exploring with participants strategies that leverage brand visibility to advance LGBTQI+ inclusion 24/7, 365 days a year.



(Left to Right): Srini Ramaswamy (He/Him), Anubhuti Banerjee (She/Her), Sneha Suresh (She/Her), Sahil Sethi (He/Him)

Panel Members:

- **Anubhuti Banerjee** (She/Her), Sr. Manager IT C&I, Tata Steel Ltd.
- **Srini Ramaswamy** (He/Him), Co-Founder, Pride Circle & Rainbow Bazaar
- **Sahil Sethi** (He/Him), Category Leader, Personal Healthcare, P&G India
- **Sneha Suresh** (She/Her), Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Leader | India and Philippines, Wells Fargo

A Measure for Inclusion: The India Workplace Equality Index

The [India Workplace Equality Index \(IWEI\)](#) is India's first comprehensive benchmarking tool for companies to measure their progress on LGBTQI+ Inclusion. First launched in 2020 by Keshav Suri Foundation (KSF), Pride Circle, and Stonewall, the 2022 index measured 105 organizations and, for the first time, recognized outstanding individuals and companies. In this cutting-edge session, participants learned how to adapt inclusion programs from other regions, plus how to leverage the benchmarking tool to curate unique DEIB blueprints.

Panel Members:

- Dhritisha Bhagawati (She/Her), Senior Program Manager, Pride Circle
- Sanjay Paramesh (He/Him), Vice President– Business Management & Pride Co-chair – GSC
- Zoya (They/Them), Manager–D&I, Employer Branding, Godrej Properties



(Left to Right): Dhritisha Bhagawati (She/Her), Zoya (They/Them), Sanjay Paramesh (He/Him)



Leading with Authenticity

The word “authenticity” has become an integrated part of conversations around LGBTQI+ workplace inclusion. What does authentic leadership really look like? In this candid conversation, **Gaurav Sharma** (He/Him), Vice President-IBM Cloud and Cognitive Software, IBM, walked participants through strategies designed to help professionals explore and leverage their unique leadership styles to create work environments rooted in honest dialogue, empathy, and unapologetic inclusivity.



Gaurav Sharma (He/Him)

High Tea

The dynamic, first-ever 2023 LGBTQI+ APAC Forum concluded with traditional High Tea and closing remarks from Fidas and Sinha. The workplace advocates reiterated the importance of aligning system-wide DEIB practices with the authentic needs of the LGBTQI+ workforce. They encouraged attendees to think *glocally*, to stay connected, and to build alliances that transcend perceived borders.

“There have been great strides in the field, from hiring LGBTQI+ talent to supplier diversity, and more companies are recognizing the value of inclusion and are stepping up their efforts. The forum reaffirmed that together we can make a difference and build a kinder and more inclusive world.”

Ramkrishna Sinha (He/Him), Co-Founder, Pride Circle & Rainbow Bazaar

“The receptivity to the first regional Out & Equal #APACForum2023 has been overwhelming. And we couldn’t be more grateful. From increased productivity to overall job satisfaction, an inclusive workplace isn’t just good for business—inclusivity unites and strengthens our global LGBTQI+ communities at large. We entered today with hope and leave, having transformed that hope into resolve, with collective strategies for change.”

Deena Fidas (She/Her), Managing Director & Chief Programs and Partnerships Officer, Out & Equal

LGBTQI+ Workplace Inclusion Leadership Symposium and Corporate-Community Roundtable

Hyderabad, India

Two days after the successful 2023 LGBTQI+ APAC Forum, Out & Equal, in partnership with Pride Circle, organized a half-day “LGBTQI+ Workplace Inclusion Leadership Symposium,” followed by a “Corporate-Community Roundtable” in Hyderabad, India.

The LGBTQI+ Workplace Inclusion Leadership Symposium centered around the theme of *Leading with Authenticity* and leveraged the knowledge of local expert and session speaker, Harsha Ravikumar (He/Him), ERG GLEAM Co-Lead, Microsoft, alongside Akriti Rana (She/Her), Out & Equal APAC Manager. This informative session was followed by an intimate, thirty-person Corporate-Community Roundtable in which local, invited community leaders working towards LGBTQI+ workplace inclusion facilitated constructive dialogue toward shared goals, agenda alignment, and best practices for hiring and retaining LGBTQI+ talent.



Be The Change

Amplify workplace inclusion and download our [Global Toolkit for Change](#), now available in Mandarin!