

# Pride in Procurement





Annual Pride celebrations are deeply rooted in the political struggle of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender + (LGBT+) communities for basic rights, freedom from persecution, protection from discrimination and acceptance within society. For many, Pride events still agitate for LGBT+ liberation both in the UK and abroad. However, in recent years they have become associated as much, if not more, with rainbow merchandise, slogan t-shirts and corporate sponsorship. Whilst the increase in Pride merchandise might support LGBT+ visibility in the UK, production of clothing and other merchandise often relies on the exploitation of workers, including LGBT+ workers, in global supply chains.

UNISON has worked with **Labour Behind the Label** to help activists planning Pride events become even more informed and discerning buyers, so that we can promote pride in procurement, as well as in our workplaces, in our communities and around the world.



## Who makes Pride merchandise?

Global inequalities are baked into the garment industry. Big brands and retailers make obscene profits at the top of supply chains, whilst workers are paid poverty wages.

Even when workers receive the legal minimum wage, in most production countries this falls far short of a living wage. Brands have maximised their profits by seeking out production in countries with low wages and poor worker rights protections.

The industry does not just rely on cheap labour, it actively drives wages down and pushes workers further into poverty.

The stories of those who make Pride merchandise are often unheard and unseen. This is because many brands and retailers refuse to commit to transparency and publish their supply chains.

## Power & privilege in Pride movements

Globally, the LGBT+ rights movement is seen to prioritise issues that mainly affect white Western populations. For instance, high profile campaigns for same-sex marriage have galvanised more mainstream support than protests against violence inflicted on trans women of colour.

When we look at our own power and privilege it helps us to better understand global workers' rights.

## No LGBT+ solidarity without worker solidarity!

Economic justice and workers' rights are key issues for garment workers (including those who are LGBT+), where neo-colonial trade structures extract cheap labour and exploit global inequalities. Addressing LGBT+ rights in supply chains must include labour rights.





72 countries  
criminalise same-sex  
relationships and in  
eight countries it can  
be punishable by  
death.

Most  
governments  
around the world do  
not allow trans people  
to legally change their  
name or gender that  
they were assigned  
at birth.

Only around  
40% of countries  
have legislation to  
protect LGBT+ workers  
from discrimination.

## LGBT+ protections around the world

Therefore, this means that same-sex relationships will be criminalised and trans people may not have legal recognition in some major production countries.

Legislation alone cannot eliminate discrimination, and LGBT+ rights violations occur in all countries. However anti- LGBT+ legislation indicates extremely high levels of danger for LGBT+ communities.

This means that LGBT+ workers may be producing t-shirts with empowering LGBT+ slogans on them, whilst they face persecution and oppression for their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Changing legislation and tackling discrimination and stigma is empowering

and effective when led by local LGBT+ activists and movements, not by international clothing brands. However, brands have a responsibility to uphold human rights for all workers in their supply chains, and this includes LGBT+ rights.

However, with significant momentum across Europe and in the European Union pushing for new regulations that would hold corporations accountable for **failing to prevent** abuse to people and the planet, and campaigners calling for a similar law in the UK, in a few years the brands may no longer have the option to ignore their responsibilities. And it could provide further opportunity for trade unionists to influence what happens.

## Solidarity or marketing?

Brands and retailers are increasingly realising the purchasing power of LGBT+ communities, otherwise known as the '**pink pound**'. The pink pound is estimated to be worth £6 billion per year in the UK alone.

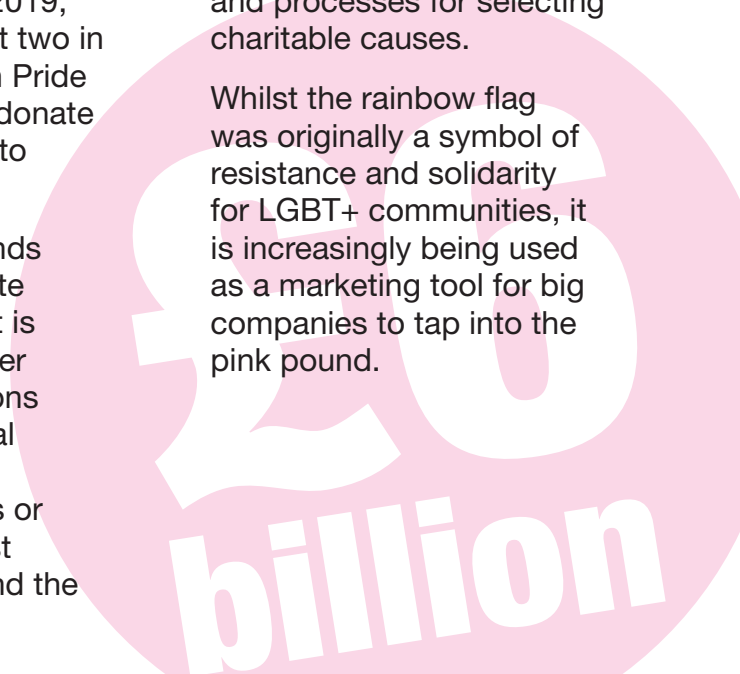
Increasing numbers of big brands and retailers are releasing Pride collections. Whilst some may donate a percentage of the profits from Pride lines to national LGBT+ charities,

others do not. Very few will allocate funding to LGBT+ communities in the countries where garments were produced. In 2019, **research** found that two in five companies with Pride campaigns did not donate any proceeds at all to LGBT+ causes.

In cases where brands or retailers do donate to LGBT+ causes, it is important to consider whether the donations will lead to structural and lasting change. International brands or retailers are not best placed to understand the

complexities of LGBT+ human rights in local contexts, and so it is crucial to look at their partnerships and processes for selecting charitable causes.

Whilst the rainbow flag was originally a symbol of resistance and solidarity for LGBT+ communities, it is increasingly being used as a marketing tool for big companies to tap into the pink pound.



## Purchasing power of Pride

It is not just LGBT+ individuals who purchase Pride merchandise. Local bodies such as Pride committees place bulk orders, and big employers also procure items such as rainbow lanyards or t-shirts for staff.

Pride committees and other organisations that source pride merchandise have the power to effect positive change, and source merchandise from brands and retailers that align with their values. UNISON members can encourage and support their local Pride committees to improve their purchasing practices by taking the following actions.

## Steps to improving purchasing practices for Pride committees

The UNISON National LGBT+ Committee encourages UNISON LGBT+ groups, networks and activists to discuss ethical trading with the LGBT+ organisations they work with, including Pride committees.

The first step is to urge the adoption of an ethical procurement policy which covers expectations on transparency, workers' rights and LGBT+ inclusion. This provides the basis on which to consider any potential suppliers or brands.

## Knowledge is power – know which questions to ask

- Does the supplier or brand have a code of conduct that, at a minimum, includes workers' basic rights to earn a living wage, work freely and without discrimination, and defend these rights by joining a trade union? How do they implement the Code of Conduct? How do they support workers' rights to organise?
- Knowing where products are made, and who made them is an essential step to ensuring human rights in supply chains. Can the supplier or brand tell you where their products are made?
- A living wage is a human right. Has the supplier or brand published how much their workers are paid?

## Assess how your purchasing impacts LGBT+ human rights

- How are LGBT+ workers protected in the supplier or brand? Does the supplier or brand have LGBT+ inclusion policies in place to protect workers? What do the policies specify, and who is responsible within the company?
- What percentage of the price will go towards LGBT+ communities? Does any money go towards LGBT+ communities in the production country? If so, how are the LGBT+ communities in

production countries selected and who selects them?

- Are the suppliers or brands trying to partner with LGBT+ groups to distract from wider human rights violations within their supply chain?

## Use your purchasing power to make change

- Demand more evidence from suppliers and brands on how they monitor workers' rights and compliance with codes of conduct in their supply chains.
- Ask suppliers and brands to publish their full supply chain and make it available on the Open Apparel Registry.
- Ask brands to support the **campaign** organised by CORE Coalition and strongly supported by UNISON for a new legal '**Failure to Prevent**' (abuse of human rights and the environment) regulation.
- Join forces with other Pride committees who use the same supplier or brand and use your collective power to strengthen your calls for improvements.
- Be honest- if suppliers or brands have not met the expectations set out in your procurement policy, make sure they know why they are losing your business as this can prompt change.

**For more information and helpful resources, visit [www.unison.org.uk/planningpride](http://www.unison.org.uk/planningpride)**