



HIGH LEVEL EVENT 'DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH' KEY LEARNINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

*The European Commission, the Polish Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment and the Responsible Business Forum organised the **High Level Event, 'Diversity Management for Inclusive Growth'**, on 17 October 2013 in Warsaw at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland.*

More than 100 delegates from governments, NGOs, multinational companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from across the EU came together for the event. The conference aimed at encouraging a dialogue between policy makers and key business leaders to discuss how diversity can bring value to employers and share best practices on successful diversity management alliances between public authorities and private organisations.

The High Level Event forms part of the European Commission's 'Support for voluntary initiatives promoting diversity management at the workplace across the EU' project which brings together Diversity Charters from across Europe in an EU-level platform for exchange¹. There are 12 national Diversity Charters which have joined the EU Platform since 2010, including Austria, Brussels-Capital Region, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Poland, Finland, Luxembourg, Ireland and Estonia.

I) CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS AND THE BUSINESS CASE OF DIVERSITY

- Diversity is to be seen from two points of view that are complementary: the economic and profitability aspects on one hand and fundamental rights and non-discrimination aspects on the other. In times of crisis it is worth highlighting that diversity is economically beneficial and worth investing in, and at the same time, note that foreign investors will not invest in a region where discrimination exists.
- Supporting diversity can be beneficial for all parties involved — for companies, governments and citizens. However, this involves changing mindsets, investing in talent, and tapping into available resources.
- Making Europe more competitive means raising the number of people entering the workforce. The EU should be an attractive place for all qualified employees from all over the world, no matter their ethnic origin, sexual orientation or age. Improved anti-discrimination policies and broader inclusion are key to achieve this objective.
- Diversity is a catalyst for innovation, and thus economic growth. Real progress can be made by communicating to businesses that innovation stems from diversity.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/diversity/charters/index_en.htm



II) SPECIFIC ISSUES FACED BY DIFFERENT TARGET GROUPS AT WORK

- When speaking about LGBT issues, three fundamental principles for successful diversity management were mentioned: recognition, respect and rights. Recognising the existence of special needs and vulnerability, for which raising-awareness is essential. Respecting diversity and spreading a culture of tolerance is crucial for an inclusive environment, and to ensure effective rights for non-discrimination within the organisation. These principles are applicable to all discrimination grounds.
- It was highlighted that the issues of discrimination against ethnic minorities have not been eliminated despite existing legislation, and the problem of stereotyping persists in the form of what many companies called the issue of “unconscious bias”. Guidelines and training are amongst the solutions that were proposed to overcome the unconscious bias. The importance of collaboration with NGOs and partnerships between private and public sectors was also pointed out.
- As far as elderly workers are concerned, the latest Eurobarometer report on discrimination² shows that older people are perceived as the most discriminated group in Europe in the employment field. Some of the current challenges for this group could be overcome with technological solutions and education/training. It was pointed out that there is no conflict between young and old in terms of employment: Research has shown that more employment of the elderly also results in more jobs for young people.
- The lack of accessibility and the lack of knowledge on laws regarding accessibility also emerged as obstacles impeding integration, inclusive education and living. In this context, good management is the key issue, not disability as such.
- From a gender perspective, the importance of creating climates that support possibilities for work-life balance to achieve a greater diversity was underlined.

III) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- Advice for the future included working on communication strategies, and how the idea of diversity management is sold. Big organisations and business leaders make the difference; leadership needs to be shown by seniors in organisations in order for real advancements to be made. The business case in this context needs to be strengthened.
- The role of EU funding for getting diversity debate started and the value-added of EU-level activities was also highlighted.

² http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_399_380_en.htm#393



- The importance of providing scientific evidence to prove that diversity is profitable was addressed, including good examples in different sectors such as industry, public administration and trade, but also 'bad' examples and their effects in terms of economic impact.
- Tolerance and respect for human rights makes our economy more competitive according to business representatives, but the challenge lies in awareness-raising. Big organisations and business leaders have the power to affect change, 'sell' change to other companies and be industry-wide change makers. In order to promote this, businesses need to be presented with strong scientific data to prove the effort is worthwhile and that diversity is profitable.
- Beyond the legal and moral obligations of employers, diversity strategies can produce measurable business benefits for companies of all sizes. The challenge now is to try to quantify these benefits as much as possible and widely disseminate these good results in order to encourage new players, public and private, to engage in diversity practices.
- More should be done to fight discrimination regarding employment. The creation of support networks for companies or regions that embrace diversity would allow for the awareness of diversity benefits to further spread, and to change recruitment processes to eliminate discrimination that occurs during the hiring process.
- Collaboration between all sectors was also highlighted as a key factor for successful public/private cooperation.

IV) DIVERSITY CHARTERS AS PROMOTERS OF INCLUSIVE GROWTH

- Diversity Charters can play an important role in connecting different actors, offering tools for advancing diversity, to promote and disseminate the existing research and benefits for all groups at risk of discrimination.
- The Diversity Charters are well placed to engage companies because of the flexibility that their voluntary character offers.
- National contexts are very different, and often diversity issues in employment are managed at local level. Diversity Charters are in a good position to adopt a localised approach.
- Diversity Charters in some countries have opened doors to innovative partnerships between public and private actors, as the collaborative effort to improve diversity aims to extend not just across workplaces, but in all spheres of life.