

LGBT+ members working abroad

The negotiating issue

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender plus people experience discrimination when looking for work and once in the workplace. At best, this is ignorance and stereotyping. Most commonly, it is prejudice and harassment. At worst, it is hatred and violence.

In the UK, this discriminatory treatment is unlawful. This is not the case everywhere. In many countries, anti-LGBT+ discrimination is perfectly lawful. And in 70 jurisdictions, including many countries where the UK has strong historic and current links, it is the law itself that discriminates. Same sex activity and relationships are criminalised, in some cases with very severe sentences, including the death penalty. The situation for trans workers can differ from the situation for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) workers, but globally, trans workers face higher levels of discrimination than LGB workers.

This is a negotiating issue for UNISON as increasing numbers of employers, including many higher education institutions, operate overseas and send UK-based workers abroad.

What steps are needed to protect LGBT+ workers?

The bargaining agenda

The fact that LGB or trans people are discriminated against in a particular country should not be used as a reason to ban LGBT+ workers from taking up opportunities.

The most important point is that employers have the same duty of care for their staff whether they are working in the UK or elsewhere.

The best practice advice in our bargaining agenda for LGB and trans workers still apply. LGB and trans equality bargaining factsheets are online in the resources section at www.unison.org.uk/out.

Additional key responsibilities of employers for when workers are posted overseas:

- Check the current situation in the country, noting that social attitudes or indeed state practice may not be the same as the legal position. Use the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office country reports at gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice, information from ILGA, the International LGBTI Association to which UNISON is affiliated at www.ilga.org; and where possible, take advice from local LGBT+ organisations, which can be contacted via ILGA;

- Effective training for all managers involved in overseas postings;
- Confirmation of what measures they are taking to ensure the safety of their LGB or T employee while abroad;
- Linking workers in with international LGBT+ staff networks, where they exist, while ensuring people are not outed (their sexual orientation or trans status revealed without their consent) when abroad - always use bcc for messages, for example;
- If an LGBT+ worker declines an overseas posting because of the situation for LGBT+ people in that country, there should be no detriment to their career prospects.

LGBT+ members in UNISON

In UNISON, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender plus members are organised locally, regionally and nationally.

Each of UNISON's 12 regions has an LGBT+ group which have their own confidential mailing lists, regular meetings, train activists, elect reps to the national LGBT+ committee and play an active part in all the union's work in the region.

Many branches have their own LGBT+ officer. There is annual training for branch LGBT+ officers; email out@unison.co.uk for details.

There are also national network meetings for Black LGBT+ members, disabled LGBT+ members, bisexual members and transgender members.

Members can sign up on the UNISON LGBT+ website for the monthly LGBT+ e-bulletin.

To find out more email out@unison.co.uk and visit www.unison.org.uk/out

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