

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

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The image is a teal-colored background with a vertical white stripe on the left side. The stripe contains a close-up of a fountain pen's nib resting on a lined notepad. The main teal area contains the title text. At the bottom of the teal area, there is another image of a fountain pen resting on a notepad.

Key Findings

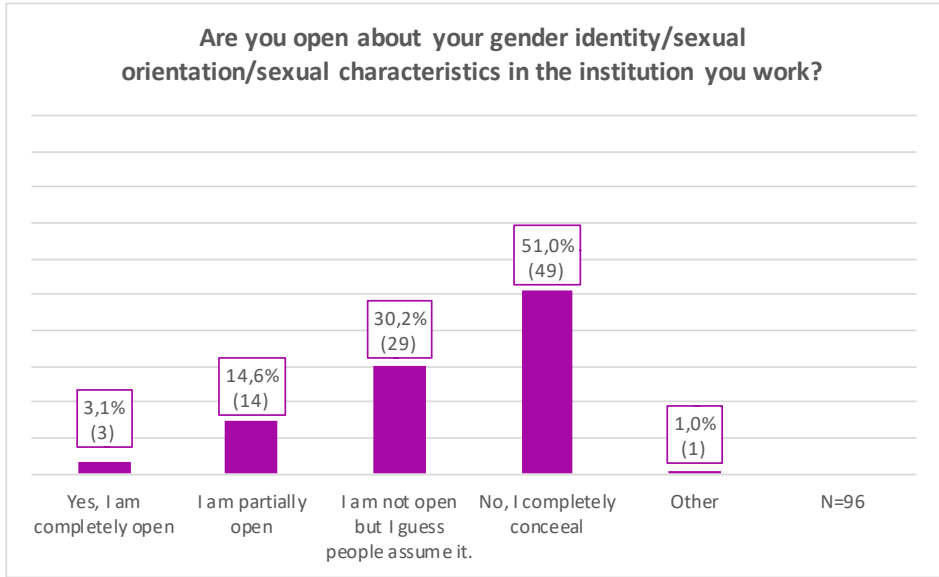
2023 Study on the Status of LGBTI+ Employees in Turkey's Public Sector

Kaos GL Association's research on the status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and plus people in the public sector in Turkey has completed its seventh year in 2023. The 2023 survey was conducted with 96 people who identified themselves as public sector employees and LGBTI+ and responded to the online survey questions we provided through SurveyMonkey Pro. As in previous years, this year's sample was predominantly composed of young people with post-secondary education who have recently joined the public sector. 64.6% of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 35; 94.8% had a bachelor's, associates, or graduate degree. 79.2% of respondents have worked in their organisation for 10 years or less.

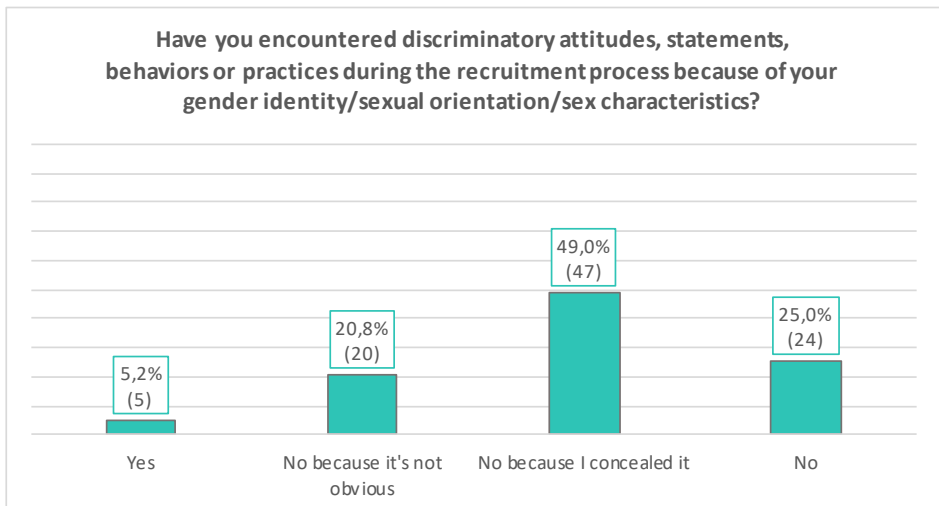
Looking at the areas in which this year's survey respondents work in the public sector, we see that, as in previous years, universities, health, and education are the leading areas. More than half of the respondents (53.1%) work in these sectors. On the other hand, the information provided by respondents shows that LGBTI+ employees from a wide range of professions are represented in the sample.

Since the 2020 survey, respondents have been asked to indicate their place of residence. However, the option "I prefer not to share" has been added to the options in recognition that some respondents may prefer not to disclose such information for safety reasons. This year, 20.8% of respondents chose to keep their city of residence confidential. In 2020, 2021 and 2022 this figure was 37.6%, 34.9% and 27.2% respectively. Of the respondents who indicated a city, 26.3% live in Ankara. Among the options most frequently chosen by these respondents, Ankara is followed by Istanbul (22.4%) and Izmir (10.5%). Although three-fifths of the respondents who specified a city live in these three metropolitan areas, it is clear from the participants' statements that our survey reached LGBTI+ employees from at least 20 provinces.

In the 2023 survey sample, 60.4% of respondents identified their gender identity as trans man, man, or cis man, and 59.4% of respondents identified their sexual orientation as gay. When the responses to these two questions are considered together, the proportion of participants who identified their gender identity as male (trans male, male or cis male) and their sexual orientation as gay was 49%. This means that gay men were again over-represented in this year's sample. On the other hand, for the first time this year, the gender identity question included the option of 'non-binary' in addition to 'other', and the total rate of participants selecting these two options was 14.6%. This rate shows that those who define their gender identity outside of the binary gender system are represented in the sample this year at the highest rate 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 12.4%.

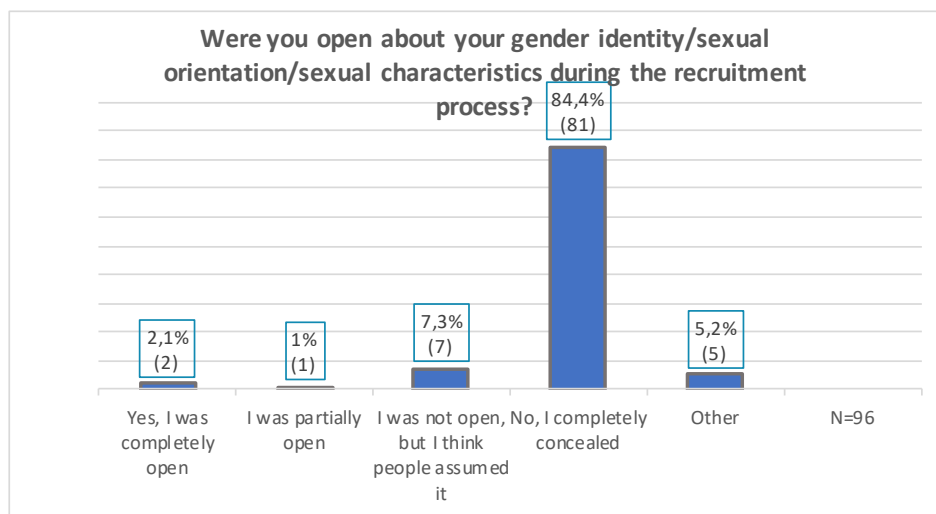


The rate of respondents who say they are completely open about gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics in their work organisation is 3.1% in the 2023 survey sample. In this year's private sector survey, which we conducted at the same time as the public sector survey, the rate is 21.3%. According to last year's surveys, the rate of fully open LGBTI+ employees at work was 6.5% in the public sector and 27.7% in the private sector. These rates were 5% and 17.2% in 2021, 3.4% and 14.8% in 2020, 4.4% and 17.4% in 2019 and 7% and 22% in 2018. The fact that the rates of disclosure of gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics are significantly lower in the public sector than in the private sector each year suggests



that the risk of discrimination and hate speech against LGBTI+ employees is much higher in the public sector than in the private sector. According to the 2023 survey data, 96.9% of LGBTI+ public sector employees in the sample cannot be fully open about their gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics.

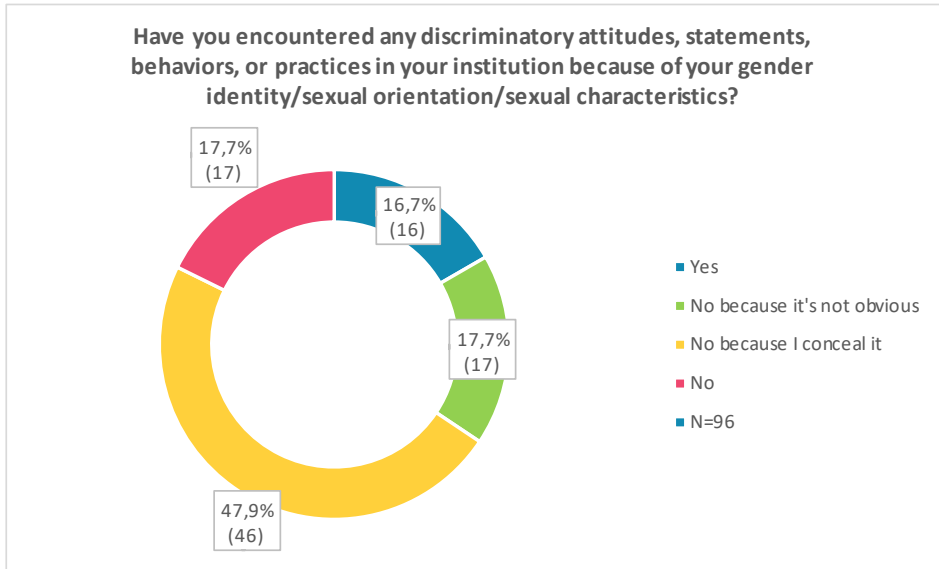
However, of the 49 people who reported being fully closeted, 3 reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes or practices on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender identity during recruitment and 6 reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes or practices in the workplace after recruitment. In addition, 25% of our respondents reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes or practices against other LGBTI+ employees in the organisation where they work, and 54.2% reported experiencing hate speech against LGBTI+ people. This rate is 32% in the private sector survey. The rate of respondents who did not want to specify their place of residence when answering the questions in the private sector survey was 10.2%; the fact that this rate was doubled in the public sector survey (20.8%) is a finding that should be considered in this context. Thus, the conditions leading to the proliferation of discrimination and hate speech against LGBTI+ people are much more severe in the public sector than in the private sector. As in previous years, the 2023 survey shows that discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation and sex characteristics is a serious obstacle to access to employment in the public sector. LGBTI+ employees follow a strategy of forced closure to avoid the risk of not being employed. As the risk of discrimination persists even after employment, the same strategy characterises the entire working life of LGBTI+ employees. In the public sector, it is even more enforced to be closeted than in the private sector.



Data from the 2023 survey shows that the proportion of respondents who reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes, statements, behaviour, or practices during recruitment was 5.2%. 69.8% of participants did not encounter such attitudes or practices during recruitment because their gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics were hidden or not openly visible. The proportion of participants who reported encountering discriminatory attitudes, statements, behaviour or practices in the workplace after recruitment is 16.7%. Again, 65.6% of participants cited hiding or being invisible about their gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics as a reason for not experiencing such treatment. In the light of these data, the first point to emphasise is that the rates of encountering discriminatory attitudes or practices, both in the recruitment process and in the workplace, are higher than the rates of being completely open in the recruitment process and in the workplace. This finding suggests that the strategy of enforced closure does not always eliminate the risk of discrimination in the public sector. Secondly, although the rates of encountering discriminatory attitudes or behaviour may seem low, the following finding should not be under-estimated: Three out of four LGBTI+ employees who responded to our 2023 survey have experienced discrimination in recruitment, and four out of five participants have either experienced discrimination in their working life or believe they have not experienced discrimination because they are perceived by those around them as cisgender and heterosexual, as they hide or do not reveal their gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics. On the other hand, the proportion of participants who reported that they had not experienced discriminatory attitudes or practices for no reason (25% during recruitment and 17% after starting work) should also be considered, along with the openness rates among participants. Only 2.1% of participants reported being completely open during the recruitment process and only 3.1% reported being completely open at work.

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 noted that the strategy of remaining in the closet, which LGBTI+ employees are forced to develop in the face of the risk of discrimination and harassment, makes it difficult to analyse the actual extent 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 where this strategy does not work, the feared risks are being materialised. As in previous years, this year's survey shows that it is extremely difficult for LGBTI+ people in Turkey to work in public with an open identity and that being closeted is adopted as a compulsory strategy.

In the 2020 survey, the overall rate of those who reported being fully or partially open in recruitment processes was 6.3%, and the overall rate of those who reported



experiencing discriminatory attitudes or practices in these processes was 6.9%. The rate of being fully or partially open increased to 17.7% after the start of service, and the rate of being discriminated against increased to 10.9% for the whole sample. In 2020, when we wrote up the key findings, we noted that if we only looked at these rates, we could conclude that being fully or partially open would automatically increase the rate of discrimination for LGBTI+ employees. However, when we analysed the responses to the questions about discrimination from participants who said they were open and partially open, we found that the rates of discrimination among these people were well below the general rates of discrimination in the sample. In the light of these data, we concluded that LGBTI+ civil servants only abandon the strategy of being closeted when they are sure that the risk of being discriminated against has almost disappeared. In these cases, the risk is rarely materialised. We underlined that in work environments where hetero- and cis-normative gender perceptions based on the binary gender system are very strong, the strategy of being closeted does not always work and the slightest word, behaviour or attitude that is incompatible with gender roles can expose a person to a discriminatory practice although they are not open.

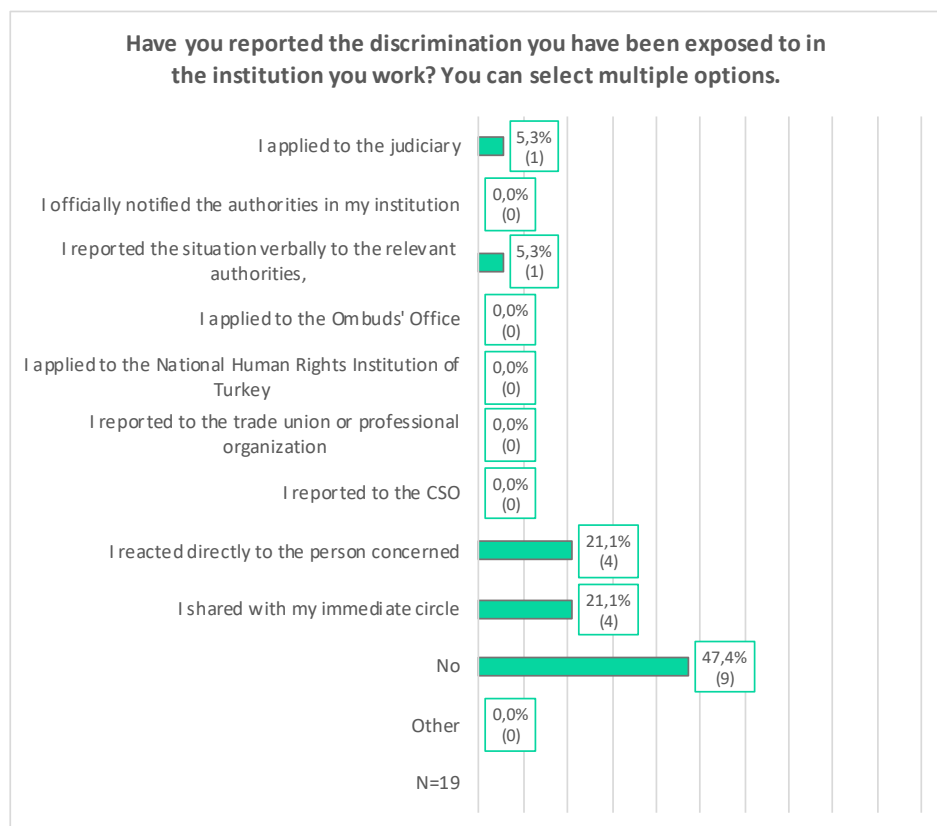
In the 2021 survey, the overall rate of those who were fully or partially open in recruitment was 7.3%, and the overall rate of those who reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes or practices in these processes was 4.5%. The rate of total or partial openness rose to 21.3% after starting work, while the rate of discrimination rose to 15.8%. There was not much difference in these rates compared with the previous year. However, an analysis of the responses of fully open and partially open

respondents to the questions about discrimination in 2021 shows that the rates of discrimination among these respondents exceeded the overall rates of discrimination in the sample. Three out of 16 respondents (18.8%) who reported being fully or partially open during recruitment and 13 out of 47 respondents (27.7%) who reported being fully or partially open in the workplace reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes, behaviours, or practices. Although there was no significant increase in the rates of being fully or partially out in the sample compared to the previous year, the fact that the rates of discrimination among these participants were significantly higher than the general rates in the sample raised the question of whether there was a relationship between this finding and the public dissemination of discriminatory discourses against LGBTI+ people by officials at various levels of the state at the time. Of course, this question had to be followed up in a comparative way with the results of the research we would conduct in the following years.

In the 2022 survey, the overall rate of those who reported being fully or partially open in recruitment processes was 10.8%, while the overall rate of those who reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes or practices in these processes was 7.6%. The rate of being fully or partially open increases to 25% after starting work and the rate of being discriminated against increases to 20.7% in the sample. 1 out of 10 participants (10%) who reported being fully or partially open during recruitment and 9 out of 23 participants (39.1%) who reported being fully or partially open at work reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes, behaviour, or practices. This increased inclusion of discriminatory discourse against LGBTI+ people in the statements made by officials at different levels of the state increased the risk of discrimination against fully or partially open public employees in their workplace.

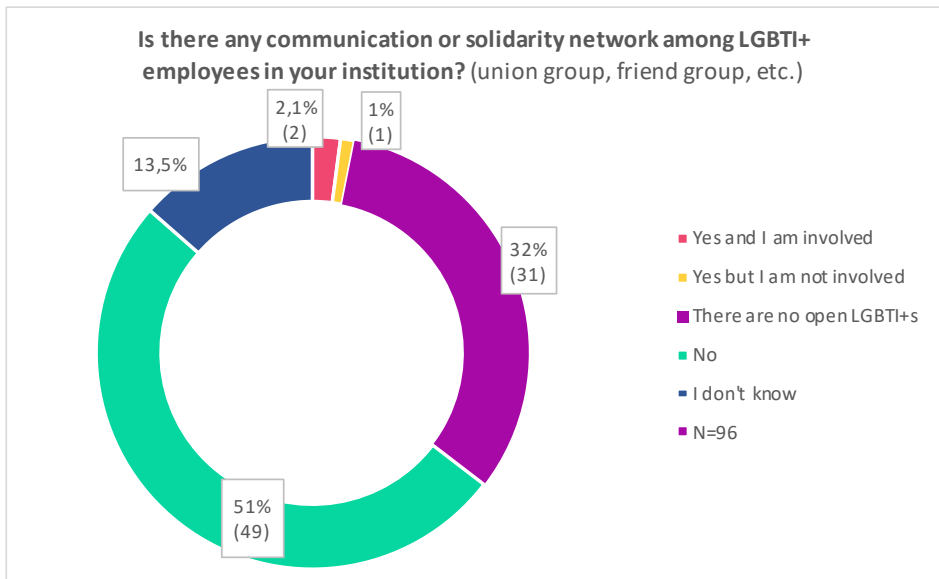
The overall rate of those who reported being fully or partially open during the recruitment process this year is 3.1%, while the overall rate of those who reported encountering discriminatory attitudes or practices during these processes is 5.2%. The rate of being fully or partially open rises to 17.7% after starting work and the rate of being discriminated against rises to 16.7%. Of the 17 participants who reported being fully or partially open in their workplace this year, 3 (17.7%) reported encountering discriminatory attitudes, behaviour, or practices. This rate is again higher than the general rate in the sample. The overall rate (3.1%) of those who reported being fully or partially open during recruitment was significantly lower than last year's rate (10.8%), with only 3 respondents giving this response. Although these three respondents did not report any experience of discrimination, it will be important to monitor whether the decrease in this rate continues in future surveys.

In addition to the strategy of remaining closeted, another phenomenon that makes it difficult to analyse the real extent of discrimination against LGBTI+ people in employment in Turkey is the low number of cases in which mechanisms for redres-



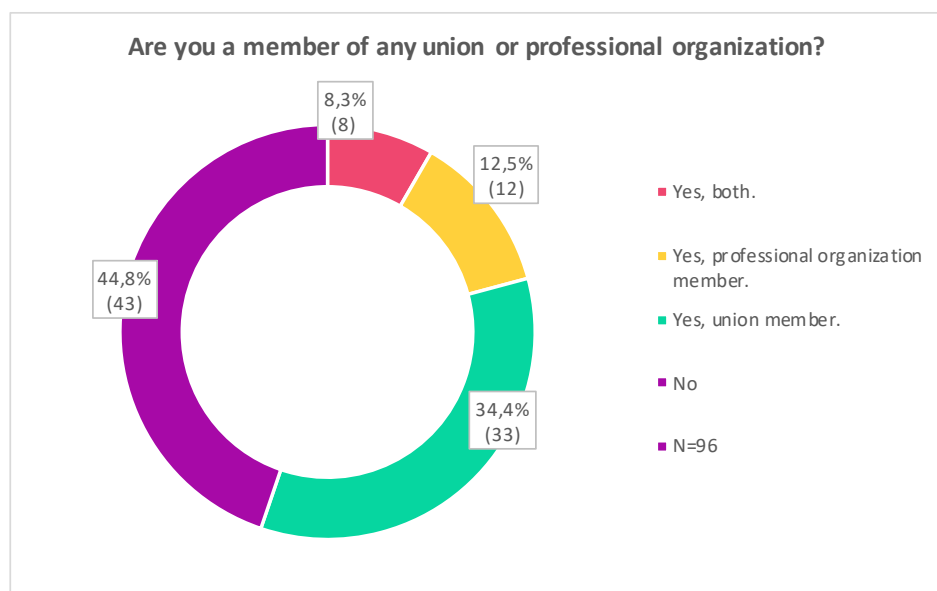
sing discrimination are used. Again, in parallel with the results of the research we have conducted in previous years, the 2023 survey shows that LGBTI+ public employees generally do not use any official channels to complain about the discrimination they face. This year, 5 participants who indicated that they had encountered discriminatory attitudes or practices during recruitment did not take any initiative to address the issue. Of the 16 participants who indicated that they had encountered discriminatory attitudes or practices in the organisation where they worked after recruitment, only one reported the situation verbally to the institutional authorities, while four of them reacted directly to the person concerned. Only one of these participants took the matter to court. The other participants did not take any initiative or only informed their relatives about the situation. The statements of the participants show that LGBTI+ employees do not believe that they can win against discrimination through official channels. On the contrary, they fear 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 disclosed against their will.

This table shows that LGBTI+ employees need empowering mechanisms to access public employment and working life. However, our research shows that such mechanisms do not exist in the public sector in Turkey, and where they do exist, they are ineffective. Only 2.1% of respondents reported that their organisation has rules or committees to prevent discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics. 6.3% of respondents said that such mechanisms existed but were not effective or well known. Examples of rules, customs and practices that lead to discrimination are dismissal from the public service, termination of employment, not being promoted, changing, or threatening to change the place of work and bullying.



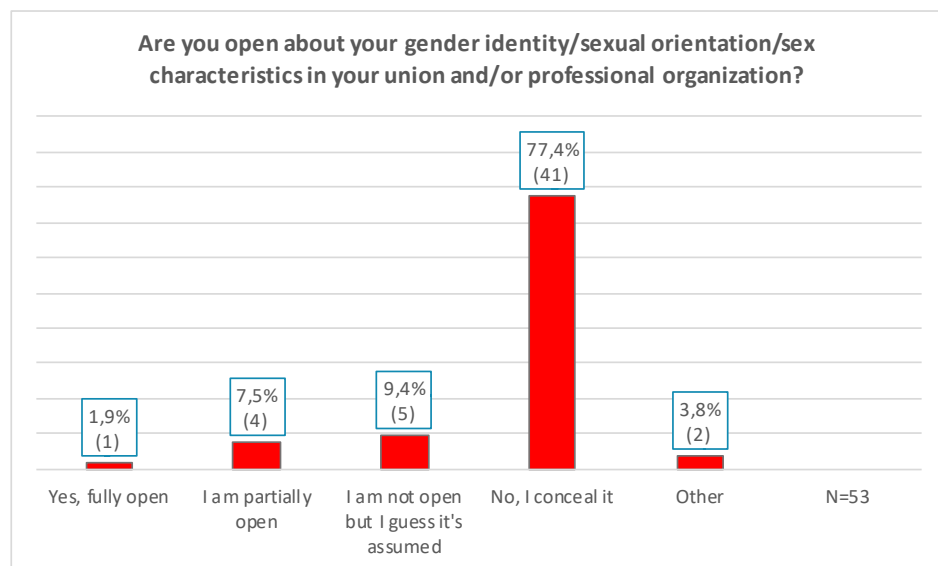
The results of our research, similar to the results of previous years' research, indicate that the strategy of remaining closeted that LGBTI+ employees are forced to follow also prevents them from creating empowerment mechanisms such as communication and solidarity networks among themselves. Only two participants (2.1%) indicated that such networks exist in their institution and that they are included in these networks. One participant said that there were such networks but that they were not involved in them. Our research shows that membership of trade unions or professional organisations among LGBTI+ public sector employees is not high. It is assumed that those who are members generally do not see trade unions and professional organisations as areas of struggle against discrimination of LGBTI+ people in working life. The proportion of our participants who said they were trade union members was 42.7%. This rate is much lower than the unionisation rate of public employees in Turkey. According to the communiqué of the Ministry

of Labour and Social Security published in the Official Gazette on 4 July 2023, number 32238, the unionisation rate among public employees in Turkey is 74.54%. On the other hand, only 20.8% of the respondents said that they were members of professional organisations. Among the respondents who indicated that they were members of a trade union and/or professional organisation, only one respondent indicated that they were completely open to their trade union or professional organisation. Although the rate of being completely closeted is lower than the corresponding rate in the sample, it is still high at 77.4%. These rates explain the fact that none of the respondents who said that they had been discriminated against at work because of their identity reported this to the trade union or professional organisation to which they belonged. The rate of respondents who chose 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 13.1%.



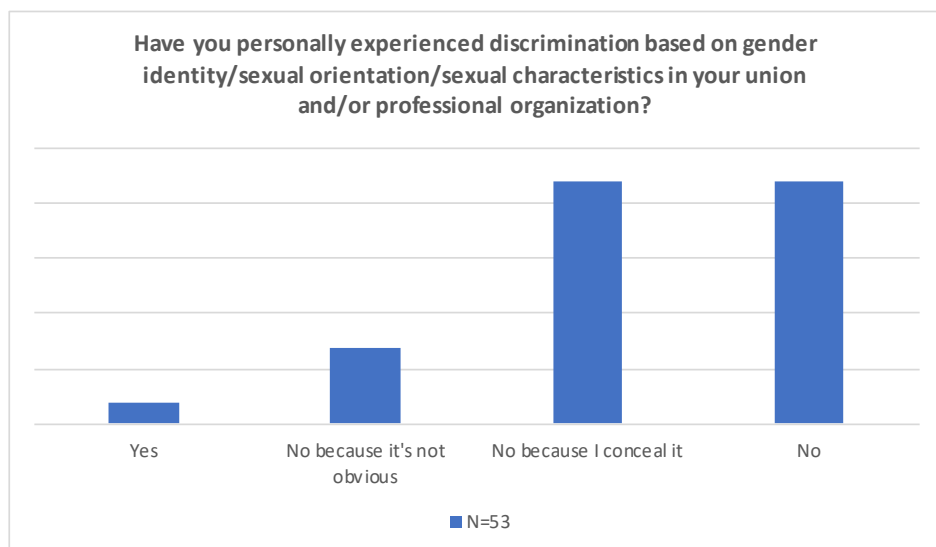
Although the fact that the rate of discrimination in the trade union or professional organisation of which one is a member (3.8%) is lower than the rate of discrimination in the workplace (16.7%) and the rate of hate speech (9.4%) is significantly lower than the corresponding rate in the workplace (54. 2%) suggests that trade unions and professional organisations provide somewhat safer spaces than public institutions, the fact that the rate of being closeted is still very high, the high rate (46%) of those who attribute this to the fact that their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics are not known and the statements of the participants

show that trade unions and professional organisations have important roles to play in empowering LGBTI+ employees in the workplace and in preventing discrimination against LGBTI+ people, and in this context trade unions and professional organisations should make it one of their priorities to develop policies in this direction.



Indeed, the results of our research show that the International Labour Organization's 2016 information note on the findings of the Pride Project, which states that the economic and social rights of LGBTI+ persons are not a priority issue for trade unions, is also valid for Turkey. Whereas the same briefing note states that LGBTI+ people are among the main groups facing discrimination and harassment in the workplace, that LGBTI+ people seeking employment prefer to be closeted about their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics as a coercive strategy, and that this strategy tends to persist throughout their working lives; whereas field studies on this issue show that LGBTI+ people who are open in the workplace are much less likely to show symptoms of anxiety, depression and burnout; supportive and inclusive policies should be implemented to ensure this; in countries where marriage equality is not recognised, discriminatory practices exist which result in LGBTI+ employees not being able to enjoy some rights on an equal basis due to family norms.

All of these findings are consistent with the results of previous years' surveys and the findings of the 2023 survey that we have presented so far. In addition, participants also shared that discrimination on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender characteristics, hate speech or the risk of discrimination and hate speech, and the strategy of remaining closeted that they have to main-

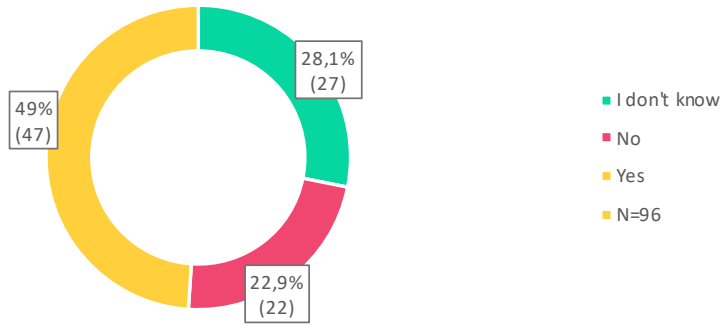


tain, have resulted in LGBTI+ employees not being able to build close and genuine relationships with their colleagues. It is understood that they do not feel a sense of belonging to the institution they work for and experience intense emotions such as hopelessness, unhappiness, anxiety, worry, anger, low performance and motivation, depression, stress and tension, and burnout syndrome caused by psychological and physical overload. This in turn reduces productivity and job satisfaction in the workplace. Given that workplaces are the places where we spend most of our lives in today's societies, the extent of these negative effects becomes even more apparent. It is also worth noting that the proportion of respondents who said that these conditions had a negative impact on their productivity and job satisfaction at work was higher among public sector employees (49%) than private sector employees (36%).

Although being closeted may provide some protection for LGBTI+ workers against the risk of discrimination and hate speech, being forced to be closeted is itself a form of discrimination. LGBTI+ workers who are certain that they will be discriminated against take certain precautions from the pre-employment stage and continue to do so throughout their employment.

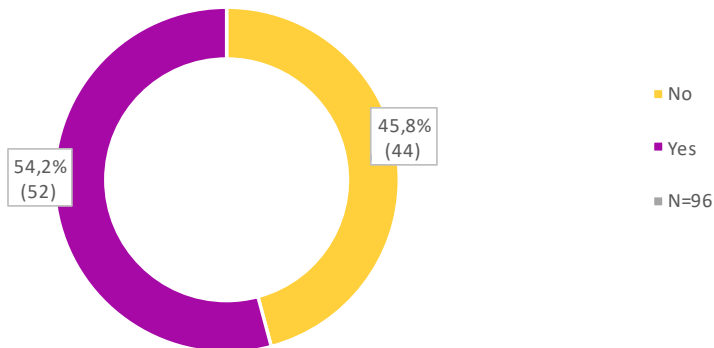
Although being closeted may seem to provide some protection for LGBTI+ workers against the risk of discrimination and hate speech, being forced to be closeted is itself a form of discrimination. In general, LGBTI+ workers take certain precautions from the pre-employment stage, knowing that they will be discriminated against, and continue to do so throughout their working life, hiding their gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics or revealing them only to very close colleagues.

Do discriminatory attitudes, statements, behaviors, or practices that you have encountered or are likely to encounter because of your gender identity/sexual orientation/sexual characteristics affect your productivity and job satisfaction at work?

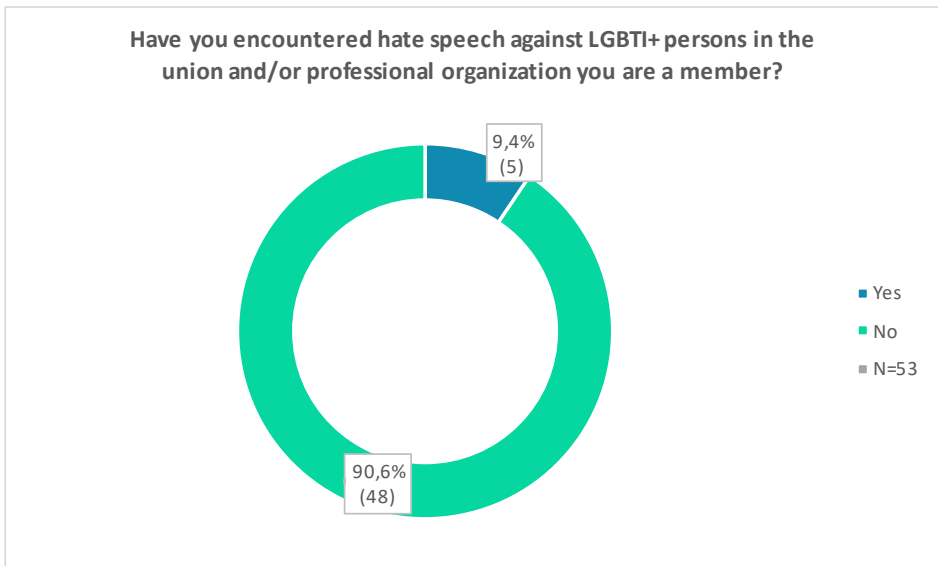


gues or other LGBTI+ employees, separating their work and private lives with strict boundaries, sometimes being forced to pretend in terms of language, body language and gender expression. This state of not being open, of having to be constantly on guard against potential discrimination, becomes itself a state of ongoing discrimination and can have serious psychological and sometimes physical effects on LGBTI+ workers that extend beyond the workplace. In fact, the responses to the open questions show that the most prioritised demand of LGBTI+ workers is freedom and visibility. As a condition for meeting this demand, respondents point to increased social awareness and the effective functioning of legal protection mechanisms.

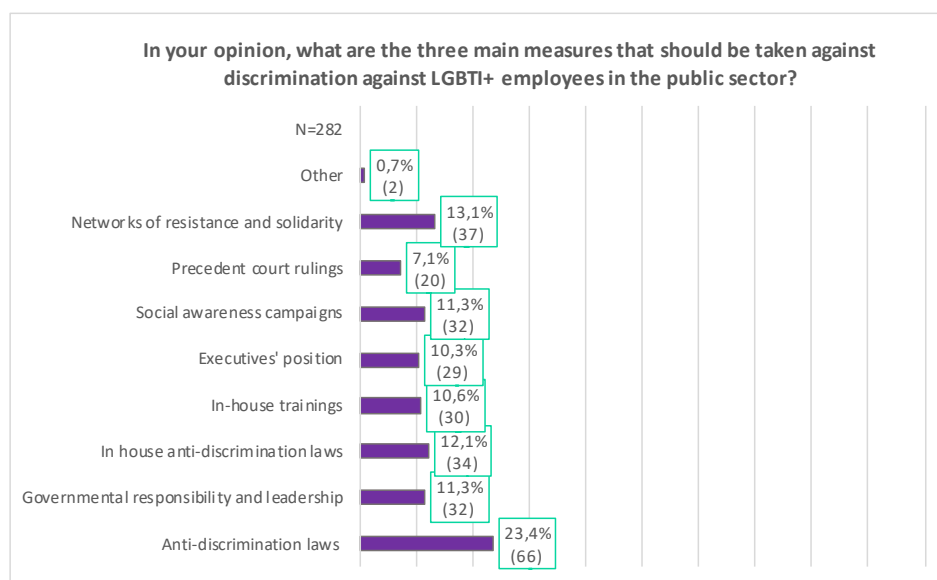
Have you encountered hate speech against LGBTI+ persons in the institution you work?



In the 2021 and 2022 surveys, in order to collect data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working lives and conditions of LGBTI+ employees, we asked participants whether they felt that the new working conditions created by the pandemic affected them differently because of their gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics. The results from the two years were mutually supportive. The statements of the participants who talked about positive effects showed the extent of the stress, anxiety and insecurity caused by the strategy of being closeted that LGBTI+ employees had to maintain in the workplace. Participants talked about the positive effects of working remotely or alternatively due to the pandemic. Responses revealed that physical distance from the heteronormative, cisnormative and male-dominated work environment made LGBTI+ workers feel safer. There were even participants who stated that this process created an opportunity to accept their own identity and find themselves. On the other hand, participants who highlighted the negative consequences of the pandemic pointed to isolation and insecurity. This time, as part of the 2023 research, participants were asked whether the pandemic had changed the conditions of their working lives and whether these conditions had subsequently become permanent and, if so, whether these new permanent conditions affected them differently because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. Only two of the 13 people (13.8%) who said that permanent conditions had been created thought that these conditions affected them differently because of their identity. When compared with the data from the private sector survey we conducted this year, these figures show that permanent changes to working conditions as a result of the pandemic are not as common in the public sector as in the private sector.



Last year, 14.2% of respondents answered 'yes' to the question we added to the survey in 2022 to collect data on whether the economic instability and uncertainty experienced in Turkey was affecting the working conditions of LGBTI+ workers. The contributions of the participants who gave this answer showed that the pandemic, as well as the economic situation, deepened the isolation and precariousness of LGBTI+ workers. It was understood that the need to reduce social life outside of work had a negative impact on LGBTI+ people, who were particularly in need of safe spaces and solidarity; the fear of being dismissed and not finding a new job increased among LGBTI+ workers; in this context, being open at work became an even greater risk for LGBTI+ workers, and thus their strategies for living in better conditions were disrupted. A trans male participant working as a health worker highlighted the difficulties that he experienced in accessing hormones during his last period.



Looking at this year's findings, the first striking data point is that the proportion of participants who chose the 'yes' option in the sample increased to 26.9%. The statements of these respondents suggest that economic instability leads LGBTI+ workers in the public sector to be more closeted. The quotes show that LGBTI+ people working in the public sector have to tolerate negative conditions due to both the fear of losing their jobs and the lack of job and salary security in the private sector, and that as their economic freedom decreases, they become more dependent on others, more vulnerable and have fewer opportunities for socialisation. Some participants link economic instability to the political demonisation of LGBTI+ people and the increase in hate speech and violence against LGBTI+ people. In this

context, there are also participants who state that they would like to live abroad if the conditions were right.

In conclusion, in line with the findings of previous years' research, our 2023 research shows 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 gender characteristics in employment, to transform the disadvantaged position of LGBTI+ workers in accessing a peaceful and productive working environment, and to ensure equality in the exercise of social and economic rights. We hope that this research will contribute to the development of policies to prevent discrimination against LGBTI+ people in employment and to empower LGBTI+ employees.