



UNION PRACTICES TO ACHIEVE AN EGALITARIAN WORKPLACE



SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Why address sexual diversity as a union issue

People who are, or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex suffer from social stigma, exclusion and discrimination at work, at home, at school, in health institutions and in many other aspects of their lives.

Individuals can be fired from their jobs, bullied at school, they are denied proper medical treatment, expelled from their homes, disowned by their parents, forced into psychiatric institutions, forced to marry or become pregnant, and subjected to attacks on their reputation.

At work, the impact of "coming out" can range from the lack of career advancement, to offensive jokes, to exclusion until the non-renewal of the employment contract or unfair dismissal.

Trade unions, as promoters of decent work for all men and women are essential in generating policies and actions that will help create inclusive work environments.

What problems may LGBTI workers face at work?

The first obstacle is the difficulty of living one's identity in peace. The fear of exclusion, discrimination and harassment among peers as well as the constant fear of dismissal or exclusion from training and career advancement make LGBTI hide their personal life at the workplace, which causes constant and unjustified tension, and may result in adverse effects on their health.

This concealment can also mean that workers cannot access the same benefits as their heterosexual peers (such as pensions, leave, paternity leave, etc.).

If their sexual orientation is known, they can be rejected when applying for a job or a promotion, or they can be discriminated against and harassed by peers and superiors.

The first step, using language correctly

LGBTI people have always been marginalized and harassed through the use of language. Not only because of the existence of jokes and insulting words but because they are invisible within groups that eliminate their differences and own identities. That is why correct language must be used at the workplace, within unions, during collective bargaining with employers, in organizing as well as in recruitment activities. One must speak of LGBTI, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual, without forgetting that each of these groups are different and have their own needs, which should be addressed.

The simplest way to make this happen is by creating spaces where all voices can be heard and their problems and needs can be heard.

When it is time to act what can a union do

01 Include LGBTI rights on the **Equality Agenda** of the union and make sure that its top leaders and representatives are committed to the issue.

02 Develop **specific policies** on LGBTI rights at work, including equal rights and non-discrimination, and incorporate them into all policies that can affect LGBTI people. For example, policies regarding women workers can have issues that affect lesbian workers.

03 Establish **structures or networks for LGBTI members**. These spaces not only serve to better address issues related to LGBTI rights but to support those workers who have not yet "come out of the closet", but want to do so. Knowing of other LGBTI

union members can be a critical step in giving them the confidence to open up about themselves. However, you should always ensure confidentiality. Information on these structures should be visible to all workers but the ways of contacting them should be structured in a way that workers can approach them without being exposed to the rest. Likewise union representatives should be able to provide information guaranteeing its confidentiality.

04 For all of these reasons it is essential that both union representatives and **union leaders are trained in issues regarding equality and the rights of LGBTI workers**. This should include the law of each country as well as international standards, etc.

05 In this regard, and in order to be able to give visibility to the issue and the actions the union carries out, it is advisable to disseminate and sensitize people on the need to promote equality for the LGBTI community and what unions are doing about it. For this you can hold seminars, conferences, newsletters or campaigns in various media.

06 Include in the **collective bargaining** of each sector and of each company clauses related to LGBTI rights. For example, anti-discrimination clauses that include sexual orientation and gender identity; definitions of family in which same-sex couples are included; ensuring that social benefits are also for same-sex couples, etc.

07 Ensure that **union benefits** are offered without discrimination on sexual orientation or marital status.

08 Recruit and organize LGBTI workers in the union. This will not only help strengthen the unions but it will allow unions to truly represent all workers affiliated.

LGBTI people contribute to our societies, communities, workplaces and unions.

We all perform better when we have the freedom to be ourselves without fear.

Let us work together to ensure that workplaces and unions include everyone, without distinction.

True belonging does not mean being like everyone else.

We are diverse.

We are equal.

We are organized.

Decent work for all. Let's make it happen ... together.

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