

Bi+ sexuality: A Trade Union Issue

UNISON is the UK's largest trade union, with more than 1.3 million members. We represent all staff who provide public services in the public, private and voluntary sectors. UNISON has a long and proud history on equality.

Following a rule change at our National Delegates Conference in 2019 our 'bi caucus' became the bi+ caucus to better represent our bi+ members. In UNISON the term Bi+ relates to the umbrella definition of bisexuality. We include all people who are attracted to more than one gender, this includes people who are pansexual, omnisexual, asexual or questioning to name just a few. The bi+ umbrella is inclusive of trans and non-binary people. Adding the '+' is a way to ensure all bi+ members know UNISON is welcoming to them.

We recognise that bi+ people face particular issues at work, and we strive to tackle the prejudice and discrimination bi+ people can face both outside and within the wider LGBT+ community. It is important to note the 2010 Equality Act protects bi+ people (and lesbian, gay and heterosexual people) from discrimination because of their sexual orientation.

Bi+ phobia – the facts

Bi+ phobia is prejudice and discrimination against bi+ people. Research published in 2020, confirmed that bi+ workers experience alarmingly high rates of hate crime, sexual violence, bullying and exclusion at work both within and outside of the LGBT+ community. Bi+ people are more likely to feel they must hide their sexual orientation at work than lesbians and gay men (very few heterosexual people hide their sexual orientation). Amongst bi+ workers, women faced greater prejudice than men [*Stonewalls' Bi Report (2020)*].

Bi+ phobia feeds off myths and stereotypes which range from bi+ people being untrustworthy, greedy and promiscuous to our sexuality being 'just a phase' or not really existing at all. People who are asexual are told that they 'just haven't found the right person'. Bi+ people must often 'come out' repeatedly to avoid people making the wrong assumptions about our sexual orientation.

Tackling bi+ phobia in the workplace

Trade unions, such as UNISON exist to defend members from discrimination and to work for better employment conditions. So, tackling bi+ phobia in the workplace **is** clearly a trade union issue. Bi+ workers can feel particularly isolated, experiencing stigma from both straight colleagues *and* lesbian and gay colleagues.

Although many workplace equality policies refer to lesbian, gay and bi+ people, few do more than pay lip service to the existence and rights of bi+ workers.

Recommendations for workplaces

Stonewall, the UK's leading charity for LGBT+ equality, research reveals the impact bi+ erasure and bi+ phobia has on health and well-being of bi+ communities. Organisations can do more to create and maintain inclusive bi+ friendly workplaces.

To support bi+ people in your workplace:

- Inform yourself and avoid stereotypes.
- Separate bi+ phobia from homophobia and recognise that there are specific issues facing bi+ people
- Note that these include invisibility; stereotypes about greediness or promiscuity and pressure to be either gay or straight
- Make sure bi+ identities are specifically included in equality policies
- Don't assume all bi+ people are the same: bi+ people come from all sections of society.
- Recognise the role that bi+ phobia plays in negative outcomes for bi+ people.
- Don't assume that all those that identify as '+' are also 'bi' in the 'traditional' interpretation.

UNISON endorses these recommendations and urges employers to adopt them. These are simple actions, but they can transform the day-to-day experience of bi+ workers.

UNISON – always by your side

We are determined to make sure bi+ issues are fully addressed in our work. We hold annual meetings for bi+ members to network, identify issues and discuss proposals for national LGBT+ conference. We represent UNISON at bi+ specific events like BiPride and BiCon.

There are reserved seats for bi+ members on the national LGBT+ committee. Bi+ members also meet at our national LGBT+ conference. If you are facing bi+ phobic discrimination at work, contact your local rep for support and advice. There is also information on UNISON's website.

How you can get involved

Each of UNISON's 12 regions has an LGBT+ group with a confidential mailing list. Many branches have their own LGBT+ officer. Contact details should be widely publicised, so you can find out without outing yourself. Alternatively, ask your regional LGBT+ group. All branches should have an equality coordinator, and many have workplace equality reps.

To find out more Visit our webpages www.unison.org.uk/out

- Ring UNISON *direct* 0800 0857 857
- Write to Mitch Coe, National Officer - LGBT+ Equality, UNISON Centre
- email out@unison.co.uk