



## **LGBTI+ Rights are Union Rights**

### **Outcome Report of the "Increasing LGBTI+ Equality in Unions" Meeting**

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#### **Why LGBTI+ Rights Are Union Rights?**

LGBTI+'s are exposed to discrimination due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual characteristics and face serious problems in accessing rights. In this situation that also affects individuals' professional lives, equality is hampered and LGBTI+'s are isolated in their struggle for rights. Considering that the focus of trade union activities is the social and economic rights of the workers, protecting and defending the relevant rights of LGBTI+ workers without discrimination is also included in trade union rights.

LGBTI+ movement of Turkey has turned its face towards the union movement since its formation. The problems of LGBTI+ workers and the violations of their rights in work-life have become one of the main issues of the LGBTI+ movement.

The Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK) added "sexual orientation and sexual identity" to discrimination bans in its constitution proposal presented to the public in 2009. The Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (KESK) included measures against sexual orientation discrimination in work life and making these measures a constitutional rule in

its "proposals for a new constitution". Across the union perspective, Kaos GL organized the third International Anti-Discrimination Symposium in 2014 and Tum-Bel-Sen, a member of KESK hosted the Symposium.

Trade unionists from the United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Northern Cyprus, and Turkey participated in the Third International Symposium on Anti-Discrimination. The KESK Central, All Municipal and Local Government Services Workers Union (All Bel-Sen), Health and Social Service Workers Union (SES), the Education and Science Workers Union (Eđitim-Sen), LGBTI Commission of İzmir Eđitim-Sen Branch No. 2, LGBTI Commission of İstanbul Eđitim-Sen Branch No.3 and Eskişehir, Malatya, Mersin and Urfa Eđitim-Sen representatives took part in the symposium.

With the developing interaction, the unions published celebratory messages on their social media accounts on May 17th International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and on Pride Week, and published statements against the smear campaigns towards LGBTI+.

### **The Situation of LGBTI Employees in the Private and Public Sector**

Within the scope of the researches that the Kaos GL Association conducted for the private sector since 2015 and for the public sector since 2017, different aspects of LGBTI+ employees' work-life such as hiring processes, working conditions and discrimination experiences at workplaces are being assessed. Kadir Has University The Gender and Women's Studies Research Center has been participating in the research since 2018.

The 2019 research on public employees shows that public employee LGBTI+'s generally do not apply to any official channel in the face of discrimination they are subjected to. Out of the 27 participants who stated that they faced discriminatory attitudes or practices during or after the recruitment processes, only 1 participant stated that they reported the situation to the union or

professional organization they were affiliated with. It is also striking that none of the LGBTI+ public servant participants were members of trade unions or professional organizations.

In the 2019 study of private-sector employees, out of the 59 participants who stated that they faced discriminatory attitudes or practices based on gender identity, sexual orientation or sexual characteristics in their workplace, not even one has stated that they reported the situation to their union or professional organization.

Members of trade unions in both studies generally do not see the unions and professional organizations as a place to combat discrimination against LGBTI+'s. In the public sector research, 22% of the participants selected the "organized struggle and solidarity networks" for the question on the three main measures to be taken against discrimination against LGBTI+'s. These findings show that unions and professional organizations have important responsibilities in empowering LGBTI+ workers in employment and the struggle against discrimination.

Not having developed an environment against discrimination, facing tougher conditions in the public sector than in the private sector in terms of human rights, shows Turkey's disadvantageous situation.

### **Current Situation in the Unions**

The state of emergency issued by the government in 2016 has dramatically reduced participation in unions and unions' LGBTI+ policies. This situation also affected LGBTI+ commissions. LGBTI+ policies and activities were left to the initiative of the people present in the branches. In addition, the fact that the union managements pulled themselves back and remained silent regarding the LGBTI+ policies played an important role in the decline of participation and policies.

The LGBTI+'s are exposed to intense mobbing and human rights violations in working life in the current period. LGBTI+'s are being drained down for the professional interests of other employees. LGBTI+ inclusiveness is not considered even in the city change options of public employees, and the system is operated in favor of cis-heterosexuals.

While municipalities or bar associations relatively adopt LGBTI+ policies, the requests of union representatives who want to work in the context of LGBTI+ policies and activities are left unanswered. A hierarchy of rights is generally well established within the trade unions. These hierarchies also affect the motivation of union representatives. LGBTI+ people hesitate to become members of the unions. LGBTI+ issue is not seen among the struggle for rights. However, it is seen as just a "topic". The idea that LGBTI+'s cannot members of the unions also emerges among the managers. Also, patriarchy in the unions stands out as another problem. Women's say are being ignored and their demands are not evaluated.

Considering the 2016 process, being a union member is perceived as a negative situation and the isolation in the local organizations is getting deeper. Despite these current events, union representatives who have adopted LGBTI+ policies and feminist policies as a principle continue to organize meetings, establish reading groups and popularize LGBTI+ policies on their own initiative.

### **Recommendations**

Considering the process experienced in unions since 2016 and their lowkey response to the LGBTI+ issue, this process and LGBTI+ policies should be analyzed in depth.

Anti-heterosexist policies should be included in the fundamental policies of the trade unions. Both of the parties should guarantee discussions and debates

on these policies within the union. These policies should be made visible in the union's publications and programs.

A communication network should be established to strengthen solidarity among trade union representatives who carry out LGBTI+ policies. Dates such as May 17, November 20, Pride Week should be added to the union agendas.

It should be clearly declared that LGBTI+ equality will be addressed at all organizational levels and that the union “accepts LGBTI+ equality as a union issue”.

Gender awareness trainings in trade unions should be implemented for the representatives and managers. Associations should forward their reports and brochures to union branches and include joint trainings with unions on their agenda.

Considering the influence of headquarters on branches, LGBTI+ organizations should communicate with union headquarters. A quota should be introduced in the head office elections of unions to increase the participation of LGBTI+'s and women.

The problems of LGBTI+ trade union members should be reported; awareness studies should be planned and implemented. The reflections of LGBTI+ studies within the union should be monitored and evaluated regularly. Trade unions should organize activities and policies to increase LGBTI+ participation. Trade unions operating on LGBTI+ rights should work together.

LGBTI+ rights advocacy should be guaranteed with changes to the union constitutions and motions. Safe environments should be created in unions where LGBTI+ can come out and develop policies.

Managers should provide the necessary support to increase the number of LGBTI+ commissions within the branches and increase their efficiency. The

name of the women's secretariats should be changed to gender equality secretariats or an additional LGBTI+ secretariat should be established.

## Conclusion

The steps taken by some of the unions regarding LGBTI+ policies and activities before 2016 are known to everyone. Before 2016, the unions made various inclusive statements, declared their adoption of LGBTI+ policies, issued congratulatory messages and organized awareness activities.

The repressive and destructive process which started in 2016 and still being felt has shaken not only the LGBTI+ work carried out in the unions but also the unions themselves. The rights violations suffered by LGBTI+ are human rights violations and unions should facilitate the work-life of LGBTI+'s in this context. Ensuring the participation of LGBTI+'s in the unions will also transform and strengthen the unions.

The recommendations mentioned above have been listed for this purpose and should be implemented both by trade unions and non-governmental organizations.