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WORKPLACE PROGRAMME FOR EMPLOYERS IN CROATIA



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Introduction

First actions in Croatia, aimed at active engagement of employers in fighting discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, started in 2015 through joint efforts of CSOs Common Zone, LORI, Association Dawn and Organization for Workers' Initiative and Democratization.

As a basis for starting work in the area of employment, two surveys were conducted - the survey of employers in the Republic of Croatia on policies and practices related to LGBTI employees and the survey among LGBT persons in the Republic of Croatia about conditions in the workplace.

The results obtained from the surveys were quite alarming: 75.1% LGBT respondents experienced discrimination, harassment and/or abuse (homophobic comments and jokes, gossip, insults, excessive amount of work, exclusion from the work process, violence, sexual harassment, etc.) in the workplace. Only 11% of them reported their experience to the employer, which means that the majority of them had not filed a complaint even though it is their legal right.

Over half of the employers who participated in the survey (53.9%) had a collective agreement, but only 40.8% of them have defined the protection of rights and prohibition of discrimination against LGBT persons. Only 4.5% of them said they had a special document regulating this area. The survey had shown that the majority (80.4%) of employers do not have any particular means of expressing openness towards LGBTI persons and topics, which means that these employers are not contributing to creating an inclusive environment for LGBTI workers.

LGBT employees also answered the question about the ways in which their current employer expresses openness towards LGBTI persons. The majority (60.6%) of respondents said they had not noticed any procedures, measures or policies aimed at expressing openness towards LGBTI employees. Those that did notice specific measures reported that they were the use of language that is respectful of LGBTI persons and the ability to express freely one's gender identity regardless of the sex assigned at birth.

What was reassuring in the survey results was that nearly 60% of employers have expressed willingness to participate in trainings, education and workshops for promoting diversity and inclusion of LGBTI persons in the workplace in the event that they be invited to take part. It is also interesting that the majority of employers stated that employee motivation is vital for the introduction of such programs and trainings, followed by binding laws and policies.



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The results of this 2017 study were not surprising given the fact that the need for raising awareness of LGBTI issues in the workplace and society in general was not sufficiently recognized in Croatia, which indicated the need for a more active engagement of all relevant stakeholders.

Based on the findings of the surveys Croatian organizations undertook further steps in advancement of the actions aimed at active participation of the employers in combating discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in employment.

Pilot Workplace Equality Index Croatia was developed and implemented in Croatia for the first time in 2017. It was based on workplace equality indices used in other countries, particularly the one used by the UK charity Stonewall. Croatian organizations were trained by Stonewall, their extensive experience, expertise and the methodology they used to implement this tool were a framework within which all the research regarding the Croatian Workplace Equality Index was carried out.

In the first Croatian Workplace Equality Index 95 Croatian employers participated, mostly from non-profit and public sector as well as smaller businesses (with less than 20 employees). The pilot Index, in the form of online questionnaire, covered areas of employment such as prohibition of discrimination based on SOGIGE in official documents, employee protection mechanisms, informing and educational programs for employees as well as special activities undertaken by the organization to encourage the inclusion of LGBTIQ persons. Pilot Index did not have an elaborate scoring methodology. Therefore, recognitions for contribution to LGBTI workplace equality were given to two organizations that were the only ones to have special policies and official documents regarding the inclusion of LGBTI employees.

After the completion of the project and evaluation, based on the findings and conclusions, Croatian organizations – Common Zone, LORI and Foundation Solidarna started to work on the more comprehensive program which resulted in the Work Equality for All (Cro. Radnopravnost svima!) programme which was developed and implemented during 2019 – 2021 in Croatia.



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Work Equality for All! Programme

At the beginning of the programme preparation, Croatian organizations identified key methods of work with employers with the aim to fight discrimination based on SOGIGE and promote social acceptance of LGBTIQ people in the employment - assessment of employers' practices and policies aimed at inclusion of LGBTIQ people through the implementation of the Workplace Equality Index and practical work with employers through awareness raising trainings.

Workplace Equality Index

A workplace equality index is a way of assessing policies and practices within an organisation and organisational culture relating to the workplace equality and inclusion. The data that it collects are useful information not only for the employer but also for the employees and the entire community. Starting with formal policies, and including non-formal ones, the aim is to ensure equal rights and working conditions for all employees, which means that the same rights and conditions must be ensured to LGBTIQ persons without exception. In addition to a legal framework, which the state regulates, a part of the responsibility for creating equal rights and working conditions also lies with the employers so that LGBTIQ employees could feel appreciated in their workplaces without fear or concern that they will have to face additional stressors because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and/or expression and/or sex characteristics. By taking part in the Index, employers in Croatia were given an opportunity to improve the way they manage their organisation, to show



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concern for the well-being of all their employees and, and as a result, to more actively create an inclusive workplace, ensuring equality and respect for diversity. In addition, filling in the questionnaire itself was educational since the questions asked suggest to employers a number of topics and areas that they should take into consideration when managing an organisation.

The Croatian Workplace Equality Index in addition to questions pertaining to basic employer data, contains 12 questions grouped into four areas:

1. Organisational policy and strategic level – this part contains questions on official documents, core values, strategies, action plans, budgets and reports that the employer has in place in the organisation;
2. Mechanisms of employee protection – employers respond to the questions whether they have appointed a person (formed a team or a department) whose remit covers issues relating to human rights protection, discrimination and the promotion of equality, and whether they have provided specific examples and descriptions of unacceptable behaviour in the workplace in their documents and introduced measures and sanctions in cases of established discrimination;
3. Activities within the organisation – data on various ways employers use to ensure a safe and accepting work environment are collected. The data include e.g. displaying LGBTIQ symbols in the workplace and dealing with LGBTIQ topics and/or using visual content in internal communication channels. The use of language in formal communication that includes LGBTIQ employees is also taken into account (e.g. when marriage is mentioned, so is life partnership, and terms such as life partners, same-sex partners, etc. are also used), as are the ways of informing the employees on their rights and the prohibition of discrimination;
4. Activities outside of the organisation – employers list the ways in which they support the LGBTI community (for instance, sponsoring LGBTIQ organisations and initiatives, taking part in surveys on LGBTIQ topics, etc.) and the ways in which they present themselves in public as promoters of diversity policy (e.g. featuring LGBTIQ topics/content in promotional materials, advertising in LGBTIQ media and so on).

The responses are marked, and the employers are ranked on the basis of their total score, showing the extent to which an employer is successful in creating an inclusive work environment for LGBTIQ people.

Index data has been collected in accordance with the required ethical standards, and were all confidential. Employers completed the survey online, via a questionnaire link, and the system also allowed for the re-entry of data. Taking part in the Index was voluntary and took about 30 minutes.



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The questionnaire was supposed to be completed by a person in a position of responsibility who is familiar with the legal documents of the organization taking part in the survey. Some questions required supporting evidence to be supplied, usually in the form of documents (pictures, copies or scanned sections of a text) or by providing an internet address etc., to corroborate the employers' statements.

An invitation to take part in the Index was sent to the email addresses of 6000 employers in the private (N = 2700), public (N = 3050) and non-profit (N = 250) sectors in the Republic of Croatia. The private sector encompassed large, medium and small enterprises; the public sector included various public administration bodies; and the non-profit sector consisted of active organisations with a minimum of two employees. Three hundred and seventeen employers entered the survey, and one hundred and ten completed it.

Results showed that of 110 employers, the greatest number, just over half, operate in the public or predominantly public sector, while employers from the private or predominantly private sector and civil society organisations were each represented proportionally in the other half. Concerning the number of people employed, the largest number of employers has between 21 and 500 employees (54.5%). This categorisation of employers is based on legal requirements specifying that employers with 20 and more employees have to, among other things, have Work Regulations in place and appoint a person responsible for the protection of workers' dignity, while employers with more than 500 employees, in addition to this, have to submit annual Activity Reports that include the data on the protection of workers' dignity.

One of the aims of the Index was to make a ranking list of employers that use their formal and informal policies to create a safe and accepting work environment for LGBTI employees. In order to mark employers' responses, the adequacy of submitted evidence had to be checked first. If the employer did not provide adequate evidence, responses were declared invalid. The entire ranking methodology and results of the Croatian Index can be found here: <http://radnopravnost.hr/indikator/workplace-equality-index-results/>.

The ranking list of all employers was made, however, only the top 10 places were released, featuring employers with the highest scores based on their responses. The ranking list only disclosed the names of the employers who have given their consent to have their names used in public releases, while the others were listed as anonymous. Employers who have scored the same number of points shared the same place.



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The top ten places were mostly taken by civil society organisations. In the first and eighth place were employers from the private/predominantly private sector, while the tenth place was shared by an employer from the public/ predominantly public sector and two civil society organisations. Four fifths of the top ranked employers are small organisations with up to 20 employees. Although they have achieved an excellent result compared to others, as many as four employers out of twelve wanted to remain anonymous.

The data from the Croatian Workplace Equality Index 2019 have yielded additional important results. Very few employers decide to take part in this type of survey. Just over three hundred employers entered the survey, with 110 of them completing it, which accounts for 1.8% of 6000 addresses to which the invitation to participate was sent. And when they do take part, almost three quarters of employers decide to remain anonymous. It is difficult to draw conclusions on the reasons why this is so, but it is possible that the awareness of the importance of respecting all employees, including LGBTIQ people, is not sufficiently developed and that employers do not recognise the problems of LGBTIQ employees and the need to promote affirmative LGBTI policies in the workplace.

The data obtained by the Croatian Workplace Equality Index 2019 also point to the need to educate employers. It has been observed that employers themselves are not aware that they have legal documents that contribute to workplace equality. The importance of ensuring an inclusive work environment for all employees, including LGBTI people, is indisputable, as is the need to do so; therefore, the Indicator has also been used to raise awareness of this need among employers as well as to educate them on how to achieve workplace inclusion. Within this project, employers were also offered an awareness raising training course in creating an inclusive and fair work environment for LGBTI employees and persons seeking employment; however, this survey has shown that less than 50% of employers expressed willingness to accept any of the forms of support in order to create a work environment in which LGBTIQ people would feel safe and accepted. Therefore, one of the recommendations to LGBTIQ organisations is that they should first tackle the problem of employers' motivation to take part in such surveys, before helping them understand the importance of respecting the LGBTIQ community in their business. Also, a more efficient way might be for civil society organisations dealing in these topics to establish collaboration with various employers and, together with them, develop systems and methods to create the best and most inclusive work environment possible for LGBTIQ people.

All employers who participated in the Index received general recommendation for improvement of their policies and practices in regards to ensuring safe and accepting workplaces for LGBTIQ



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employees. Top 10 ranking employers also received tailor made recommendations on specific areas where they could advance policies and practices in their organizations.

Awareness raising trainings for employers

The development and implementation of trainings for employers was a logical next step in order to raise the knowledge and awareness of staff and management in regards to stereotyping, discrimination, LGBTIQ identities, terminology and inclusive language and other relevant areas for creating safe and accepting work environment.

In order to raise awareness and knowledge of the participants, instead of lectures on above-mentioned topics, idea was to create innovative and participative educational methods to be able to engage a very heterogeneous groups which employees make (staff and management) as much as possible. Therefore Croatian organizations teamed up with an organization from the Netherlands – Tûmba, specialised in creating innovative and engaging educational tools such as participative workshops and theatrical plays.

Tûmba and theatre experts - Live Your Story, a Dutch organization that had a long and successful run of a LGBTQ+-themed play aimed at younger - from the Netherlands transferred the methodology to local trainers, actors and directors during several visits which resulted in participative educational program and educational theatrical play performed in employers' organizations.



Photo from the play

70-minute play shows a series of interactions that raise awareness of the challenges that LGBTQ (only LGBT identities are presented in the play) people face in the work environments. The issue of discrimination of LGBTQ individuals is articulated through an immediate theatre experience that aims at informing its audience, as well as to create an emotional closeness with them.



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The play shows the forms of discrimination that LGBTQ people experience (homophobic jokes, ignoring and exclusion, personal insults, wrong assumptions as well as positive and subtle discrimination), and talks about what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in the workplace. This discrimination is often the result of ignorance and lack of education on the topic, which is why this play is educational in terms of shining light on uncomfortable situations that a members of the LGBTIQ community might find themselves in in the public space. The play also steps out of the work environment and in the broader context speaks about the experiences of LGBTQ people in terms of non-acceptance in everyday life, for example in the family.

However, although it has a goal audience, the play equally speaks to LGBTQ+ individuals and everyone in their surroundings, but also to any other audience that is interested in the matter and wants to have a better understanding of a LGBTQ person’s everyday life.

The documentary nature of the matter that served as the inspiration furthers the palpability and liveliness of the play that was poetically conceptualized to come as close to the audience as possible. Four actors bring to life stories that have been translated from real-life experiences, collected through interviews with LGBTQ community in Croatia, into a dramatic act, thus building a mosaic, trying to look at as many different perspectives as possible and provide a thorough analysis of different experiences LGBTQ+ individuals have at the workplace. The language of the play is simple, so to say, human, with a highlight on recognition and empathy that arise from an expressive interaction between actors.

The theatre is considered to be one of the only immediate media of today, serving as a communication field, a forum where everyone can find out something new, learn, but also to experience and live, which is what the play is aiming to achieve: to educate the broader community on LGBTQ+ issues and present them in a way that will be recognisable and more importantly, relatable, to the audience.



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Unfortunately due to Covid-19 epidemic measures, play was performed live only four times in the employers' organizations, while the rest of the trainings were held online where participants had the opportunity to see the video recorded version of the play.

In the evaluation forms, after the trainings, all of the participants stated that the play fulfilled the goal – raising awareness and knowledge in regards to issues and challenges faced by LGBTQ people in the work environments thus showing that the chosen methodology was appropriately chosen.

Beside the theatrical play, educational programme for employers also included awareness raising participative exercises such as Genderbread man where LGBTIQ terminology and key concepts of gender, sex, identity and expression as well as sexuality are explained; Myth Busters, where participants have the opportunity to learn about misconceptions and wrong assumptions in regards to LGBTIQ identities and rights; Privilege Walk that allows participants to gain greater knowledge about the diversity, equality and inclusion and other exercises aimed at raising awareness in regards to stereotyping and prejudices.

Specifically for smaller employers (mostly from non-profit sector), special part of the programme was created that consisted of the overview of antidiscrimination legislation/provisions in employment and application in official documents (for example in Work Regulations) and inclusion policies such as inclusive language, respectful treatment of trans employees and other.

As an introduction to training, we talked about why we discuss about this topic in the context of the work environment through an overview of the situation in Croatia and research findings.

In the evaluation forms after the training only 4 persons out of 116 said that they would not participate again in the similar education, while 94 participants (81%) said that they would like to participate in even more specific training such as how to monitor discrimination in the organization and affect positive change in regards to attitudes of their colleagues, trans and intersex specific training, legal aspects in implementation of labour law, practices of other EU employers and other.



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Training was accompanied with educational platform, consisting of two parts – one part for the employees and other part for the management. Educational modules for employers include topics such as stereotypes and prejudices with quizzes after the module, overview of the LGBTIQ terminology, while modules for management consist of overview of the relevant legislation as well as overview of the best policies in the areas of recruitment, promotion and career development; work within (monitoring, trainings and support for LGBTIQ employees) and outside the organization (suppliers, clients and service users, and support for local LGBTIQ community). The main idea behind the platform was that educational materials serve as a preparation for the training and that they remain available to employers even after training so they can use them in their work when needed.

Conclusion

Through the implementation of the Index and trainings, Croatian organizations have gained many valuable experiences and insights that they will continue to use to improve the programme for employers. Therefore, in the following educational cycles, they will focus on employers who are ready for long-term engagement and continuous work in this area. For example, the program for employers will now consist of both Index and trainings, so far methodologies have been used independently, and employers who participated in the Index were not required to participate in the training and vice versa.

Also, trainings will be specialized in such a way that one training covers one area of employment and there will be more of them, so that employers will be able to acquire the knowledge and skills that they and their organization needs based on the assessment (Index).

Furthermore, focus will be on the employers who have already participated in the previous activities and expressed interest to continue as well as on the employers committed to promoting diversity and inclusion such as Diversity Charter signatories. It is expected that in this way the results will be sustainable as well as that more and more employers will follow the example of the employers who are continuously and publicly engaged to create safe, accepting and respectful work environments for LGBTIQ people in Croatia.



This project is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The content of this document represents the views of the author - Common Zone only and is its sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Office for Cooperation with NGOs

Project is co-financed by the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs. The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of Common Zone and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs.