

## WP2

# Innovative model "D&I for Corporate Welfare in Microenterprises"

### AN OVERVIEW OF PARTNER COUNTRIES

Achieving equality in the workplace has always been a challenge, especially for women and individuals within the LGBTQ+ community; due to the discrimination they face, these groups often encounter significant difficulties finding employment, keeping jobs and securing high-profile positions. Women and LGBTQ+ both face work-related discrimination, each in their own way.

Women are often subjected to gender stereotypes, presumptions and biases that do not allow them to express their full potential. In the workplace, this often translates into acts of microaggression, such as being the target of sexist jokes, being ignored during meetings, or being passed over for promotions. Microaggressions and biases prevent women from advancing in their career, creating the so-called glass ceiling. When compared to their male counterparts, women are less paid and are less likely to be in a management or executive position. There is also a significant gap between male and female entrepreneurs; for example, only 22% of all Spanish enterprises are led by women. Last but not least, women are expected to be primarily involved in caregiving and housework, with 47.5% of women shouldering a significant unsalaried work burden.

The LGBTQ+ community shares some of women's burdens, such as reaching high-profile positions and dealing with microaggressions. Additionally, they often choose not to come out at work, as they fear it might harm their career and/or their personal relationship with the colleagues; when they do come out, there is a significant chance that they'll experience some kind of negative reaction, such as discrimination and exclusion. Moreover, LGBTQ+ led enterprises receive less support from institutions or associations. The percentage of supported LGBTQ+ enterprises is as low as 6.5% in Spain.

The Covid-19 emergency exacerbated these challenges, disproportionately affecting gender minorities. Research shows that women were the most impacted by the pandemic for several reasons. In fact, women lost their job more often than their male counterparts during the post-pandemic job crises; female-dominated sectors such as retail, hospitality, and residential care were particularly impacted. Additionally, female entrepreneurs leading small and medium sized businesses lacked the

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resources to face the pandemic economic crisis. Women who managed to keep their jobs had to work from home, finding themselves shouldering the majority of household chores and family care responsibilities, which increased their unpaid workload. The advent of the pandemic has shown that, despite formal progresses in equality, minorities are still facing discriminations that affect the participation of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace and in entrepreneurship.

Sexual and gender discrimination in the workplace is regarded as an important issue in the European Union: The European Court of Human Rights has recently ruled against discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation in the workplace. The European Union is promoting various initiatives to enhance diversity and inclusion in the workplace. A specific strategy called Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 has been implemented, aiming to promote gender equality in general; concerning the workplace more specifically, the EU provides a toolkit – the Gender Pay Gap Reporting Toolkit – to help employers recognize and close their gender pay gap. All across Europe, countries are following the EU’s lead and are working towards more inclusive workplaces. German companies participate in Diversity Week; Spanish association REDI (Red Empresarial por la Diversidad e Inclusión LGBT) co-operates with workplaces to promote non-discrimination and equal opportunities; Ireland’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan endorses gender equality in the economic recovery after the pandemic; and so on.

Nonetheless, even with increased awareness, efforts and legal protections, there is still much work to be done. In fact, despite numerous companies considering workplace inclusion a priority, most of them fail to actively engage in promoting diversity. Companies usually lack specific measures, formalized policies, guidelines, a dedicated budget, or department. If action is taken, it is usually directed toward diversity in recruiting, overlooking all of the other aspects of inclusion promotion. In some cases, diversity policies are purely performative, used solely to portray the company as inclusive for public appeal. For example, in Germany only 26% of the prioritize diversity, and more than half of them do not have a dedicated budget. Medium and small enterprises seem to particularly struggle with diversity, especially regarding sexual and gender minorities. Some studies suggest an inversely proportional relationship between company size and inclusiveness, with smaller workplaces being the least inclusive. Given that SMEs play a significant role in the European economy, it is crucial to assist them in fostering equality and diversity. Some companies wish to commit to inclusion but lack the needed knowledge or resources to do so, while others perceive diversity issues as non-concerning in relation to their business.

The covid-19 emergency has had a significant impact on small and medium enterprises. Therefore, it is understandable that the major concern of these companies is to get back on track rather than focusing on implementing inclusion. However, this attitude might soon change as it is proven that a more diverse workplace is beneficial to both the workers and the companies. Inclusive businesses are more innovative, productive, profitable, and competitive. By differentiating themselves from

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competitors, they are also seen as more likeable and attract a broader range of customers. These positive changes are particularly true for SMEs. On the other hand, employees who work in inclusive spaces feel more connected to the company's goals and, in general, more satisfied with their work-life and overall psychological well-being. Therefore, attracting and retaining employees from sexual and gender minorities, creating a more diverse board, and implementing an efficient diversity management allows businesses and minorities to thrive together. Additionally, women and LGBTQ+ individuals actively seek ways to attract a broader range of job applicants, enhancing workplace diversity and reducing the risk of losing qualified candidates due to bias. In leadership roles, women also tend to advocate for inclusive policies and openly support the LGBTQ+ community, fostering a more inclusive organizational culture.

Promoting diversity in the workplace and creating safe workspaces is a priority. Both women and LGBTQ+ workers could benefit from equality and inclusion policies. Some of the most useful initiatives include providing training to educate staff about microaggressions and biases, creating a formal procedure to report discriminative behaviour, promoting communication and awareness, establishing a D&I department or unit, communicating diversity values with posters, press releases, manifestos. Cooperation with external associations and communities that address minorities' needs and issues contributes to these efforts. Specific attention should be given to the human resources management and the hiring team, as they are primarily responsible for hiring and promoting talented workers without acting on prejudices and biases. Actions towards a more inclusive talent manager include providing training to hiring management, performing blind resume reviews, establishing a diversity quota, and actively seek candidates to reach this goal.

Despite both women and LGBTQ+ workers benefiting from these initiatives, they have different needs and issues that need to be addressed. Women struggle with equal pay, reaching high-profile positions and achieving work-life balance. To help them reach their full potential, companies can promote pay transparency and equality, establish leadership programs to facilitate their access to high-profile roles, and offer flexible schedules and parental leaves options. LGBTQ+ workers often face discrimination because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. To mitigate these issues, businesses can provide gender-neutral spaces, such as restrooms and lock rooms. Additionally, they can implement a gender-neutral dress code and use inclusive, gender-neutral language.

## **BEST PRACTICES**

### **BELGIUM - IHF**

#### Gender Equality Index 2022 (European Institute for Gender Equality)

The European Institute for Gender Equality releases an annual index on gender equality within the EU. The Gender Equality Index 2022 evaluates advancements in gender equality across a range of domains, including the workplace. The index offers a thorough examination of workplace gender disparities as well as potential policy changes. The Gender Equality Index, created by EIGE, is a tool for tracking the advancement of gender equality in the EU. It raises awareness of problem areas and ultimately helps policymakers create gender equality policies that are more effective.

#### EU Platform of Diversity Charters (Promoting Diversity in the EU in 2022)

The European Diversity Charters support organizations in both the public and private sectors throughout the EU to develop and implement effective diversity and inclusion strategies. By signing the Charter, organizations publicly commit to advancing diversity and inclusion in the workplace. At the national level, there is one Charter for each country, collectively representing 16 million employees and over 12.800 signatories, including private and public organizations, NGOs, and labour unions. The EU Platform of Diversity Charters brings together the 26 Charters to share best practices and draw inspiration from successful EU-wide policies.

#### Diversity activities across EU

The purpose of European Diversity Month is to recognise the efforts made by organisations to promote diversity, build diverse teams, and foster inclusive workplaces.

### **GERMANY - IHK-PG**

#### Charta der Vielfalt (Charter for Diversity)

The goal of this initiative is a work environment free from prejudice and that all employees feel valued no matter their age, ethnical background and nationality, gender and gender identity, physical and mental abilities, religion and world view, sexual orientation and social background. 4,900 companies and institutions have signed this charter to demonstrate an appreciative and unprejudiced work environment. The charter is represented by a union established in 2006 that

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represents 15 million employees in Germany and is supported by the federal government and several ministries. It initiates a yearly diversity day and a diversity challenge aimed at teams of younger employees between 16 and 27.

The union does not only offer publicly visible certificates for diversity but also supports companies on the way to achieve those through a four-stage model. This functions as the basis for the establishment of a diversity management. Additional info is available in a brochure and a media centre. Success stories show best practices and experiences in establishing diversity management.

SME Equity Check of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

Since most evaluation and checking procedures are tailored to big companies but the diversity and inclusion measures offer great potential for SMEs the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has created a SME Equity Check. It systematically checks work and employment conditions as well as the payment regulations to ensure men and women are treated equally in SMEs and micro companies. It includes the areas: recruiting, working conditions, wage, communication and cooperation. According to the system, these four areas are essential to the development and economic success of the SMEs. To perform this check managers are asked to get a overview about the structure of their staff, to answer questionnaires, to insert their answers into an evaluation paper, to read info brochures with questions for their demand for action and to formulate goals and measures.

### #WomenDigit Project

The digital transformation, which is currently affecting all areas of the world of work, offers new opportunities for gender equality. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, women shall be empowered to help shape the digital transformation through the #WomenDigit project. It investigates how equal opportunities can work in the digital transformation within the framework of the in-company learning and experimentation spaces funded by INQA (Initiative New Quality for Work). This is where concepts are developed that other companies can also use to create a gender-equitable working environment for all employees. The starting point of the project is the fact that digital transformation is not only about new technologies, but also about new forms of business: work is reorganized, leadership is thought differently, corporate culture is redefined. This opens up new opportunities, especially for women.

### SPAIN - IWS

#### Allies Program

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Mahou San Miguel has been recognized by the Ministry of Equality for its commitment to gender equality. The company has an LGBT+ Allies Program that is focused on creating a safe and supportive environment for its LGBT+ employees. The program provides training and resources to employees who want to become allies and advocates for the LGBT+ community. The company has also a Women Leadership Program that is designed to promote gender diversity in leadership roles.

### Telefónica

One of the largest telecommunications companies in Spain, Telefónica has made diversity and inclusion a key part of its business strategy. The company has implemented several initiatives to promote diversity, including setting targets for the number of women in leadership positions and offering training programs on unconscious bias for all employees. Some examples are Mujeres4Tech, #SheTransformsIT,

### Girls Love Tech or the STEAM Alliance for Female Talent

Promoted by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training  
(<https://www.telefonica.com/es/talento/diversidad-e-inclusion/> )

### Ferrovial

This Spanish multinational infrastructure company has been recognized for its commitment to diversity and inclusion, with a focus on creating an inclusive workplace culture. Ferrovial has implemented several initiatives to promote diversity, including employee resource groups for underrepresented groups, a mentoring program for women, and a diversity and inclusion training program for all employees. (<https://www.ferrovial.com/es-es/>: )

### Acciona

This Spanish infrastructure and renewable energy company has been recognized for its commitment to diversity and inclusion, with a focus on gender equality. Acciona has implemented several initiatives to promote gender diversity, including setting targets for the number of women in management positions and offering flexible work arrangements for employees with caregiving responsibilities

## Santander

One of the largest banks in Spain, Banco Santander has made diversity and inclusion a key priority in its business strategy. The company has established a Diversity and Inclusion Council to oversee its efforts, and has implemented several initiatives to promote diversity, including offering unconscious bias training for employees and implementing a diversity hiring policy.

## "Sabor Especial"

A small restaurant in Madrid that focuses on employing individuals from marginalized communities, such as immigrants, refugees, and people with disabilities. They provide training and support to their employees to help them integrate into the workforce and offer a diverse menu inspired by different cultures.

## IRELAND - LWL

### Longford Women in Business Network

Longford Women in Business Network is a network for female entrepreneurs in Longford, Ireland. It is run via the Longford Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and provides networking, training and event opportunities for women in business in the Longford area. There are regular peer-to-peer events with similar networks from neighbouring counties of Westmeath and Leitrim which facilitates increased networking and B2B opportunities for female entrepreneurs. Regular events are held during National Enterprise Week and on International Women's Day to celebrate the achievements of female entrepreneurs and showcase local and regional businesses. These events provide those in attendance with the opportunity to step back from the day to day running of their own business and network, learn and share in the experience of other business women from the region.

## WEBNET

Partas secured funding from the Department of Children Equality, Disability Integration and Youth through the Gender Equality European Social Fund (ESF) PEIL programme, to run a 3-year programme offering training, mentoring and support to budding female entrepreneurs. The programme, which was under Priority 2 Gender Equality Measure - a) Women returning to the workforce b) Women's entrepreneurship, was delivered free of charge via Zoom to women who were working in the home, working part time, or not working at all

Throughout the life of the programme

- 123 women participated
- 110 achieved Level 4 QQI awards in Career Planning
- 79 achieved Level 5 QQI awards in Start Your Own Business

Since completing the programme, 30% have become self-employed, 27% have returned to employment or further education/training. Overall 100% reported increased confidence, self-belief and self-worth

LWL WISE Group

This programme was established in 2018 and recognises as well as highlights the inequalities that exist for female entrepreneurs. It also champions the role that self-employment can play in improving opportunities for women to participate fully in economic life. The programme has been recognised by philanthropic funders and local enterprise agencies as a model of good practice in supporting equality for women in business.

## PORTUGAL - Mindshift

Ageas Portugal Group

The Ageas Portugal Group is one of the biggest insurance companies in Portugal. Currently, the company is committed with attracting and retaining talent, tolerance, respect, dignity, and innovation. According to Flávia Nobre, responsible for the company's sustainability, Ageas is committed with a diversified and inclusive workspace, thus with the development of practices and programmes that support equality of opportunities, fighting discrimination and creating a work environment that embraces diversity. According to Flavia, during 2021, the company developed a 3-year action plan – Impact24 – for which it had the contribution of its employees through interviews and focus groups, a participatory process that allowed the company to define thematic priorities. An anonymous survey was also launched so that Ageas could have a clearer picture of the diverse composition of the company's employees and their understanding regarding current discrimination or equal opportunities practices within the company. Gender equality is one of the core diversity and inclusion dimensions of Ageas. Therefore, the company decided to integrate the United Nations



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Global Compact Target Gender Equality Group, that promotes gender equality in the private sector, as well as participate in SDG5 Cluster, a working group that joins together several companies that want to reach gender equality and empower all women. To make sure that the company is on the right track regarding diversity and inclusion, every year Ageas monitors its developments by reaching out to all employees, making sure that they are treated with respect and that the company provides equal opportunities despite their gender or sexual orientation [2].

### Sonae MC Group

The Sonae MC Group is one of the largest Portuguese retail groups. For years it has adopted an inclusive policy based on diversity, but in 2020 Sonae decided to formalise this strategy. According to Catarina Oliveira Fernandes, manager of the Learning, Development and Inclusion area of the retailer, diversity and inclusion have benefits in terms of attracting and retaining talent, innovation, and performance. For her, the theme is not new, as it is basically about managing people, considering them for their individuality and creating conditions for them to develop to their full potential, but there is now greater intentionality and consistency and an innovative way of taking this approach. So, in 2020, Sonae MC wanted to increase intentionality in action, promoting an environment where people felt valued for their skills and talents. The dimensions of diversity on which Sonae MC focused – gender, disability, LGBTIQA+, generations, nationalities and ethnicities – were defined and principles of action were established with the objectives of (1) promoting equity and not equality, i.e. giving the necessary opportunities for each person to develop to their full potential; (2) clarifying that diversity and inclusion are everyone's responsibility and benefit the whole organisation and (3) fostering uniqueness as a catalyst for sustainable personal and professional development, ensuring that people feel respected and valued for their skills and have confidence in the organisation. The adaptation of this human resource management strategy based on diversity and inclusion is inspiring and perfectly possible, even in small companies [2].

### ITALY - Sinapsi; IAL FVG

#### Female Leadership Acceleration Program

The Female Leadership Acceleration Program is a development program created by an Italian bank, aimed at women who work in the organization at the managerial level. Since women are less likely to have promotions and reach for top positions, the program aims to develop and consolidate these women's leadership potential. Trusting their employees' talent and investing in their professional growth helps leverage the gap between men and women at top-level positions and makes it possible for the business to have a more diverse management team. Having the chance to reach for their

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fullest potential also allows women to break the so-called glass ceiling and to reach for job positions usually taken by men. To further help women, the company also provides paid leaves or special permissions for all things related to childcare and caregiving, such as birth preparation courses or placement of children in the nursery. Given that women still often struggle to balance their family life and work, the firm cares to promote the importance of fathers' role, giving them paid leave for childbirth and extending their parental leave.

### IsProud

IsProud is a community of LGBTQ+ people whose mission is to create a safe and inclusive working environment. The community, born after the pandemic in 2021, has a monthly meeting to discuss issues and ideas, share experiences, cooperate together and create proposals. The result of their meeting is then submitted to the company, creating direct communication between LGBTQ+ workers and the business. This allows the community to participate in their own well-being at work proactively, gives them the chance to make their voices heard, and makes it easier for both them and the company they work with to come up with actual and concrete initiatives. The community has already achieved some outstanding progress, such as creating and implementing a protocol to help transgender workers with their social transition and providing awareness moments with the work groups of transitioning people.

### Human Capital Development

The Human Capital Development, Diversity & Inclusion is a special team created by a medium-sized company that works in the energy infrastructure field. The unit is born during the covid-19 emergency, in 2020, in response to a call for action launched by the company. It now involves thirty-five employees and its purpose is to coordinate all the initiatives related to inclusion, to create a more inclusive organizational culture, and to implement diversity at all levels. The team has its own budget and uses it to plan for inclusion measurements, follow up on them, and monitor their results. Then, twice a year, the unit presents its achievements and proposes new strategies to the firm. Since the birth of the Human Capital Development team, the company has hired more women and has had its first women in the factory department. Noticeable results were also achieved regarding the employees' perception of inclusivity. To make this possible, special attention was given to training, such as talks about diversity issues, videos about unconscious biases, and sessions about sexual orientations. The company has also promoted a Manifesto, stating clearly its position on inclusion and endorsing the use of inclusive language.

## Direct experiences of IAV FVG

a) Establishment of professional support figures within VET institutions, in charge of supporting learners with particular fragilities during the orientation and job placement phases, helping them to overcome difficulties either by intervening directly or by putting them in contact with specialized external support networks (e.g., counselling centres, associations, etc.).

b) Among the most widespread practices to ensure inclusivity for LGBTQI+ learners, some VETs such as IAL FVG grant them the possibility of using bathrooms and locker rooms accordingly to their gender identity, to use in informal exchanges and daily school life their name of choice, to report to dedicated staff any needs, critical issues, discriminatory episodes of which they have been victims, so as to ensure concrete and timely forms of protection.

(c) VETs are staffed with professionals such as Tutors and Coordinators with liaison functions, who are in charge of identifying the companies that are best suited to host LGBTQI+ learners and dialoguing with them to ensure that internship activities take place in an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual enrichment.

## PARtime

PARtime is a training and research project promoted by INDIRE in collaboration with the Region of Tuscany and is aimed at promoting a culture of equality and respect and combating violence in schools of all levels and in services for children (0-6). The project aims to promote a gender-sensitive educational perspective in schools by monitoring the training needs of teachers and offering them specific training on issues related to gender equality.

The training, offered to teachers, school leaders, ATA staff, and educators in the Tuscan territory, is organized in video lectures and teaching kits to be consulted asynchronously and independently.

The video lessons are both theoretical (they provide a concise yet comprehensive overview of the topic of gender education, with particular regard to curricular teaching and the role of schools in the prevention of gender stereotypes and violence) and workshop-based (specific and declined for schools of all levels, they offer ideas, suggestions and materials to be adopted in daily teaching).

NEW-D, New educational models for vocational and initial educational training of disadvantaged youth to reduce school dropout.

NEW-D is a project that aims to propose a new didactic model for vocational training for young people from disadvantaged groups (e.g., those with migration backgrounds or socioeconomic disadvantages), which current didactic models in use are unable to motivate. Research conducted as part of the project has shown that the pedagogical methodologies used in VET do not meet the

needs of an increasingly large target group and do not propose effective solutions to the schools and companies involved either.

The NEW-D project aims to develop and propose a new teaching approach that takes greater account of the needs of young people from disadvantaged groups, so as to prevent their abundance and accompany them up to the time of their induction into the company, supporting them more effectively during their transition between training and employment. Among the outputs of the project, we highlight in particular the drafting of guidelines dedicated to the implementation of this new inclusive model addressed to VET trainers and managers of companies that receive young people in internships.