

Meliha Beysülen

Trade Union of All Municipality Civil Servants,

“To find a common space”

Hello, everyone. This is Meliha Beysülen. Between 2014 and 2017, I was in the women’s secretariat of the headquarters of Tüm Bel-Sen (Tüm Belediye ve Yerel Yönetim Hizmetleri Sendikası, Union of All Municipality and Local Services Employees) sector, affiliated to the KESK (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu; Confederation of the Public Employees Trade Unions).

The municipalities are in general filled with male employees, thus the trade union reflected this; male members were two thirds more than the women members. Thus, we can call Tüm Bel-Sen as a male trade union. Certainly, the fact that the male members outweighed women members in numbers proved to hinder our works. Before us, our friends had the formation of a women’s assembly, accepted in the congress. In our period we tried to make the women’s assemblies functional. Our women members were composed of the employees in the municipalities all around Turkey. Therefore, their needs were different. It was important to launch trainings and experience sharing in the assemblies which would make women meet at a common point; we put these as our goals. Women, after taking gender training put more emphasis on the value of women’s struggle. Hence, we had found a shared space where we could get close, we could understand each other much more, where we could look from within the same frame. And we reflected on what to target in the upcoming training and planned collectively. One of the topics that came forward was the mobbing in the workplace. We conducted a study on mobbing, and came up with a training for this, and prepared a brochure, as well. We ensured that this brochure was sent to our members in all workplaces.

Followingly, we conducted studies on the history of women’s struggle, discrimination and on refugees. Each one of these studies were really valuable. Our women friends, who contributed to our studies, were the trainers. We turned out to be women who could evaluate these, who could communicate with each other in these mutually responsive workshops. This certainly had its reflections in the workings of the general assembly in Tüm Bel-Sen. For, when women met with an unequal practice concerning a woman, they expressed this in tandem with each other in the general assembly; and related studies started to flow through the branches, too. Later. we also published a policy document against sexual harassment; this was through our assembly.

Again, this was a need. For, it was quite difficult for women to describe sexual harassment. This was an important study to define where it starts and ends. It was important to convey these to the branches, and to the workplaces. On different occasions, we had already observed the awareness about women's struggles and the solidarity in the branches where these studies were held. This was important for the outcomes. And as a result of these trainings, we as women had understood the importance of acting together, being in solidarity with each other. At the same time we learned that whenever we encountered a problem, we could find a solution by standing against all inequalities, and that we could triumph only by standing side by side. That was teaching for all of us. We became aware of the fact that within the scope of social changes, it was first the inequality towards women that needs to be resolved by the women's struggle, and that all other inequalities could then be resolved. And thus, we understood that by the experiences we had in our activities in Tüm Bel-Sen we should prioritize women's struggle.