

LGBT+ ISSUES ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

Why UNISON works internationally

UNISON has a long, proud history of international work. We are known in the UK and globally for our internationalist perspective in organising, fighting privatisation and defending employment and trade union rights.

The neo-liberal economic model behind privatisation and outsourcing and attacks on workers rights are global. UNISON has no option but to respond as part of the European and international trade union movement.

How UNISON works internationally

Work is co-ordinated by a small unit who report to the NEC's international committee. Most regions also have international committees. A network of branch and regional activists also play a vital role in taking work forwards including:

- Contact with unions abroad
- Solidarity work
- Working with international organisations
- Sharing experiences
- Involving members.

Current priority areas are Palestine, Colombia, Qatar and Turkey. Issues of ethical procurement and supply chain management and public services in the global south continue to be important policy areas for campaigning work.

National LGBT+ committee's international work

Our LGBT+ international work, coordinated by the international sub-committee, is underpinned by a number of **principles**:

- a genuinely international focus (not Eurocentric)
- LGBT+ rights are raised in all the international forums in which UNISON works
- trade unionism is raised in all LGBT+ forums in which we work

- all our work is aimed at furthering UNISON's agenda
- solidarity actions are guided by the stated wishes of the other body, not our assumptions about their needs.

Much of this work is long term and strategic, and has 4 main areas:

1. Promoting and participating in ILGA

UNISON is an associate (supporting) member of ILGA, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, the global federation of LGBTI organisations. The National LGBT+ Committee is a full member, as are most regional LGBT groups. Full membership is open to LGBT+ groups and gives the right to participate in ILGA decision making. UNISON has played an important part in ILGA over many years. We encourage LGBT+ members and groups to support its work and make use of its great resources at www.ilga.org.

2. Extending the equality agenda of labour internationals and sister unions

UNISON is active in Public Services International, the global federation of public sector unions. PSI and the sister body for education unions, Education International, have a joint LGBT equality programme, which we've been involved with from the start, and we've worked for the equality remit of the International TUC to explicitly include LGBT+ rights.

We are also part of ETUC (European TUC) and EPSU (European federation of Public Service Unions). EPSU's 2014 Congress adopted amendments proposed by UNISON to extend its equalities work to include LGBT equality.

Increasing numbers of unions acknowledge LGBT+ equality as a trade union issue. UNISON raises LGBT+ equality issues with other unions wherever it can. We were a project partner with the Slovenian lesbian group SKUC-LL in their work with the Free Trade Union Association of Slovenia and Teacher's Trade Union.

3. Solidarity and LGBT human rights

We lend UNISON's name to LGBT+ groups facing crisis or particularly challenging situations, where they have sought our support.

We work with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to develop and promote campaigning against 'pinkwashing' and for boycott, divestment and sanctions. With help from UNISON, Palestine Solidarity has a profile at pride events across the UK, handing out hundreds of campaign postcards.

Under the last Labour Government, the UK began to seriously address LGBT+ equality in its foreign policy for the first time. We were part of a stakeholder group which – among other developments - oversaw the drawing up LGBT human rights ‘toolkit’. This later became the basis for the European Union’s guidelines on LGBT human rights. We seek to influence government policy and actions towards the EU, the International Labour Organisation, the UN Human Rights Council and the Commonwealth.

We raise international LGBT+ rights with the Labour party, and promote the work of the Labour Campaign for International Development. We also work through Labour Link towards the European Parliament.

4. Encouraging an internationalist perspective amongst LGBT+ members

A very important part of our role is encouraging an internationalist perspective amongst LGBT+ members. We use the website, LGBT+ newsletter ‘Out in UNISON’, monthly LGBT+ e-bulletin and a range of events – within UNISON and out in the community - to get this message out

An important thread of this has been explaining to our members the golden principle of solidarity - ask those affected and listen carefully before you act, not decide for ourselves how to respond to reports of anti-LGBT threats or atrocities.

More information

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International work:

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unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/working-internationally