

2023 Study on the Status of LGBTI+ Employees in Turkey's Private Sector

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2023 Study on the Status of LGBTI+ Employees in Turkey's Private Sector

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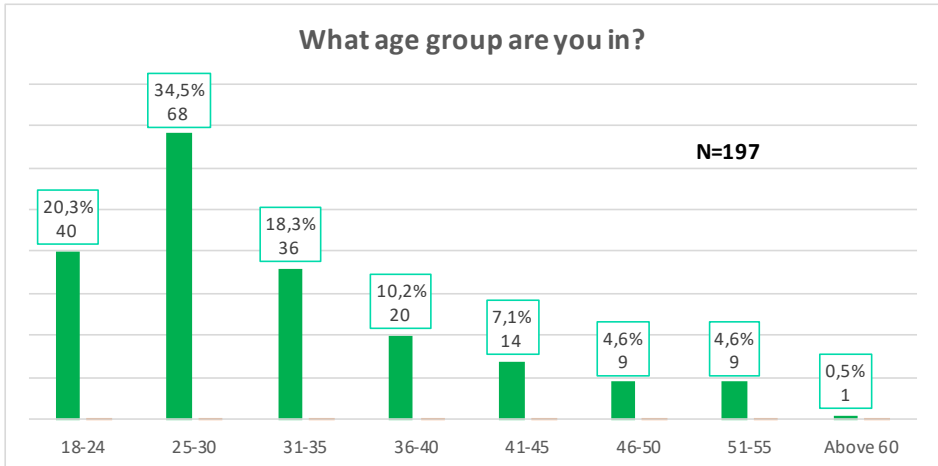
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Key Findings

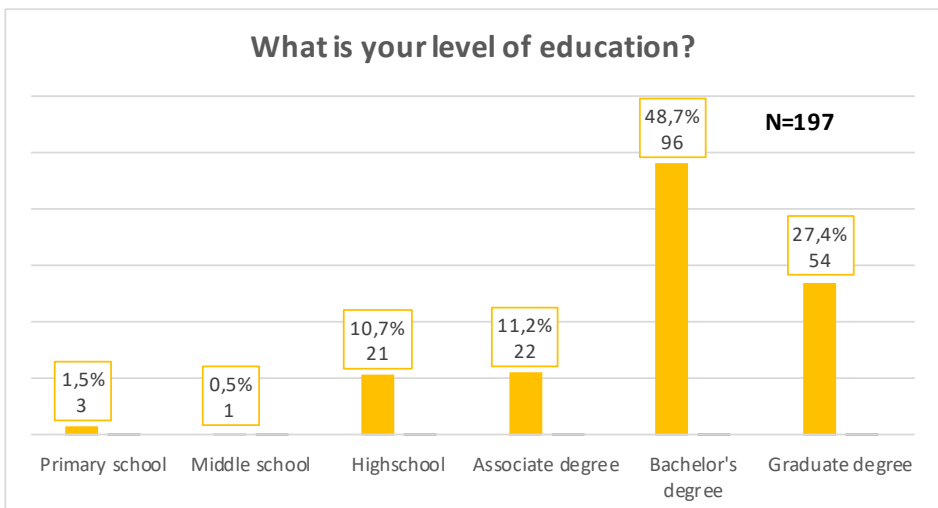
2023 Study on the Status of LGBTI+ Employees in Turkey's Private Sector



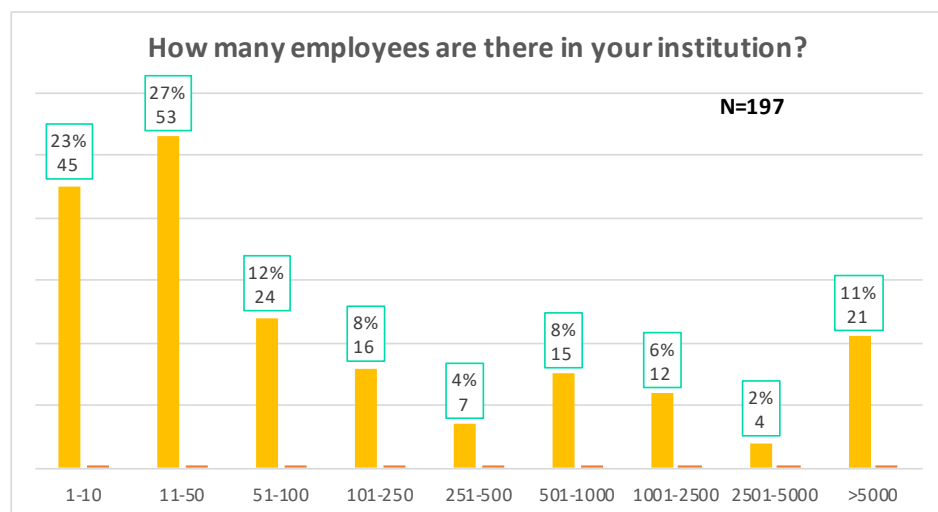
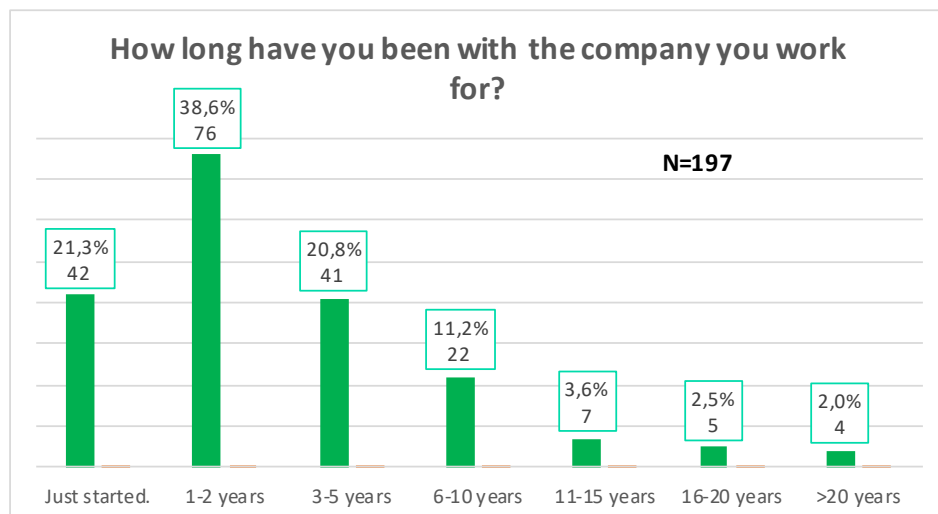
Kaos GL Association's survey on the status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and plus people working in the private sector in Turkey has completed its ninth year. The 2023 Survey was conducted with 197 people who identified as employed in a private company operating in Turkey and who are LGBTI+, and who responded to the online survey questions we provided through Survey-Monkey Pro.



Once again, the sample was predominantly young people with post-secondary education and those who had recently entered the labour market. 73.1% of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 35; 87.3% had a bachelor's, associates, or graduate degree.



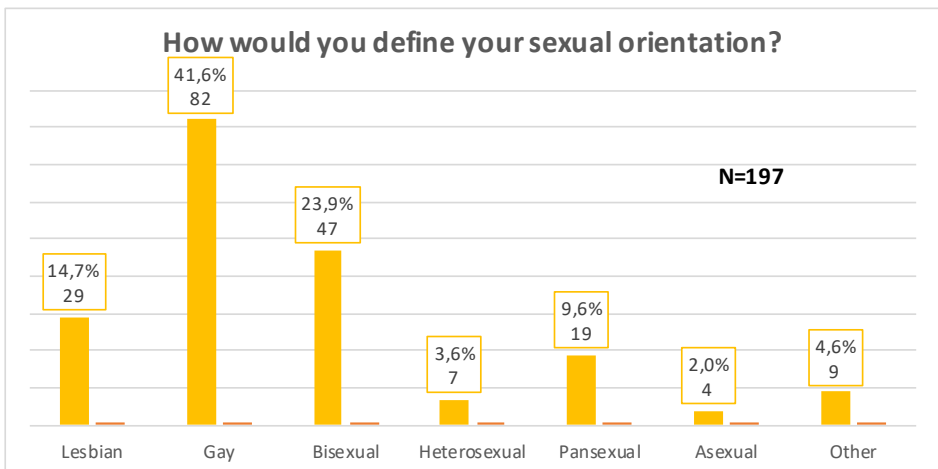
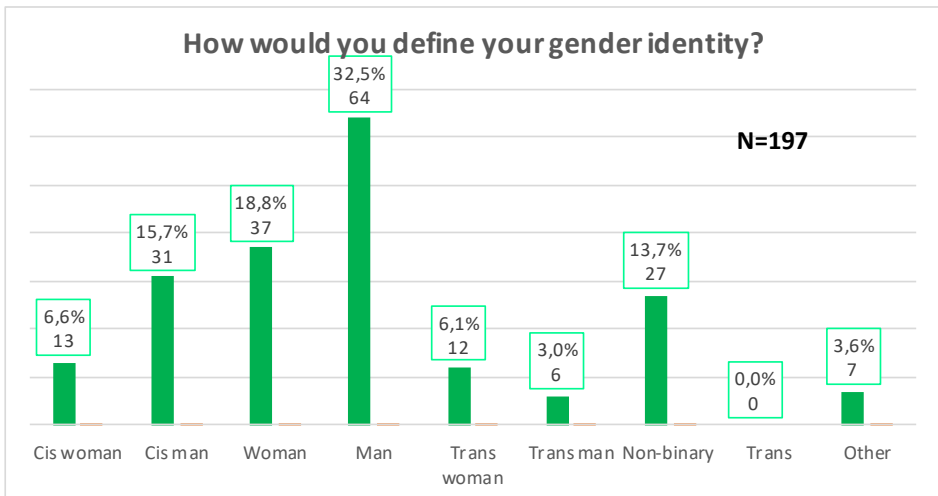
80.7% of respondents have been in their current job for 5 years or less, and 70% of respondents work for small and medium-sized enterprises.



Since the 2020 survey, respondents have been asked to indicate their city of residence, but the option “I do not want to share” has been added to the options in recognition that there may be respondents who would prefer not to share this information for security reasons. This year 10.2% of respondents chose to keep their city of residence private. As was the case last year, more than half of the respondents who indicated a city this year live in Istanbul (56.5%). Istanbul was the most frequently chosen option by these respondents, followed by Ankara (14.7%) and

Izmir (9%). Although the majority of those who indicated a city live in these three major cities, the responses indicate that our survey reached respondents from at least 23 provinces.

In the 2023 sample, the total proportion of respondents who answered the question on gender identity by selecting the options trans man, man or cis man is 51.2%, while the proportion of respondents who answered the question on sexual orientation by selecting the option gay is 41.6%. When the responses to these two questions are analysed together, the proportion of respondents who identified their gender identity as male (trans male, male or cis male) and their sexual orientation as gay is 39.1%. This means that gay men were again the majority of respondents in this year's survey.



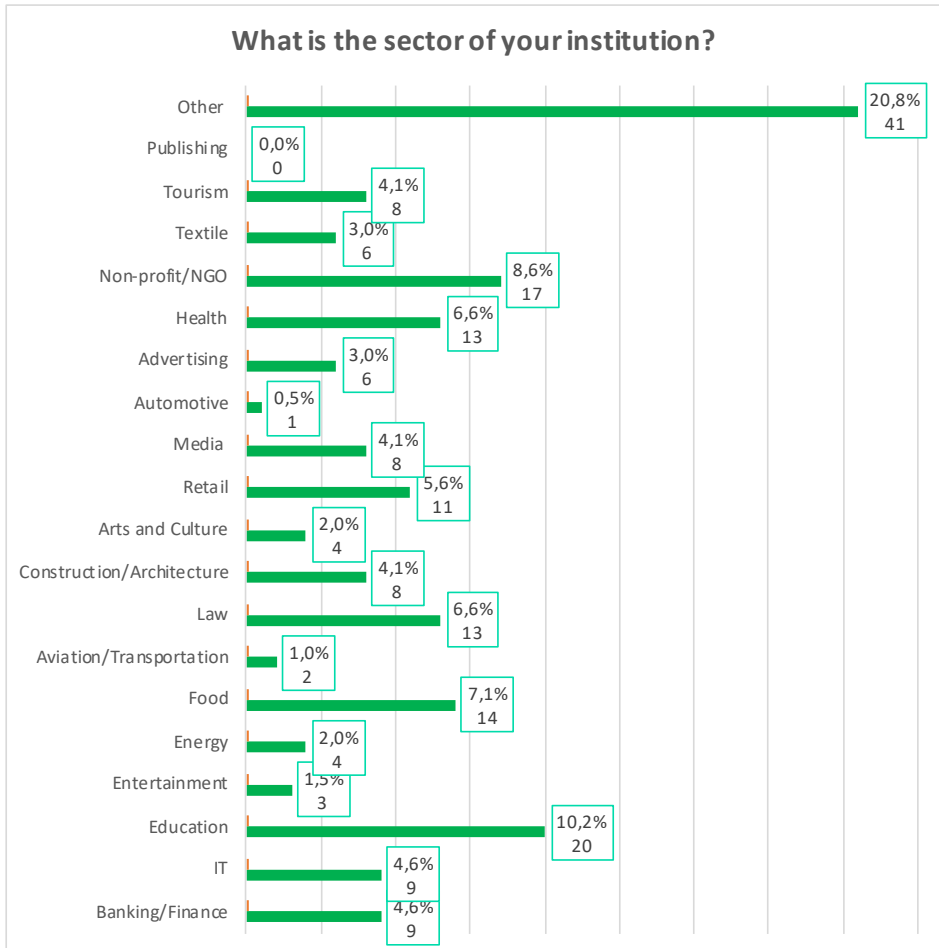
On the other hand, for the first time this year, the question on gender identity included the option of 'non-binary' in addition to 'other', and the total rate of participants selecting these two options was 17.3%. This rate shows that those who define their gender identity outside of the binary gender system are the most represented in the sample this year since the research began. The proportion of respondents who answered the sexual orientation question by selecting an option other than lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual (asexual, pansexual, and 'other' options) was 16.2%.

When we wrote the key findings in previous years, we tried to analyse the rates of gender identity from the perspective of gender equality and emphasised that we did not have sufficient data to explain the phenomenon of the decrease in the proportion of women in the sample with the increase in the number of participants. On the basis of the basic labour force indicators of TÜİK for persons over 15 years of age, which show that the labour force participation and employment rates of women in Turkey are quite low in comparison with those of men. Therefore, following the rapid increase in the number of participants since 2019, it can be concluded that the rates in the sample are getting closer to the rates in the survey population. According to TÜİK's basic labour force indicators for 2019 for people aged 15 and above, the labour force participation rate and employment rate for men in Turkey were 72% and 63.1%, respectively, while the same rates for women decreased to 34.4% and 28.7%, respectively. According to the pandemic indicators for 2020, the labour force participation rate was 68.2% for men and 30.9% for women. The employment rate was 59.8% for men and 26.3% for women. In 2021, the labour force participation rate for men was 70.3% and the employment rate was 62.8%. The same rates were 32.8% and 28% respectively for women. In 2022, these rates were 71.4% and 65% for men and 35.1% and 30.4% for women respectively.

Statistics show that women in Turkey generally have low access to employment and are heavily involved in the informal labour force. According to the DISK/Genel-İş Research Department's Women's Labour Report of March 2023, Turkey has the widest gender gap in employment and the highest female unemployment rate compared to OECD countries. The main problem for working women is the lack of security. According to the report, three out of ten women in Turkey are employed informally. Studies show that access to employment and working conditions have become even more difficult for women workers during the pandemic. On the other hand, many international documents, opinions, and resolutions point to higher unemployment rates among transgender people, especially in countries where there are no empowering policies on gender affirmation and legal recognition of gender identity. It is noted that this phenomenon leads to outcomes such as unregistered and socially insecure work and sex work that is not optional, especially for trans women, which should be further investigated in terms of discrimination.

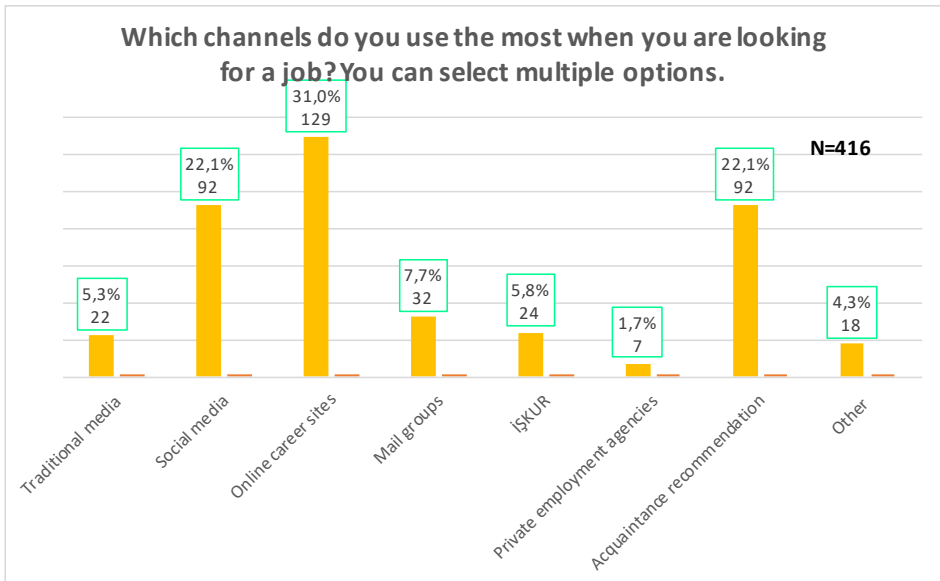
In the framework of our research, if we recall the course of the rate of female respondents over the years, this rate (the total rate of those who chose trans wo-

men and women) was 38% in 2016 among 85 respondents, 45% in 2017 among 166 respondents, and 36.3% in 2018 among 198 respondents. In 2019, this rate decreased to 29.3% among 772 respondents. In 2020, the corresponding rate was 29.7% among 674 respondents. In 2021, the total rate of those who selected the trans woman, woman, and cis woman options, which were added to the survey for the first time in that year, was 34.4% among 633 respondents. In 2022, the corresponding rate was 34.6% of 289 respondents. When we reported the key findings last year, we said that the results of our research in the coming years would show whether the increase in the proportion of female respondents in 2020, 2021 and 2022, after the highest number of survey participants in 2019, would support our analysis in the past. In the 2023 survey, the total proportion of respondents who selected trans women, women and cis women was 41.1% out of 197 respondents. This data supports the analysis above.



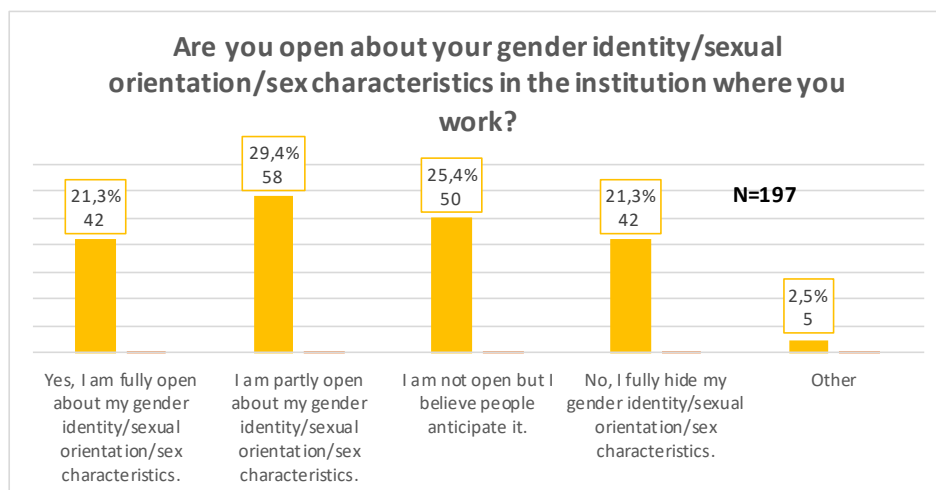
As in previous years, education was the leading sector in the 2023 survey, followed by civil society, food, health and law. The total number of respondents working in these sectors represents 39.1% of the sample. On the other hand, the proportions of participants show that LGBTI+ employees from almost all sectors are represented in the sample this year. When analysing the scores given by participants to workplaces out of 4 in terms of sensitivity to LGBTI+ rights, civil society stands out as the sector with the highest average score this year (3.2), as in previous years. This year, the energy sector received the lowest score (0.5).

Consistent with our findings from previous years, the 2023 Private Sector Survey shows that LGBTI+ employees mainly rely on channels such as referrals from acquaintances and checking company profiles on online career sites when looking for and applying for a job.



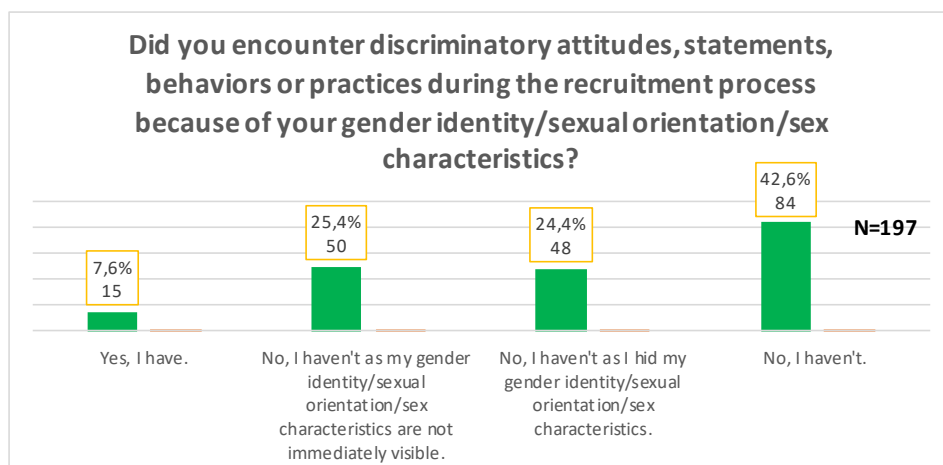
This reinforces our view that LGBTI+ employees need to anticipate the compatibility of the job they are applying for with their personal qualities and the type of working environment they will have to work in. Despite these precautions taken when looking for a job, the high proportion of participants who are not fully open at work (78.7%) in the sample shows that there are major barriers to LGBTI+ visibility in the private sector in Turkey and that the number of workplaces that effectively implement inclusive policies is low.

According to the participants' statements, anti-discrimination and inclusive policies are in most cases not included in the job advertisements and recruitment



processes of workplaces, and the prominence of norms and role expectations produced by the heteronormative and cis-normative binary gender system in these processes has a negative impact on LGBTI+ employees even before they are hired, forcing them to adopt a strategy of hiding their identity. Participants' responses to open-ended questions also support this finding.

In the 2023 private sector survey, 7.6% of the sample reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes, statements, behaviour, or practices during recruitment. 42.6% of participants reported that they had not experienced discriminatory attitudes, statements, behaviours, or practices during the recruitment process; 49.8% of participants attributed the fact that they had not experienced such treatment to the fact that they had hidden their gender identity, sexual orientation, or sex characteristics or that their gender identity, sexual orientation, or sex characteristics were



not immediately apparent. The proportion of participants who reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes, statements, behaviour, or practices in the workplace after recruitment is 16.2%. 40.6% of participants attributed the fact that they did not experience such treatment to the fact that they were hiding their gender identity, sexual orientation, or sex characteristics or that they were not immediately visible. The proportion of respondents who reported that they had not experienced discriminatory attitudes or practices for no reason was 43.1%.

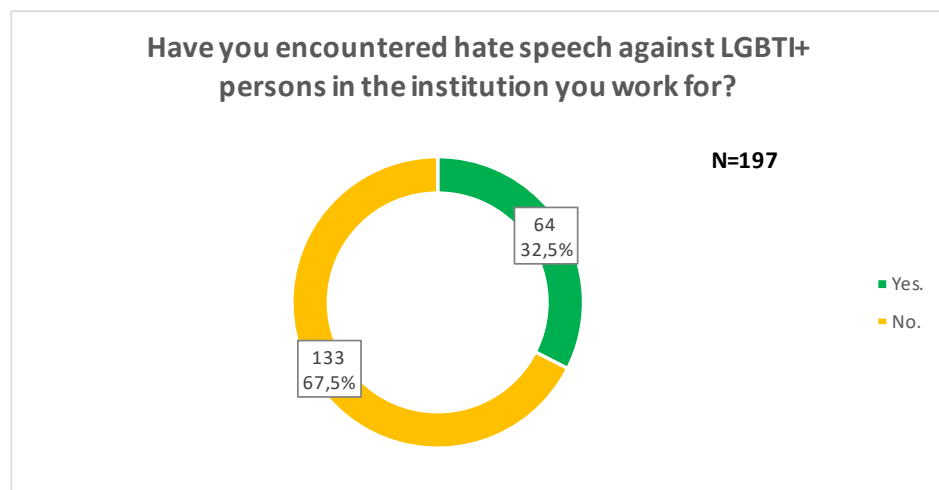
The proportion of respondents who reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes or practices during recruitment and in the workplace appears to be low. However, as in previous years, these rates should be considered in the context of a number of other data. Firstly, the following finding should be highlighted: Three out of five LGBTI+ workers in the private sector have either experienced discrimination in recruitment (57.4%) and/or at work (56.8%) or do not think they have been discriminated against because they are perceived by those around them as cis-gender and heterosexual due to their gender identity, sexual orientation or gender characteristics being hidden or not visible. On the other hand, the proportion of participants who reported that they had not experienced discriminatory attitudes or practices for no reason should be considered alongside the rates of openness in recruitment processes and in the workplace. Only 11.2% of participants said they were fully open during the recruitment process and only 21.3% said they were fully open at work. The rate of participants who witnessed discriminatory attitudes or practices against another LGBTI+ employee in the workplace (12%) should also be analysed in this context.

As mentioned above, the overall proportion of respondents who say they are completely open at work is 21.3% in this year's survey sample. In this year's survey of public sector employees, which we conducted at the same time as the private sector survey, the corresponding rate was 3.1%. According to last year's research results, the rate of LGBTI+ employees who are fully open at work is 27.7% in the private sector and 6.5% in the public sector. The rate of openness among private sector respondents was even lower when it came to recruitment processes. Only 11.2% of respondents said they were fully open in the recruitment process. This compares with 2.1% of public sector respondents.

As in previous years, the 2023 surveys show that discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics is a serious barrier to access to employment. LGBTI+ workers follow a strategy of forced closure to avoid the risk of not being employed. As the risk of discrimination continues after employment, the same strategy characterises the entire working life of LGBTI+ workers. The fact that the overall rate of LGBTI+ employees in the private sector who are fully or partially open at work (50.7%) is higher than the corresponding rate during the recruitment

process (21.4%), and that the rate of total non-disclosure of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender characteristics decreases after recruitment (from 47.2% to 21.3%), shows that LGBTI+ employees can be more open about their identity if there is an environment of trust, depending on the conditions in the workplace and the attitudes of superiors and other employees. This is also the view expressed by the participants.

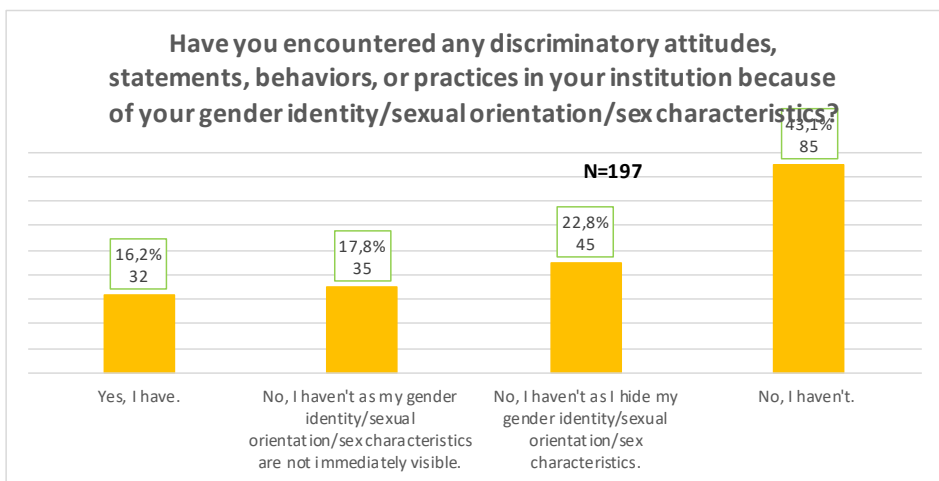
In the detailed 2011 report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights on discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, it is stated that the strategy of hiding that LGBTI+ employees necessarily develop in the face of the risk of discrimination and harassment makes it difficult to analyse the real dimensions of homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination in employment. Based on the results of our surveys, it is possible to say that this finding, which is based on research conducted in different countries, is also valid for Turkey. Again, these findings show that when the strategy of hiding is abandoned or does not work, the feared risks are realised. For this reason, LGBTI+ workers in Turkey follow a compulsory strategy of coming out, starting from the job search process, in order to reduce the risk of discrimination and harassment as much as possible.



To better understand the conditions that push LGBTI+ workers to continue this strategy throughout their working lives, a question on hate speech was added to the survey for the first time in 2019. As part of this question, 34% in 2019, 36.9% in 2020, 30.5% in 2021 and 27.3% in 2022 said that they had encountered anti-LGBTI+ hate speech in their workplace. In 2023, the figure will be 32%. In light of these data, it can be concluded that one in three LGBTI+ employees in the private sector in Turkey will encounter hate speech against LGBTI+ people. These findings also confirm the conditions that force LGBTI+ workers to maintain their strategy of

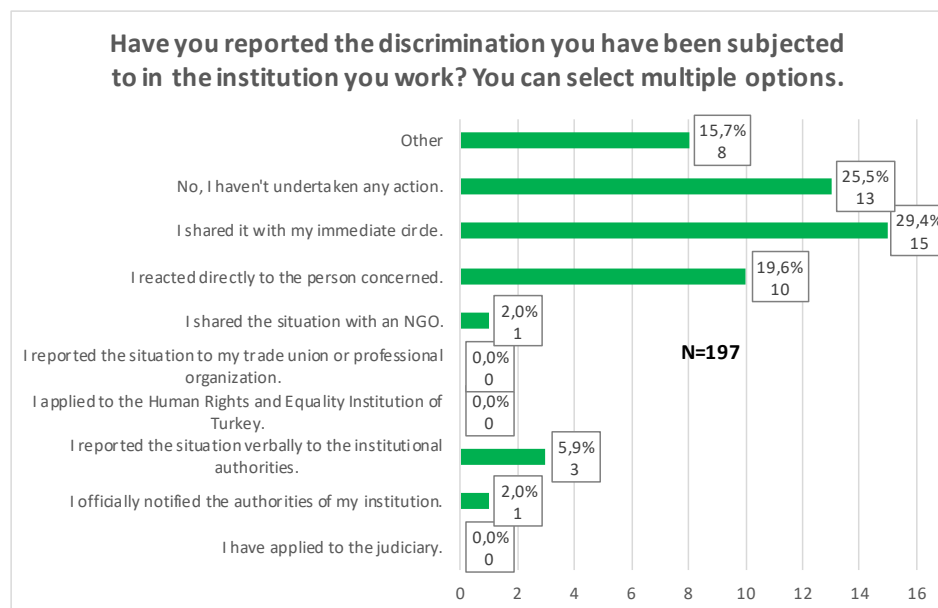
remaining closeted in the private sector. This figure rises to 54.2% for public sector employees. This is one of the reasons that may explain the much lower rate of openness among LGBTI+ public sector employees than in the private sector.

On the other hand, as in previous years, it is understood that some of the participants in this year's research accept sexual orientation, gender identity and gender characteristics as private and personal characteristics and do not see them as categories related to social and economic rights that are protected and supported on the basis of human rights against discrimination in working life. This situation may determine how participants define discriminatory attitudes, statements, behaviours, and practices in the workplace.

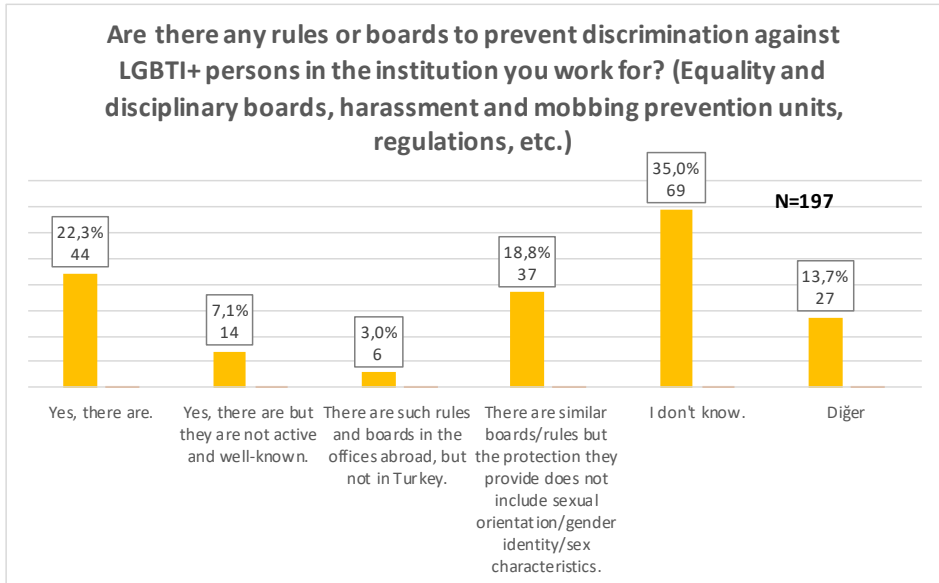


Another phenomenon that makes it difficult to analyse the true extent of discrimination against LGBTI+ people in employment in Turkey is the low number of cases where complaint mechanisms against discrimination are used. Again, in parallel with the results of the research we have conducted in previous years, the 2023 private sector research shows that LGBTI+ employees generally do not turn to official channels when faced with discrimination. Of the 32 participants who indicated that they had experienced discriminatory attitudes or practices at work because of their gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics, only one officially reported the situation to the institutional authorities, one person informed an NGO about the situation, 13 people did not take any action and most of the rest either reacted to the person concerned, reported the situation verbally to the institutional authorities or shared the problem with their relatives. Of these 32 people, none of the participants took the matter to court. None of the participants preferred to contact the TIHEK or the trade union/professional organisation to which they belong. The shares of the participants show that LGBTI+ workers do not believe

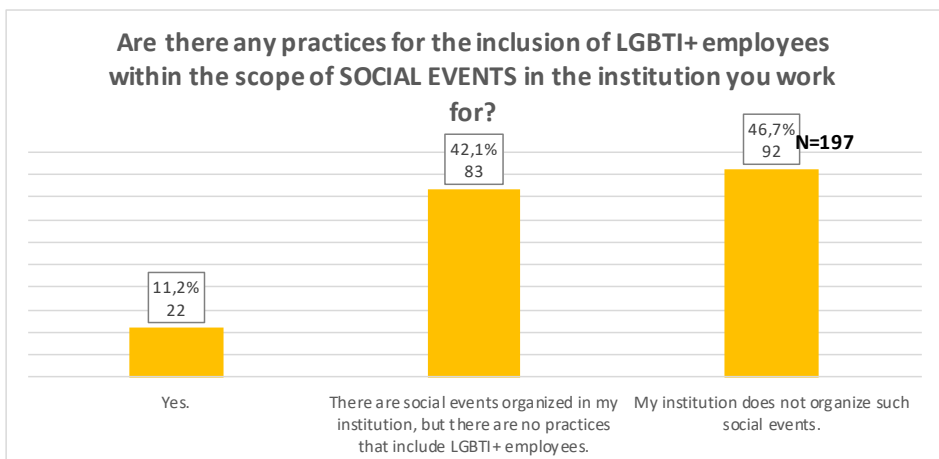
that they will get results against discrimination through official channels. On the contrary, they are worried about being further victimised during the reporting process, losing their jobs, facing hate speech and prejudice, and having their gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics revealed against their will.



This picture shows that there is a need for empowering mechanisms for LGBTI+ workers to access employment and working life in Turkey. However, our research shows that such mechanisms are not widespread enough in the private sector, and where they do exist, they can be ineffective. The few positive examples where empowerment mechanisms have been identified and are operating demonstrate that these tools can protect LGBTI+ workers from discrimination and hate speech, and increase the job satisfaction and productivity of LGBTI+ workers. For example, similar to previous years, satisfaction with the work environment is higher in workplaces based abroad compared to workplaces based in Turkey. 78.4% of workplaces outside Turkey are headquartered in the US, Canada and European countries, and their average score is 2.4. This average drops to 1.8 for workplaces based in Turkey. In line with this finding, 56.8% of respondents who reported working in a workplace headquartered abroad said that the workplace had mechanisms in place to prevent discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation and gender characteristics. This rate drops to 14.4% for participants working in workplaces based in Turkey. Again, the rate of complete openness regarding gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics among participants working in workplaces headquartered abroad (24.3%) is higher than the general rate in the sample (21.3%).



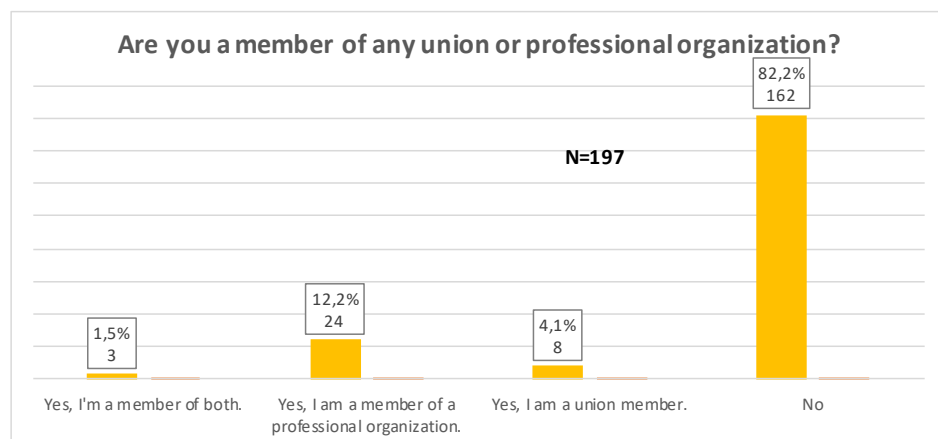
Looking at the sample as a whole, the proportion of respondents who said that the organisation where they work has effective rules or bodies to prevent discrimination on the grounds of gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics is only 22.3%. On the other hand, in workplaces where such mechanisms exist and are effectively implemented, the rate of being completely open among LGBTI+ employees is 1.5 times higher than the general rate in the sample, while the rate of being completely hidden falls to two thirds of the rate in the sample. Among participants working in workplaces with these characteristics, 34.1% reported being fully open and 13.6% reported being fully closeted. Remember that in the sample as a whole these rates are 21.3% and 21.3% respectively. Furthermore, the propor-



tions of respondents show that even in the absence of official rules or bodies, an unwritten consensus, and an organisational culture sensitive to LGBTI+ rights can have positive results.

Similarly, only 11.2% of respondents reported that their organisation had practices in place to include LGBTI+ employees in social activities. 59.1% of participants in such workplaces said that they were fully open at work. Participants working in workplaces with practices sensitive to the needs of LGBTI+ employees in terms of social assistance and medical-psychological support represent only 10.7% of the sample. Of these participants, 52.4% reported being fully open at work. As can be seen, workplaces where mechanisms to empower LGBTI+ employees are in place and operating effectively are rare in the private sector in Turkey. However, the results of our research show that these mechanisms are fundamental to combating discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics in employment and to ensuring equal access to economic and social rights for LGBTI+ workers.

Trade unions and professional organisations are undoubtedly among the first areas that come to mind in terms of mechanisms that empower LGBTI+ workers to access employment and working life. Our research shows that membership of trade unions or professional organisations is low among LGBTI+ workers in the private sector. Those who are members do not see trade unions and professional organisations as one of the most important areas to combat discrimination against LGBTI+ people in working life. Only 13.7% of the sample consists of participants who reported being members of professional organisations. The proportion of participants who reported being a member of a trade union remained at 5.6%. This rate is well below the rate of unionisation among workers in Turkey. According to the latest information from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the rate of trade union membership in Turkey is 14.76%.



According to the data from our research, 9 out of 32 participants who reported being discriminated against at their workplace are members of a trade union and/or professional organisation. However, as mentioned above, none of them reported the situation to the trade union or professional organisation of which they are a member. In addition, the proportion of respondents who ticked the option 'organised resistance and solidarity networks' when asked in our survey about the three most important measures to take against discrimination against LGBTI+ people remained at 8.8%.

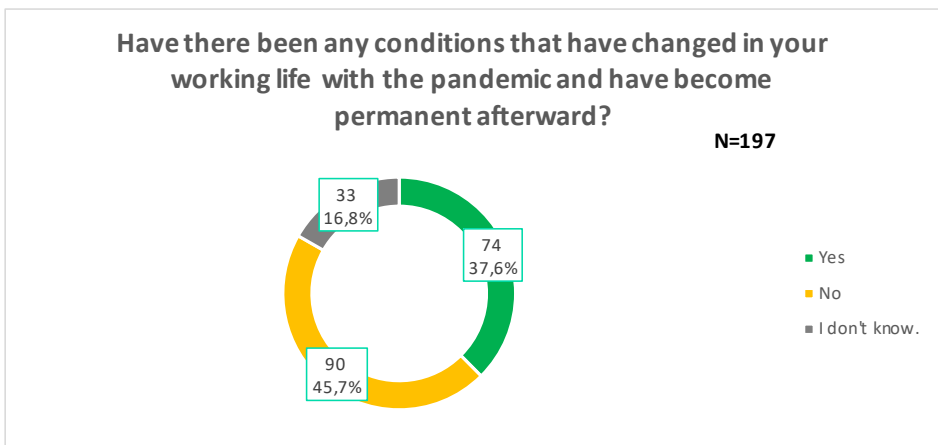
These findings show that trade unions and professional organisations have an important role to play in empowering LGBTI+ workers in the workplace and preventing discrimination against LGBTI+ people. Therefore, trade unions and professional organisations should make it one of their priorities to develop policies in this direction. However, the International Labour Organization's 2016 briefing note on the findings of the Pride Project, which states that the economic and social rights of LGBTI+ people are not a priority issue for trade unions, seems to apply to Turkey as well. The same briefing note states that LGBTI+ people are one of the leading groups facing discrimination and harassment in the workplace; LGBTI+ people seeking employment prefer to be closeted about their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics as a compulsory strategy, and this strategy tends to be maintained throughout their working lives; while field studies on the subject show that LGBTI+ people who are open at work are much less likely to show symptoms of anxiety, depression and burnout; to ensure this, workplaces should implement supportive and inclusive policies.

All of these findings are consistent with the research we have presented so far and will be shown in the following sections. From the participants' responses, it can be seen that discrimination on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics, exposure to hate speech or the risk of exposure to discrimination and hate speech, and the strategy of closure that they are forced to maintain result in LGBTI+ workers not being able to build close and genuine relationships with their colleagues, not feeling a sense of belonging to the organisation they work for, experiencing intense emotions such as hopelessness, unhappiness, anxiety, worry and anger, low performance and motivation, depression, stress and tension, and burnout due to mental and physical overload. This in turn reduces productivity and job satisfaction in the workplace. Given that workplaces in today's societies are where we spend most of our lives, the extent of these negative effects becomes even more apparent.

While non-disclosure appears to provide some protection for LGBTI+ workers from the risk of discrimination and hate speech, being forced to do so is itself a form of discrimination. In general, LGBTI+ workers, being certain that they will face hate

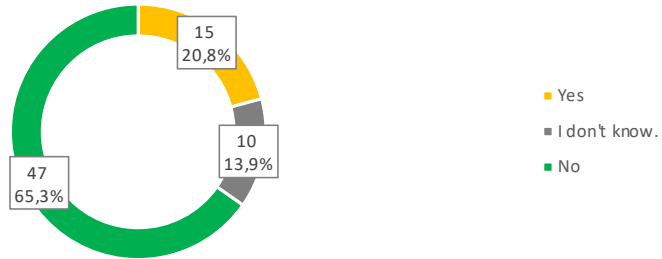
speech and discrimination, take certain precautions from pre-employment and throughout their working lives, hiding their gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics throughout their employment or sharing them only with very close colleagues or other LGBTI+ workers, separating their professional and private lives with strict boundaries, sometimes being forced to pretend in terms of speech, body language and gender expression. This state of not being open and being constantly on guard against potential discrimination becomes a permanent discrimination and can have serious psychological and sometimes physical effects on LGBTI+ workers that extend beyond their working life.

The responses to the questions we added to the survey in 2021 and 2022 to collect data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working lives and conditions of LGBTI+ people also supported the above findings. The responses of participants who felt that the new working conditions created by the pandemic affected them differently because of their gender identity, sexual orientation or gender characteristics provided important data. The statements of participants who talked about the positive effects of the pandemic on working conditions revealed the extent of the stress, anxiety and insecurity caused by the strategy of closure that LGBTI+ workers had to maintain in the workplace. Almost all of these participants stated that working remotely due to the pandemic allowed them to physically distance themselves from the heteronormative, cis-normative and male-dominated work environment, that this distance reduced the risk of hate speech and discrimination, that communicating with managers and colleagues only online made them feel safer, and that the pressure they felt to look and behave according to gender norms decreased. Most of the participants who highlighted the negative consequences of the pandemic spoke about the isolating effect of being deprived of the support and solidarity they found within the limited social relationships where they could live their identity openly, and the impact this had on their productivity at work. Again,



Have these new conditions affected you differently in terms of your sexual orientation/gender identity/sex characteristics?

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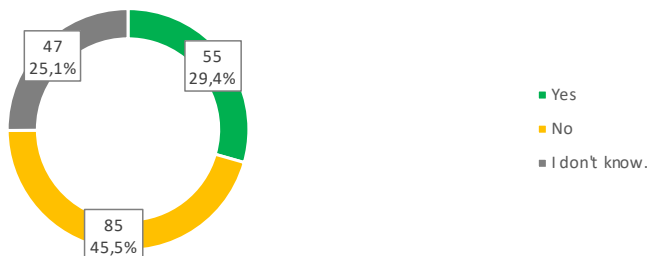


participants pointed out that the fear of the future caused by the pandemic could be exacerbated for LGBTI+ workers and that the increased risk of unemployment and difficulty in finding a job could have a more negative impact on LGBTI+ people.

The 2023 survey asked participants whether the pandemic had created conditions in their working lives that had changed and become permanent and, if so, whether these new permanent conditions affected them differently because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. Of the 74 participants (37.6%) who said that permanent conditions had been created, 15 felt that these conditions affected them differently because of their identity. More than half of the participants who gave this response mentioned the positive effects of moving to a hybrid or fully home-based working model, such as a decrease in the likelihood of discrimination, a decrease in their concerns about social pressure, and the ability to be more comfortable with their appearance. Some participants point to the isolating

Has the economic instability and uncertainty in Turkey affected your working life/conditions differently due to your gender identity/sexual orientation/sex characteristics? How?

N=187



effect of this situation. Some participants stated that it was more difficult to find a job and that their economic freedom was restricted.

Last year, for the first time, 18.6% of respondents answered 'yes' to the question we added to the survey to collect data on whether the economic instability and uncertainty in Turkey was affecting the working conditions of LGBTI+ workers. The responses of those who answered 'yes' showed that the need to reduce social life outside of work due to economic difficulties as well as the pandemic has had a negative impact on LGBTI+ people, who are particularly in need of safe spaces and solidarity, that unemployment has become widespread among LGBTI+ employees, that the fear of dismissal and the inability to find a new job has deepened, and that being open at work has become an even greater risk for LGBTI+ people in this context. Looking at this year's responses, the first striking data point is that the proportion of respondents who chose the 'yes' option increased to 27.9% this year. The contributions of these participants show that the continuous decrease in the purchasing power of wage earners due to economic instability and the increase in unemployment and concerns about job security put LGBTI+ workers in a more vulnerable position. The fear of losing their job and not being able to find a new one leads LGBTI+ workers to continue working in jobs where they are paid less than they deserve, where they cannot be open about their identity and where they are subject to pressure, discrimination and harassment. While some participants pointed to adverse economic conditions forcing LGBTI+ people to leave cosmopolitan cities and neighbourhoods where they could live relatively more comfortably, others linked economic instability to increasing conservatism in society, political demonisation of LGBTI+ people and hate speech against LGBTI+ people. Some participants stated that they would like to live abroad if they could create the conditions due to economic uncertainty, political instability and increasing conservatism.

The percentages suggest that the impact of economic conditions on transgender workers should be considered separately. This year, 10 out of 18 respondents (55.6%) who answered the question about their gender identity by selecting the options 'trans woman' (12), 'trans man' (6) and 'trans' (0) reported being negatively affected by economic instability. This rate is double the general rate mentioned above. The statements of these participants show that the adverse economic conditions in Turkey further limit the access of transgender people to gender-affirming processes. In particular, some participants stated that they could not afford to start taking hormones due to the high price of hormone medication, and that they had to postpone gender-affirming surgeries due to financial difficulties. Being marginalised because of their transgender identity and not being able to find a job, having to work while hiding their gender identity unless their gender identity is legally recognised and their name is changed in the identity register are among the experiences shared by transgender participants.

In parallel with all these findings, the responses to the open questions show that the main demand of LGBTI+ workers is freedom and visibility. As a condition for the fulfilment of this demand, participants point to increased social awareness, the abandonment of hetero- and cis-normative assumptions based on the binary gender system, and social transformation through education. Although the demand for legal security against discrimination, both in general and in employment, is prioritised among LGBTI+ workers, it can also be mentioned that there is a widespread perception that social transformation cannot be achieved through law alone. In this context, it is clear from the participants' statements that LGBTI+ employees also have demands from universities, professional organisations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations working in the field of LGBTI+ rights.

In conclusion, in line with the results of previous years' surveys, our 2023 surveys indicate that there are steps to be taken and discussions to be held in terms of legal policies, institutional policies and strategies to be developed by civil society organisations in order to prevent discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics in employment, to transform the disadvantaged position of LGBTI+ workers in accessing a comfortable and productive working environment, and to ensure equality in the exercise of social and economic rights. We hope that these studies will contribute to the development of policies to prevent discrimination against LGBTI+ people in employment and to empower LGBTI+ employees.