

**Gender and Media in Turkey**  
**Alternative Media: A Study on Kaos GL, Voice of the Turkish LGBTs**

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**Abstract**

In Turkey, as in many parts of the world, LGBT individuals live under social and economic pressure. LGBT individuals are seen to be unnecessary identities living in the community and they are marginalized. One of the contributing factors to this perception is the mainstream media. LGBT individuals can not represent themselves, defend their rights and they are exposed to hate speech in the mainstream media. Therefore, the LGBT individuals turn towards the alternative media in order to defend, express themselves obviously and tackle with their problems. In this context, this study aims to examine Kaos GL, Turkey's first printed LGBT magazine within the frame of alternative media theories and to find out the magazine matches up with which alternative media theory through the reasons.

**Key Words:** Alternative Media and Theories, Kaos GL, Citizen Media.

**Türkiye’de Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Medya**  
**Alternatif Medya: Türkiye LGBT’lerinin Sesi, Kaos GL üzerine bir İnceleme**

**Özet**

Dünyanın birçok yerinde olduğu gibi Türkiye’de de LGBT bireyler sosyal, ekonomik baskı altında yaşamaktadırlar. LGBT bireyler toplumda yaşayan gereksiz kimlikler olarak görülerek ötekileştirilmektedirler. Bu algının oluşmasını destekleyen unsurlardan biri ise ana akım medyadır. LGBT bireyler kendilerini temsil edememekte, haklarını savunamamaktadırlar ve ana akım medyada nefret söylemine maruz kalmaktadırlar. Bu sebeple, LGBT bireyler kendilerini savunabilmek, açıkça doğru ifade edebilmek ve sorunlarına çözüm aramak için alternatif medyaya yönelmektedirler. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma Türkiye’nin ilk LGBT basılı dergisi olan Kaos GL’yi alternatif medya teorileri çerçevesi içerisinde incelemeyi ve hangi alternatif medya teorisi ile örtüştüğünü nedenleri ile birlikte bulmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alternatif Medya ve Teorileri, Kaos GL, Yurttaş Medyası.

## Introduction

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) individuals' being subjected to pressure in almost all areas of life in Turkey has attracted the attention of various organizations from the international arena. Although they have gained legal status and have been recognized officially, especially transgenders are still subjected to communal, social, economic exclusions due to the fact that social norms have not changed yet. As it is seen in the report (ILGA, 2010) which Europe was prepared, some of the murders in Turkey have occurred because of these individuals' communal exclusions.

LGBT people who are under pressure by dominant ideology are also excluded in dominant mainstream media. This occurs because during news production process, economic and political elites eliminate the news by using news eliminating filters or find them acceptable to be printed. And with this qualification, they trivialize the opposite opinions by pushing them aside, and emphasize the messages they want (Herman & Chomsky, 1999: 21-22). That's why news organizations do journalism in the interests of property owner broadcasting corporations. And in this context, LGBT individuals are identified as porn objects or unnecessary identities living in the community. The violence imposed on LGBT people and the news about the attacks are not put on mainstream media's agenda at all. Moreover, they actually keep the hate speech to exclude these individuals ([http://upogau.org/eng/inform/uanews/worldnews\\_3182.html](http://upogau.org/eng/inform/uanews/worldnews_3182.html)). Therefore, the LGBT individuals turn towards to alternative media channels in order to defend, express themselves obviously and tackle with their problems.

In this respect, the aim of the study contains the analysis of alternative media theories as secondary data collection in order to find out whether or not Kaos GL, Turkey's first printed LGBT magazine matches up with the theory of citizen media. An in-depth interview as primary data collection, was carried out with the coordinator of the human rights trainings in Kaos GL Magazine and the LGBT Association that publishes the magazine, and the results were interpreted in the theoretical framework.

## Theoretical Framework of Alternative Media

Although alternative media is a well-established phenomenon, its different definitions by theorists draw attention. An alternative characteristic of the media indicates that mainstream media uses applications in different ways in comparison to its theoretical structure, content, distribution type and its relationship with the audience. Today, due to the fact that media tools are in dominant groups' hands who have economic and political power, alternative media becomes popular for the class, who can not find place in their society and the mainstream media

where they are excluded or ignored, to ensure their effectiveness in issues such as representing themselves, generating political processes about themselves etc. “Radical Media” study by John Downing in 1984, has been considered as a milestone for the theoretical studies about alternative media (Hass, 2004:116).

Downing (2000: ix) suggests that what makes the radical media an alternative is the fact that it has a potential to stimulate social and political changes in the society, and that extreme leftist or rightist, racist, fascist character media can also be named as alternative media. The matter Downing mentioned here is that these types of media are alternatives to the mainstream media with a different structure. Downing (2000: ix-xi) defines radical media with ten basic characteristics. In the first characteristic, he emphasized that everything is, at some point, alternative to something else. In the second characteristic, he pointed out that radical media should be defined in a different way due to the fact that racist, fascist media expresses radical media too. In the third characteristic, he emphasized that ethnic minority media may also be included in the radical media definition. In the fourth characteristic, he stated that radical media often overlaps with their effectiveness in expressing themselves. In the fifth characteristic, he pointed out that these media are forced to go underground due to the pressures of authoritarian and militaristic regimes. In the sixth characteristic, he stated that radical alternative media has many different formats. In the seventh, he expressed that all radical alternative media destroy the rules of each other. In the eighth characteristic, he emphasized that financially small-scale media are considered to be fearful or mocked in the community. He summarized the ninth characteristic in line with two objectives; those who are in the lower segments of the society to direct the opposition to ruler ship’s applications vertically and to create solidarities and organizations against the structure of the ruler ship horizontally. In the tenth and the last characteristic, he summarized that these media are more democratic than mainstream media in terms of internal organization. As it is seen, Downing’s radical media definition is far from radical fact and there are no social change, or transformation oriented explanations in his definitions.

Based on Chantal Mouffe’s radical democracy, citizen and citizenship concepts (Rodriguez, 2001), Clemencia Rodriguez defined citizen media in order to emphasize the transformation of people, who have joined alternative media production process, into active citizens. On the contrary to Downing’s definitions, radical emphasis is more significant in Rodriguez’s citizen media definition. But in the meantime, she emphasizes as Downing does, that independent media may show up with the participation of ordinary people. Rodriguez (2001:20) indicates the important points of citizen’s media content in three ways by using the

citizen media concept. Citizen media is first activated by collectivizing the citizenship with the purpose of an active readjustment for institutionalized media's transformation. Secondly, citizen media resists all institutionalized social codes, legitimate identities, social relationships. Thirdly, these communication practices include the authorization of the community where transformations and changes are possible. As it is seen in the definition, citizenship term represents a meaning that activates hierarchies to transform. In another sense, citizen media creates a communication area where women, men and children can use their own languages, codes, signs and symbols in the society. Citizen media allows citizens to develop communication for the purpose of transforming the community they live in (Rodriguez, 2010:100). Also according to Rodriguez, citizen media offers an alternative to institutionalized vertical production configurations. In this context, there is an equal participation in citizen's media. Readers can also be effective in decision making processes by getting involved in content production.

Olga Bailey, Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier (2008:5) explain the alternative media through diversity and relationality concepts in their classifications. Bailey et al., evaluate the alternative media with community media definitions divided into four different approaches (serving a community, alternative media as an alternative to mainstream media, linking alternative media to civil society, and alternative media as rhizome) within themselves. Due to the fact that the alternative media term is hard to be described by theorists, alternative media can be defined not only through its relationship with the mainstream media but also with different concepts such as community media, civil society media and rhizomatic media (Bailey et al., 2008: xii). In serving a community which is the first approach; the role of community media devoted to the society is emphasized and serves the community defined as geographical and legitimate and thus strengthens that community. In this approach; community's media access and participation are used as a base. Issues concerning the community are discussed. Alternative media as an alternative to mainstream media, as the second approach, is based on the distinction between the mainstream media and alternative media. This approach points out that community media uses alternative discourse, format and representation opportunities. In the third approach, alternative media is linked to civil society, which functions as a bridge between the community and the civil society; community media is not only a community-centric approach but also seems as a part of civil society, a mandatory social layer for democracy to live (Bailey et al., 2008: 11-23). In this context, as Wasko and Mosco (1992:13) stated, community media ensures democratization through the media and gives different social groups and communities the opportunity to participate in public discussions in the public places,

and thus represent themselves. The fourth approach, rhizomatic community media is a part of civil society networks and has the characteristic of a meeting point for various organizations and social movements (Bailey et al., 2008: 27).

But Mitzi Waltz defines alternative media as activist media. In Waltz's (2005:3) definition, activist media encourages its readers to participate actively in social transformation. Waltz states that activist media also adopts all political philosophies from extreme right to extreme left and it may be in a relationship with mainstream by advocating for mainstream activities, even voting for elected politicians. Briefly "Waltz defines activist media as the media of opposing political movements - indiscriminately from left to right - that covers all political approaches against the ruling power and does not have an obligation to produce an alternative politics in the given situation (Yanikkaya & Çoban, 2014: 126). In this context, alternative media and activist media seem to differentiate from each other. On the contrary to the activist media, alternative media does not develop a cooperation with mainstream or relate to the mainstream. Because alternative media with its anti- hierarchic, anti-authoritarian and nonprofit mentality, is opponent to mainstream media so that it covers the news which is not reported by mainstream media.

Fuchs and Sandoval (2010: 147-148) reveals an ideal alternative media model which will function in alternative media organization. Theorists bring a dialectical alternative media definition which does not exclude participation and also continues being opponent in content and activism level. In this context, alternative media is a media which is not commercial, is critical and produces in a participatory order. Especially based on Fuchs and Sandoval's definitions, it is seen that alternative media should offer a non-commercial quality and critical content in order to have a structure against oppressive capitalist mainstream media system both in terms of its commercial and ideological structure (Sandoval, 2009:10). In this respect, alternative media eliminates the distinction between media producers and consumers by differentiating from capitalist mass media and opens the production period to a wide audience. Because through its open access, alternative media let everybody attend to process of production. Thus everyone can be prosumers which means they can be both producers and users with non-hegemonic comprehension. Additionally, according to Fuchs and Sandoval (2010:146), for alternative media to achieve their political objectives also depends on the use of certain capitalist techniques on the basis of production. In this respect, alternative media can criticize capitalist structures but at the same time can use them. From this point, it is seen that ideal alternative media model of Fuchs and Sandoval is far from Downing's strategy and tactics which are completely independent from mainstream's dominant methods which define the

media as an industry, and thus differs from the free alternative media definition. As a result, according to Fuchs and Sandoval's dialectic centered alternative media approaches, alternative media may contribute to a free social transformation by producing critical media content. They can use non-alternative techniques and strategies in terms of production type while they drive a radical critical production period.

### **Alternative Media in Turkey**

Turkish media started in 1960's and its industrialization period continued between 1965-1980, and also experienced its horizontal and vertical integration stages after 1980's. In 2000's, dominant media groups started to cooperate with global media companies, and this cooperation has facilitated global media giants to become localized. Media workers have been significantly affected by this change. Because localized global media companies were able to make the changes they wanted on the labor process and the employment policies against employees'. This change and transformation has affected negatively not only the employees but also the media content. Media products have been commercialized, news have been tabloidized (Sönmez, 1996:76-80). Commercialization of the media environment has gained deeper roots every day and has caused exclusion of different social opinions from public discussions. Mainstream media in the hands of the powerful and rich people, has begun to use agendas that may be in favor of themselves. As a result, the groups with different social or ethnical structures were not able to represent themselves with their own language and tools, but instead powerful and rich people have given the meaning to these groups. Different groups have come to a situation where they have not been able to represent themselves in mainstream media. In fact, there is a wrong, exclusivist representation in the mainstream media for the groups such as ethnic groups, homosexuals and so forth as the source of the problems in daily life.

But with the mainstream media commercializing and gaining strength more and more, different groups that this media exclude have also increased in number directly proportional. Groups that have been excluded and increased in number, have established their own media with the purpose of representing themselves in a right way, presenting their opinions, having a voice in the society and transforming the community they are in. The leftist press has started to use alternative media beginning from the Second Constitutional Era in Turkey (Sönmez, 1996: 85). After 1980, the opponent public space has been varied in Turkey with feminist, Kurdish, environmentalists and anarchist movements. This diversity in different opponent public spaces has triggered an alternative media occurrence that expresses itself differently against from mainstream media.

### **LGBT Movement and Turkey**

LGBT movements have found a new field of interaction with various social and cultural identities along with cross-politics formation, and have become an international political power against nation-states in terms of equality and justice concepts (Cockburn, 2000: 46-47). LGBT Movements position themselves to produce an alternative politics in order to create social and political change against the structure and social order imposition against sexual orientations by nation-states. The LGBT Movement is global at the same time, because it is formed on the basis of human rights and it is the identity they have. So individuals' sexual orientations have a global identity specification besides their ethnical, religious and economic identities. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is not special to a specific country. That's why LGBT Movements are supported by transnational, global networks like Ilga, Iglyo and etc. all over the world to find solutions to the problems encountered by homosexuals and to defend their rights<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, LGBT Movement started to rise in USA after World War II although it is said that homosexuality has gained importance with "a third gender" definition in a magazine that was published in Germany in 1896 (Ertetik, 2010: 24). At the beginning of the LGBT Movements period, thousands of Americans have become a part of political campaigns that have been recorded in academic articles. Stonewall riots were held in New York in 1969 in response to the US Government and the media who attacked LGBT policies (D'Emilio, 1983:100-113). Media shows have been held with support groups against conservative movements that threaten LGBT Movements (Ertetik, 2010:25-27). LGBT Movements have become a target of nation- states that put pressure on different sexual orientations with their norms and policies. This contrast has transformed LGBT Movements into a resistance movement.

LGBT Movements started to take part in Europe's political agenda for first time in the world in Denmark in 1989 when same-sex marriage became legal. Regulations on LGBT rights and efforts against conservative groups have played a part in human rights discussions by LGBT Movement and LGBT people fighting in all countries to win social, political and economic rights. But despite these efforts, no human rights organizations have added sexual rights into their political agenda until 1980s (Kollman, 2007: 329-357).

When examining Turkey in line with historical processes, in terms of politization of homosexual identity, it is important to note that the Radical Democrat Green Party was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.outrightinternational.org/content/directory-organizations-relevant-human-rights-lgbt-people>

established after the 1980 military coup. The Party has focused on topics such as feminism, ecology, LGBT, anti-militarism and atheism as policy. The Party has not been able to follow effective politics on these topics due to the fact that it was established at the end of the 1980s. LGBT groups started to have a voice in political areas to a certain extent in the period following the failure of the Radical Democrat Green Party and have kept going with organized protests despite the government bans, hunger strikes and the organization of LGBT conferences in 1993. The LGBT Movement has been partially successful with transgenders' gaining legal status in 1988 in Turkey and also Kaos GL, the first LGBT magazine and organization, being established in 1994 in Ankara. The establishment of Kaos GL group (currently working as an association) triggered other similar groups and organizations during that period (ILGA, 2004).

### **Alternative Media of LGBT; Kaos GL Magazine**

Kaos GL Magazine has been published since 20 September 1994 with the purpose of creating an alternative area where LGBT people can use their own words to convey their own problems. The Magazine contributes to the sexual politics of Turkey as the long-term and the only LGBT publication in Turkey, and so plays a role as an important document of LGBT life and culture in Turkey. The Magazine creates its content by following LGBT agenda closely (<http://www.kaosgldergi.com/dergi.php>). The coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Association (Assoc.) and the volunteer editor of Kaos GL Magazine, with whom an in-depth interview was conducted, emphasizes the birth of the magazine as follows:

“In 93-94, friends say this... Always other people talk on our behalf. There is a homosexual type on TV and the newspapers but none of these represent me. Because I am a worker, a teacher at the same time. You define me despite of me. Thus, they worry about how they can have a voice, say their own words. Homosexuals are defined as extreme marginal people or porn objects in media. I am an individual living in the society, I have many problems in health, education, work, military, law etc. and none of these problems actually find voice. LGBT individuals are otherized by society. For this reason alternative channels are needed to let LGBTs announce their voices.”

Kaos GL Magazine began broadcasting life with the purpose of expressing themselves freely against hate speeches and wrong interpretations of homosexuals in mainstream media. People started to say something for themselves in the period when social movements found themselves in after the coup in 1980 in Turkey. Groups with different opinions came together and supported each other due to the fact that not only homosexual movements but also feminist, anarchist movements were common at that time too. So not only LGBT people but also heterosexuals with different opinions played an active role in Kaos GL Magazine establishment



too. Afterwards the supporters of ecological movement joined the support groups too. Kaos GL Magazine was sent to council library after it became official, says the coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Assoc. and the volunteer editor of the magazine, who states the following: “When the magazine is legally issued for the first time (Kaos GL,1994), they think of selling it in a pochette due to the fact that it is a homosexual magazine. That is the perception! There is a perception that it is a pornographic element. Actually it is a magazine consisted of political articles but the perception is like that at those times!”

When examining Kaos GL Magazine’s political approach, the coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Assoc. and the volunteer editor of the magazine emphasizes that the magazine does not have a socialist or communist structure because there are many types of people inside the magazine. And she explains the political approach as follows:

“The Magazine is seen as ‘bedroom dialogue’. This is not called as a political issue. And leftists say this ‘what will be the private lives of people anyway?’ but they do not consider that there may be homosexuals on May 1<sup>st</sup> and in union movements. They say ‘ok, homosexual is something else’. In a word, they do not see the problems you face in your business life as political problems, they just see your presence as an object, a soul. You are an any element that beautifies or deforms the society, nothing else” (<http://www.kaosgldergi.com/arsiv.php>).

When examining the context of the Magazine, it is seen that the issue of homosexuality is not the only subject that is questioned. The Magazine has file subjects; it handles conservatism subjects as well as immigration and social policies. The questioned subjects may include LGBT people not being allowed in shelters and also social, health and security problems in these shelters, or anti-militarism. Sexism and anti-militarism topics are expressed harmonizing with each other. There is an advisory board consisted of around 40 academicians who are mostly heterosexual and have different professions in Kaos GL which is published every two months. As soon as the topic of the following issue is determined, it is announced on the website or in the last issue of the magazine. The Magazine is open to everyone, may receive articles from everyone but the published articles are controlled by the experts in their fields who are members of the advisory board. The advisory /editorial board decides whether those articles will be published in the magazine or not. The Magazine does not have an activist characteristic although it is issued by a ‘movement’ association. The coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Assoc. and the volunteer editor of the magazine explains this as follows:

“You know sometimes there are leftist magazines which say ‘let’s walk’. Kaos is not so. In the first pages, we briefly give the news in Turkey’s agenda and LGBT movements. The Magazine informs about the activity, panel etc. there but does not invite you saying ‘let’s walk together’. It gives information about the panel, the

conferences with dates or when it is about a march, the news say ‘participation to the march was as follows’ in the following issue.”

The coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Assoc. and the volunteer editor of the magazine answers the question about hate speech made for LGBT people in the mainstream as follows:

“We sue the media who makes a hate speech. For example, we have a compensation we received from a newspaper that has used hate speech. Ten thousand Liras, both from the writer and the newspaper. We give coverage to subjects including updated topics on our website. But Kaos GL functions independent from our website and the association. We do not have a counter-discourse in the magazine. The Magazine is a bit more academic.”

Everyone works voluntarily in the organization structure of the magazine. Most of the employees work for the association such as the coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Assoc. and the volunteer editor of the magazine. The magazine has a link with the association so that they get a salary from the association but work voluntarily for the magazine. They serve voluntarily not only in the magazine but also in all association- related activities and areas as LGBT. The coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Assoc. and the volunteer editor of the magazine has Social Sciences Teaching degree and s/he (name and gender of the interviewee is not given purposely for research ethics) can contribute to the magazine, work in different areas too, although s/he works as human rights coordinator in the association.

In the production part, volunteers take care of design works themselves or an artist, graphic artist works voluntarily outside. They may also work with an agency in rush hours. LGBT members provide volunteer support to the association and the magazine apart from their personal lives and business lives. Printing outputs are done in Ankara as it is the center of the association is in Ankara. The magazine team in other words the volunteers agree with cargo company for distribution. The magazine is not available for purchase in popular bookstores. As the coordinator of the human rights trainings of LGBT Assoc. and the volunteer editor of the magazine calls it “Because Kaos is not a magazinish magazine based on advertising which is a pink capital that serves man and woman body”, they only give place to the promotion of a new book.

In this way it is seen that it is not a magazine based on advertising. The magazine is not displayed in popular bookstores due to the fact that it is not based on advertising, due to its low circulation as well as its perception in society. The magazine which is published bimonthly, is

sold for 5 TL (1.38\$) in specific bookstores stated in its website, but annual subscription is 25 TL (6,90\$ - in terms of Turkish Lira, the prices are not changed but for US Dollar the prices indicate the last currency rate in 24<sup>th</sup> of March ,2017). Ofcourse the money earned from the sales does not cover printing and distribution costs. Additional costs are covered by ambassadors that support LGBT Association and the European Union of HumanRights Fund ([http://www.outrightinternational.org/content/directory-organizations-relevant-human-rights-lgbt- people](http://www.outrightinternational.org/content/directory-organizations-relevant-human-rights-lgbt-people)).

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

KAOS GL Magazine is the first printed alternative media of LGBT Movement in Turkey which aims partial changes by defending LGBT rights in society and the public policies to create a fair and equal conception of social order by showing resistance through institutionalized ways that were organized against today's inequalities and injustices.

Although the magazine has a characteristic as being the defender of LGBT people, as a result of the interview and the review of various issues of the magazine, it is seen that the magazine develops a discourse against the mainstream media content. Although it is considered that it may harmonize with the critical media definition of Fuchs (2010) in terms of developing a discourse against the mainstream at first sight, the fact that the magazine is not developing a discourse digresses from the theory. But as it can be understood from the interview, Kaos GL magazine emphasize LGBT's opposing discourses on their website, but stay far from this discourse in the actual printed magazine. Various topics are discussed inside the magazine but a critical opposing discourse is not developed against existing problems in the system. Subjects as solutions to the problems are discussed. The magazine accords with alternative media definitions, which Fuchs and Sandoval (2010:146-148) have established about production, in terms of the Magazine's production techniques, its ability to work with agencies about design work, and its cargo companies' agreements about distribution work. According to the definition of Fuchs and Sandoval, achieving political objectives depends on the use of capitalist techniques on the basis of production. In this respect, alternative media criticize capitalist structures but at the same time can use them.

Although it is the magazine of a LGBT Movement, the magazine does not have an activist characteristic. With Waltz's (2005: 3-5) definition, activist media encourages its readers to participate actively in social transformation. However, it is seen that no activist discourse is developed in Kaos GL about for example participation in LGBT marches. It is striking that they develop activist discourses on their website as their opposing discourses compared with a

magazine of movement association.

Kaos GL Magazine may be harmonized with Rodriguez's (2001: 20) citizen media definition. Because citizen media includes the authorization of the community where transformations and changes are possible by resisting all institutionalized social codes, legitimate identities and social relationships. At the same time, citizen media creates a communication area where women, men and children can use their own languages, codes, signs and symbols in the society. This is exactly what Kaos GL magazine does by creating an area where LGBT people can use their own language and symbols. Citizen media allows citizens to develop communication for the purpose of transforming the community they live in. In this context, Kaos GL aims to transform the local society by defending LGBT rights. Citizen media offers an alternative to institutionalized vertical production configurations too. In this context, there is an equal participation in citizen's media. Readers can also be effective in decision making processes by getting involved in content production. In this respect, Kaos GL shows that it is open to participation from the outside by announcing following issues' topics in advance of their publication.

As it is understood in this study, the content of Kaos GL Magazine is created with a more academic perspective, yet it emphasizes opposing discourses and the activist side of LGBT Association. Therefore, it is important that a comparative study be done within the context of the website of LGBT Association and the printed magazine. In other words it needs to be examined as to why an association that serves the same purpose moves with different missions on internet and in printed media within the alternative media concept. And this needs to be compared and contrasted with global examples. Furthermore, the studies focusing on the social problems of LGBT individuals in Turkey together with global examples such as exclusion, working life issues etc. and the solutions be examined within both current and proposed policies.

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