

**GLOBAL
UNIONS
LGBTI
WORKERS**

Strategy Roundtable Report



Amsterdam, Netherlands

06.12.22 – 08.12.22



Introduction

The Global Unions LGBTI Workers project convened a strategy roundtable in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in early December 2022. Representatives of global union federations (GUFs), their affiliated trade unions, labour movement solidarity organisations, and allies gathered at De Burcht, the beautiful former headquarters of the Diamond Workers Union, hosted by Mondiaal FNV and Netwerk Regenboog FNV of the Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV). The roundtable was the first cross-sectoral, global gathering of LGBTI trade union leaders and allies since 2018. Participants came from South Africa, Uganda, Korea, Costa Rica, Guyana, Peru, Canada, the United States and Europe.

A Note About Terminology

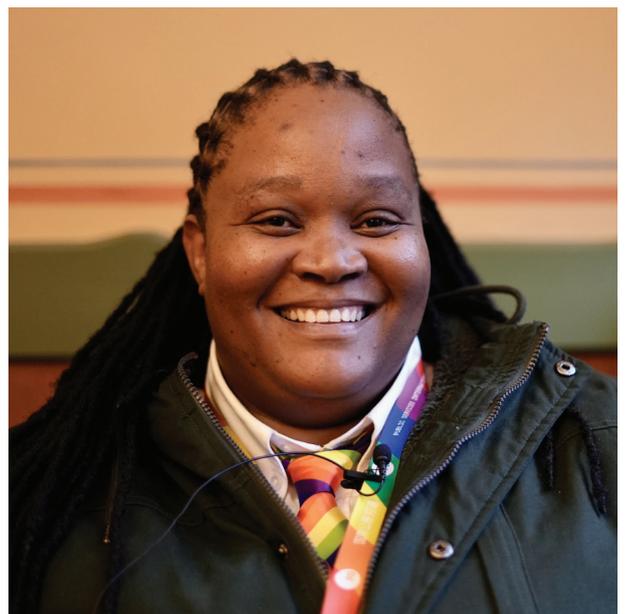
We use LGBTI – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex – to name our project and community. Some global union federations and affiliates use variations of this, including LGBT+. In all cases, our intentions are to be fully inclusive.



A Brief History of The Global Unions LGBTI Workers Project

The Global Unions LGBTI Workers project coalesced after a meeting held in 2018 to coordinate efforts and nudge GUFs and their affiliates to undertake work to advocate for LGBTI workers' rights. Previously, some GUFs or their regional organisations occasionally made statements or held meetings on LGBTI issues. Some affiliated trade unions embraced the struggle for LGBTI rights and achieved progress internally and at the bargaining table. Public Services International (PSI) and Education International (EI) have collaborated for over 20 years on LGBTI issues. Initial funding from Mondiaal FNV, the Dutch trade union solidarity organisation, was later supplemented by PSI, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and PSI affiliates Kommunal and Vision (Sweden), and UNISON (United Kingdom). The project published *Fighting for Equality* (in English, French and Spanish) in 2021, established a website, lgbtiworkers.org and established a social media presence. A group of GUF representatives guides the project, and a coordinator, based with PSI, administers the project.





Challenges

Participants explored the many familiar challenges facing us as we organise to make our trade unions, GUFs and the labour movement more inclusive of LGBTI workers. These challenges included:

- Organising in countries where LGBTI people and activity is criminalised or faces official harassment.
- Cultural, social, religious, and political contexts.
- Trade union loyalty to political parties espousing anti-LGBTI policies prevents public advocacy work.
- A failure to apply trade union values (equality, inclusion, fairness, solidarity) and a human rights lens to LGBTI issues.
- Reluctance of GUFs to alienate affiliates on a sensitive issue.
- Lack of resources and budget allocated for LGBTI-focussed organising.
- Resistance within the union and among some leaders and an assumption that members are not supportive or “ready”.
- The generational divide in membership and leadership regarding attitudes toward LGBTI people.
- Trade unions adhering to a cautious and reformist business or servicing model.
- LGBTI union members are not organised or connected, and identifying LGBTI members and leaders is difficult.
- LGBTI issues are considered niche and not part of the actual work of the union.
- Leaders do not view transgender/transition issues as significant or a priority.
- Often, we accept good intentions but lack the power to demand action and progress.
- Members are distracted by employers’ “pink-washing” while viewing their union as unresponsive.
- There is a real or perceived lack of safety to be “out” in the union and workplace. Even trade union events, spaces, and structures can be unsafe for LGBTI members.
- Trade union education programmes are not inclusive and do not reflect the realities of LGBTI workers’ experiences.
- Trade union culture and leaders that are strictly workerist deny the validity of intersectionality.



Successes

Participants also acknowledged progress. Here are some notable success stories we heard:

GUF World Congresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events and speakers (PSI, EI, IUF, ITUC) • Resolutions (EI, PSI, BWI, IUF, ITUC)
LGBTI and Human Rights Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNI, IUF, EI, PSI • UNISON and many affiliates
Campaigns and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNISON trans allies' campaign • International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) • UFCW OUT Reach campaign • LGBTI-focussed web and social media posts • Statements for IDAHOBIT and Pride (GUFs and many affiliates)
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserved executive seats for LGBTI workers (some affiliates) • Global and regional committees/ working groups/networks (PSI, IUF, UNI, ITF), national and local committees/working groups/networks (UNISON, UFCW, and many affiliates)
Collective Bargaining and Global Framework Agreements (GFAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal benefits and protections (many affiliates) • Transition leave negotiated at IKEA (FNV) • GFAs under discussion with major transnational companies (IUF)
Education, Research and Membership Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training (IndustriALL, IUF) • Membership surveys (UFCW) and affiliate surveys (PSI, ITF, UNI) • Union Equality Pledge (KMWU)
Outreach and Coalition-Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ILGA-World and ILGA-Europe membership and involvement (UNISON, IUF, PSI) • Participation in community Pride events (many affiliates)



Successes

Participants also took a deeper dive into these examples of successful LGBTI worker organising:

- The IUF takes a very systematic approach. Its global LGBTI Workers and Allies committee centres its work around four key pillars: company work, politics and lobbying, training and education, and coalition building.
- In the United States and Canada, the United Food and Commercial Workers international union (UFCW), an affiliate of both UNI and IUF, has an LGBTI constituency group, UFCW OUTreach, with its own membership and elected executive. It collaborated with the University of California Los Angeles to conduct a comprehensive survey of members on the lived experiences of LGBTI workers.
- The PSI has a global network of LGBTI leaders and an active and engaged Inter-Americas regional LGBT+ working group that meets regularly.
- PSI affiliate UNISON (United Kingdom) has a significantly developed democratic structure featuring a national committee, local and regional committees, and an annual conference that guides LGBT+-related work. UNISON also has a national staff officer dedicated to LGBTI issues.



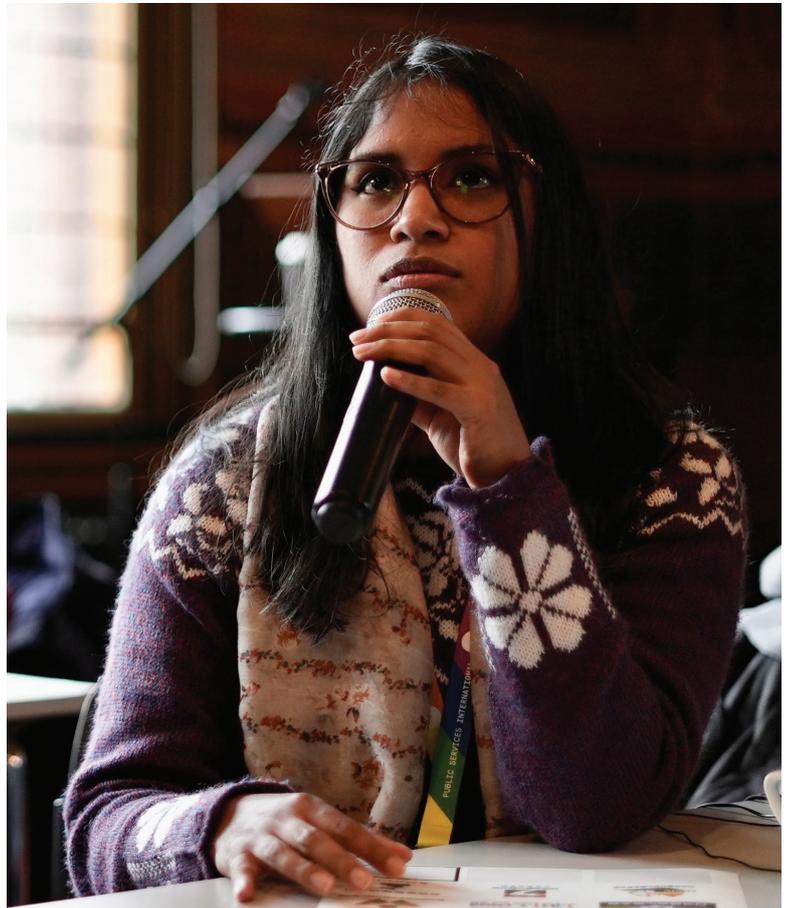
Summary

LGBTI workers have, without doubt, made great strides within our trade unions, and we can point – with pride – to many of our individual and collective accomplishments. However, the progress is uneven. At a global level, there is a clear divide between trade unions which are, to varying degrees, LGBTI-inclusive and proactive and those which are not. The division cannot be easily categorised as a global north/south one.

The social, political, cultural and religious contexts in which trade unions operate are real but cannot be an excuse for inaction. Where would we be if trade unions had allowed sexism and misogyny to determine the place of women in our organisations and society? When have we ever settled for the status quo?

It is discouraging to see brave and vibrant LGBTI civil society organisations working in countries where trade unions remain silent on the denial of our fundamental human and labour rights. Homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are not consistent with trade union values. Discrimination and exclusion undermine workers' solidarity and unity.

The trade union vision of a fair society based on equality and solidarity amongst workers must extend to our LGBTI members (and other marginalised groups). To this end, we must recommit to this undertaking with vigour and heart. We call on all trade unions and all comrades to join and embrace our struggle.



Calls To Action

Share Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project should develop and maintain a comprehensive digital library and information hub to share current best practices in collective bargaining, internal union policies and structures, resolutions, organising, and campaigning, and make these resources widely available.
Create Space and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our trade unions must be safe and inclusive organisations for LGBTI members. Affiliates are responsible for ensuring this through proactive policies, education and a culture shift. • Affiliates must create and support LGBTI worker self-organising. • The structures within affiliates and GUFs must be open to and reflect LGBTI workers. • The project should create a global network to connect LGBTI workers and update its website. • We must find more opportunities for LGBTI trade unionists to connect (mainly face-to-face) across national, trade union, sectoral and geographic boundaries.
Build Coalitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTI workers should seek allies within their trade unions, especially in women's and youth committees. • The project, GUFs, their regional organisations and affiliates should strengthen relationships with the LGBTI and human rights civil society organisations at global, regional, national, and local levels. • The project should strongly encourage affiliates and GUFs to join ILGA-World and its regional organisations.
Educate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project should prioritise developing new or translations of existing LGBTI-focused technical resources to support GUFs and affiliates in collective bargaining, internal union policies and structures, resolutions, organising, and campaigning. • GUFs and affiliates should develop LGBTI competency training for staff, elected leaders and activists, and LGBTI-inclusive member education programmes.
Communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliates and GUFs must communicate more effectively – vertically and horizontally - on LGBTI issues. • GUFs should better coordinate messaging on LGBTI issues, initiatives and events, including IDAHOBIT and Pride. • GUFs and affiliates should engage the larger LGBTI community in dialogue about trade unions and the labour movement and use LGBTI inclusion as an organising advantage. • Tell LGBTI workers' stories.
Expand Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At every level – from the workplace to the global labour movement – we must develop and support LGBTI leaders. • LGBTI workers must lead this work (“Nothing about us without us!”). • GUFs and affiliates must, in consultation with LGBTI members, establish and implement an LGBTI equality plan with clear goals and benchmarks to measure progress.
Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliates must speak out against discriminatory legislation and policies consistent with trade union values. • The project, GUFs and affiliates must improve and coordinate advocacy on LGBTI issues at the International Labour Organisation and other UN bodies.



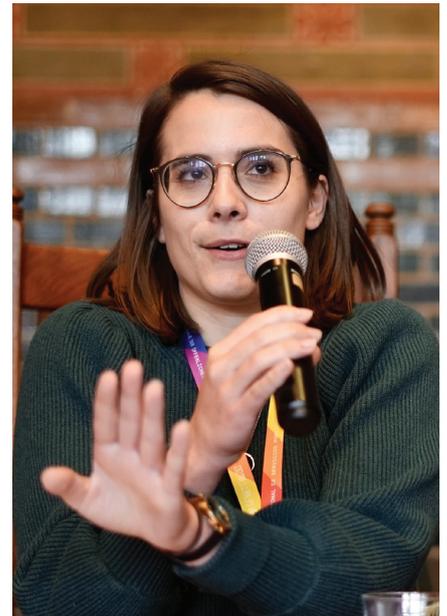
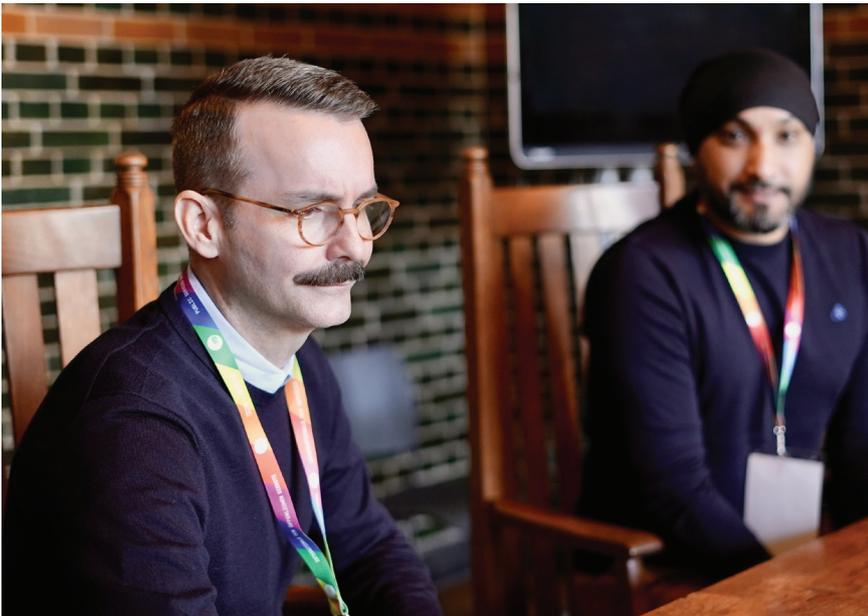
Participants

Name	Union / Global Union Federation	Affiliation	Country
James Bartholomeusz	International Transport Workers Federation	ITF	United Kingdom
Aisha Bahadur	Public Services International	PSI	South Africa
Bodo Busch	Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft GEW	EI	Germany
Jeffrey Boyd	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations	IUF	Switzerland / United States
James Cavalluzzo	Public Services International	PSI	France / Canada
Sherwood Clarke	Clerical and Commercial Workers' Union CCWU	ITF / IUF / UNI	Guyana
Sylvia Cormaci	International Trade Union Confederation	ITUC	Belgium
Min-Jung Kim	Korean Metal Workers Union KMWU	IndustriALL	Korea
Kwak Ekyeong	Korean Confederation of Trade Unions KCTU	ITUC	Korea
Véronica Fernandez Mendez	UNI Global Union	UNI	Switzerland
Darienne Flemington	UNISON	PSI	United Kingdom
Sarah Flores	IndustriALL Global Union	IndustriALL	Switzerland
Cherisse Gasana	IndustriALL Global Union	IndustriALL	Switzerland
Lainie Keper	Education International	EI	Belgium / United States
Michele Kessler	United Food and Commercial Workers Union UFCW	IUF/UNI	United States
Bertine Lamers	Mondiaal FNV	FNV	Netherlands



Participants

Name	Union / Global Union Federation	Affiliation	Country
Tanja Lehtoranta	Ammattiliitto PRO	SASK / STTK / PSI / UNI	Finland
Nthabi Maine	National Union of Mineworkers NUM	IndustriALL	South Africa
Fiona McCann	Mondiaal FNV	FNV	Netherlands
Peter Mekers	Netwerk Regenboog FNV Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging FNV	BWI	Netherlands
Zameny Menso	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging FNV / Building and Wood Worker's International	BWI	Netherlands
E. N.	UNI Global Union	UNI	Uganda / Qatar
Deiby Porras Arias	Asociación Nacional de Empleados Públicos y Privados ANEP	PSI	Costa Rica
Natalia Queralt	International Federation of Journalists IFJ	IFJ	Spain / Belgium
Wilma Roos	Mondiaal FNV	FNV	Netherlands
Gurchaten Sandhu	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association	ILGA-World	Switzerland / United Kingdom
Armelle Selby	IndustriALL Global Union	IndustriALL	Switzerland
Graciela Tiburcio	Asociación Nacional de Periodistas del Perú ANP	IFJ	Perú
Tarja Valtonen	Suomen Ammattiliittojen Solidaarisuuskeskus	SASK	Finland
Jolanda van Gool	Netwerk Regenboog FNV Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging FNV	PSI	Netherlands
Rob Witte	Mondiaal FNV	FNV	Netherlands



Guest Speakers

Biljana Ginova	Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey	Serbia
Nancy Kachingwe	South Feminist Futures	Zimbabwe
Neelanjana Mukhia	South Feminist Futures	India
Adam Rogalewski	European Federation of Public Service Unions EPSU	Belgium
Filip Vulovic	Civil Rights Defenders Belgrade Office	Serbia



Evaluation

Participants were enthusiastic about the opportunity to gather, connect and strategise, although many expressed a need for more time to plan a programme of work and learn from each other.

Some comments:

"This meeting was an important step in building intersectoral solidarity as we fight for and champion the rights of LGBTI workers."

"Safe, inclusive, spaces like these are examples we can all bring back to our organisations."

"A dynamic activist space which is helping to drive progress on social equality within the global labour movement"

"I thought the experience was outstanding."

"While this meeting was an exciting first step, we have so much more to do as a global labor movement for LGBTI workers. The potential as we organize together can have an amazing impact lifting up LGBTI issues & advocacy, as we build stronger more inclusive Unions. Shame on us all, if we don't use these synergies created to grow a meaningful LGBTI network among the CGU members."

"We needed more time to discuss concrete plans and next steps, more candid focused discussion on our programme of work."

Acknowledgements

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