

MEASURING PROGRESS.
INSPIRING ACTION.
CREATING **BELONGING**.

SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACE EQUALITY INDEX

EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS REPORT

Infrastructure.
Lived-Experience.
Capability.
Accountability.
Shared Responsibility.



2026

PUBLISHED BY THE
LGBT+ MANAGEMENT FORUM



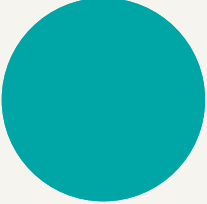
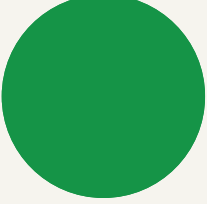
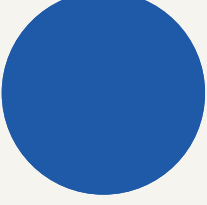
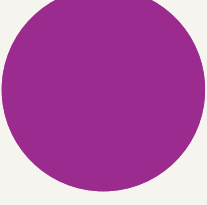
THIS BOOKLET IN CONTEXT



“ The true measure of inclusion is not the policies we write, but the experiences

The SAWEI 2026 National Report was published online on 18 May 2026. This booklet supports the 27 July Launch & Recognition event. It does not replace, amend or expand the published report. Where detail is required, the National Report remains the authoritative source.

FIVE READER GROUPS

-  **LGBT+ people** who move through workplace, public and commercial systems
-  **Employers** responsible for workplace and customer-facing systems
-  **Government** as employer, regulator and service provider
-  **Sector institutions** including researchers, civil society and media
-  **Allies** whose actions influence day-to-day inclusion



SCAN THE FULL
REPORT

WHY THE SAWEI FRAMEWORK MATTERS



The benchmark measures organisations so that systems can improve.

SAWEI measures organisations.

The purpose of the measurement is to improve the systems that shape LGBT+ experience across the employee and customer lifecycle.

1

INFRASTRUCTURE

Policies, governance, employee networks, HR systems and support pathways.

2

CAPABILITY

Leaders, managers, HR, recruiters, service providers and frontline roles equipped to act.

3

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Consistent access to the system as it was designed, across routine interactions.

The 2026 cycle asks whether these layers connect consistently. The main finding is an uneven relationship between infrastructure and day-to-day execution.



SAWEI AT A GLANCE

An independently assessed South African benchmark.

8

THEMES

110

QUESTIONS

5

TIERS

2025-2030

ACCREDITATION

PURPOSE

SAWEI enables organisations to measure LGBT+ inclusion against an evidence-based standard and peer practice. It also provides externally validated recognition for stakeholder engagement.

SOUTH AFRICAN FOUNDATION

The framework is anchored in the Constitution and aligned with national labour and equality legislation. The legal architecture operationalises rights through employment, identity recognition, privacy, benefits, service delivery and protection systems.

CONSTITUTION

Foundational rights

PEPUDA

Services and public interface

CIVIL UNION ACT

Family and benefits

EE ACT

Workplace equality

POPIA

SOGIESC data privacy

ALTERATION ACT

Identity recognition

FROM COMMITMENT TO CAPABILITY



The 2026 instrument measures implementation depth and evidence.

2021

17

Questions

DECLARATIVE

Responses

POLICY

and commitment
focus

2026

110

Questions

EVIDENCE

Required

INDEPENDENT

Audit validation

HOW TO READ PARTICIPATION

The two instruments are not directly comparable. Fewer completed submissions reflect the higher evidentiary demand of the revised framework and differences in organisational readiness. They are not evidence of a national decline in commitment.

THE EIGHT THEMES

Eight connected dimensions assess inclusion from governance to external impact.



WELCOME includes transitional questions mapped from the previous framework. Counts reflect the full 2025-2030 instrument.

HOW ORGANISATIONS WERE ASSESSED



Evidence, independent audit, validation and calibrated recognition.



THE FIVE TIERS

PLATINUM	Leading	80%+
GOLD	Progressive	60-79%
SILVER	Emerging	40-59%
BRONZE	Foundational	20-39%
ENTRY	Grassroots	0-19%

FOUNDATION GATE: Three or more zero scores across 13 baseline practices cap the tier at Bronze.

PARTICIPATION, SCALE & CONFIDENCE



The cohort is a bounded evidentiary sample, not a national census.

300

EMPLOYERS
ENGAGED

11

SUBMISSIONS

7

VALIDATED

4 + 3

PUBLIC +
ANONYMOUS

4 incomplete submissions

These were not scored. They are retained as a market-readiness signal reflecting evidence availability, sponsorship, governance capacity and organisational readiness for external measurement.

SCALE AROUND THE COHORT

648,300

PAYE-REGISTERED EMPLOYERS

17.1m

PEOPLE EMPLOYED, Q4 2025

The seven validated submissions sit within a much larger employer landscape. The cohort reflects organisations that completed a higher-resolution, evidence-based assessment. Findings describe that cohort and should not be generalised to all South African employers.

Sources used in the National Report: SARS Tax Statistics 2025 and Stats SA Q4 2025 Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

RECOGNISED EMPLOYERS

Validated organisations that consented to public recognition.

	McKinsey & Company South Africa Management Consulting	GOLD / PROGRESSIVE
	Vodacom South Africa Telecommunications	SILVER / EMERGING
	PricewaterhouseCoopers South Africa Professional Services	SILVER / EMERGING
	Absa Group Financial Services	SILVER / EMERGING

Tiers are published without individual percentage scores. Recognition reflects calibrated maturity of practice, evidence and consistency.

FIVE COHORT FINDINGS

What executives and system owners should retain from the validated cohort.

1

ACCOUNTABILITY

Stated values and policies are widely present. Evidenced governance and accountability are less consistent.

2

ACTIVATION

Infrastructure is present in most participants. Day-to-day activation remains uneven.

3

CONSISTENCY

Activity remains concentrated in Pride periods. Stronger practice is distributed across all four quarters.

4

SUPPORT

Benefits, EAP, wellness, affirmation and safety are where uneven implementation has the most direct consequences.

5

EXTERNAL EXPERIENCE

Internal systems are generally more developed than customer, supplier and brand-facing systems.

FROM INFRASTRUCTURE TO LIVED EXPERIENCE



Inclusion systems work through operational roles and routine decisions.

POLICY

Stated commitments and protections



SYSTEMS

HR, benefits, data, reporting and service design



OPERATIONAL ACTORS

Managers, HR, recruiters, frontline staff, security, facilities and providers



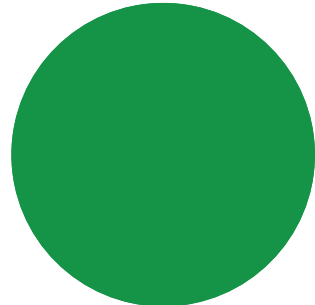
LIVED EXPERIENCE

What the person can access consistently in practice

The primary gap is between design intent and operational execution. Capability and accountability at the implementation layer determine whether infrastructure is activated.

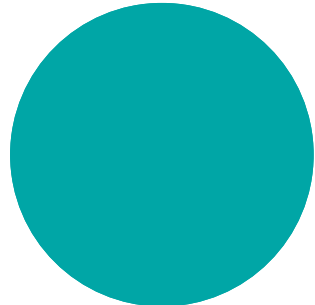
SIGNALS OF PROGRESS

Observed strengths within the validated cohort.



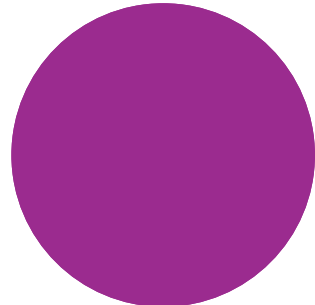
GOVERNANCE

Policy statements and EXCO sponsorship are present across most participants.



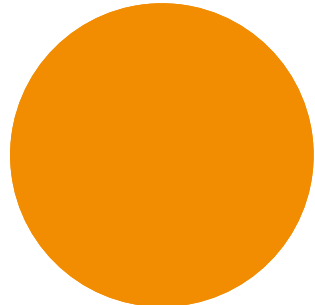
INTERNAL SYSTEMS

Chosen names and pronouns are increasingly supported in HR and identity systems.



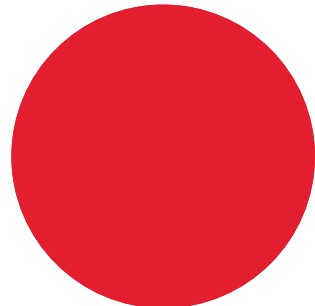
EMPLOYEE NETWORKS

Active LGBT+ employee networks are present across most participating organisations.



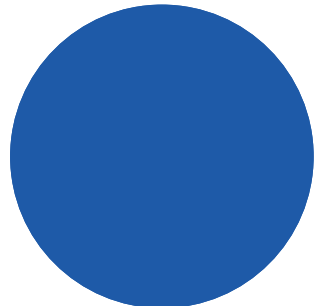
TALENT ATTRACTION

Explicit welcome language and recruiter capability are more developed than in earlier cycles.



COMMUNITY & SUPPLIERS

Community partnerships are visible and supplier-diversity recognition is beginning to emerge.



AI REVIEW

A small number of organisations have started reviewing AI tools for inclusive language and bias.

These are cohort-level signals. They recognise investment already made while preserving the report’s finding that integration remains uneven.

PRIORITY GAPS

Where the 2026 cohort requires focused development.

LEADERSHIP KPIs

Explicit LGBT+ inclusion measures are rarely embedded in senior performance contracts.

BENEFITS

Family recognition and Civil Union Act alignment are not consistent across the cohort.

EAP COMPETENCY

Providers are not consistently confirmed as LGBT+-affirming.

ROLE-BASED LITERACY

Mandatory learning for managers, HR, recruiters and customer-facing roles is not consistently in place.

CUSTOMER SYSTEMS

Internal identity infrastructure is not consistently extended to customer-facing processes.

DATA & SUPPLIERS

Representation, pay parity, progression and LGBT+-owned supplier tracking remain limited.

The report treats these as system design and capability priorities. It does not infer organisational intent.

CAPABILITY MUST SIT WHERE DECISIONS ARE MADE



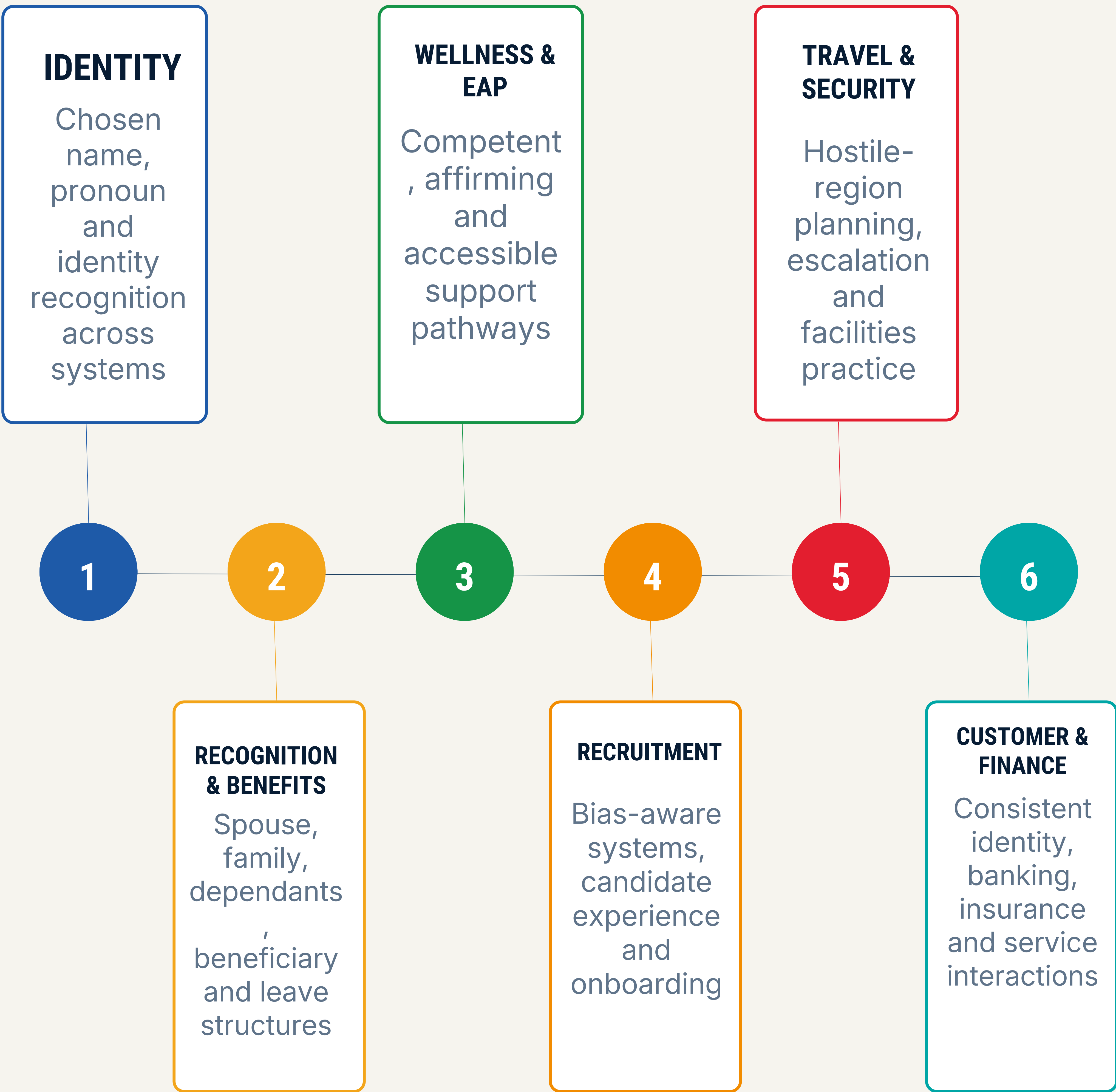
Policies reach lived experience through the roles that interpret and operate them.



Capability at this layer is a primary determinant of whether infrastructure is activated or remains declarative.

SIX RECURRING TOUCHPOINTS

Operational interfaces most frequently identified in the National Report.

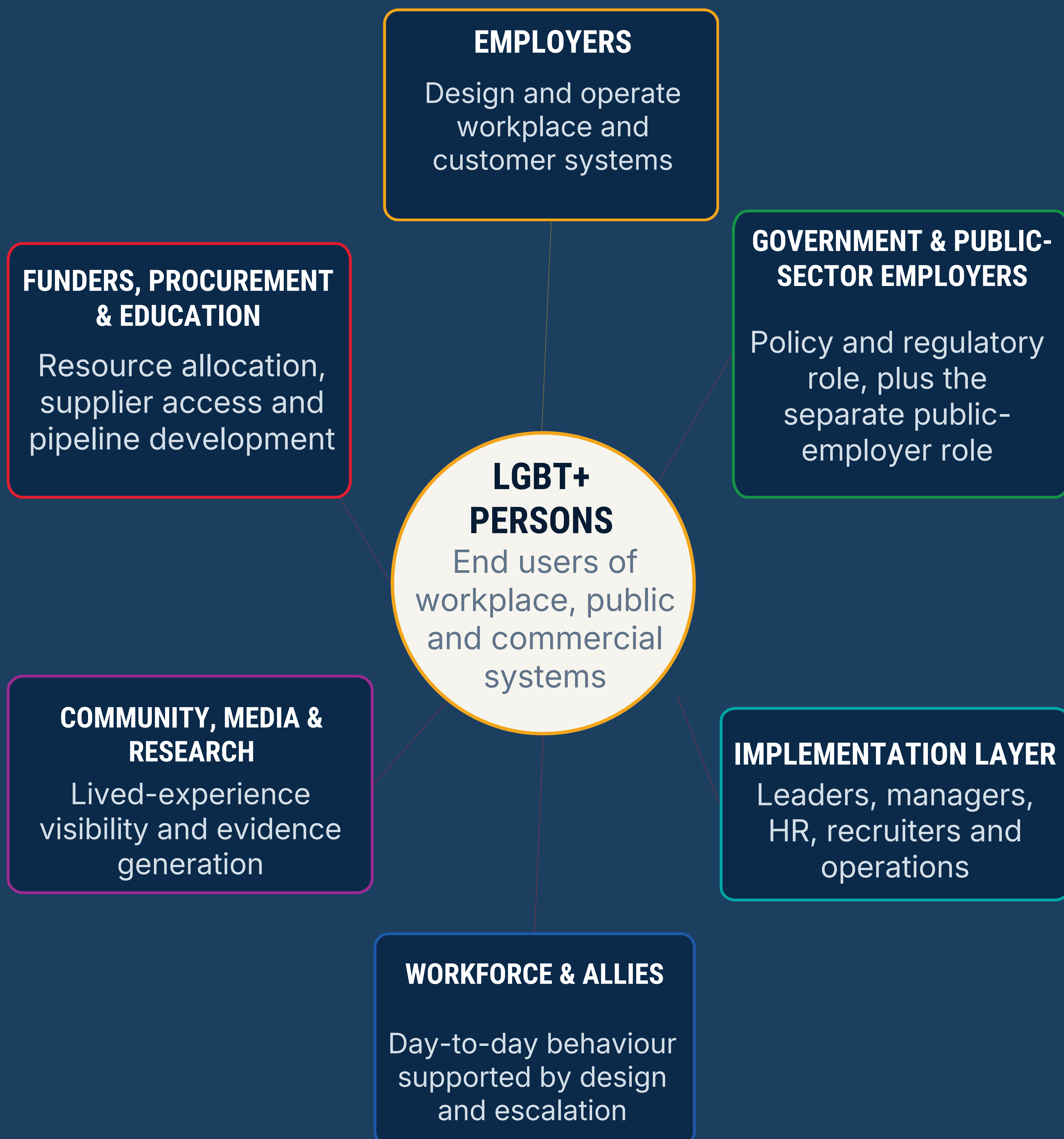


The design test is whether each person can use the system consistently without repeated explanation, manual workarounds or avoidable exposure.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



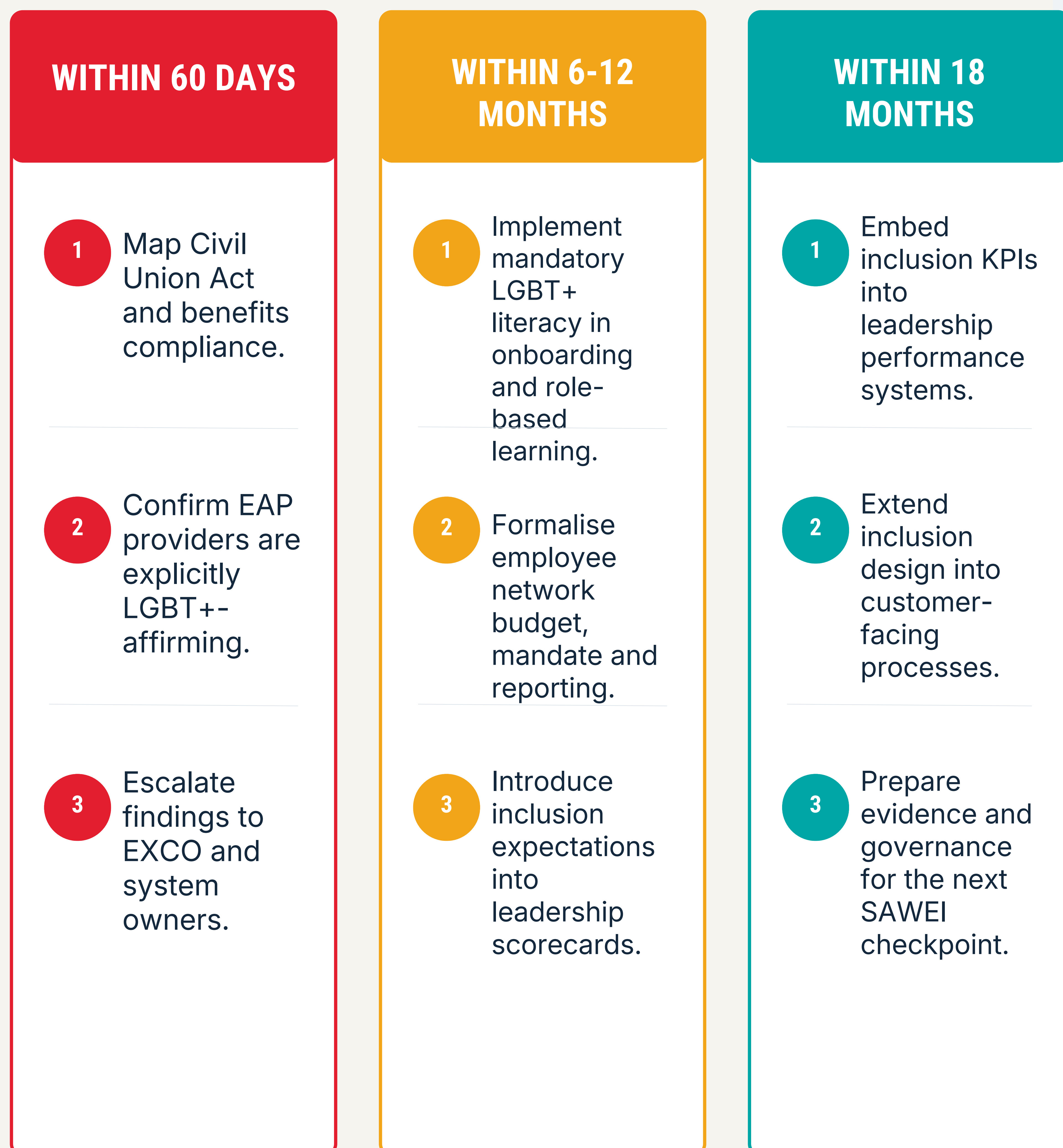
SAWEI measures employers directly, while adjacent systems shape the conditions for inclusion.



Responsibility is assigned to the actor with control over the relevant system. Participation and voice do not transfer accountability away from system owners.

EMPLOYER ACTION MAP

Minimum priority moves drawn directly from the 2026 findings.

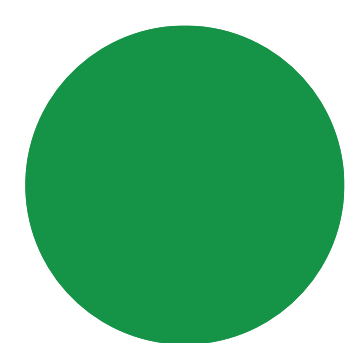


The action sequence stabilises support systems first, builds capability next, then embeds accountability and external integration.

SYSTEM-LEVEL PRIORITIES

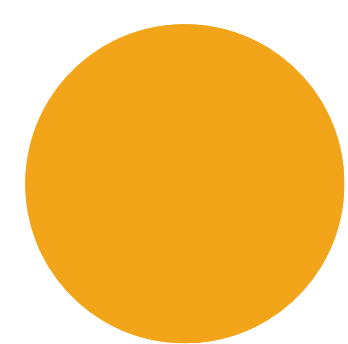


Actions that extend beyond the control of a single employer.



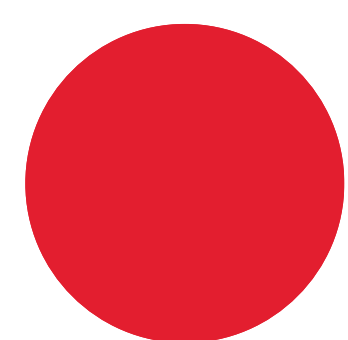
GOVERNMENT

Engage on explicit LGBT+ visibility in Employment Equity, B-BBEE, supplier development and public-sector measurement.



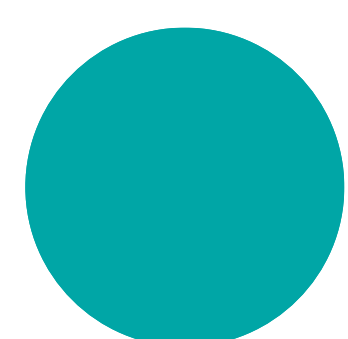
CSI & ESG ACTORS

Map current allocations, move from single-point support to multi-year partnerships, and track outcomes.



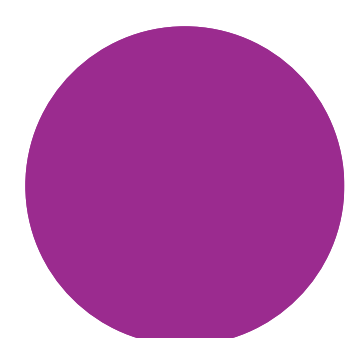
PROCUREMENT

Enable confidential voluntary identification, pilot LGBT+ supplier development, and begin spend tracking.



EDUCATION & PROGRAMMES

Audit bursary, internship, learnership and graduate programmes for access barriers. Build sustained pipeline partnerships.



RESEARCH & DATA

Develop longitudinal evidence on representation, pay parity, progression, access barriers and sector outcomes.

These priorities are system enablers. They strengthen the conditions under which organisational interventions can operate consistently.

THE ROAD FORWARD

The 2026 result is a baseline within the 2025-2030 accreditation period.



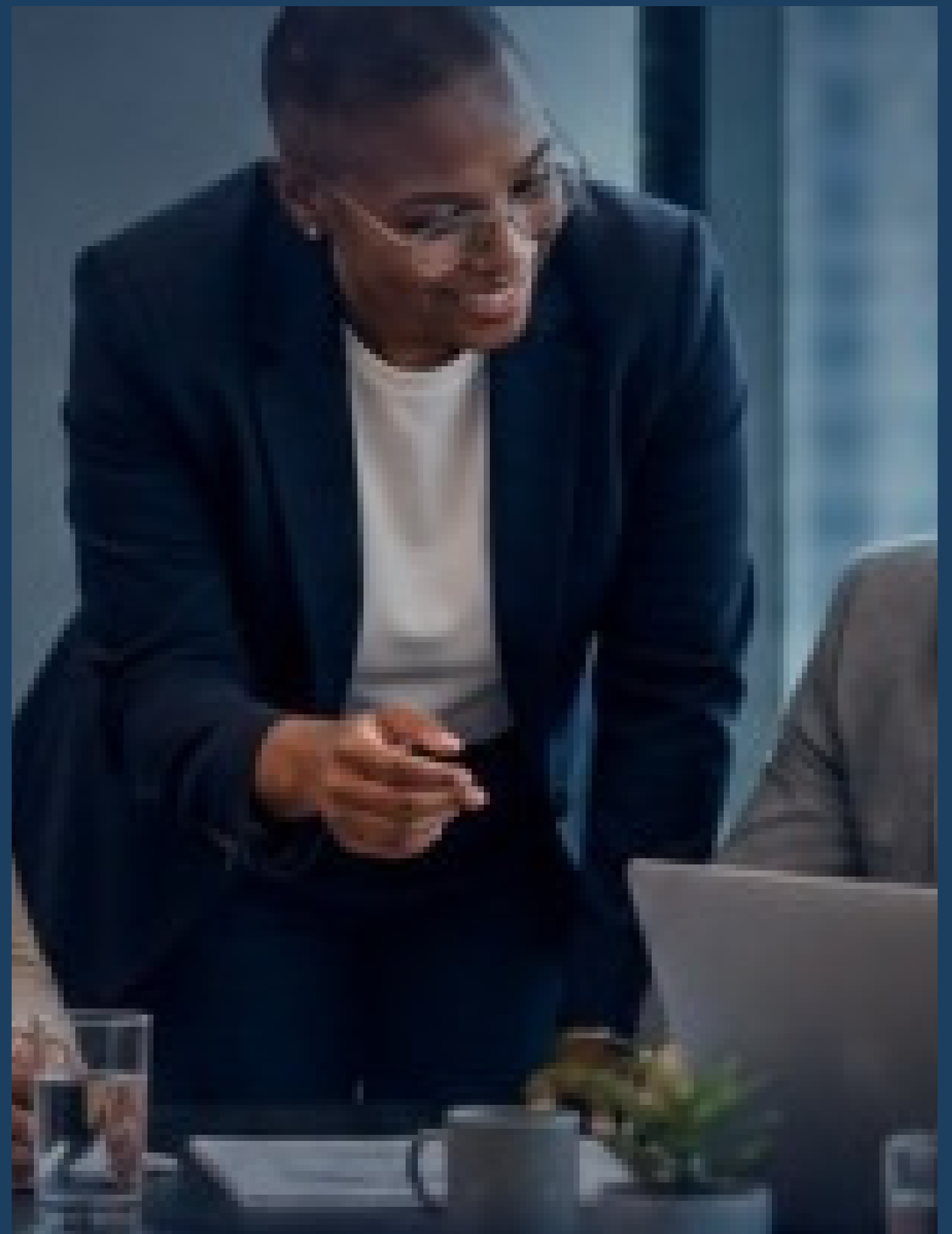
The five-year structure allows organisations to enter, pause or re-enter as internal capability develops.



THE WORK CONTINUES.

The 2026 cycle is a baseline. The Forum recognises every organisation that submitted to independent scrutiny and invites wider participation in the 2027 checkpoint.

To enter SAWEI -
members@lgbtforum.org



READ THE FULL NATIONAL REPORT

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