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Inclusive business communication



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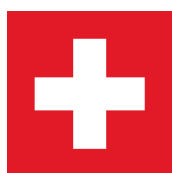
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Address: Obala Kulina Bana 2/3, 71000 Sarajevo

Design: Renato Juričev

Text: Emina Bošnjak i Dajana Bakić



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**Do we know what
diversity and
inclusion are?**

In everyday informal speech, but often also in a professional environment, people tend to confuse human rights violations with discrimination, equity with equality (especially with respect to gender), and diversity with inclusion. Sometimes these concepts are used interchangeably. This is not surprising, since the concepts and terms are relatively new, especially in the business environment and they refer to related social phenomena. However, it is important to highlight their conceptual differences because meaning nuances can affect not only the position of groups that have been historically neglected and marginalised, but also the understanding of the measures and moves that need to be taken to improve the business or work environment, communication with clients and the success of the business model, and to attract meaningful human potential.

Therefore, we will attempt here to present distinctions that can affect (and we will see in what ways) how and to what extent we (successfully) do business.

Equality means a situation in which different social groups united by a common personal characteristic such as sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or disability have access to the same resources or opportunities. On the other hand, equity assumes that each person is facing different circumstances and assigns them exactly the level of resources and opportunities that are necessary to achieve fair and equal treatment or outcome.

Therefore, achieving equity entails different treatment of social groups (men and women, or persons without and with disabilities) with the aim of correcting the initial inequalities. These measures are not necessarily equal, but it is precisely their inequality that contributes to equality in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

In the simplest terms, if you have two children: a boy and a girl, who receive an average allowance of BAM 50 for the boy and BAM 40 for the girl, and if you want to make them equal, it is clear that you will have to be unfair to the boy for a while and give him an increase of BAM 10, whereas for the girl the increase will be BAM 20 to achieve the GOAL that leads to their equality.

Justice and fairness in the treatment of girls and boys in

this case may at first seem very unfair if the initial position is ignored for the purpose of achieving – as is the case here – gender equity. To ensure fairness and justice, measures must be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from being equal.

Example:

Employer X has posted a job ad on their website and other online recruitment platforms. The text explicitly states that people with disabilities are also encouraged to apply for the job. In addition to headhunting for talented workers, this is standard practice of advertising vacancies – nothing out of the ordinary.

However, the text format of the ad is not adapted or accessible to blind or visually impaired people so there was little chance for the blind or visually impaired people, unlike the general population, to even become aware of this employment opportunity or to be able to apply. Furthermore, if the job interview takes place in-person and if the employer's premises do not have wheelchair ramps – potential candidates with disabilities may be prevented from participating in the recruitment process.

Although there are no legal obstacles in this case – the job ad even underlines that the employer intends to employ people with disabilities, therefore, employment opportunities for a person with disability are, in theory, equal to those of people without disabilities – the fact that access to information about employment and parts of the process is not actually provided in practice results in an unequal position of persons with disabilities.

Physical installation of access ramps at the employer's premises or special activities introduced to reach potential future employees with disabilities (sending calls to associations advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, adjustment of job ads so that they can be read and accessed by e.g. visually impaired or blind people)

constitute additional measures that are not usually taken in the recruitment process, and can seemingly – if viewed from the outside and without context – give the impression that some people are being granted special treatment, while in fact they only offer the possibility of an equal outcome: employment.

Human rights are basic rights that every human being is entitled to. These rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible. Human freedoms refer to the freedoms and privileges that individuals possess in exercising their rights without unnecessary interference or influence from other actors: either individuals or institutions. Freedom allows people to act, speak and think as they wish, within the limits of the law and without violating the rights of others. Together, human rights and freedoms create a framework for a just and fair society that respects the dignity of every individual, regardless of race, sex, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other personal characteristic. They include civil and political rights, such as the right to vote and freedom of speech, as well as social and economic rights, such as the right to healthcare and education.

Discrimination, in terms of the BiH Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, means every different treatment including every exclusion, limitation or preference based on real or assumed features towards any person or group of persons on grounds of their race, skin colour, language, religion, ethnic affiliation, national or social origin, connection to a national minority, political or any other persuasion, property, membership in trade union or any other association, education, social status and sex, sexual expression or sexual orientation, and every other circumstance with a purpose or a consequence to disable or endanger recognition, enjoyment or realisation, of rights and freedoms in all areas of public life.

With these definitions in mind, a violation of rights therefore means a violation of any right or freedom set forth in the relevant constitutions and laws, and other relevant regulations, by intentional action of individuals or the state or resulting from the state's failure to protect against the violation of rights, whereas discrimination means different treatment in relation to human rights, based on one of the prohibited grounds, i.e., personal characteristics.

Example:

Azra and Boris work for an IT company. They are both in their early twenties. Boris plans to start a family and devote a great part of his private life to it, while Azra does not. Due to the volume of work that summer, the management decided not to grant anyone their annual vacation they are entitled to by the relevant labour laws and internal regulations. This is an example of violation of the right to vacation, which is part of the set of labour rights. Regardless of their gender, both are denied this guaranteed right.

However, let us take a step back. In a situation where Azra and Boris are offered different salaries at the job interview for the same positions, responsibilities and tasks, just because Azra is a woman and Boris is a man, such treatment would constitute gender discrimination. Asking questions about family life (plans to start a family) to Azra, but not to Boris, during the employment process is also a form of gender discrimination.

Example:

Amir is a gay man who, during lunch break with colleagues one day, shared details about the vacation he had with his male partner. After the employer found out about his sexual orientation, he did not extend Amir's contract, despite the fact that Amir was a great employee with promotion perspectives. His heterosexual colleagues regularly share details of their private and daily lives of their relationship, marriage or common-law union in chats and talks and are not subjected to the same consequences. It was because of his sexual orientation that Amir experienced unequal treatment; he was denied the opportunity for promotion and he lost his job – which is a clear example of discrimination at work.

While violations of rights and freedoms and discrimination are ways to prevent the true exercise of and access to various rights and freedoms, and they require an intervention by state institutions to enforce, promote and protect human rights, diversity and



inclusion are not issues addressed by the state in the context of protection human rights and freedoms. Diversity and inclusion represent a move from the minimum level of legal respect for rights and freedoms towards the real acceptance of the values and benefits that different people from different backgrounds bring to the workplace/collective, but also to diversity in the broadest business eco-system. They assume good HR practices, but also recognition that clients and business partners have their own specific experiences, values, and the need for acceptance in the wider community, including the business community.

Diversity in the work environment is a concept that implies recognition that employees in the workplace are individuals who possess/identify with different characteristics (as listed above: sex/gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability) and that these characteristics can have a different impact on their position, success, progress and creativity in the workplace.

Inclusion is the process of removing historical inequalities and distinctions, bringing different social groups together, and providing equal opportunities to all individuals for life, development and participation in society. Inclusion manifests itself as solving the problem of social exclusion, through a clear attitude, specific actions or policies to include all individuals and social groups in society, especially those who suffer marginalisation or segregation, so that they can have equal opportunities for

personal growth and development, but also equal opportunities to participate in society and contribute to the achievement of social development and well-being.

Example:

Normally, labour regulations and similar internal documents, adhering to valid labour laws, grant employees the right to a paid leave of several working days annually in case of marriage, illness or death of a spouse or close family member. An inclusive employer will not only hire a lesbian, gay or bisexual person, but will also provide them with the same or similar opportunities if they have same-sex partners, even though no law in Bosnia and Herzegovina currently recognises same-sex partnerships. There are no obstacles to granting employees a broader scope of rights than legally envisaged, if such a measure by the employer will correct the injustice that exists due to social homo/transphobia and result in equal treatment of all its employees, regardless of sexual orientation. This is a great example of inclusion that costs nothing.

Recommendations and lessons learnt:

- In addition to complying with the laws that regulate labour relations, it is possible and necessary to offer the same opportunities and end results for employees also by way of internal procedures and regulations, as well as through the recruitment processes, professional growth and development, benefits and performance assessment.
- Such improvements may be faced with resistance in the work environment because when viewed out of context, measures leading to equality may seem unfair to the majority: there must be clear communication about the goals with all employees, and inclusion and diversity need to be part of the organisational culture.



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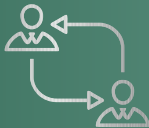


**The benefits of
implementing
diversity and
inclusion for
business
performance**

IN A BUSINESS ORGANISATION THAT FOSTERS DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICIES, THE FOLLOWING OCCURS:



Rise of productivity and creativity



Better flow of information



Growth of innovation



Better recognition of the needs, views and habits of clients/partners



Expanding the range of skills within the team



Reduced employee turnover and increased loyalty



Greater job satisfaction, but also commitment to organisational growth and development

People who come from different backgrounds bring with them different knowledge, perspectives and experiences that they shape into new ideas that can contribute to better work of an organisation – exchange of opinions, more open communication, increased creativity – but also can result in innovative approaches to problem solving. It is through daily communication, living or working with people who are different from us that we increase the chances for our own progress – we get exposed to new ideas and new ways of thinking about our values and beliefs.

When we work in a uniform team within which a culture of true inclusion is not nurtured, there is a great danger of falling into “groupthink” – the absence of different ideas and ways of thinking precisely because of the fear of being different and the desire to conform. The result is the absence of any alternative ideas or different approaches to a task or problem, which could have been of multiple use for the business itself.

Example:

The team of programmers in an IT company comprises men who come from urban areas. They were recently given a task to develop a mobile dating app. The app was developed in record time, but when it was launched, a large number of female users reported that they felt unsafe using it because their location was easily accessible to other users and that they gave up on the app after a series of cases that can be classified as sexual abuse or stalking. The story about these cases was reported by the media, and the number of app users dropped sharply making it pointless.

Of course, to design a new product, it is not necessary that the creators of products or services have all the characteristics of their market segment, and it is certainly possible to compensate for this by testing the product or hiring external suppliers for a specific job. However, this represents an additional cost and loss of time, which would certainly be at least partially reduced if some of those employed in the development of the application could share the female experience with digital dating with potential partners.

Therefore, in the process of developing products or services, it is necessary to keep in mind, to the extent possible, the diversity of consumers and the market. The most adequate services that are receptive to a diverse market will come from ideas conceived and developed by a diverse team.

For most modern industries, technological innovations in processes, but also in the goods and services, require problem solving, critical thinking, innovation and creativity. These are all factors that may vary depending on the level of diversity and inclusion within the business collective. If diversity of different opinions from different backgrounds is missing, we will find ourselves in a situation where we cannot view business problems from different perspectives or see how they affect different groups in our society – target markets/clients. Furthermore, innovative and fresh ideas on how to solve mapped problems through the development of services/products will also be missing – those that make us a distinctive, attractive and competitive business organisation.

On the other hand, business organisations that have developed internal documents, policies and practices of equal treatment, non-discrimination, prohibition of sexual harassment or mobbing, and inclusion of persons with disabilities clearly communicate the message of openness and inclusion, and readiness to prevent all possible situations at work that can put an employee in a disadvantageous position due to personal characteristics. These messages can have a two-fold effect: on the one hand, the interest of talents/persons who can be recruited grows, and on the other hand, they improve the reputation and the brand of the organisation among different actors/audiences, and finally, increase the profits.

Where this is the case, employees come to the workplace and, in addition to simply performing their tasks, they grow loyal to the business organisation through sharing common organisational values, but also the goals of the business organisation, as well as its growth and development. Therefore, every recruitment/employment process should be seriously permeated by the rule that talents are hidden in different categories of society and that efforts in the recruitment/employment process should be informed by that.

In addition, where they nurture the values of corporate social responsibility, business organisations have an additional moral obligation to recognise and reach out to less represented and vulnerable groups in our society and recognise their work potential. Human rights, diversity and inclusion are increasingly important aspects of corporate social responsibility and responsible business behaviour, as defined by the European Commission, and

especially in relation to the global supply chain.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights define what companies and governments can do for business organisations not to have a negative impact on human rights. The EU has supported these principles through its internal documents and policies, such as the 2015 Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, and committed to supporting its implementation. The European Commission continues to develop the respective policies in its field and we can expect in the accession process of Bosnia and Herzegovina that an increasing focus will be placed on respecting gender equality, inclusion of persons with disabilities, Roma men and women, LGBTIQ persons, and other historically marginalised social groups.



Recommendations and lessons learnt:

- Introducing the principles of diversity and inclusion is simply good for business: it has been proved that it leads to increased productivity, creativity and innovation, and better recognition of the needs, views and habits of clients/partners.
- The participation of women, persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons, and Roma in the development of products/services and their testing processes will ensure that all these groups can use them equally, and that they will not be harmed by them.
- The European path of Bosnia and Herzegovina sets new requirements for employers and the business sector with respect to the principles of diversity and inclusion, and these requirements grow over time and intensify with our progress on this path.



Basics of inclusive communication

Language is a powerful tool for recognising and combating discrimination in the workplace. With the proper use of language, we undertake affirmative actions in favour of employees of different identities, especially the underrepresented and marginalised groups, and we create an organisational culture of understanding and acceptance, leaving no one out.

Gender-sensitive language is an important social and ideological issue that contributes to greater visibility of women and women's work. Social power is clearly reflected in language, and rejecting the generic use of the masculine gender in written and oral communication, where women are neither seen nor heard but implied, is the first step towards equal distribution of that power. Language is, among other things, also a paradigm of ideological, social, economic, legal and political relations that rule in society.¹

The BiH Gender Equality Law defines language discrimination as the exclusive use of one grammatical gender as generic, and therefore there is a legal requirement to use gender-sensitive language.

Example:

Employment contracts and other internal documents, as well as names on office doors, titles, and professions, business cards, e-mail signatures – should all be written in gender-sensitive language. For example, words “leader”, “manager”, “economist”, “analyst”, “employee” can be written in both genders using appropriate suffixes and they should be. It is especially important to be gender-sensitive with respect to leadership positions of women to break the stereotypes about leadership positions being only for men.

Politically correct language implies avoiding stereotyping or discriminating against socially excluded persons and proper naming of persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, members of racial or ethnic minorities, and other groups of people or individuals subject to certain social stereotypes and prejudices.

¹ Čaušević, Zlotrg: *Načini za prevladavanje diskriminacije u jeziku u obrazovanju, medijima i pravnim dokumentima, Sarajevo 2011.*

One of the prerequisites for building an inclusive team is creating a relaxed atmosphere, primarily taking into account the diversity of the team. Offensive jokes against Roma, LGBTIQ persons or other minorities – even when these people are not necessarily part of the work collective – are a signal to all employees, especially those who belong to minority groups, that members of minority groups have a different status, that such a talk can degrade them or negatively affect their dignity and sense of belonging to the team. Such exclusionary elements of the organisational culture can negatively affect future team diversity. Instead, it is possible to focus group communication and dynamics on building togetherness. Humour goes far beyond making fun of social groups that are in a disadvantaged position, therefore, it is necessary to encourage connections and collegiality.

It is important to ensure equal access to the workplace, conditions and opportunities for all employees, especially for groups that do not use conventional language and means of communication due to different levels of ability, and for groups that have historically been excluded due to their marginalisation from cultural and socio-economic flows.

Certain employees may encounter obstacles to accessing, advancing or remaining in employment due to factors such as the physical environment at the workplace or the way work is organised. Equal access is ensured by removing or reducing these obstacles by adapting the existing way of working to the needs of the employee, such as, for example, adjusting working hours, or by removing physical barriers in the workplace where necessary and feasible, such as, for example, replacing stairs with a ramp to facilitate access for people in wheelchair.

Accessibility therefore covers issues such as workplace infrastructure, the types of technologies used in the workplace or other ways in which work is structured. Accessibility implies continuous strategic planning of companies. Such a strategic approach ensures that products, environments, programmes and services are equally accessible to all employees to the greatest extent possible.

Examples:



Depending on their size, companies should consider providing adequate space in the workplace for workers who are breastfeeding or for workers who wish to pray during their break.

01



If the company employs or has as clients persons with learning disabilities or difficulties participating, it is necessary to adapt the company's infrastructure so that it is equally accessible to everyone (remove architectural barriers, install ramps, adapt toilets and other inventory) and other work and learning tools.

02



Some companies choose to provide training for staff through online courses. If the worker has a visual impairment, then it may be necessary to provide screen reading technology to ensure access to the online training.

03



When providing food at the workplace, companies should provide a range of options and take care of the different dietary needs of employees (people on a special diet for medical reasons, people who do not eat meat or animal products).

04

Active listening means willingness to carefully listen to the voices of (underrepresented) staff, as well as clients, and provide feedback that will develop mutual understanding.

Active listening creates a safe work environment where employees are encouraged to express themselves freely, outside of the hierarchy.

A diverse workforce that is not afraid to openly communicate their positions provides different perspectives, a larger pool of ideas and experiences and thus enables the company to be more innovative in planning and solving problems.

Recommendations

- Organise regular meetings and other events where you will ask workers to explain what obstacles they encounter in performing their work, especially keeping in mind employees belonging to marginalised groups.
- Ask staff if there are any adaptations or modifications that could remove and mitigate the obstacles they encounter.
- Give feedback on what can be done to remove or mitigate obstacles and involve workers in problem-solving processes.

Intersectionality identifies the advantages and disadvantages that workers may face due to the combination of several factors related to their identity, such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, appearance and other.

The point of understanding intersectionality is to understand the variety of privilege and/or forms of discrimination that one can experience simultaneously at any given time in the workplace. For example, when we look at the work environment through intersectionality, we can see that on the higher economic class levels we find white middle-aged heterosexual men. This means that opportunities and working conditions are organised around their privileges and power.

Through intersectionality, we recognise individuals and their needs; we build an organisational culture of equal chances and opportunities and a true culture of inclusion.

Example:

Organise collaboration platforms around specific tasks that include people from all sectors of the organisation and from different professional, academic and socio-cultural backgrounds. These non-hierarchical, multi-sector groups should be brought together to find ways to improve the organisation's functioning and performance. Through the sharing of problems and different perspectives, an appropriate and original solution can be reached.

A close-up photograph of a person's eye, heavily adorned with vibrant, multi-colored makeup. The makeup features a spectrum of colors including red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple, applied in a way that creates a rainbow effect across the eyelid and surrounding skin. The person's eye is closed, and their dark eyelashes are visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus skin tone.

**Avoiding traps
of business
communication
that leads to
exclusion**

Interpersonal relationships, be it those within the workplace or with business partners and clients, assume that in every collective or group that we want to influence (to behave in a certain way, buy/use goods or services) we are primarily focusing on other people. Information industry today sees people as resources and/or products, not only as consumers/clients, giving rise to a series of sociological and ethical questions. In any case, business models that focus on increasing productivity, creativity, information flow, innovation, or other benefits in the organisation must care about diversity outside the business environment, but also within it (in relation to the approach of other business organisations: businesses, corporation, etc.) and the way they communicate about it and to what extent they promote and support it.

On the one hand, the business collective has shared values and experience, which implies a similar view of phenomena, events, and common goals within each business collective, and they function as a link or social glue within the business organisation, but also extend to a range of clients on market and partners outside the business team. As such, shared values and experience can be the foundation for working to promote diversity and inclusion. They are opposed by a series of psychological mechanisms that necessarily direct each individual within the collective to simplify the experiences and characteristics of others, and to understand their own individual position within the business collective and the overall business. Therefore, inclusion and diversity are rather goals or processes than an outcome, and these two opposing forces are the most important aspects in the context of their development.

As human beings, we are inevitably primarily focused on our personal experiences, as well as observing the world through the prism of opportunities, possibilities and accomplishments that we ourselves have come across, experienced or achieved. This is expected considering the different psychological mechanisms. However, no two individuals have identical experiences and this is one of the most deceptive bases on which to judge the experience, position or accomplishments of other human beings.

At the core of this understanding of the position of others lies anecdotal evidence as type of logical fallacy that refers to "proof" that has been gathered unscientifically and is supported by isolated, specific examples. Anecdotal evidence relies on personal experiences

instead of scientifically researched and established facts, and is therefore one of the weakest forms of reasoning. Argumentum ad populum is another type of logical fallacy that does not rely on facts and reasons, but on the (un)founded claim that a mass of people is in favour or against a certain position. Even if there is a mass of people in favour or against the position, that in itself is not an argument.

Example:

How many times have you heard in comments on articles or in everyday conversation that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people demand special rights? These are the comments of people who take for granted the right to private and family life that is regulated by the state which allows them to use these rights – more or less – without restrictions by the state. So, these are conclusions that are based on the opinion of the majority, but also on their own experience, which structurally cannot be informed by what it means to live without these rights because they are guaranteed to them.

In social psychology, attribution is the process of inferring the causes of events or behaviours. In real life, attribution is something we all do every day, usually without any awareness of the underlying processes and biases that lead to our inferences. These are thoughts about other people and groups that help us explain their behaviours. But in reality, there is a frequent attribution error because the focus is on the manifested – the behaviour – while the situation, context and circumstances that lead to such behaviour are being ignored. Similar to attribution, projection is the process of unconscious displacing of one's undesired feelings or traits onto others and, as yet another psychological mechanism, it is set to achieve the same as all defence mechanisms: to keep away the unpleasant feelings about ourselves.

Example:

People who feel inferior and have low self-esteem can easily fall into the trap of projecting their own feelings of inadequacy onto others, and can often be at the centre of racism or homophobia/transphobia – a defence mechanism at play on a somewhat broader scale.

Both of these psychological mechanisms are at the core of human judgments about others, but are especially important for inclusion and diversity. Namely, this kind of judgment of other people does not require much thought or reasoning. The human brain tends to make automatic inferences about the behaviours and experiences of others so that we can move through the world without expending too much energy or time. However, the sociological and psychological mechanisms that were better suited to the past – where quick judgments and reactions were necessary for survival – are far from necessary in the modern market and environment.

The basis of inclusion and acceptance of diversity lies in understanding (of the other, the different), which is demanding because it requires reflection, patience, compassion and an open mind. In each phase of communication (creating messages, testing, choosing channels, choosing communicators and possibly communication itself, regardless of whether it refers to communication within the business organisation or outside to partners or clients and the market) it is necessary to take into account the complexity and different levels of diversity: gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity or other affiliations.

Judging others is often an attempt to create a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority and to define and assign value to everything we encounter in business life. It also extends to persons, as well as social groups to which these persons belong. A binary perspective of the world loses a nuanced view of persons, processes and results and leads us to be either right or wrong because of often extreme and exclusionary attitudes. The aforementioned psychological mechanisms lead us to condemnation instead of understanding as a basis for inclusion.

Implicit (unconscious) bias in business organisations can be eliminated through three steps: awareness – identification – reaction. A good way to identify implicit bias is to be aware of the fact that all people are prone to cognitive (logical) errors, that everyone can have implicit biases, and that people who have them are not necessarily malicious. In the identification process, it is necessary to analyse and test all aspects of human resource flows for implicit biases. For example, in the recruitment process, this can be done by the analysis of biographies, interviews, assignment of tasks, mentoring programmes, performance evaluation, identification of the best employees, promotion and dismissal processes.



It is certainly necessary to practice implicit impartiality also through external communication, which, in terms of marketing, is subject to the evaluation of the end clients, i.e., buyers and users, as well as to the test of the public.

If there is a large imbalance between e.g., men and women, but also other minority groups in some of the mentioned aspects of recruitment, it is likely that there is implicit bias in the organisation.

In such cases, it is necessary to react, i.e., work on creating inclusive organisational values and eliminating implicit bias.

Some of the possible ways are: anonymous employee surveys for more objective information about the specifics of implicit bias and unfairness in the workplace from the employee's perspective; suggest to employees that they report cases of implicit discrimination without fear to a person of trust; continuously support activities that educate everyone in the organisation about implicit bias and encourage a positive image of minorities in the organisation (e.g. through organisational diversity campaigns, internal newsletters, annual reports and the like); support the implementation of organisational programmes that encourage diversity in order to prevent leaky pipelines, i.e., maintain the possibility of advancement towards certain careers for members of a demographic group in order to avoid underrepresentation in certain industries (e.g. rewarding employees who volunteer or mentor minority groups in the organisation); create safe environments where women and minority

groups have access to mentorship or leadership programmes, support groups and the like.

What may appear to be good practice on the surface is a symbolic effort or inclusion/recruitment of a small number of people from marginalised groups, in order to create an impression within the business organisation that the

organisation respects the values of diversity and inclusion. This can be acceptable as an initial step and, of course, should depend on the size of the business organisation; in fact, it must happen, but it must not stop there. There are at least two specific reasons against maintaining such practices in the long run:

01

Expectations and values related to diversity and inclusion are placed on people who come from marginalised groups, while in fact this burden must be distributed within the organisation and through its various functional units, especially in the management structures.

02

So-called tokenism renders the principles of diversity and inclusion meaningless, whether within the business organisation or towards clients and the market, reducing them to a few employees from marginalised groups, without serious and dedicated work on cultivating and operationalising these values.



Recommendations and lessons learnt:

- A series of psychological and sociological phenomena complicates and greatly slows down the processes of introducing and recognising the value of the principles of diversity and inclusion. Therefore, to avoid falling into the traps of business communication that leads to exclusion, it is necessary to nurture the following:
 - ▶ **OPENNESS** – before we judge others, it is necessary to try to understand them;
 - ▶ **CURIOSITY** – it is necessary to be aware that there must be something about people or a situation that we do not fully understand;
 - ▶ **EMPATHY** – cultivating empathy even though we are not fully aware of the situation or circumstances in which others find themselves;
 - ▶ **SELF-AWARENESS** – dedication to analysing one's own thinking, attitudes and prejudices, and the possibility of separating one's own mental processes from prejudices, stereotypes and entrenched, unconfirmed attitudes and positions.
- If the efforts remain only at the symbolic level in the context of achieving diversity and inclusion, they will soon become meaningless and will make difficult further efforts to create a diverse team, recognise diversity in the market, and ultimately – achieve success of the business organisation.



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A man in a dark suit and light shirt stands in a modern office with large windows, gesturing with his right hand while speaking to a group of people. A woman with blonde hair is visible on the right, and another woman is in the foreground. A small potted plant sits on a table in front of him.

*Inclusive communication in
different business segments*

Internal communication

Introduction of diversity and inclusion as basic organisational values and commitment of the management to operationalise them

A growing body of research suggests that diversity in all its forms such as sex, race, age, sexual orientation, economic class, academic background and specialised skills can improve organisational performance and transform company operations for the benefit of society as a whole. When a company cares about diversity and inclusion, its decision-making processes improve, its actions become more legitimate, and its reputation increases.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring diversity in the workplace. Each work organisation will have different needs depending on their specificities. Company management must be ready to build an organisational culture and learn how to effectively manage a diverse workforce that leads to success. Management should motivate and intellectually stimulate its associates in professional development, stimulate effort and mobilise collective intelligence by emphasising the talents and contributions of each individual. This type of inclusive management capitalises on all good ideas, regardless of their origin, and thus drives sustainable organisational change by creating a culture where everyone is recognised for their contribution.

Example:

Companies should create internal documents and policies, and develop business practices of equal treatment, non-discrimination, prohibition of sexual harassment and mobbing, and clearly communicate messages of openness and inclusion, as well as willingness to prevent any situation at work that could put any employee in a disadvantageous position due to their personal characteristics.

In the process of creating inclusive policies and programmes, staff whose personal characteristics and life perspectives are often neglected in socio-political reality should be included. If companies do not have the capacity to independently build a diverse and inclusive organisational culture, partnering with non-governmental organisations that address these issues can be a sound solution.

Communicating the core values of the organisation (ensuring they include diversity and inclusion)

All information related to the organisational culture built on values (diversity and inclusion) should be easily accessible to all employees, who must be thoroughly familiar with these provisions, policies and approaches. They are communicated in different ways, such as through vacancy ads, job interviews, the process of organisational socialisation, team meetings and training of staff, and can be displayed on notice boards in the company, on the company's website to be available to employees and other persons who actively participate in the work of the company, as well as users.

It is also important that all aspects of organisational culture and practices are regularly reviewed in consultations with employees to ensure that they encourage their inclusion.

Transparent communication of decisions and opportunities

Keeping secrets suggests you have something to hide, which breeds suspicion and cynicism. Transparent communication inside and outside the workplace, on the other hand, helps companies build trust and nurture meaningful relationships. Furthermore, when you are transparent about what is going on with your business, you set the narrative instead of letting others impose it. In transparent companies, people know what is happening and why, they feel included, while management is considered part of the wider team because they are not locked in offices that no one can approach.



Transparent and two-way communication improves relations and trust between management and employees, improves morale, reduces work-related stress, leading to increased satisfaction and higher performance.

It is extremely important to avoid bias and exclude no one when communicating information, decisions and opportunities within the company that come from management or leaders. If we build an inclusive work environment, we build equal chances and opportunities for everyone.

Some companies ensure transparency in recruitment by standardised tests and interviews to avoid bias. Transparent communication is also achieved by regularly informing the staff about development plans, realised income, salaries. Some companies use different online communication platforms (e.g., Slack) to regularly inform about decisions and opportunities, but at the same time provide space for questions and ideas exchange. Notice boards in companies can be used for regular communication of plans, decisions and opportunities, but it is noteworthy that transparent communication is a two-way process and that space for feedback and equal participation must also be ensured.

Recruitment, employment and the process of organisational socialisation

Setting clear goals that lead to diversity and inclusion together with active management engagement can generate measurable improvements in recruitment and

promotion practices in all companies.

A good example of employment can be many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Diversity and inclusion policies attract many people to work in the NGO sector, and, on the other hand, organisations know that their success and sustainability directly depend on their staff. This leads to success in talent acquisition and retention, as NGO management sees diversity and inclusion as essential to an inclusive culture that supports engagement, empowerment and authenticity.

Example:

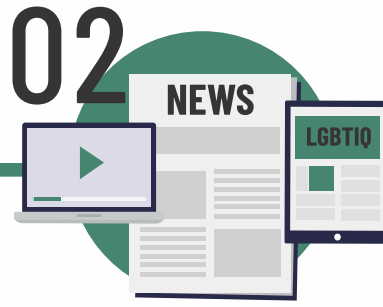
In the recruitment process, the job ad should include an invitation to the candidates to indicate whether they have special needs or need accommodation to enable them to participate in an interview or other assessment task. The job ad can emphasise that this is “an employer of equal opportunities that wants to enable all applicants to participate in the selection process on equal footing. Please let us know if you have any special requirements if you are invited for an assessment/interview or which you would like us to take into account when considering your application”.

Selection and recruitment constitute a critical exercise for all companies, regardless of size or scope, and an opportunity to attract and retain the best available talent. It is in the company's interest to ensure that vacancies are carefully designed to meet the needs of its business, while avoiding obstacles that may reduce the number of qualified job candidates.

An **example** of steps to consider includes the following:



Write a clear description of the education and experience requirements for the position, distinguishing between those that are necessary and those that are desirable.



Publish your ad in various places, including publicly available newspapers, websites and internal newsletters, as well as in government agencies, social service providers, organisations of different groups (people with disabilities, LGBTIQ people, Roma, etc.) and universities.



When assessing the CVs of potential candidates, removing names or other information that may indicate the candidate's sex, race, age, or other bias-inducing factors can significantly reduce implicit selection bias.



Job ads should be available in a variety of formats, including electronic versions that are compatible with screen readers.

In the context of equal opportunities for development and advancement, mentoring, advocacy and networking can change negative perceptions and illuminate an untapped pool of underrepresented talent. People in higher positions have the power to recognise the achievements of (marginalised) people who report to them and ensure that colleagues pay more attention to their good results. At the

level of directors and senior management, they should focus equally on the achievements of everyone without prejudice in the recruitment and promotion process.



*Inclusive communication in
different business segments*

External communication

Communication with clients (website, social networks, marketing, advertisements and other)

Many companies have invested in building brands that convey a message of social purpose based on respect for human rights and commitment to positive social change. This can affect the business power of the company and at the same time have a positive social impact.

Such brands pay special attention to ensuring that their communication channels, message format, as well as the communicators themselves, are appropriate from the perspective of diversity and inclusion. Since our lives and markets exist largely in the digital sphere, inclusive design – among other things – means creating websites, applications, browsers, tools and other digital products that take into account those who have some form of disability. Excellent guidance is provided by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The standards and guidelines cover content accessibility to a wider range of people with disabilities, including blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, learning disabilities, cognitive limitations, limited movement, speech disabilities and photosensitivity.

Detailed instructions are available at:
<https://www.w3.org/TR/2008/REC-WCAG20-20081211/>.

We must bear in mind that textual/visual content can deepen or help to reduce or eliminate gender stereotypes and prejudices, as well as stereotypes and prejudices against other marginalised groups.

Example:

A successful company that produces menstrual pads presented a new package of pads that “do not rustle” on the market at the same time when a public debate was launched about the unnecessary burden of shame imposed on women with respect to menstruation, as well as about the general topic of menstrual poverty. After the presentation of the product, the company was criticised

and faced a massive negative reaction on social networks from women – who are the end users of the product. Just before that, the company presented an excellent concept for environment protection through the possibility of simple recycling of its packaging parts.

In contrast, a competing company that also produces menstrual pads released a commercial that recognises the diversity of its clients by celebrating the diversity of women in terms of their physical appearance, sexual orientation, disability, age, as well as the experience of menstruation.

Due to factors such as price, this type of marketing may not have affected sales in the short term, but it certainly affected brand building. While the users of menstrual pads found the approach and marketing of the first company hypocritical and backward in the context of the difficulties women face in relation to menstruation, the second one was seen as progressive and will certainly in the long run attract more women for whom feminism is becoming a core value.

Recommendations and lessons learnt:

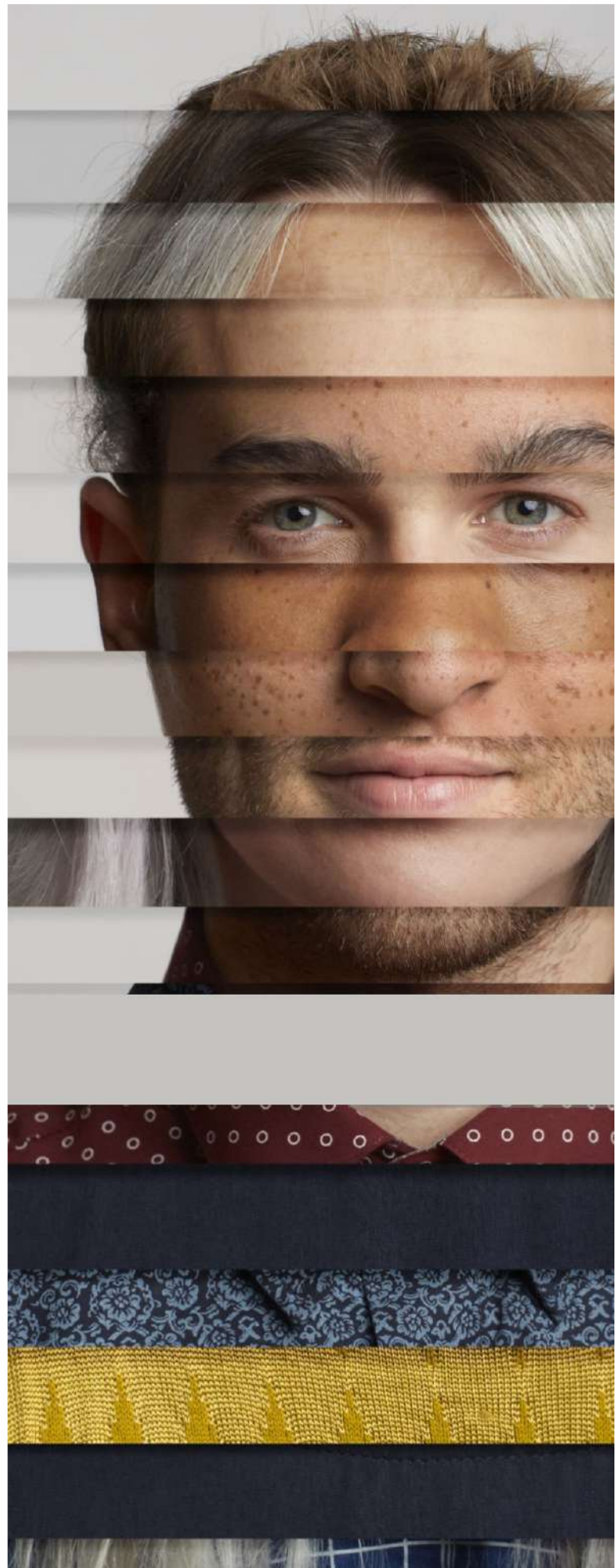
- Portray women/girls, people with disabilities, Roma women/Roma men in roles that expand their opportunities in the business environment in contrast to prevailing stereotypes and prejudices and that show them as successful, especially in photo and video content. Show how the reality may be different for these groups.
- Use gender-sensitive and politically correct language, in photo and video contents as well.
- Follow the guidelines for inclusive content design – especially online – with the help of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- Monitor how different marginalised groups respond to the content you create either through data collection processes or through testing.

Communication with other stakeholders: institutions, regulatory bodies, local community, other groups of special importance

The business community should not only promote diversity and inclusion, but also establish diversity management practices and social responsibility. Taking a public stance, especially on social issues and controversial topics such as diversity, is critical to building authentic leadership and an ethical business reputation.

Recommendations:

- Companies should communicate their policies effectively in appropriate contexts through consultation with local stakeholders.
- Companies should, together with other companies, consult with local organisations working to promote human rights about appropriate steps they can take together to challenge discriminatory laws and practices. They should sponsor local marginalised groups.
- Companies should make use of all available legal means to review, postpone and resist the application of measures that could lead to the violation of human rights, especially the human rights of marginalised persons/groups.
- Companies and their organisations should enter into negotiations, consultations and exchange of information with trade unions at the sectoral, regional and national level, on matters of common interest related to the human rights of workers.





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 **External inclusive communication**

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS

How to prepare an inclusive job ad?

Your job ad should emphasise that you are an equal opportunity employer and want to see all applicants, regardless of sex, gender, age, ethnic or national affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, to participate in the selection process on equal footing. If invited for an assessment/interview, you can underline that the candidates can inform you about any special requests which they want you to take into account when considering their application.

Write a clear description of the education and experience requirements for the position, distinguishing between those that are necessary and those that are desirable.

Publish your ad in various places, including publicly available newspapers, websites and internal newsletters, as well as in government agencies, social service providers, organisations of different groups (people with disabilities, LGBTIQ people, Roma, etc.).

Use gender-sensitive and politically correct language, in photo and video contents as well if applicable to the ad. This is especially important for management positions. Do not deepen stereotypes and prejudices!

Adapt the content of job advertisements to people from marginalised social groups. Follow the guidelines for inclusive content online with the help of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. <https://www.w3.org/TR/2008/REC-WCAG20-20081211/>.

When assessing the CVs of potential candidates, removing names or other information that may indicate the candidate's sex, race, age, or other personal characteristics can significantly reduce implicit selection bias.

Monitor how different marginalised groups respond to the content you create either through data collection processes or through testing. This will provide inputs that can make your next ad more inclusive.

A job interview that does not exclude talents!

Avoid questions about family planning, sexual orientation or gender identity. Not only do they not contribute to inclusion and a diverse team, they are discriminatory and prohibited by law!

Ensure that you, as an employer, are physically accessible to people in wheelchair to ensure their access to the interview process. If this is not possible, consider an alternative interview venue that is accessible.

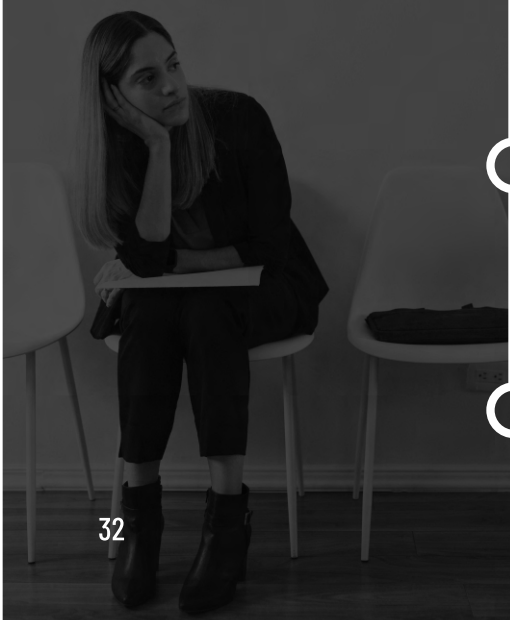
Try to make the selection panel interviewing candidates diverse on different grounds (gender, age, ethnicity, disability, etc.) to the extent possible. This sends the message to candidates that you are an inclusive business team and that they are welcome.

Insulting jokes about Roma women/Roma, LGBTIQ persons and other minorities during the interview are unacceptable. They are a signal to members of minority groups that they have a different status, that such a talk can degrade them or negatively affect their employment opportunities, but also their dignity and sense of belonging to the team.

Communicate clearly that you offer the same opportunities and end results for employees by way of internal procedures and regulations, as well as through the recruitment processes, professional growth and development, benefits and performance assessment, regardless of their personal characteristics. Mention concrete actions that you have already put into practice. Make it clear that you are guided by the rule that talents are hidden in different categories of society. By doing so, you emphasise that your primary motive is a talented workforce, and that you do not judge only on the basis of the candidates' personal characteristics.

Be aware of implicit bias during the interview. Reconsider whether your assessments and conclusions about the interviewed candidates are based on prejudices based on sex, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or other personal characteristics.

Listen actively to your candidates and try to be open, curious, empathetic and self-aware during the interview.



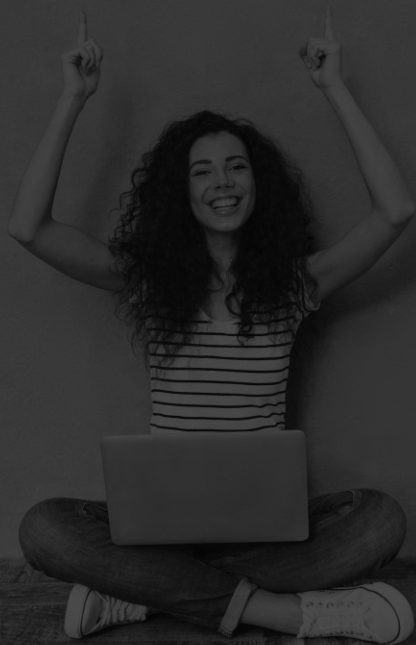
Inclusive websites: for everyone to have access to online and digital information and services?

Create websites, applications, browsers, tools and other digital products that take into account all people with disability. Excellent guidance is provided by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The standards and guidelines cover content accessibility to a wider range of people with disabilities, including blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, learning disabilities, cognitive limitations, limited movement, speech disabilities and photosensitivity. Detailed instructions are available at: <https://www.w3.org/TR/2008/REC-WCAG20-20081211/>.

Use gender-sensitive and politically correct language, in photo and video contents as well. Do not deepen stereotypes and prejudices!

If you opt for both grammatical genders, first use the feminine and then the masculine. If you mention people with references to gender, age, other personal characteristics or belonging to marginalised groups, first mention those who are marginalised. For example, say "Roma women and Roma men, girls and boys, women and men" instead of "men and women, boys and girls, Roma women and Roma men". The order shows your focus on different groups and how aware you are of their unequal social position.

Portray women/girls, people with disabilities, Roma women/Roma men in roles that expand their opportunities in the business environment in contrast to prevailing stereotypes and prejudices and that show them as successful, especially in photo and video content. Show how the reality may be different for these groups.



Inclusive marketing: how to get there?

Invest in brand building that, in addition to the basic business activity, information about the goods and services you offer, also conveys a message about a social purpose based on respect for human rights and dedication to contributing to positive social changes. This can affect your business power and at the same time have a positive social impact.

Many non-governmental organisations that work for and with members of marginalised social groups (LGBTIQ people, Roma women/Roma men, people with disabilities) are ready to assist in marketing. Contact them in your local community: they will give you relevant information about the position of marginalised groups, help you avoid reproducing stereotypes and prejudices and help test marketing messages before they are publicly released.


Include people from marginalised groups into marketing, if possible, as communicators of marketing messages.

Inform and educate the marketing staff about the position of marginalised groups so that they can create content that is not harmful, offensive or discriminatory.

Follow global trends that specifically target certain market segments, such as Generation Z, with their respective needs and attitudes.

✔ **Internal inclusive communication**

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS



Create internal documents, regulations and policies, and develop business practices of equal treatment, non-discrimination, prohibition of sexual harassment and mobbing, adjustment and accessibility for people with disabilities, and clearly communicate messages of openness and inclusion, as well as willingness to prevent any situation at work that could put any employee in a disadvantageous position due to their personal characteristics.

Employment contracts and other internal documents, as well as names on office doors, titles, and professions, business cards, e-mail signatures – should all be written in gender-sensitive language. For example, words “leader”, “manager”, “economist”, “analyst”, “employee” can be written in both genders using appropriate suffixes and they should be. It is especially important to be gender-sensitive with respect to leadership positions of women to break the stereotypes about leadership positions being only for men. Consider making business cards with information about employees in Braille and using gender-sensitive and politically correct language at meetings, conferences, and in business correspondence.

Communicate clearly that policies and practices related to assignment of tasks, mentoring programmes, performance evaluation, identification of the best employees, promotion and dismissal processes are guided by the principles of inclusion and diversity.

To design a new product, it is not necessary that the creators of products or services have all the characteristics of their market segment, and it is certainly possible to compensate for this by testing the product or hiring external suppliers for a specific job. However, this represents an additional cost and loss of time, which would certainly be at least partially reduced if some of those employed in the development of goods/services could share the experience of marginalised social groups.

Organise regular meetings and other events where you will ask workers to explain what obstacles they encounter in performing their work, especially keeping in mind employees belonging to marginalised groups. Ask staff if there are any adaptations or modifications that could remove and mitigate the obstacles they encounter and give feedback on what can be done to remove or mitigate obstacles and involve workers in problem-solving processes.

Do not limit your action to hiring a few employees from marginalised groups, without serious and dedicated work on cultivating and operationalising the values of inclusion and diversity.

If you lack the capacity to independently build a diverse and inclusive organisational culture, partnership and communication with non-governmental organisations that address these issues can be a sound solution.

Consult with local organisations working to promote human rights about appropriate steps you can take together to challenge discriminatory laws and practices. Support some of their activities and keep them in mind with respect to corporate social responsibility. You will see a multiple return on your investment!



AUTHORS



Dajana Bakić (1986, Tuzla) graduated from the Department of Pedagogy-Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tuzla. She joined the Sarajevo Open Centre team at the beginning of 2021 and took over the function of Programme Coordinator of The Initiative for Monitoring the European Integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and coordination of the BiH Civil Society for UPR informal initiative of organisations monitoring the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review of BiH. Since December 2021, she works as Operations Manager.



Emina Bošnjak (1983, Zenica) is the Executive Director of the Sarajevo Open Centre, providing strategic direction to the organisation, ensuring its financial and long-term stability through successful fundraising and the quality of work and results in line with the strategic goals. In addition to her position at the Sarajevo Open Centre, she is actively involved in the work of other organisations and networks. She was a member of the Coordination Board of the Women's Network of BiH and is currently on the Board of Directors of ILGA-Europe, an independent, international umbrella non-governmental organisation that gathers more than 600 LGBTIQ organisations from 54 countries in Europe and Central Asia. In addition to the skills required to manage a civil society organisation, she possesses knowledge in the field of human rights of women and LGBTIQ people, skills in media appearances and advocacy, as well as strategic communication, and has edited and authored numerous reports and publications in the field of human rights of LGBTIQ people and women.

Sarajevo Open Centre coordinates the D&I Network that promotes and advocates diversity and inclusion in the workplace and, through the “Excelling in Diversity” certification, enables the business community to reform and serve in accordance with the world's best D&I practices.



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