

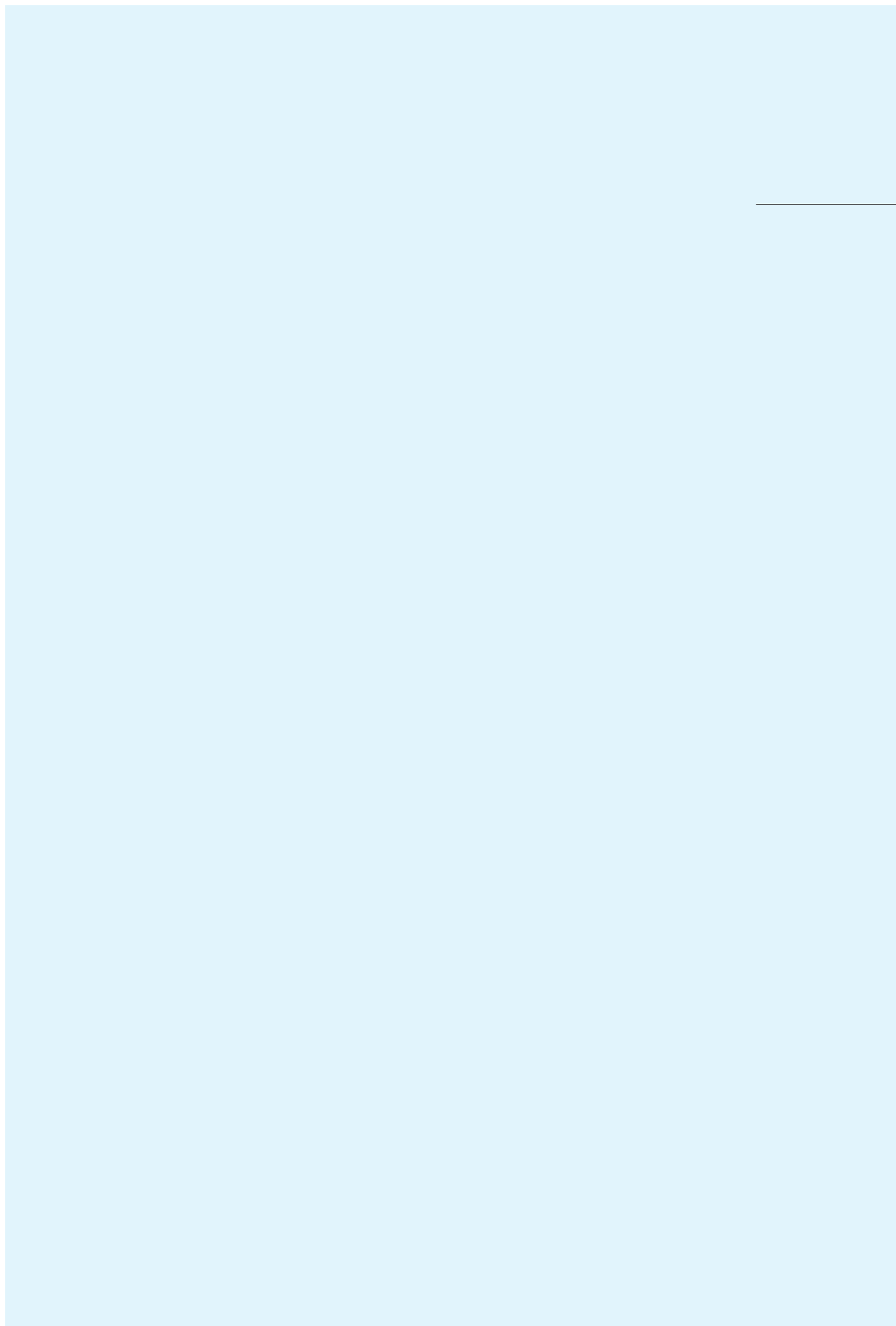
Diversity Management in Romanian Organisations

2nd edition



ROMANIAN
DIVERSITY
CHARTER

Bucharest, 2023



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Embracing Diversity: The Journey Continues

A Publication Celebrating Five Years of the Romanian Diversity Charter

We are thrilled to present a publication that celebrates five years of the Romanian Diversity Charter. It all began on 18 April 2018, when Romania officially launched the Charter and joined the European Diversity Platform, becoming the 21st country in the European Union to do so.



The Romanian Diversity Charter was created by a local consortium that involved a diverse range of stakeholders. Drawing inspiration from the European diversity movement and backed by a wide range of organizations, the Charter aims to establish a multi-stakeholder platform and provide a fresh framework for addressing diversity and inclusion issues.

At present, the Romanian Diversity Charter boasts a community of 210 signatories, encompassing approximately 260,000 employees from various companies, public institutions, and NGOs. These signatories have publicly committed to the principles of the Charter, with the aim of promoting diversity, equal opportunities, and social inclusion as valued and respected concepts in Romania. By signing the Charter, organizations take a significant step towards embarking on their diversity journey, while also gaining access to a framework that can help develop and enhance existing policies.

Under the auspices of the Romanian Diversity Charter, several initiatives have taken place, including experience exchanges, workshops, seminars, debates, task forces, learning and mentorship programs, where different practices and organizational policies of diversity management were presented, analyzed, debated and disseminated. Since 2021, the Charter and its signatories have celebrated the EU Diversity Month together to promote diversity in the workplace and in society.

This publication is the result of a collaborative effort between the Romanian Diversity Charter and our signatories. It aims to explore the concept of diversity management in the workplace, with a particular focus on Romanian companies. Our objective is to provide a more structured and conceptualized view of diversity initiatives in the Romanian working environment and to examine why business leaders perceive diversity management as a vital contributor to their competitive advantage in today's economic and social climate.

This second edition brings together the key findings of the third local research on diversity management, best practice examples in the D&I field, as well as opinions and interviews with Romanian and international experts. Additionally, a series of messages of support by business and institutional leaders are included, promoting the principles of equality and non-discrimination in Romanian society.

This publication is intended to provide inspiration, support, and motivation to organizations striving to advance the diversity and inclusion agenda. It offers a quick and practical guide based on successful initiatives implemented in diversity management by Romanian organizations. The guide includes 15 practical examples of diversity and inclusion initiatives implemented by our signatories with the aim of inspiring other organizations in their D&I efforts.

The research presented in this publication highlights that teams and organizations across all sectors of society demonstrate better performance and decision-making abilities when they prioritize diversity and inclusion in their culture, particularly among their leadership. Increasingly, having a diverse workforce is being recognized as crucial to improving a company's performance, and it is an imperative that organizations can no longer afford to ignore.

While many companies acknowledge the vital role of diversity and inclusion in maintaining their competitiveness, not all have reached the same level of advancement in their D&I initiatives. Thus, comprehending the current state of D&I work in Romania is crucial to determine what actions must be taken to bridge the gap between their desired outcomes and the actual results.

The "Diversity and Inclusion in Organizations in Romania - the Employee Perspective" study marks another successful collaboration with MKOR Consulting, as the second D&I report in Romania that delves into the employee perspective. To collect our data, we surveyed 800 respondents in April-May 2023, ensuring national representation based on gender, age, and geographic distribution. Our aim was to gauge employees' understanding and awareness of diversity and inclusion programs in their workplace. We inquired about their familiarity with D&I policies, participation in related initiatives, and opinions on the benefits of workplace diversity, as well as challenges encountered in recruitment, retention, and career advancement. Lastly, we investigated the extent of management's involvement in implementing D&I policies for employees and their families.

In recent years, an increasing number of companies have recognized the importance of diversity as both a social reality and an asset to their operations. Many have implemented diversity management strategies and collaborated with other organizations to make diversity a core part of their business strategy. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are still many companies that have yet to embrace diversity fully. This publication delves into some of the key challenges organizations face in promoting inclusion from a diversity and inclusion perspective.

I am grateful to all the colleagues who supported and believed in this editorial project - from our partners, researchers, signatories, and the entire European Diversity Platform community to our passionate contributors. Although it's impossible to thank each author individually, I want to recognize their valuable perspectives that provide insightful, informative, and forward-looking insights. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the signatories for allowing us to showcase their D&I programs in this publication. Without the collective effort of everyone involved, this project would not have been possible.

Finally, I express my gratitude to all those who work towards creating a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable working environment while actively promoting the principles of equality and non-discrimination in Romanian society.

Dana Oancea, Co-founder and Project Manager, Romanian Diversity Charter

Towards a More Inclusive Europe



Diversity is a cornerstone of the European Union's values, because we know that it brings significant benefits not only to private and public organizations, but also for a society as a whole. A thriving society is one that values and includes all its members, creating a sense of belonging and contributing to long-term economic growth.

For over a decade, the European Commission has been actively combating discrimination through legislation, empowering millions of people to reach their full potential and helping thousands of companies benefit from their talents. However, legislation alone is not enough. This is why the Commission is taking further steps to promote diversity and inclusion. One such initiative is the EU Platform of Diversity Charters, which guides thousands of companies in managing diversity and offers a recognized public trademark that demonstrates a company's commitment to equality and diversity.

Currently, there are 26 Diversity Charters in Europe with more than 15,000 signatories representing over 17 million employees from across the EU. We are very proud to have the Romanian Diversity Charter part of this European network. Having just joined the network in 2018, it has grown to 210 signatories representing over 260,000 employees - an important achievement in just five years.

The European Commission applauds the work done by the Charter and all the organizations in Romania that have publicly declared and shown their commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. I am delighted to see so many examples of their work in this publication displaying the immense commitment among the Charter's signatories.

We are hoping that the Romanian Diversity Charter will keep expanding and encouraging more companies and organizations to build diverse, inclusive, and fair workplaces and societies. Given the tough times the world is facing, prioritizing diversity and inclusion could make all the difference in overcoming the economic and social challenges.

Susanne Knoefel, Head of Unit of Non-discrimination: LGBTIQ, Age, Horizontal Matters, European Commission - Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers

ALL IN for diversity and inclusion

Sanofi Romania is proud to be among the signatories of the Romanian Diversity Charter, which the company joined since its launch in 2018. The initiative offers us, the business environment, an additional channel through which we can further promote and carry the flag of compassion, inclusion, and a diverse workplace open to unlimited possibilities. For us, this belief represents the basis of any approach we take towards diversity.

Thus, at Sanofi, we strive to reflect the reality of the communities we operate in – be it patients, employees, or the larger public – and cherish their diversity, to transform the practice of medicine, turning the impossible into the possible. Across the globe and in Romania, Sanofi is driven by one purpose: to chase the miracles of science to improve people's lives.

This purpose also guides our continuous and ambitious scope of activities in Diversity & Inclusion. And to stimulate the progress in this area even further, Sanofi is committed to focusing on three distinct Diversity & Inclusion pillars: building a representative leadership, creating a work environment where we can bring our best selves, and engaging with diverse communities.

We cannot change the world by ourselves. This is why a collaborative effort like this editorial project is highly valuable. Sanofi Romania is fully committed to driving a sustainable change inside our company and within our communities. We put diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as health and environmental sustainability at the core of our ambitions.

Following these principles, we understand that our strength lies at the core of every patient's and team member's uniqueness, which is essential in evolving as a company and as a responsible and considerate social entity. We always say that Diversity & Inclusion is not a lonely journey! It is about All of us, not only at Sanofi, but in the industry as a whole – leaders, managers, employees. We are all responsible for assimilating and actively promoting Diversity & Inclusion principles. Because when we are ALL IN, we can do more!



Iulia Ionescu, Country Lead Sanofi Romania

Diversity is an advantage: let's use it wisely

Diversity & Inclusion must be among consistent commitments taken by companies, and we know that changes won't happen overnight.

Why? Ultimately, customers' appreciation and business success are rooted in inclusive culture that is built inside the organization. For us, it means creating a working environment that facilitates diversity and team work, and ensuring successful integration in Orange of diverse candidates from the labour market, when we speak about recruitment and on-boarding. A difference in opinions and perspectives brings benefits to everybody: to customers, by better understanding their needs and better serving them, to teams, through innovation and fast problem solving, and finally, to business, in terms of competitive edge.

When employees feel valued and can explore each individual potential, the organization's productivity increases and company's image thrives; a team of engaged employees is openly embracing social and environment commitments, so we can uprightly reach the goal of sustainable development.

Being a signatory member since 2018, Orange aligns its activities with the Romanian Diversity Charter's endeavour in Romania so that equal opportunities, gender equality in the workplace and social inclusion become principles acknowledged and respected in our country.

We are continuously focused to implement and develop the initiatives that sustain the "People first" pillar of our business strategy, maintaining the social contract with our employees updated, concentrating on wellbeing & recognition, on learning & development. That is why we apply solid principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment, transparency, objectivity and consistency along all our people related processes.

Joining efforts, together we are creating a fair and inclusive working environment for Romanians.

Liudmila Climoc, CEO Orange Romania



On Diversity and Inclusion as Drivers of Innovation

Etymologically speaking, diversity means to take a different way (from Latin, *divertere*). If we look at diversity from this perspective, taking different ways by including people from different backgrounds is actually a critical propeller for creativity and growth in our Zeitgeist of unparalleled complexity. We do not live in a one-way world any longer – if we ever did, for that matter. So, we definitely need different angles and different solutions to stay relevant in the future. That is why diversity in business is no longer a nice add-on, but a must have for managing challenges in an increasingly globalizing world, confronted with growing complexity, uncertainty and crisis.

Matters of diversity and inclusion have in recent years increased in importance amongst legislators and regulators, at the national as well as European level. Apart from regulators also investors have taken an increased interest in diversity and inclusion at the corporate level, the interest being mainly fueled by two reasons: first, researches have shown that an inclusive organizational culture highly correlates with stronger financial performance of a company; second, an increasing number of investors intend to make a difference and use their financial resources to support social change.

Effectively managing diversity can serve as a response to transforming potential threats into innovation and development opportunities, for both our employees and our clients. This is our belief at BCR, part of Erste Group: we are committed to contribute to a more equal, inclusive and sustainable economy and to promote a culture of openness to new ideas, where everyone can develop their inherent potential. In the past years, diversity and inclusion have become essential components of our corporate strategy and culture DNA. We believe in our clients and our employees and their power to implement their plans and create prosperity. Believe in yourself and follow your own path – and we try to live this attitude towards our customers and employees every day.

Therefore, increasing diversity is not only a legal or moral imperative, but also a powerful catalyst for evolution and success. I believe that we are able to adapt sooner and recover more rapidly from any crisis, due to a wide range of perspectives and views that help us innovate, turn potential risks into opportunities and live up to the transformative processes of our present and future.



Elke Meier, Chief Financial Officer, Chairperson of BCR Diversity Council

Breaking barriers, building bridges: diversity & inclusion defining workplaces

Picture a kaleidoscope. Colorful, diverse, always changing. This is Kaufland Romania: a vibrant, evolving mosaic of talent, passion, and potential.



At the core of our workplace, there are diversity and inclusion. Different hues, various patterns, that together create a masterpiece. This is who we are. Not a monochrome sketch, but a technicolor tapestry. We believe that no color shines brighter alone than when illuminated by others.

Inclusion fuels innovation, diversity catalyzes creativity.

At Kaufland, I am proud of our diverse team. I, myself, am German but I learned and I speak Romanian. We value diversity in all its forms. No matter the social background, culture, gender, age, disability, religion or sexual orientation. We value skills and dedication. We value input and creativity. We value our people. We believe in a world where everyone should have access to professional development opportunities.

Creating an equitable and inclusive culture, where anyone feels welcome, takes action. When we launched the A.C.C.E.S. program, we created for people with special needs the opportunity to be part of a team. To become financially self-reliant. Many of them had never worked before. Today, I have over 450 co-workers with disabilities and further 700 open positions. We support age diversity, with a team varying from 16 to 78 years old. And we value gender equality at all levels. Half of our leadership positions are held by female executives. At Kaufland, there are more female store managers than male.

Signing The Romanian Diversity Charter, back in 2018, is an evidence of our strong commitment. A pledge, not for display, but for action. A promise to not just accept differences, but celebrate them. This Charter is not only a piece of paper, but a symbol of our pledge to ensure everyone feels valued, respected, heard and understood.

Think again of the kaleidoscope. Imagine its every twist, every turn, a unique pattern, a new perspective. This is our shared future. A collaborative tapestry of minds and hearts. Diversity is our strength. Inclusion is our power.

So let's pledge. Paint with all the colors. Listen to all the voices. Celebrate every pattern, every hue, every texture. Yes, it can be challenging, but it is crucial to creating a more equitable and supportive workplace for everyone.

Let us all invest time and effort in growing this kind of mindset and inclusive environments.

Marco Hößl, Chief Executive Officer, Kaufland Romania and Moldova

Our Journey towards Inclusion at Edenred Romania

At Edenred Romania, diversity and inclusion have always been a strong part of our identity. As a global company, we have over 60 nationalities working in the Edenred network, each with different backgrounds and different stories, but with the same drive and team spirit to our mission – to create enriched connections for our customers.

For us, diversity and inclusion are not just a manifesto, but deeply ingrained values in our organizational culture and in every individual who works at Edenred. In 2019, when we officially signed the Romanian Diversity Charter, our approach to diversity and inclusion reached a more strategic level.

We firmly believe that people are the heart of our company, and they give it meaning, regardless of age, status, gender, or nationality. Diversity makes us stronger, enhances creativity, and fosters innovation. Therefore, we have created an environment where everyone has equal opportunities to grow both professionally and personally. This belief extends to our clients, partners, and beyond because diversity is not limited to the workplace. It is reflected in all our relationships and our ability to empathize with others, be they friends, colleagues, or clients.

To actively address unconscious biases, we have implemented mandatory training on prejudices (unconscious bias) for all employees in Romania and at the group level. Additionally, every year since 2021, we dedicate the month of May to diversity, organizing internal and external initiatives. This year's Diversity Month focuses on parenting, recognizing that a significant portion of our employees are parents. The initiative aims to raise awareness and create a supportive workplace for working parents.

At Edenred, we are confident that we can overcome any challenge with empathy and acceptance. We value every voice, support every idea, and encourage every passion. We foster a culture of inclusion where each team member feels appreciated and respected.

Promoting diversity and inclusion is one of the best decisions a company can make. We wholeheartedly encourage everyone to join us in being part of the Romanian Diversity Charter, which serves as an invaluable resource for sharing information and exchanging perspectives.

Based on our experience over the years, we have found that being a diverse and inclusive company, and actively engaging with other organizations on this topic, makes us more valuable as a team, increases our productivity, and makes us more attractive to talented individuals seeking to join our organization.



Dana Sîntejudean, Edenred CEE Regional Director

Diversity is our greatest strength

Our company, Philip Morris International, is going through a huge transformation. We are a leading company in the tobacco industry that, through a revolutionary move, has set out to build a smoke-free future. This requires, in addition to a huge dose of courage, the willingness to reinvent yourself as a company.



But such an important and courageous move could not be done without people sharing our vision. We are an international business with employees from around the globe and we are harnessing an inclusive and diverse work environment—one where every voice is heard and valued, regardless of background or identity. At PMI, diversity is our greatest strength. There are currently 37% of management positions held by women, and we aim to raise that at international level to at least 40%. Working with our employees, we are driving forward discussions on gender, LGBTQ+, ethnicity and race, disability, and mental health.

These are dramatically changing times. But change is nothing new to us. We are fully committed to building a future in which cigarettes are no longer present, for the benefit of over a billion smokers worldwide, but especially for the almost 5 million adult smokers in Romania. We have been investing in Romania for 30 years and since the establishment of the affiliate we have always looked to the future. In these three decades we have invested over a billion dollars, hired local workforce, and continued to be part of the socio-economic development process of the country.

By signing the Romanian Diversity Charter in 2020 we committed both at an international level, but also in Romania, to continue to offer a work environment in which employees feel supported, respected, involved, and have the necessary opportunities to reach their potential regardless of age, nationality, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or any other characteristic that might make them feel too visible or invisible. At PMI, our people are part of a creative, collaborative culture in which leaders give back to the people, helping to develop their professional skills, and inspiring them to play a key role in delivering a smoke-free future.

Mircea Scăunașu, Managing Director Philip Morris Romania

Perspectives on Diversity and Inclusion in Romanian Organisations: Employee Insights

Diversity and inclusion are two related concepts that focus on creating environments where all individuals feel respected, valued, and included, regardless of their backgrounds, identities, or characteristics. D&I is important in various contexts, including workplaces, educational institutions, communities, and society.



In today's global landscape, there is a widespread pursuit of multicultural teams and diverse employees. The concepts of Diversity and Inclusion have become deeply embedded in the language and policies of corporations and organisations worldwide, presenting numerous growth opportunities for companies.

In Romanian organisations, the management of Diversity and Inclusion is still in its early stages. The adoption of D&I practices is primarily through the Human Resources departments.

In this context, the Romanian Diversity Charter, in partnership with MKOR Consulting, conducted the second edition of the study exploring diversity and inclusion in Romanian organisations, collecting insights from employees. The first study was launched in 2021, [Diversity Management in Romanian Organisations - Employees Perspectives](#).

By capturing firsthand insights, the study aims to provide an objective analysis of the current landscape in 2023, shedding light on both strengths and areas for improvement.

Through an employee-centric approach, this research offers valuable perspectives on the state of diversity and inclusion in Romanian organisations.

Diversity and Inclusion Study in Romanian Organisations - Approach and Methodology

The study conducted by MKOR alongside the Romanian Diversity Charter questioned 778 employees from Romanian private and public organisations.

The research was conducted with the primary goals of determining:

- How do Romanian employees relate to Diversity and Inclusion principles?
- What is the perception of employees regarding the principles of diversity and inclusion in the organisations they work for?
- Which are the issues that limit the acceptance of diversity in their current workplace?
- What D&I policies and practices are implemented in organisations?
- What D&I practices are in place in Romanian organisations regarding employee support services?

Key findings

27% declared that they witnessed or it happened to them to receive negative opinions in the organisation where they work because they belong to a different ethnic group.

64% have not heard or witnessed the expression of a negative opinion towards a person/group because they belong to another ethnic group.

44% of respondents were discriminated against within the organisation where they currently work.

22% have participated in diversity and inclusion training programmes or workshops organised by their company, while 8 out of 10 have never participated in any diversity and inclusion training programmes or workshops at their workplace.

78% of the employees have never participated in any diversity and inclusion training programmes/workshops organised by their company.

Fundamentals of Diversity and Inclusion

According to [Global Diversity Practice](#), *diversity* stands for any dimension that can differentiate people from one another.

Diversity refers to a variety of characteristics that make us different as individuals, such as gender, age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or physical and mental abilities.

Embracing diversity involves valuing and respecting unique characteristics, identities, and experiences that individuals bring to a group, organisation, or society.

Inclusion involves creating an environment that embraces and values diversity. It means actively engaging people from different backgrounds, ensuring that their voices are heard and that they have equal access to opportunities and resources. Inclusion aims to foster a sense of belonging, where everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to fully contribute.

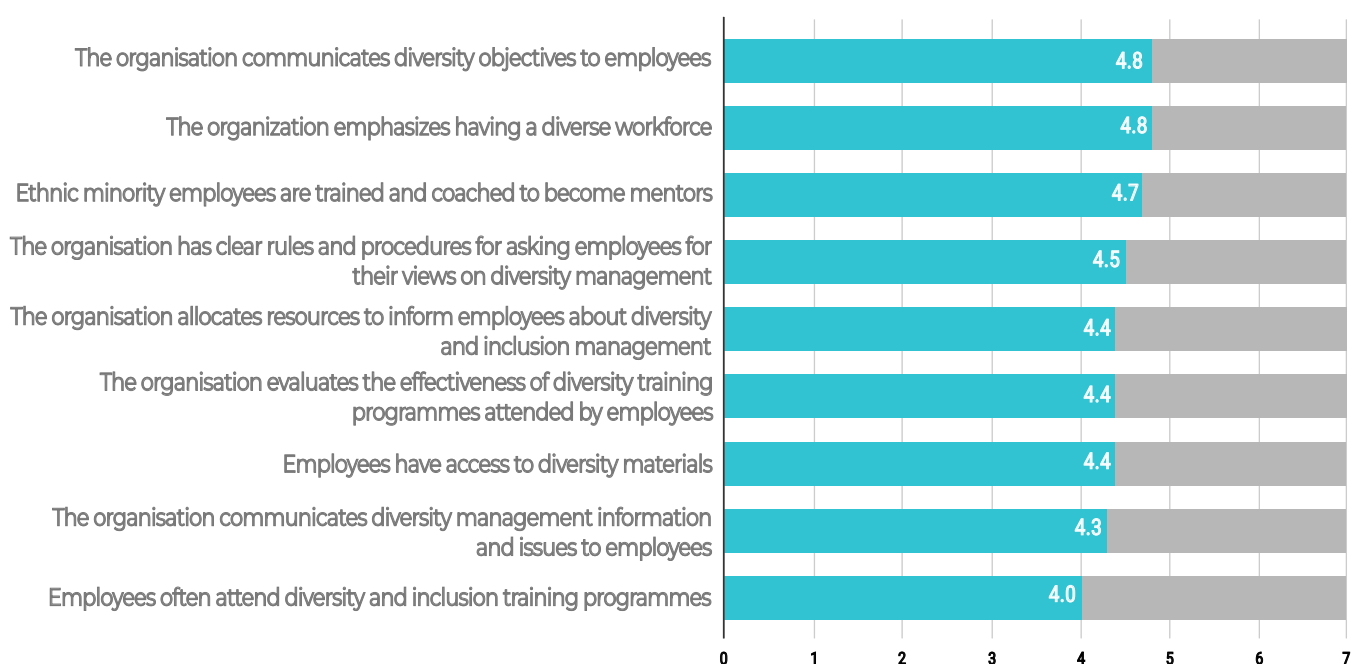
By embracing diversity and promoting inclusion, organisations and communities can harness the power of different perspectives, experiences, and talents to drive innovation, creativity, and better problem-solving.

What does “Diversity and Inclusion” mean for Romanian Employees?

In an increasingly open global world, companies and organisations understand the importance of supporting diversity and creating an inclusive work environment. But how is this approach experienced by the main beneficiaries, the employees?

The interest in D&I management is perceived by the employees at a medium level. The most noticeable practices are the internal communication of diversity objectives and the emphasis on having a diverse workforce (4.8 out of 7).

However, employee training activities on topics related to diversity and inclusion and an open dialogue about diversity management issues are less common practices in most organisations.

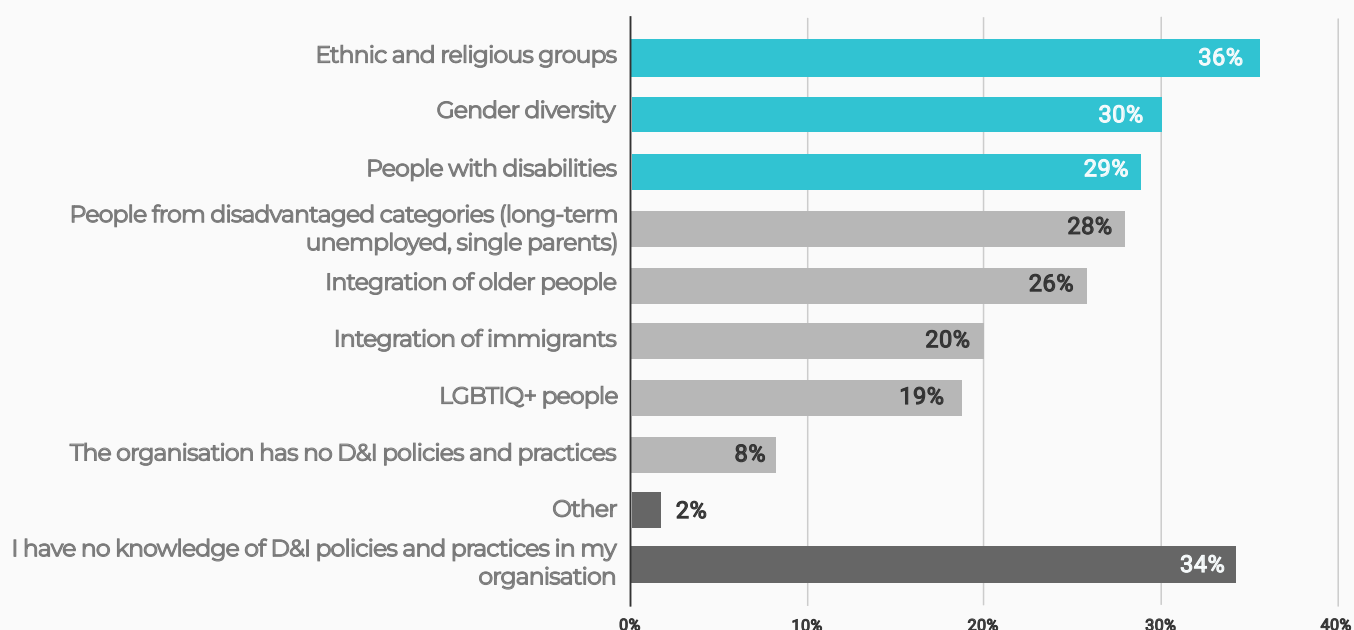


Diversity and Inclusion programmes as perceived by employees

Data shows that ethnicity and religion, gender and disability are most commonly addressed within the Romanian organisations. However, there is still a lack of awareness and specific initiatives, which highlights the need for continued efforts to foster inclusivity and diverse teams.

Specifically, *more than one-third of employees* consider that the organisations they work for support the integration of *ethnic and religious groups* through diversity and inclusion policies and practices implemented by D&I. Additionally, approximately 3 out of 10 organisations focus on *gender diversity* and the inclusion of *people with disabilities*.

Initiatives aimed at integrating LGBTIQ+ individuals within the workplace are less common, as perceived by employees.



Despite that, a considerable number of respondents (34%) are not aware of any Diversity and Inclusion policies and practices in their organisation. This highlights a potential communication gap or lack of transparency within the organisations, which may hinder the effective implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

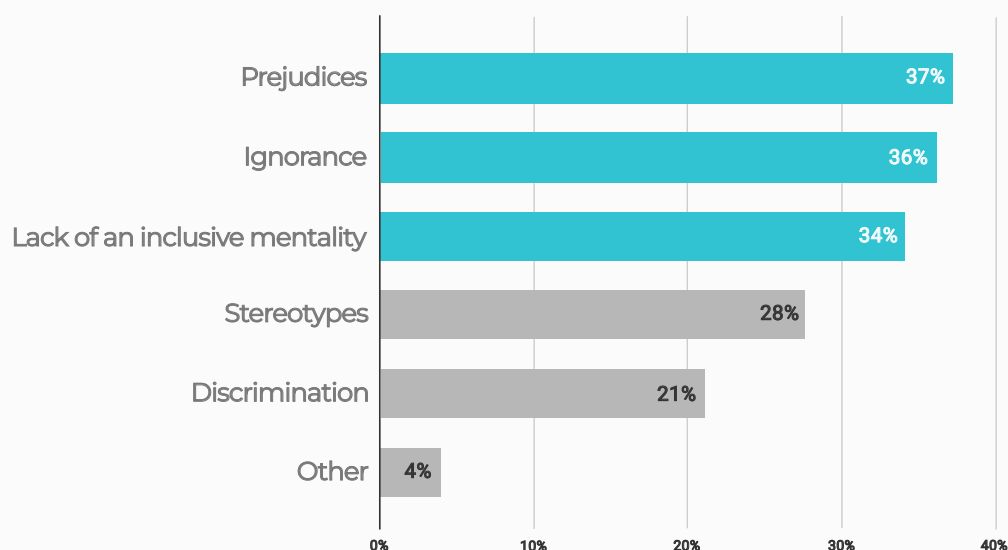
Additionally, almost 1 out of 10 employees indicated that there are no D&I policies and practices in place at their workplace.

Barriers to accepting diversity in Romanian organisations

Implementing Diversity and Inclusion practices can come with several challenges. Some common challenges include discrimination, prejudices, ignorance, lack of an inclusive mentality, stereotypes, and others.

37% of the respondents say that prejudices are on top of the list when it comes to accepting diversity in their current workplaces.

Approximately third of the employees responded that ignorance, lack of an inclusive mentality and stereotypes are also issues that stay in the way of embracing workplace diversity.



Building an inclusive culture and practices within an organization requires time, effort, and continuous commitment. Ensuring that policies, procedures, and day-to-day practices are inclusive can be a challenge that requires consistent evaluation and improvement.

Identifying vulnerable groups

In the organisation where they work, the employees have heard or witnessed the expression of negative opinions towards individuals or groups based on their ethnicity.

According to the MKOR study, 27% of the respondents witnessed the expression of a negative opinion towards themselves, a person or a group because they belong to another ethnic group.

64% have not heard or witnessed the expression of a negative opinion towards a person/group because they belong to another ethnic group.

Incidents of discrimination

The data indicates that almost half of the respondents have experienced discrimination within their current organization, suggesting that a significant number of employees have faced discriminatory treatment in their workplace.

44% of respondents were discriminated against or witnessed discrimination, heard negative comments regarding their look, mocking jokes within the organisation where they currently work.



Communicating and promoting Diversity and Inclusion principles in Romanian organisations (2021 Study)

According to the study in partnership with MKOR Consulting in 2021 ([Diversity Management in Romanian Organisations](#)), diversity is a reality in Romanian organisations as *more than 3 out of 4 employees have at least one colleague who belongs to vulnerable or minority groups*. Most of them are of Roma or Hungarian ethnicity, individuals practicing a minority religion, or those in precarious social situations.

In this context, employees generally feel comfortable working with individuals from diverse groups (6.28 out of 7).

However, they tend to exhibit a higher tendency to discriminate against Roma individuals and those in precarious social situations, preferring to maintain strictly professional relationships and avoiding closer interactions in the workplace.

Similar with the current study, in 2021 almost *4 out of 10* employees have personally experienced or witnessed discriminatory situations in the workplace, particularly related to political orientation, ethnic background, and older age.

European policies for non-discrimination and equal opportunities

In Europe, strategies for combating discrimination include various initiatives and measures implemented at both the European Union level and within individual member states.

European social policies prioritise non-discrimination and equal opportunities. Therefore, the European Commission launched in 2010 the [EU Platform of Diversity Charters](#) in order to exchange and share experience and good practices.

One of the key strategies include *Equality Policies and Action Plans*.

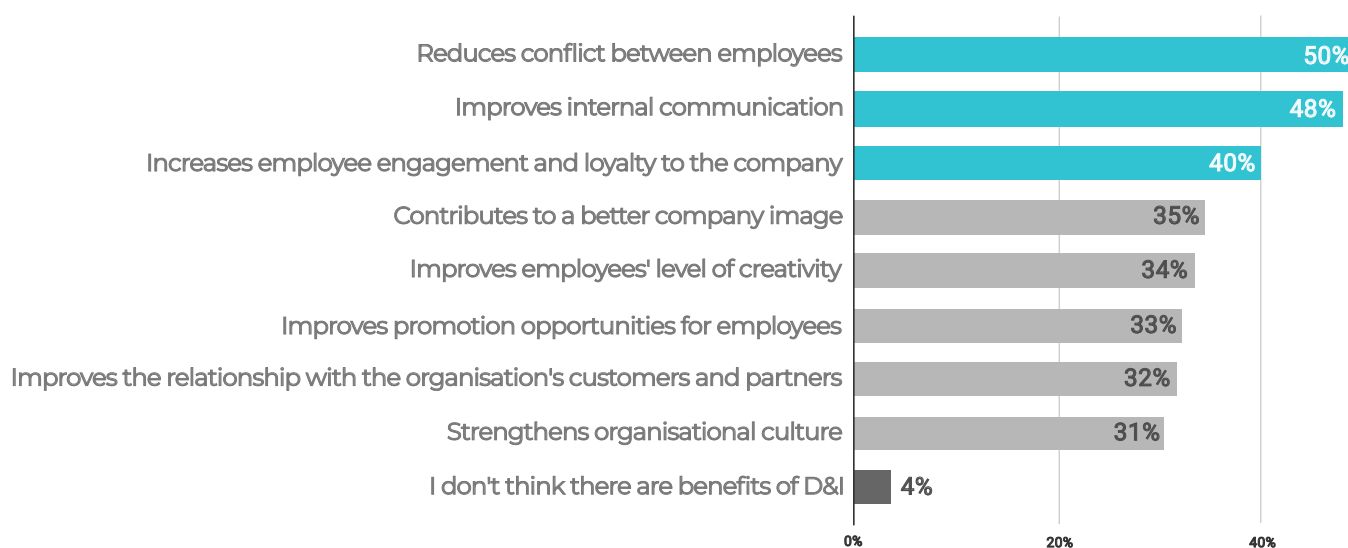
Member states develop national strategies, action plans, and policies to address discrimination, promote equality, and ensure equal opportunities for all. These policies encompass various areas, including employment, education, healthcare, housing, and public services.

Benefits of the initiatives supporting Diversity and Inclusion

The study revealed that *half of the employees* think the most important benefits of programs and initiatives supporting Diversity and Inclusion in companies are reducing conflict.

Moreover, *48% say that D&I initiatives improve internal communication*, while 4 out of 10 think that they increase employee engagement and loyalty to the company.

A small percent (4%) *do not think that there are benefits* of diversity and inclusion programs.



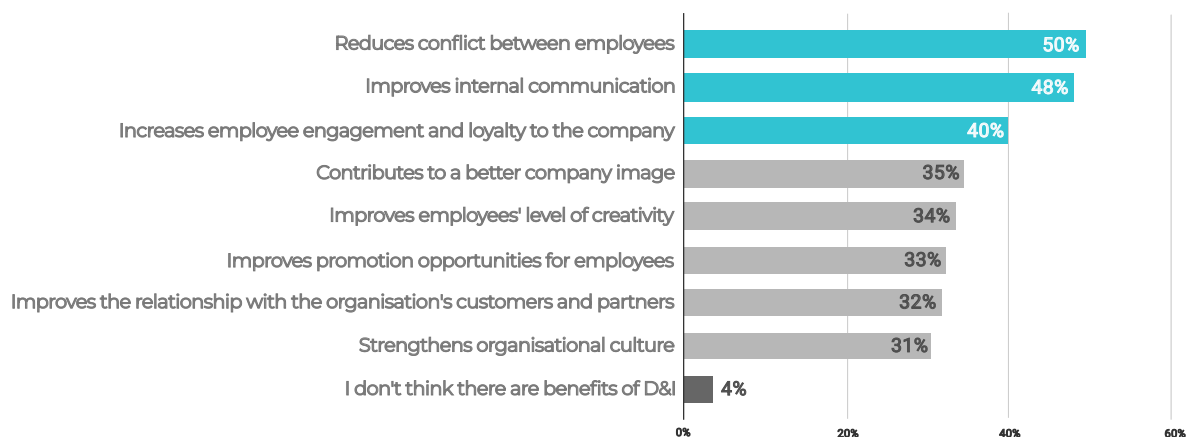
What support services do Romanian organisations provide to its employees?

Romanian organisations are taking small steps to support their employees by implementing training programs, to help them develop a better relationship with their colleagues and work-life balance.

When it comes to support services, *25% of respondents have access to information* on optimising relationships with colleagues and optimising their lifestyle.

In *17% of the respondents' teams*, there is a designated person responsible for documenting and addressing cases of bullying or harassment. The same percent of employees (17%) benefit from work-life balance workshops and stress management trainings.

33% answered that none of the options presented are provided by the organisation where they currently work.



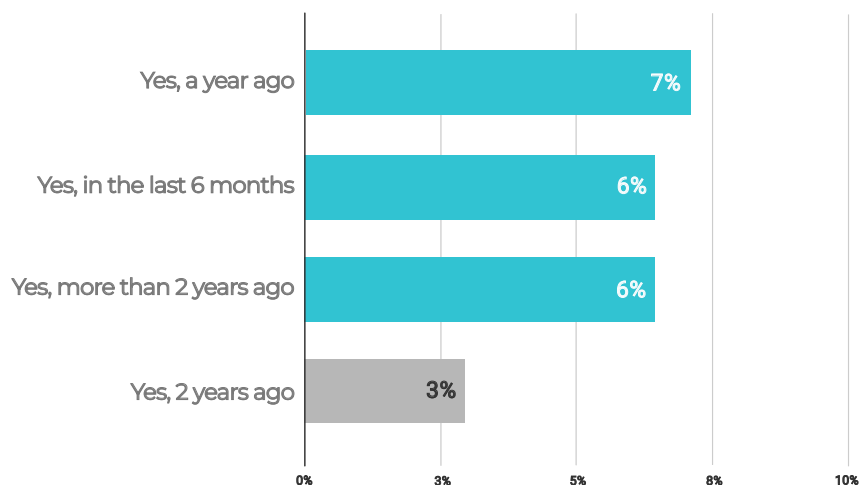
There is room for improvement, particularly in terms of mentoring minority groups and addressing bullying and harassment concerns, in a large number of organisations.

Training programs

A small percentage of the Romanian organisations prioritise training and development programs. These initiatives can foster open discussions on existing prejudices, ignorance, stereotypes, and discrimination, addressing them for both employees and managers within the organisation.

78% of the employees have never participated in diversity and inclusion training programmes/workshops organised by their company.

22% have participated in diversity and inclusion training programmes or workshops organised by their company.



Promoting Diversity for an inclusive workplace and lifestyle

Diversity and Inclusion is a fundamental principle that emphasizes the acceptance of individuals for their unique identities, regardless of cultural background, sexual orientation, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, vulnerability, or social environment.

The data from the study indicate that organisations are taking steps to foster positive relationships, support work-life balance, and address workplace misconduct.

The benefits of Diversity and Inclusion principles are numerous. Here are some of the most important:

- Awareness of minority groups, people with disabilities, disadvantaged categories, ethnic and religious groups
- Increased employee well-being;
- Equal opportunities for employees;
- Diversity of ideas;
- Improving productivity;
- Integrating people with disabilities in work environments;
- Direct impact on increasing motivation and satisfaction at work.

Diversity and Inclusion have significant positive impacts on employees and businesses, regardless of their size, industry, or location.

The rationale is straightforward: a diverse work environment brings a variety of perspectives to address business challenges, which in turn promotes organizational growth. Thus, it creates a win-win situation where individuals feel included, secure, and appreciated, leading to business growth.

Addressing the current challenges requires a comprehensive and sustained approach, including

education, training, leadership support, and a commitment to creating a culture that values diversity and fosters inclusion.

CORINA CIMPOCA

At MKOR, we strongly believe in the benefits that diversity brings to individuals and to organisations. We actively strive to create an inclusive and welcoming work environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents.

We are happy to continue our partnership with the Diversity Charter in Romania, a journey we started in 2020 when we conducted the first study on Diversity and Inclusion Management in Romanian organisations.

This year, the research focused on the employees' perspective on diversity and inclusion in their workplace. Our aim was to provide a comprehensive view of D&I, analysing perceptions, challenges, support services, benefits - as people see it.

We hope that this material will serve as a foundation for organisations of all types to understand the benefits and, most importantly, to support and embrace D&I principles.

Through our continued support of the Diversity Charter and our ongoing efforts in promoting D&I, we aim to inspire other organisations to join us in creating inclusive workplaces that celebrate and harness the power of diversity.

Together, we can build stronger, more vibrant, and more successful organisations that reflect the diverse societies we operate in.

Study Coordinator: Mădălina Iorga PhD, Senior Researcher MKOR

MKOR Consulting is one of the proud signatories of the Romanian Diversity Charter, ever since its launch in Romania, in 2018.

From Vision to Action: The ACCES Program at Kaufland and its Role in Promoting Inclusive Workplaces

In a tandem interview, Estera Anghelescu, Recruiting & Employer Branding Director and ACCES Program Coordinator, along with Ștefan Sfeatcu, Project Manager ACCES, shed light on Kaufland's transformative ACCES program. As they delve into the motivations behind its creation and the impact it has had on both the company and employees with disabilities, Estera and Ștefan discuss the challenges faced, the support systems in place, and the measures taken to ensure the program's success. With valuable insights and lessons learned, they offer advice to other companies seeking to promote disability inclusion, highlighting the importance of openness, adaptability, and personalized solutions.



Can you tell us about the ACCES program and what motivated Kaufland to create it?

Estera Anghelescu

The A.C.C.E.S. program came into being from our desire to transform Kaufland into a more inclusive employer, more specifically an employer able to integrate people with disabilities into the workplace. We recognized both an opportunity and a responsibility to create a more diverse team and acted on it. We started by adapting our jobs to the various needs of people with disabilities. At the same time, we reviewed the processes of integrating new colleagues into our team. These two stages were then followed by creating recruitment channels for people with disabilities. It's a continuous learning process, to be honest. So far, we have been able to expand our team with 450 people with disabilities and we're looking forward to welcoming 500 more. We're convinced that together we can build a more equitable and inclusive society, where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and contribute with their unique talents.

Ștefan Sfeatcu

Kaufland believes that diversity is a strength and that everyone deserves equitable opportunities, regardless of their gender, age, cultural background or disability. Through the A.C.C.E.S. program, we aim to challenge stereotypes, remove barriers, and create an environment that celebrates the unique abilities and contributions of individuals with disabilities. Until now, the program has welcomed, as Estera already mentioned, 450 colleagues with disabilities that have taught us immensely. There's still a long way to go. More than 850,000 Romanians are, in varying degrees, affected by disabilities, and as employers, we take the responsibility to make a change regarding the employment opportunities. Together, we can inspire and motivate other employers to follow our example.

How has the implementation of the ACCES program impacted Kaufland as a company, and what benefits have you seen for both the company and employees with disabilities?

Estera Anghelescu

By embracing people with disabilities into its team, Kaufland has consolidated a culture that values and respects everyone,

fostering a sense of belonging and equity. We work with people who have valuable skills, perspectives, and experiences, able to enhance the overall creativity and problem-solving capabilities of our team. All these have resulted in increased engagement, whilst our colleagues with disabilities have earned more independence and are now more able to harness their resourcefulness.

Ștefan Sfeatcu

Additionally, Kaufland has become more creative and resilient, being able to adapt to the unpredictable. Kaufland now also has a better overview of what it can improve and how. Working alongside colleagues with disabilities inspires empathy and compassion among all employees. This awareness and understanding translate into improved interactions with customers and collaboration between colleagues, creating a more supportive work environment. Last but certainly not least, the A.C.C.E.S. program allows people with disabilities to improve their abilities and actively participate in community life.

What are some of the biggest challenges that Kaufland has faced in implementing the ACCES program, and how have you worked to overcome these challenges?

Estera Anghelescu

The challenges were and still are varied, from inflexible belief systems to limited accessibility. At first, the working spaces were not fully accessible for people with disabilities. For instance, our cash registers didn't provide enough space for people in wheelchairs to fit behind the counters. We have since then reconfigured the spaces and now have 13 some cash registers for people with disabilities in some Kaufland stores across the country. We've also discovered that a lot of people with disabilities who are able to work have difficulty in traveling from their homes to work. That is the reason why, in the future, Kaufland wishes to provide transportation for all its employees with disabilities. To combat unconscious bias and our limited knowledge about living with a disability, we have ongoing awareness trainings and regularly examine what we can do better and how.

Ștefan Sfeatcu

Our colleagues with disabilities remind us every day that each person and disability is unique and requires different support systems. Transparency and flexibility are key in creating an inclusive and diverse workplace culture where individuals with disabilities feel valued and accepted. This sometimes requires a cultural shift within the organization, which can be challenging at times. To add to what Estera has already shared, we combat challenges through effective communication and by consistently evaluating what works and what doesn't, so we can upgrade our integration systems to benefit our colleagues.

How does Kaufland ensure that the needs of employees with disabilities are being met, and what support systems are in place to facilitate this?

Estera Anghelescu

Essentially, we ensure equal opportunities for colleagues with disabilities by remaining highly approachable and willing to adapt. So far, we have modified workspaces, adjusted schedules and offered flexible working arrangements. Most importantly, we periodically conduct disability awareness trainings for all employees to foster understanding, empathy, and awareness of disabilities. In order



to empower employees with disabilities to grow professionally, we also provide them development opportunities and engage in open and transparent communication with employees to collaboratively set goals and expectations.

Ștefan Sfeatcu

Another very important way to ensure each employees' needs are met is listening to them. Assuming what someone else requires in order to feel needed and appreciated is counterproductive. We not only listen to them, but we also foster an environment that encourages them to speak up. We create the context for all our employees to communicate their feelings and experiences openly. At the same time, we try to provide visibility to the experiences of our colleagues with disabilities. In 2022, during EU Diversity Month, we've created a special series of video-interviews with the beneficiaries of the A.C.C.E.S program, where they had the chance to share their stories. At Kaufland, we value the opportunity to learn from these stories and hope that others will too.

How does Kaufland measure the success of the ACCES program, and what metrics are used to track progress?

Estera Anghelescu

When it comes to evaluating the impact of our project, we look at both qualitative and quantitative indicators to assess what we have achieved so far with A.C.C.E.S. Our journey was challenging but also motivating. From a qualitative perspective, I am happy to share with you some of our key results, such as adapting the work schedule according to the skills and needs of our employees or organizing internal trainings and workshops tackling the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace. But perhaps what mattered the most was making efforts to inspire the team, customers and community as a whole in the mission of achieving a more equitable and inclusive society. Apart from this, numbers also reflect the program's impact. As already stated, we have 450 colleagues with disabilities, and we are happy to have another 500 dedicated positions to be filled. We encourage anyone who wants to join #TeamKaufland to apply for a role.

Ștefan Sfeatcu

Building on what Estera has shared, I would like to add that our adaption process for the inclusion of people with disabilities at work is an ongoing practice. Thanks to the A.C.C.E.S. program, so far, as previously mentioned, we have adapted cash registers and we allocated internal resources to adjust workspaces. Moreover, we adapted wheelchair shopping carts in over 50 cities, we held 1065 interviews and we proposed over 500 job offers. On average, we received 60 applications per month. Being more than numbers, these are essential results that help us realize the impact of our program, as well as the importance of such initiatives on the labor market. These results do not only measure success but motivate us to continue what we started: design and implement actions aimed at increasing diversity and tolerance at the workplace.

What role do you see Kaufland playing in promoting disability inclusion in society as a whole, and what steps can the company take to be a leader in this area?

Estera Anghelescu

I always believed that we can learn from each other. We can learn from other companies' practices, we can learn from our employees, and we can definitely learn from our candidates' needs. That is why active listening is key to understanding the market you're operating in, helping you as a recruiter or as an organization as a whole to constantly improve your diversity and inclusion strategies. Thus, I'm a firm believer that Kaufland can inspire change not only within our own company, but also among other industries, among our communities, leading to a bigger societal change. Our efforts and dedication to being an inclusive employer are visible both in our internal practices and our Employer Branding campaigns. Of course, change cannot happen overnight. And this is a reality that we must be aware of. However, in this mission of disability inclusion, good things happen when working patiently, wisely, and most importantly, when having the discipline to approach each challenge incrementally.

Ștefan Sfeatcu

As a Top Employer which promotes diversity and inclusion, which offers equal opportunities and which makes efforts to create a safe space for people from all backgrounds, Kaufland is already making steps towards becoming a leader in the DE&I area within the workplace. What motivates us to do so are the people. We always say that at Kaufland, people are the most important resource. We value their abilities and potential and we offer them the adequate environment for their professional and personal growth. Our objectives for the future of A.C.C.E.S. are continuing to strengthen partnerships with people with disabilities, state institutions, associations. Moreover, we aim to extend the program to the entire company and at the global level. As mentioned above, welcoming more and more people with disabilities into our team is a continuous objective that we are committed to fulfilling.

What advice would you give to other companies looking to create similar programs for employees with disabilities, and what lessons have you learned from the implementation of the ACCES program?

Estera Anghelescu

First of all, I believe that employers should look at their core values. For example, at Kaufland, we prioritize inclusivity on all levels. We value honesty and fairness both in our daily tasks and in our relationships with other colleagues. My advice would be to make sure that when designing and launching similar programs, the company is dedicated to creating a supportive and accessible work environment, while also promoting equal opportunities. Another key aspect is to organize training and awareness activities that involve the employees. Holding regular training sessions to educate the team about disabilities,

inclusivity, and to foster a culture of empathy and collaboration are essential to making steps towards a more inclusive workplace in which programs like A.C.C.E.S. can make a difference.

When it comes to lessons learned in this journey of ours, I must say that openness and a willingness to continuously adapt the program are key. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the project's impact, analyzing the integration process of new colleagues in our team and identifying the potential to improve the current tools are some of the main takeaways we learned during A.C.C.E.S. Besides this, celebrating the milestones, acknowledging success and recognizing the achievements of employees with disabilities has proven to be an essential aspect in creating a positive work climate.

Ștefan Sfeatcu

To me, a comprehensive approach is fundamental when creating programs for disability inclusion. In other words, this means listening, being aware of the diverse needs of individuals, and being prepared to adapt both the workspace and internal policies to better accommodate and support those needs. Companies should recognize that disabilities can vary, and each person may require different types of support and guidance. Offering personalized solutions to address specific needs, such as a flexible work schedule or tailored job descriptions, are some examples of how flexibility can manifest in this area.

Our experience with A.C.C.E.S. led to some inspiring practices, and we surely gained new insights on how to improve our work. Continuous communication with all stakeholders is a valuable learning experience: maintaining an open and transparent relationship, seeking feedback, engaging with each party involved in the program, fostering trust and respect between colleagues and between colleagues and their managers – these are all practices we believed in and which we aim at promoting in the future.

Interview by Dana Oancea

The Unfinished Journey: LGBTQI+ Inclusion in Romania

Prior to Romania's accession to the EU, there was little national political will to address LGBTQI+ inclusion, let alone advance the LGBTQI+ inclusion agenda. This unfortunate reality stemmed from Romania's recent emergence from a dark communist dictatorship, where homosexuality was considered a criminal offense punishable by up to 5 years in prison. I say almost no political will because back in Romania's pre-accession times, the only political party that allowed a meaningful discussion on curbing down state discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons was the Hungarian Romanian Democratic Union, the only political party openly discussing about LGBTQI+ inclusion. Beyond the political landscape, there was only one LGBTQI+ NGO in the entire country focused on promoting LGBTQI+ inclusion, namely ACCEPT.

The promise

The promise of LGBTQI+ inclusion in Romania emerged with the adoption of the Copenhagen political criteria for accession to the EU in 1993. Acceding countries were explicitly informed that the European Community (later the European Union) is not solely an economic or market union, but a union founded on shared values that include respect for human rights and minority rights, including those of the LGBTQI+ community.

The Copenhagen political criteria for Romania specifically spelled out the Roma inclusion and the LGBTQI+ inclusion. This is how Romania started its journey for LGBTQI+ inclusion, it had to align its legislation to the European human rights values and standards. The negotiations of these political criteria with the Romanian authorities were spiced with both ideological and naive resistance, were complicated, long and challenging.

Just to have an idea, picture this: one of the first public events organized by ACCEPT during those years, was organized under military guard. Literally, with policemen filling the hotel (and the surroundings of the hotel) where the event was organized. However, beyond all this, Romania had to report on the progress against all political criteria, including LGBTQI+ inclusion.

The progress

During Romania's pre-accession process, the European Union underwent transformations that brought a greater emphasis on LGBTQI+ inclusion. In 2001, the European Parliament's



Eugen Crai

Resolution on the enlargement of the European Union reiterated the importance of human rights and called on candidate countries to abolish legislation that discriminated against individuals based on their sexual orientation.

The 2001 progress report on Romania highlighted the abolition of the criminalization of homosexuality by the Romanian Parliament. Additionally, in August 2000, the Romanian Government introduced Ordinance 137/2000, which aimed to prevent and punish all forms of discrimination. This ordinance included sexual orientation as a protected ground against discrimination. The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights was proclaimed also in 2000, specifically mentioning sexual orientation as a protected ground against discrimination. The Charter entered into effect throughout the European Union in 2009 through the Treaty of Lisbon.

The frozen years

The EU, assessing Romania's progress in meeting the political criteria, approved its accession on January 1, 2007. However, when it comes to LGBTQI+ inclusion, Romania's efforts stagnated for almost a decade after becoming an EU member. While legislation prohibited discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals in various aspects of life, such as work and procurement of goods and services, violations of anti-discrimination laws were frequently documented during this period. Moreover, certain state-regulated discriminations, including those related to the family life of LGBTQI+ couples and adoption bans, remained unchanged or even reinforced. For instance, the new Civil Code of Romania, adopted in 2011, defined marriage as a union exclusively between a man and a woman.

Although political will to advance the normative agenda of inclusion froze, Romanian society as a whole advanced in terms of acceptance. One longitudinal analysis of the acceptance indicators monitored by the National Council for Combating Discrimination showed such ascending trends for all vulnerable communities (with LGBTQI+ acceptance having the lowest values among all). LGBTQI+ communities became gradually more visible and more involved in public affairs. NGOs and private sector companies promoted LGBTQI+ inclusion. Yet, at a normative level nothing much happened...

The regress

Despite the promising impact anticipated with the adoption of the EU Charter on Funda-

mental Rights in 2009, Romania experienced a regression in LGBTQI+ inclusion. This regression reached its culmination in recent years with a national referendum seeking to amend the definition of marriage in the Romanian Constitution. The proposed amendment, supported by opponents of diversity and inclusion, would have had no meaningful constitutional or legal effect but would have served as a symbolic victory for their cause. However, the referendum failed as less Romanians showed up than legally required to validate the referendum.

The regression in LGBTQI+ inclusion in Romania became more apparent starting in 2013 when a group called the "Coalition for the Family" launched a campaign for the referendum. In the same year, the Coman-Hamilton spouses sued the Romanian authorities for their refusal to recognize their marriage. The lawsuit specifically challenged the authorities' denial of family reunification rights to Mr. Hamilton, a US citizen, based on their marital relationship. It can be argued that the regression in LGBTQI+ inclusion was triggered, at least in part, as a reaction to this lawsuit. It was not. It was actually the other way around. The case was brought to Court because the Constitution was since 2007 under attack and highlighted the need for Romanian legislation to provide legal protection for same-sex couples, ensuring comparable rights and protections to those enjoyed by heterosexual couples.

In 2018, just a few months before the planned, held, and failed referendum, the Constitutional Court of Romania ruled on the Coman-Hamilton case. The court recognized the need for legal protection of same-sex couples and affirmed their rights. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the challenges faced in LGBTQI+ inclusion in Romania existed long before this particular case, indicating that the struggle for inclusion and equality was not a recent development.

The evil is older

The assault on the constitutional definition of marriage in Romania did not originate in 2013 but has a longer history. The battle to introduce a constitutional ban on same-sex marriages began in 2007, with efforts supported by various Romanian and international groups known for their intolerance. These anti-LGBTQI+ movements often receive funding and influence from US fundamentalist groups and Vladimir Putin's Russia. Conservative Christian groups, conservative and ultra-conservative

political factions, far-right groups, and neo-fascist groups are among the consistent supporters of the anti-LGBTQI+ movement.

In 2006, a coalition of Christian groups and the neo-fascist Romanian party Noua Dreaptă collected around 650,000 signatures for a civic legislative initiative to redefine marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman. They also sought to add a constitutional ban on polygamy, despite its irrelevance in Romania. However, the initiative failed as it did not meet the representation requirements set by the Romanian Constitutional Court. Subsequently, the initiative groups turned their attention to the 2011 Civil Code, successfully including the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. In 2013, they proposed a referendum that fell short of the validation threshold (in 2018, when it was organized), with only about 20% of Romania's population participating. The Romanian Orthodox Church played a complicit role in supporting these groups, and the extended duration of the referendum highlighted their disconnection from the broader society they claimed to represent.

Living in a Holocaust-like ethos in the 21st century

Since 2018, a wave of hate speech has targeted LGBTQI+ individuals in Romania, mirroring a hostile environment reminiscent of the Holocaust. The unethical political intentions behind this anti-LGBTQI+ movement are condemnable from multiple perspectives. These groups baselessly attack and demonize LGBTQI+ communities, falsely labeling them as threats to Christianity, tradition, family, and freedom. They spread fabricated evidence and fake news, including apocalyptic predictions and conspiracies about a future global dictatorship of political correctness. These groups extend their opposition beyond LGBTQI+ rights, targeting gender equality, women's autonomy, racial equality, and immigration.

Their fight is not about protecting their own traditional Christian way of life, which is already thriving in Romania, but about imposing it on others and preserving their privileges. They clandestinely align the State with the Church, censoring diversity and equality-related aspects from legislation and policies. They seek to curtail the rights of others and maintain a normative universe in line with their religious dogmas. Ironically, their discriminatory actions contradict the very religious principles they claim to follow. They also undermine the fundamental principles of the Romanian

Constitution that the state is neutral (i.e. autonomous) in relation to the religious cults and that the freedom of conscience should be professed “in the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect”... They aim to impose their beliefs on everyone else, undermining the principles of ethics, legality, and constitutionalism.

Instead of conclusion

Prominent public figures, influencers, high-ranking judges, politicians, and certain spiritual leaders are openly attacking LGBTQI+ communities and individuals, despite legislation in Romania that prohibits hate speech and discrimination. Astonishingly, these acts of hatred often go unpunished, creating a sense of bizarre impunity. The National Council for Combatting Discrimination has taken action against religious blasphemy, even though blasphemy has long been abolished from Romanian legislation. Furthermore, the Hungarian Democratic Union in Romania, which used to advocate for LGBTQI+ and ethnic minority inclusion, introduced a draft law last year that aims to prohibit any discussion of homosexuality or gender identity in schools, mass media, and health facilities, all under the guise of protecting child rights.

Meanwhile, a Constitutional Court decision from 2018, which called upon the authorities to establish a form of family protection for LGBTQI+ families, is being blatantly ignored. In essence, while the rights and interests of these anti-LGBTQI+ groups remain unchallenged (as they should be in a democratic society), it is clear that their goal is not to protect their own rights. Instead, they seek to deny the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals, abolish protections against discrimination, and impose their own values on everyone else.

Their assault on LGBTQI+ rights and freedoms is unacceptable by any legal standards today. It is unjustifiable that an entire community's right to a peaceful and equal existence is denied in order to cater to the aesthetic preferences of these groups. These anti-LGBTQI+ individuals all live in diverse societies that do not undermine any of their fundamental rights and freedoms. The fact that they dislike living in diverse societies is not the fault of LGBTQI+ communities; it is their own responsibility. It is crucial that they cease their attack on the democratic order in Romania and Europe and respect the rights and freedoms of others.

How to handle financial anxiety in troubled times



The well-being ecosystem at Orange aims to support employees to reach their own well-being, according to their specific needs. It was built having at its core 7 major pillars: physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, financial, and environmental. We have integrated them all in workshops, live sport sessions and challenges, or created relevant resources around them. After a challenging pandemic, the start of a war close to our country's borders and an increasing inflation, the need for financial education has become acute, regardless of our colleagues' gender, job role or family status, so we implemented a complex, recurring financial education program.

About Orange Romania

Orange Romania is the leading local telecommunications company and a part of Orange Group, one of the largest global telecommunications operators. With more than 11 million customers and an annual turnover exceeding €1 billion, Orange connects 1 out of every 2 Romanians by offering a diverse range of services, including complete voice, fixed and mobile data services, TV and smart home services, and mobile financial services. As a responsible player in the Romanian telecom market, Orange plays a crucial role in the digital revolution, which entails both opportunities and responsibilities. Our primary objective is to ensure that our services reach the maximum number of people, and assist them in enjoying equal benefits, regardless of their background, education, age or potential communication disabilities. Our focus is on utilizing technology to enhance people's lives while respecting human rights and the environment.

Diversity & inclusion issues addressed

The difficult socio-economic context that Romania has faced over the past three years has increased anxiety levels among the population and brought to light other emotional dysregulations. Financial uncertainty has been identified as one of the root causes for some of the emotional struggles our colleagues have been facing, along with physical imbalances, sleep deprivation, overweight, or poor posture due to the hybrid work context. With all of these issues in mind, the well-being ecosystem at Orange has offered a wide range of workshops aimed at financial education, healthy nutrition, emotional support in various forms, and online live ergonomics and sport sessions.

Planning & Objectives

Starting in 2020, Orange Romania has continuously adjusted its complementary programs that support employee well-being in response to external factors. The goal of the well-being ecosystem is to provide solutions that contribute to a high-quality life and alleviate the impact of social and psychological stressors, welcoming and supporting employees

as individuals. Our aim is to help employees reach their highest potential in terms of emotional balance and physical health, make informed financial decisions, and have a healthy social life.

The key to the success of our well-being programs is a proactive approach to identify and address stressful situations that colleagues may encounter, with the goal of preventing them from becoming acute problems.

Activities implemented

In 2020, due to the pandemic, Orange Romania's employees started working remotely, which prompted us to quickly adapt to this new reality. Our well-being programs had to shift from traditional to digital and become fully online, in order to fully support our colleagues in dealing with the most critical aspects of this enormous change in lifestyle.

As the pandemic continued with no clear end in sight, we also started to consider how social relationships would change. To get a better understanding of the impact of this period on future relationships, we consulted with external specialists who had the necessary training to analyze and provide feedback on our HR strategies. We had to ensure that our well-being programs were relevant in this new global reality and took into account the diverse perceptions of our employees.

We thoroughly analyzed all feedback received after each program and made adjustments accordingly. We noticed a high level of volatility in terms of interest for the well-being programs, so we created a strategy that could adapt to the unprecedented and rapidly changing circumstances.

What did we do differently? We adopted a more granular approach to segmentation, going beyond employees' social status, family context, or age group. We created financial education programs tailored to the specific challenges facing each group, in order to help as many employees as possible. The results of our interventions showed that the structure we designed was effective.

We provided our colleagues with a 24/7 emotional support helpline, free therapy sessions, and video resources to help them better understand emotional changes and learn coping

strategies. Additionally, we launched the first financial education sitcom for employees, consisting of 8 episodes aimed at normalizing and educating about daily financial decisions.

Even after the immediate effects of the pandemic subsided, we continued to offer programs dedicated to emotional support and provided our colleagues with access to a platform featuring valuable resources such as articles, tests, and scales developed by psychologists and psychiatrists to measure stress, anxiety, depression, or burnout levels. Furthermore, we extended the 24/7 emotional support helpline to family members and updated our financial education program by focusing on critical points in any adult's life, such as planning a financial support path for children, buying a house, closing a mortgage loan, planning for retirement, or making investments.

The events following the end of the pandemic, such as the liberalization of energy and gas prices, the war in Ukraine, accelerated inflationary phenomenon, and the increase in bank interest rates or the prices of basic foods and utilities, have deepened the need for support in understanding the financial implications.

In 2022, we accelerated the recurrence of financial workshops and covered complementary areas such as smart shopping, handling budgets during turbulent times, budget planning, financial education for children, finances for couples, investments, and money masterclass. Over the course of one year, we provided our colleagues with 10 workshops, with more than 500 participants during the live sessions and over 800-page views for the recordings. Moreover, our colleagues had the opportunity to talk to a financial counselor for one-to-one budget planning sessions, in order to create a clear strategy for their finances.

Impact & outcomes

The actions we implemented during these complex years have created real connections and built a positive mindset, which maintained a healthy working environment even during the remote working experience, and raised awareness of individual responsibility for balance and happiness, even during difficult times.

All our well-being programs are implemented on a digital, mobile-friendly, and easy-to-use platform that is accessible to all Orange Romania employees.

Thanks to our continuous financial education programs, we noticed an increase in accessing other benefits we offer to our colleagues, such as private pensions or support for children's college funds. This resulted in employees having an increase in their total income and securing additional funds in the medium and long term to help them in different stages of life. Moreover, we have extended our financial education to the society as a whole, covering all levels of age, social status, and groups.

In Q1 of 2023, we conducted a survey to inquire about the well-being preferences and needs of our colleagues, which showed us that we need to maintain our focus on such programs because external factors continue to have a significant impact on all of us. The internal survey confirmed that certain elements are not just "nice to have," but are essential for our day-to-day lives.

Lessons learned

During the past few years, we have learned that salary alone is not the only factor that employees and candidates consider when choosing a company to work for. Having a consistent compensation and benefits program, as well as a sustainable well-being and recognition strategy, can have a huge impact on their decision. This is especially true for Gen Z. As a result, our HR department has shifted from a salary-focused approach to a total rewards strategy, in order to better meet the diverse needs of our employees.

In today's world, HR policies and strategies cannot solely focus on internal factors, as external factors can greatly impact the organizational climate and social dialogue. It is essential for HR to have a thorough understanding of how external factors can cause imbalances and to educate management on identifying and addressing these behaviors. In addition to traditional programs, we have added surveys to measure quality of life, self-love, and workshops focused on kindness and understanding others, which bring added value to our overall strategy.

Learning to listen more to our colleagues' needs and not making decisions solely based on our perceptions as HR experts has been our greatest achievement. Nowadays, the collective voice sets the tone for well-being programs and builds the medium-term strategy. We have learned that the voice of the detractor is among the most valuable feedback, allowing us to improve our programs.

Avoiding clichés and labeling people should be any HR team's priority, especially during these times when behavior changes much more frequently, and people tend to be more judgmental of their peers. In this context, diversity itself becomes a much broader concept as new perspectives are constantly added to this dimension, showing the need for programs that prevent any kind of stigmatization, enhance tolerance and educate against microaggressions.

We have learned that having a solid network of specialists from all fields of interest by our side is vital for our programs to have a high, positive impact on life in general.

Driving Gender Equality: PMI's Journey to EQUAL-SALARY Certification



In March 2019, Philip Morris International (PMI) became the first company to receive the global EQUAL-SALARY certification from the non-profit EQUAL-SALARY Foundation, after an extensive quantitative and qualitative assessment of our pay-related practices. This independent certification confirms that PMI provides equal pay for equal work to men and women in all the countries where we operate worldwide - which is over 90 countries.

About Philip Morris International (PMI)

Philip Morris International is a leading tobacco company that is transforming the tobacco industry to deliver a smoke-free future. The company's vision is to replace cigarettes with alternative products that – although not risk-free – are a much better choice than continuing to smoke. Through world-class multidisciplinary capabilities in product development and scientific substantiation, as well as state-of-the-art R&D facilities, Philip Morris International aims to ensure that its smoke-free products meet adult consumer preferences and rigorous regulatory requirements.

Diversity and inclusion issue addressed

At PMI, we view diversity as our greatest asset, and we are committed to fostering an inclusive culture and a workplace that reflects the diversity of our world. Our aim is to create an environment where our employees from across the globe can be their authentic selves at work, give their best, support each other, and drive the innovation and consumer-centricity needed to achieve our vision of a smoke-free future.

We are united in our pursuit of delivering a smoke-free future and are embracing change together. Whether in office or remote settings, factory floors, or laboratories, we provide an inspirational workplace to all of our employees worldwide. This entails a work environment where personal

circumstances are recognized, differences are valued, and everyone is treated with equity and respect. We want our 79,800 employees worldwide to feel supported, respected, and have the opportunity to realize their full potential, irrespective of their gender, age, race, nationality, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or any other attribute that defines them, whether visible or not.

When it comes to gender equality, equal pay for equal work is obviously the most basic measure and a first step in recognizing the value of women's work and their contributions to society. In building our ecosystem of interrelated actions to progress gender balance in our leadership at PMI, we wanted to shore up the foundations and confirm that our actual pay practices matched our good intentions, by undergoing a rigorous third-party equal-pay certification process.

Planning & Objectives

EQUAL-SALARY Certification consisted in more than a simple comparison of salary data to ensure we pay men and women equally for equal work: it was a process that included multiple steps and it is resumed periodically:

Step 1. Salary analysis. PMI submitted Compensation Data (i.e. all the relevant data which might impact the determination of salaries for female and male employees), and Compensation Documents (i.e. policies) and other documents that relate to the

Compensation Data in each country.

Step 2. Headquarter visit. PwC, the Foundation's entrusted auditor, conducted a series of interviews at PMI to gather information about:

- a. Senior leadership commitment to the EQUAL-SALARY principles
- b. PMI's global People & Culture management and strategy
- c. The resources, processes, and indicators in place to drive fair remuneration across the organization

Step 3. On-site audit. The audits took place in all PMI affiliates around the world, including the one in Romania, in order to evaluate:

- a. Management's commitment to equal remuneration between men and women
- b. The integration of EQUAL-SALARY principles in all P&C processes and policies
- c. Employee perceptions of gender equality in the organization

Step 4. Global certification. After fulfilling all these steps, PMI received Global EQUAL-SALARY Certification and could communicate the achievement both internally and externally.

Step 5. Monitoring audits. Further audits take place every two to three years in order to:

- a. Confirm PMI's ongoing commitment to a fair, non-discriminatory wage practice between men and women
- b. Demonstrate continual improvement in applying EQUAL-SALARY principles

c. Validate any actions identified through on-site assurance work

Activities implemented

The certifications, including the EQUAL-SALARY Certification that we have earned in recent years, demonstrate that we are making progress towards creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. These certifications also indicate that job seekers view us as an employer where they can achieve their potential and have an impact - in short, a top employer.

As a signatory of the Romanian Diversity Charter, Philip Morris Romania is committed to increasing awareness around equal opportunities and inclusion principles. We set objectives and take concrete actions to apply these principles in our daily operations.

One of our biggest achievements in building D&I awareness throughout the organization was the successful deployment of a hybrid engagement campaign. This campaign aimed to promote diversity and equality of opportunity in the workplace, celebrate people with diverse backgrounds, increase awareness of D&I, and strengthen relationships among team members.

The communication concept, 'Uniqueness In Diversity,' was the common root of the campaign, anchored in organizational values and behaviors. The two elements, internal Employer Branding and the hybrid dimension, were the starting point. The creative package highlighted simple human attributes: Friendship, Freedom, Communication and Growth.

We are inclusive, we champion diversity, and we act with compassion and integrity in everything we do" is the statement on which the key messages of the campaign were based. These messages were delivered through a combination of online channels (a dedicated website and engagement mechanism, management team messages) and offline channels (visuals and messages on LCDs placed on-site, factory engagement activations for employees working on the factory premises).

Due to the conditions created by the global pandemic, activating both our colleagues in the Philip Morris Romania factory and those working in offices (mostly working from home) posed

a big challenge. We aimed to create a common tool that would generate the same impact and energy, which led to the creation of the "Wheel of Diversity" - an allegoric symbol that was built offline for people working in the factory, and for office-based employees, the wheel turned into an engaging internal website accessed online. The campaign named 'Uniqueness In Diversity' proved to be successful in engaging employees, promoting interaction, and fostering experiences that brought them together. As a result, we were able to achieve 90% awareness and consideration at the company level, meaning that our colleagues were informed and understood the importance of diversity and inclusion.

However, our efforts are continuing on other fronts as well. The employee lifecycle represents the core of our D&I practices, and we are constantly working on ongoing initiatives such as reviewing job ads to remove gendered language, monitoring the balance of the number of men and women in shortlists and interview panels, consolidating personalized career and development plans for women leaders at PMI, recruiting top external female talent, identifying and addressing gender bias in our talent assessments - whether in recruitment, performance management, or opportunities for promotions, and tracking progress on the gender balance of our management populations.

Impact and outcomes

D&I entails nurturing a diverse workforce with unique talents that we can further develop to build a robust leadership pipeline within Philip Morris Romania. We also believe that having a globally recognized EQUAL-SALARY certification boosts PMI's appeal as an employer of choice and increases employee engagement and pride in working for a forward-looking and fair organization.

Additionally, this certification reinforces our efforts to transform our culture, talent management, and most importantly, our business completely to become a technology leader in the smoke-free industry, on the path to creating a smoke-free world.

Lessons learned

Fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace is not only the right thing to do; it is also crucial to our

transformation. We need to attract and retain a diverse community of innovators who can help us deliver our smoke-free vision. The EQUAL-SALARY Certification has provided us with a strong platform from which to have additional conversations about the need to achieve gender balance across all levels within the organization and to further drive action plans on D&I awareness. After undergoing the certification audit for the second time, we have learned some valuable lessons that are worth sharing as we continue to strive towards creating an inclusive workplace.

First of all, we need to leverage more data to create a meaningful action plan. The certification process highlighted the opportunity presented by delving deeper into data. PMI has set targets to increase the representation of women in management roles across the company, and progress is reported quarterly, with leaders held accountable for meeting their targets.

Visible leadership commitment should be a key driver in leveling the playing field for women in the long term, as a perception of inequality can dampen aspirations and confidence levels in young women and undermine career-building behaviors such as the willingness to seize opportunities and take risks.

Focusing on increasing objectivity, transparency, and consistency through a structured performance management process is crucial. At PMI, our key elements of the performance management system include ensuring that every employee has clearly defined objectives, providing regular development feedback and coaching that draws on multiple sources, and implementing nudges and reminders to minimize potential bias at points of decision.

Lastly, our efforts to promote diversity and inclusion have had a positive impact on our employees. As such, we are committed to continuing on this path by building a more inclusive workplace, targeting initiatives to foster our new hires, refining our local policy to further promote flexible work arrangements and wellbeing programs, promoting female talent and leadership, and creating an inclusive workspace that empowers all of our employees to take action and be part of the company's transformation.

On the road of discouraging racism: An interview with author Rowena Marin



Rowena Marin is a Romani woman, author, and Global Agency Lead at Google, in New York. She is the co-founder of The School of Reinvention – a company meant to help people align with their passions and purpose. In her book: ‘Who am I in the world?’ she tells her story in order to encourage other young women from closed communities to pursue education, grow and define themselves beyond any labels. In this interview we explore, among others, what shape individual and personal questions can take for companies interested in D&I.

Rowena, “Who am I” and “Why am I here” are two of the biggest questions for a human being. Do you think there are multiple levels on which one can ask such questions and if so, what are those levels for you?

I have to say that I love the fact you mentioned “levels”, because yes, I think there are, certainly, multiple levels on which we could ask such questions, for different areas of our life.

Also, there are different milestones when we can come back to “Who am I”, as life changes and we adapt to newer realities.

For instance, in my case I started this journey to define my identity beyond the labels of my ethnicity. That was one level of the most important areas of my life at one moment in time. But in the same area I went deeper and pushed through the limitations that came with my gender, as well. Now, a few years into exploring my true identity, I became a mother. In this new light, the same question for a different area, and enriched with my experience so far, is coming up. So I believe we can grow with such questions and we can come back to them time and time again, if we allow ourselves to constantly question our limitations and align ourselves with our highest potential.

Would questions like these apply to an organisational and community level as well? What shape should they take?

An organisation or community is made of sentient beings coming together under one purpose that transcends their personal goals. I think that for the leaders of organisations and communities it is crucial to constantly explore their mission, defining how this will drive growth for each person in the group. The answers to questions like “Why we exist” and “How your personal effort brings value to the world” should be the North Star for any organisation. I believe in an underlying desire of people to contribute to the world, but for that we need leadership that makes clear the “WHAT”, the “WHY” and the “HOW”.

The tragedy of your cousin’s death led you to inner inquiry. What do you think would be a catalyst for Romanian companies to shift perspective on the way they think and act about the inclusion of Roma people in the workplace?

Romanian companies are made of Romanian people, so what is needed is a shift in perspective of the Romanian people that still think of the Roma in a stereotypical way. For that, I believe

two things have to happen. On their end they need to accept their limitations in thinking and open their heart to curiosity around this topic. The second thing that has to happen is that we - the Roma people need to open up as well and take responsibility by being part of society with our Roma hats on. There are still too many people of my ethnicity that don't speak openly about their roots. I am very hopeful, though, because both things are happening more and more these days, compared to 10-15 years ago. So there is momentum, but we still need to build.

In your essays for DOR and in your book you talk about fear experienced by Roma people, especially by Roma women. In what ways do you think fear is connected or can lead to racism?

Fear is the main reason why some Roma people don't talk about their ethnicity and Fear is the reason why some Romanian people don't open their mind to getting to know the Roma people. In the first case, I hope it's clear why. We did have 500 years of slavery in our country and that generational trauma has not been healed. In the latter case, it's the same as in other countries: fear of the unknown. One is afraid of what one does not know and that's how racism is created. They think they do, but they don't. In my opinion, it is that simple.

In an interview you say that the road towards discouraging racism is long, but at least we are on that road, which was not the case when you were little. What do you think are the biggest obstacles on this road and what would be the next important milestone?

Yes, we are on the road. The biggest obstacles are generational trauma and lack of examples/education. Therefore, in my opinion, the road to healing should be continued with: education and examples. We need to talk about slavery in Romania, openly, in schools, movies, art, media, etc. It's only by ripping the proverbial "band-aid" can we heal the trauma. Education around this topic and also our ways and our culture, together with more examples of Roma people in leadership roles, can contribute to changing the existing narrative and group consciousness.

You worked in companies from different countries of the world. Did you experience racism or mobbing in the work-place? On the other side, are there any inspiring initiatives at an organisational level that the Romanian companies can learn from?

I worked in four countries with people all over the world, coming from most of the continents and the only country where I met people that had a racist speech, was my own. I was not discriminated against because I did not speak openly about my ethnicity, back then, but that's why I had colleagues that would make racist comments about the Roma people, not knowing

they were talking to one. Although I did not see it at that time, it shook me to my core, as it made me question my self-worth, especially as a young woman.

But, now I am very fortunate to be part of a company where I could be anyone and I am valued for who I am. Google embraces all identities. I love our internal slogan that says: "There is a world where everybody belongs, we just need to build it". That's what I hope Romanian companies will envision for their future. If not for the right cause, at least for the sole purpose that companies with more diverse leadership are eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes, according to a [McKinsey research](#).

A new door opened to you through a scholarship offered through The Roma Education Fund, an opportunity that changed your life—describing the experience you say that for most Roma girls, education is a whim / caprice. What do you think is the cause for this?

Poverty and patriarchy. Families that live on a few dollars a day cannot afford having girls going to school and not working. Therefore, education - which takes so long to bring an ROI, is seen as a whim. And then, in the cases where families are better off and don't live in poverty, the men decide the faith of women/girls in the community and some see education as a threat for the future of the community. Educated girls will not accept old ways, whereas patriarchy generally wants to preserve traditions. But things are changing, little by little, as fathers and brothers start to understand the long term benefit of having an educated wife/sister.

You started an NGO called Women Manifesto 4.0. Even though it is not active anymore can you talk about its mission and if you intend on developing the idea sometime in the future?

Women Manifesto 4.0 is meant to create a community of women that are willing to take up the challenge of self-discovery and personal growth. We come together to support each other in our journey's to growth in our own version of success, beyond the traditional definition of that term.

But since I moved to the US I am not actively participating in the organisation. My focus now changed to creating a community of Roma women only, that left their communities and are thriving in different corners of the world, on their own journey's to understanding who they are. We come together once a month, in a conversation aimed at healing the past. The main mission is to give back by each of us becoming mentors for young ladies that are curious to start their own deep dive into the unknown of self-knowledge.

Interview by Ioana Bîrdu

A mission towards gender equality in entrepreneurship

In 2022, according to the Ministry of Entrepreneurship, only 37 percent of SMEs were owned by women in Romania. Problems such as limited skills and support, prejudices that women face or the care responsibilities that fall on their shoulders have limited women's probability to participate in entrepreneurship. As a response, BCR has developed a two-step plan in its mission towards gender equality in the entrepreneurial field: to promote programs for women entrepreneurs (such as the Woman Entrepreneur national financing program) and to create partnerships focused on community building, education and mentoring for women in business (such as the Toolkit for Women Entrepreneurs powered by BCR and organized by Professional Women's Network Romania program).



About Banca Comercială Română

Banca Comercială Română is currently the most important financial group in Romania, serving both retail and corporate clients. BCR provides a full range of financial products and services, from day-to-day banking services, to brokerage, financial consultancy services and asset management. Moreover, BCR is the recognized leader in financial education in Romania, as well as the tech and data driven bank leveraging the latest technologies and investing in large scale sustainable education and technology projects. As a member of ERSTE Group, BCR's focus on diversity has always been ingrained in its mission, as it was set in ERSTE Group's founding document in 1819: to grant everyone access to prosperity, regardless of age, gender, social background or geography origin.

Diversity and inclusion issue addressed

In Romania, according to the Ministry of Entrepreneurship, only 37 percent of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises are owned by women. Among these, the majority exhibit low levels of labor productivity and growth which are linked to limited access to expansion-focused finance. Based on an internal study of BCR's women-led businesses portfolio, we have found that women-led companies are slightly smaller in terms of business development stage, business education level, and financial metrics, compared to those equally owned by both men and women or solely owned by men.

Further studies have shown that there are multiple reasons why women are less likely to start or be able to

grow their business: the prejudices that women face in the entrepreneurial field, the care responsibilities that create time and mobility constraints impacting their ability to start and grow a business, and the limited skills, knowledge, support, and experience they have in entrepreneurship.

In our mission towards gender equality in the entrepreneurial field, we have recognized that women entrepreneurs require customized offers and educational programs to assist them in growing at a faster pace. Moreover, our goal is to increase the percentage of women-led company clients from 25 percent to 40 percent by 2025.

Planning and objectives

To achieve our objectives, we have decided to support the Woman Entrepreneur national program, which was created as a response to the challenges that Romanian women face in the entrepreneurial field. The program provides non-refundable financing to Romanian SMEs that are majority-owned by women. Its goal is to reduce the gap between women and men entrepreneurs by improving the economic performance of their businesses and supporting them in achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth based on digitalization, sustainable development, and innovation.

Our support in the program included offering guidance to interested clients/prospects and providing eligible candidates with relevant products, such as pre-financing loans, co-financing loans, and dedicated bank accounts for project implementation. As a result, BCR will finance over 100 women-led businesses in 2023.

However, while the Woman Entrepreneur national program addresses the lack of funding for women-led businesses, we recognize that it does not solve the deeper issue that women face in the field: the lack of skills, knowledge, and networks to support them in growing their business. According to the IFC in 2016, “one of the biggest challenges for women entrepreneurs in Romania is their inability to benefit from business referrals and connections to avail themselves of valuable market information in the same way their male counterparts do. They also seem to be more reliant on (but also less able to access) peer support in order to address some of their challenges.” Providing supplementary services, such as training, group-based support, or offering a business network, has been shown to increase women’s direct control over resources and help them build stronger businesses.

Therefore, as a second step in our mission towards gender equality in the entrepreneurial field, we have decided to engage in an ecosystem that would help women entrepreneurs build capacity, promote their businesses, and expand their networks. BCR Group has partnered with Professional Women’s Network Romania (PWN Romania), a global movement of people working towards gender-balanced leadership through professional development, networking, and mentoring. PWN Romania, which was founded in 2011 and is part of PWN Global, aims to support women through three pillars: mentoring, entrepreneurship, and women on boards.

Activities implemented

The partnership has resulted in the development of the Toolkit for Women Entrepreneurs program powered by BCR, which aims to provide female entrepreneurs with the necessary education, networking opportunities, and mentoring resources to effectively grow their businesses. Out of the 40 available spots in the program, 25 have been offered as scholarships, covering the program’s costs.

The program has three cohorts based on the development stage of the business. The Entrepreneurship cohort is dedicated to starting women entrepreneurs, covering all relevant and essential steps for starting a business. The Scale-up cohort focuses on more experienced entrepreneurs with high potential businesses, covering financing and development topics for growing their businesses. Finally, the Unicorn cohort is dedicated to high-growth potential companies, focusing on know-how transfer and collaboration for groundbreaking development.

The official kick-off of the program took place on November 14, 2022, both online and in-person in Bucharest, featuring speeches from Andreea Voinea (Chief Human Resources Officer at BCR), Ileana Botez (President of PWN Romania), and Daniela Marișcu (VP Entrepreneurship PWN Romania). The program will conclude on July 7, 2023, with another live event.

The program offers workshops on all relevant business topics meant to expand women’s entrepreneurial mindset, including “Why entrepreneurship?”, “Why you should scale up,” “How to be a woman entrepreneur,” “How to scale your business,” “How to build a pitch deck presentation,” “Who are you starting with?”, “The partnership strategy,” and “The

negotiation.” The workshops are held by mentors in the program, such as Daniela Marișcu (Investor and Co-founder at EVX), Alexandru Dascălu (Regional Director at Founder Institute Romania), Ovidiu Toader (Business Coach), Cornel Moraru (Owner at Laboratorul de Gânduri and Assistant Professor at Universitatea Națională de Arte București), and Simona Pirtea (Managing Partner at Enache Pirtea & Associated). The program also includes pitching events that are followed by feedback from the mentors and concludes with an in-person “Meet the Investors” event, where the participants will have the chance to network with potential investors.

The program includes additional workshops led by BCR mentors, which are designed to help women gain a better understanding of how to access financing and other education areas relevant to their businesses. For instance, Ștefan Buciu (CEO at BCR Social Finance) will discuss “Microfinancing and the Growth of Social Enterprises”, while Oana Băra (Head of Financing Programs) will present the topic of “Accessing European Funds”. Ioana Gheorghiade (Director of Corporate Risk Management) will discuss “Analysis and Risk Management”, and Anita Sima (Head of Micro Lending Products and Processes) will cover the essential topic of “Business Digitalization”. In addition to the workshops, the program also features success stories from other women entrepreneurs, such as Ioana Urețu, founder of “Cărți, Dulciuri, Flori”, and Ana Maria Dubau, CEO at Asociația The Social Incubator, a BCR Social Finance client.

Impact and outcomes

As the program is ongoing, we have not been able to document its outcomes yet. However, the feedback we have received from the participants so far shows that many women entrepreneurs are excited to be part of a community that supports them in building and growing their businesses through educational resources, mentoring, and an expanded business network. These positive responses towards the support they are receiving indicate that there is a real need for such a program and a women-led entrepreneurial community in Romania.

We are confident that the program will have a positive impact on women’s attitudes towards entrepreneurship by providing them with a safety net through access to the necessary skills and mentoring, a business network, and a strong support system. We hope that in the future, more programs dedicated to women entrepreneurs and their journey will appear and help remove the gender gap in entrepreneurship in Romania.

Going forward, supporting its community of women entrepreneurs is part of BCR’s strategy. The bank plans to offer access to programs and partnerships meant to assist women in growing their businesses, thereby making progress towards closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship.

Embracing Diversity: A Journey of Belonging at Janssen Romania

Roxana Botea, Country Director of Janssen Romania, shares insights on Janssen's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and their efforts to create a more inclusive workplace.



Ms Roxana Botea, how does Janssen Romania define diversity and inclusion, and what is the company's approach to creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace?

I joined Janssen Romania recently, and the company's values and culture were part of the reason why I felt an immediate connection. Our incredible work culture is a part of Our Credo, a statement our company made more than 75 years ago and that puts people first. Our mission is to create a healthier world in which we all belong.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is at the heart of what we understand by belonging. There are multiple awards and recognitions the company received in the recent years at EMEA level, also in Romania we were appreciated as Best Place to Work. The DEI agenda is driven by our employees, as we have a local DEI Council, who oversees the country initiatives, involving, engaging and nurturing all Janssen Romania community and fostering the cultural advancement according to the times.

Considering everything we've done so far in implementing its principles on our day-to-day activity, we believe DEI is a continuous journey of learning and growth. Our ambition is that everyone within our company feels free to express themselves and to bring their unique perspectives, life experiences and ideas together to create a healthier and more equitable world.

As the first female Country Director of Janssen Romania, what specific strategies do you have to empower women in leadership positions, and how do you plan to foster gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace under your leadership?

Johnson & Johnson, our parent company, was intuitively founded on a principle of diversity and inclusion, when 8 of the first 14 employees were women and even today many top management positions are held by women. This is possible because the company always recognized the value of a diverse, inclusive team in meeting today's challenges and bringing forward innovation in tomorrow's solutions. Women are scientists and technologists, women are caregivers, mentors, mothers and innovators, sometimes all at once. Companies that understand and leverage the potential of a diverse workforce can benefit from a wealth of insights and skills to boost their competitiveness.

I feel privileged to join this thriving culture, to have my professional achievements acknowledged and to have been given the opportunity to lead and inspire the people of Janssen Romania. We celebrate 30 years of presence in Romania in 2023 - 30 years of making an impact in the patients' lives, of innovation on all aspects. Both in our Romania Leadership Team and at middle management level, we have a strong representation of women. This is an achievement I am proud of, and I am committed to

continue nurturing it. We see Romania as a best practice example in the EMEA region.

Can you provide examples of specific initiatives that Janssen Romania has implemented to promote diversity and inclusion?

One of the first measures we took, fundamental for seeding all DEI programs, was to adopt a healthy work life balance. We are listening to the feedback of our employees and acting on it. This leads to ensuring a greater work/life integration, and we were rewarded with one of the highest satisfaction scores in the region when it comes to health and wellbeing. We were pleased to notice that we continue to have not only a culture of inclusion, but also that many of the employees want to contribute more to the communities, by enrolling in volunteering programs or initiating group activities that help moving forward the mission and principles of our company.

The multiple DEI initiatives our company encompasses are guided by four pillars, interconnecting to make sure diversity, equity and inclusion shape the way we work every day. These principles find expression in Romania as well, whether through global programs we adapt locally or locally developed programs. From an extensive list of DEI initiatives, I will mention the ones I find most defining for our country.

We conduct Unconscious Bias training for employees to learn about its unintended impact on inclusiveness, helping our colleagues raise awareness of implicit biases. Last year we further progressed on our DEI journey introducing Conscious Inclusion, a workforce training program that teaches employees how to be intentional in creating an environment where curiosity about differences is encouraged. The leadership team is also planning to deploy Inclusion Dialogues, designed to advance an inclusive culture for all colleagues and build the next generation of inclusive leaders.

Alliance for Diverse Abilities is an Employee Resource Group that encourages fostering an inclusive and barrier free environment for people with disabilities and people that are neurodiverse, while advocating for mental health and wellbeing. Within its frame, we support our colleagues who go through health problems, theirs or their families', as caregivers, and we recognize the professional capabilities of people living with physical or mental disabilities. We acknowledge that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and Romania is no exception.

The Parenthood Circle is a program that supports the new parents, whether mothers or fathers. We created an internal system that aims to enhance the parenting skills by sharing experience with other colleagues, in an informal and laid-back context. The participation is on voluntary basis and consists of regular meetings or discussion groups.

WiSTEM2D program involves our employees as mentors and addresses society, Women in Science, Technology,

Engineering, Math, Manufacturing and Design (WiSTEM2D) encourages girls and women to engage in disciplines traditionally accessible to men. The program has already involved over 25,000 students, 470 teachers, and over 300 schools from 152 different areas of the country in the past 5 years.

What are some of the key challenges that Janssen Romania faces in its D&I journey, particularly within the pharma industry?

No mindset shift is easy, and it takes determination to shape up environments. But we benefited from Our Credo to build up the premises for a flexible approach to change in general. DEI principles are embedded in our corporate culture.

What role do you believe that diversity and inclusion play in the broader context of the pharmaceutical industry, particularly with regards to improving patient outcomes and addressing healthcare disparities?

The pharmaceutical industry's purpose is to address the patient's health needs, regardless of gender, race, age, sexual orientation or social status. We, at Janssen, are committed to the mission of making the healthcare innovation accessible to all in need, starting with the clinical trials for our medical solutions.

As patients become more engaged in their own health, when we talk about clinical research, they become research partners. By seeking, listening to, and acting upon patients' self-expressed preferences about research design and implementation, we can understand and address barriers in recruitment and participation that optimize trial quality. Hence, the trial outcome becomes more applicable to a wider range of patients, more diverse, and the treatment options become more inclusive and efficient. Considering this, we created the Clinical Trial Innovation work stream, which has two focus areas: making the trial enrollment more accessible to more patients and improving the participants' experience by giving them direct voice and by adapting the language to their understanding.

Looking ahead, what are Janssen Romania's aspirations for its diversity and inclusion efforts in the coming years, and how does the company plan to achieve them?

I believe in creating a safe environment where each employee can bring their best self to work and feel seen, supported and valued.

At Janssen Romania, we approach diversity, equity and inclusion as a business imperative. We regularly gather data and insights, both from within the company and from the communities we serve, to inform, design and implement programs that deliver impact where it is needed. We will continue to focus and accelerate our programs, policies and practices that enable all our people to feel they belong, with a focus on accessing deeper insights and developing on country level needs. As leader in healthcare, we see it as our duty to also lead the way in diversity, equity and inclusion.

Diversity Week at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Grigore T. Popa” Iași



GRIGORE T. POPA UNIVERSITY OF
MEDICINE AND PHARMACY IASI

Launched in May 2021, the Diversity Week at “Grigore T. Popa University” of Medicine and Pharmacy Iași (UMF Iași) has successfully reached its third edition this year. Each edition has featured a comprehensive program aimed at fostering genuine transformation at the collective mindset level. This event encompasses workshops, conferences, and debates that center around the broad spectrum of diversity, including but not limited to, promoting respect for differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, culture, ability, sexual orientation, social status, and education.

About UMF Iași

UMF Iași is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in Romania, established in 1879 as the Faculty of Medicine. Over time, it has become closely associated with two complementary institutions in the field of medical education, namely the Faculty of Pharmacy and the Faculty of Dental Medicine. In 1991, the institution was granted university status and was named after the renowned figure from the School of Functional Anatomy Iași, Grigore T. Popa. Subsequently, the Faculty of Medical Bioengineering, the only one of its kind in Romania, became a part of the university. Today, UMF Iași boasts a distinguished teaching faculty and modernized infrastructure, facilitating the seamless execution of educational and scientific research activities.

The University plays a vital role in educating and developing professionals in medicine, dental medicine, pharmacy, bioengineering, and healthcare. It promotes the values of biomedical sciences on a global scale, while continuously improving the national public health system. The University upholds academic thinking, democracy, deontology, and bioethics, while respecting fundamental rights and the rule of law.

Diversity and Inclusion issue addressed

Our University has been, for many years, a real Tower of Babel, with over 2500 international students coming from 75 countries. It is a multicultural space, where the focus is on study and practical activity, a space located in one of the most attractive cities in Romania.

The international outlook of UMF Iași pertains to the continuously growing share of international citizens among the students who choose the University as their Alma Mater. The rich diversity of its student body is fundamental to its mission of educating outstanding health care professionals for the multicultural world of the 21st century.

At the same time, UMF Iași has confirmed throughout its existence that the cultural dimension is not secondary in the training of students and within the academic community, but

an important part of its strategy development. In this spirit, UMF Iași founded Cultural Center „I. I. Mironescu”, the only center of its kind in a European medical university, whose mission is not only to promote culture among students, but of the entire community. The Center aims to protect cultural heritage and diversity, through proactive involvement of students and teaching staff in cultural life and recognition of heritage values, supporting the participation of the academic community in the development of knowledge, the promotion of multiculturalism and the protection of minority culture; educating students, masters, PhD students and residents for cultural consumption and developing their creative skills, promoting respect for differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, culture, ability, sexual orientation, social status or education.

Therefore, it is important to celebrate diversity annually, through a series of events - gathered in “Diversity Week” - which can become a tradition in our academic community and inspire other institutions of higher medical education in the Romanian space.

UMF Iași stands as a space defined by multiculturalism and tolerance. As EU Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli stated, ‘Diversity management in the workplace should be one of the primary human resources priorities for any European employer. When employees are valued for their true selves, they become committed to their work and can fully unleash their talents and creativity.’ Despite three decades passing since the fall of communism, is Romania truly prepared today to embrace and appreciate diversity and equal opportunities without hypocrisy and formalism? These crucial questions deserve to be addressed during “Diversity Week”, emphasized Professor Dr. Viorel Scripcariu, the Rector of “Grigore T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iași.

Activities implemented

The program of the first edition, which started on May 21, 2021, included dialogues and lectures about the body, gender equality and about a topic less debated: The oldness in

Romania: between stigma and scientific research, presented by Professor Marius Turda, Center for Medical Humanities, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK.

From May 16 to May 20, 2022, the second edition of Diversity Week at UMF Iasi successfully raised awareness within the Iasi academic community on various topics that remain taboo in Romanian society. These discussions focused on subjects including discrimination, the shortcomings and uniformity within the Romanian education system, as well as exploring the concept of daring thinking - the courage to seek creative solutions in times of crisis. Additionally, the event delved into the contemporary understanding of masculinity and femininity. Esteemed psychologists, psychiatrists, surgeons, historians, lawyers, and cultural figures presented captivating talks on these subjects, while book launches and a photo exhibition were also featured during the event.

During the event, Gabriel Diaconu, a psycho-traumatologist and crisis intervention specialist from Bucharest, delivered a compelling talk titled "Risky Thinking and the Risks of Thinking." Moreover, Mircea Platon, the editor-in-chief of *Convorbiri literare* in Iași and a PhD holder in History from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, USA, presented a conference on "Diversity, Platitude, and Monotony: Premises and Consequences of the Education System Reform in Romania."

The third edition of Diversity Week at UMF Iasi, held from May 15 to May 19, 2023, revolved around the theme of "Feminism and Femininity." These concepts, which can be seen as mutually exclusive, were explored through a series of engaging events. The discussions delved into thought-provoking topics such as "useless sex," inspired by Oriana Fallaci's renowned book, and an exploration of Simone de Beauvoir's influential work, "The Second Sex." The program also highlighted the significant feminist movement in Moldova during the First World War and celebrated the emblematic women in the history of Romanian medicine, including Elisa Bottez, Teresa Savini-Castano-Panaiteanu, Marta Trancu-Rainer, Elena Densușianu-Pușcariu, Alexandrina Năstase, and others.

The Diversity Week's program encompassed captivating exhibitions, including photo-documentaries and paintings. Additionally, it featured a conference on contemporary dance, along with other lectures and book launches. Dr. Richard Constantienscu, the Director of the Cultural Center of UMF

Iași, explained the chosen theme, emphasizing the university's interest in feminism. He highlighted the university's commitment to promoting women's representation and leadership within the institution. Notably, UMF Iasi prides itself on having the first female Rector among Iasi universities and medical universities in Romania. Since the 19th century, Medical Iasi has been at the forefront of advocating for women's access to higher education, with many influential voices campaigning for gender equality within the medical profession and taking comprehensive actions regarding women's issues.

Impact and Outcomes & Lessons learned

Due to the prevailing epidemiological conditions in 2021, the first edition of Diversity Week was conducted entirely online. However, despite the virtual format, the event garnered significant attention, particularly among the international student community at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Grigore T. Popa in Iasi. The diverse range of topics explored during the week resonated strongly with the students.

Notably, two events were exclusively organized by students: "Voices of Minorities, Cults, and Romanians Everywhere" featuring invited speakers representing different perspectives (Alwan Sinan - English language Medicine student, sixth year, representative of the Muslim cult; Mariam Bashtawi - Romanian language Medicine student, sixth year, representing the "Romanians Everywhere" category; Ștefana Călin - General Medical Assistance student, fourth year, representing the Roma community), and "International Student at UMF Iasi" where students from the French and English study programs participated in a bilingual event. The general public had open access to all events, which were live-streamed and can still be viewed on the University's YouTube page.

Reflecting on the experience, it became evident that the success of such an endeavor is not immediate. It requires persistence, especially in a society deeply rooted in the past and plagued by prejudices and stereotypes. The aim of the Diversity Week was to encourage acceptance and celebration of differences, emphasizing that there is no need to fear those who are different from us. Instead, we should embrace diversity, learn to respect and value one another.



Luiza Banyai is a seasoned professional with over 20 years of experience in the field of People Experiences & Organizational Development. Throughout her career, she has held various managerial HR roles in diverse industries such as Telecom, Pharma, BPO, IT software, Production, Energy Utilities companies, and Gaming. Luiza's journey has been enriched by the opportunity to work as an engineer in HR, lead exceptional teams, and inspire others through her personal example. With a perfect blend of heart and mind, she approaches her work with patience, kindness, and a genuine passion for making a difference.

Unlocking Growth and Opening Paths: Embracing the Five Generations in the Workplace

In today's business world, organizations recognize that diversity and inclusion are essential components for fostering a meaningful and inclusive workplace while unlocking sustainability.

For the first time in history, the workplace encompasses five generations, each with their unique experiences, values, interests, motivational factors, and communication styles, shaped by diverse circumstances and global events.

Additionally, we are confronted with new organizational challenges such as remote work, virtual teams, post-COVID mental health concerns, novel methods of fostering collaboration, evolving motivational factors, digitalization, and the need for reskilling. The third edition of the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report reveals that by 2025, 50% of employees will require reskilling due to the combined impact of the pandemic's economic effects and the growing automation that is reshaping jobs. The labor market is undergoing significant transformation, and the rate of change is accelerating.

A diverse, skilled, and motivated workforce, nurtured within a psychologically safe environment and receiving due appreciation, can generate innovative solutions and significantly contribute to driving these transformative shifts.

Considering all these factors, companies must persistently strive to cultivate a positive workplace environment that fosters authenticity, where individuals feel comfortable to be themselves and are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Unlocking Growth, Opening the Path Forward!

One of the key steps towards fostering inclusion among the diverse five generations working together is to acknowledge and embrace their unique differences. By understanding their distinct values, work methods, learning styles, and collaboration approaches, organizations can facilitate inter-generational dialogue and collaboration. This approach not only breaks down stereotypes but also enhances trust, encourages meaningful contributions, and promotes co-creation across generations.

Another crucial step is the implementation of mentorship programs and the cultivation of mentoring skills. These programs serve as a means to attract top talent and foster loyalty among valuable employees. Prospective hires actively seek organizations that provide avenues for personal and professional growth, and a well-designed mentoring program signifies a commitment to employee development. By offering mentorship opportunities, companies can enhance their appeal, create a supportive learning environment, and demonstrate their investment in the success and advancement of their workforce.

Pairing junior employees without experience with senior employees possessing professional expertise through mentorship programs can create valuable opportunities for mutual learning, development, and the establishment of professional trust. By leveraging mentoring, junior employees can benefit from the knowledge and insights of their more experienced colleagues, thereby facilitating a qualitative knowledge transfer at the organizational level. This not only ensures the retention of critical knowledge within the company but also expedites the growth and development of newer or less experienced employees.

To bolster digitalization and enhance skills in new technologies, companies can also implement reverse mentoring programs. These initiatives facilitate the exchange of knowledge between younger employees and their older colleagues who may require further understanding of emerging technologies, trends, and innovative approaches in the realm of artificial intelligence.

Mentoring is: “Off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking.” (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995)

In the realm of diversity and inclusion, mentoring stands as one of the most powerful tools for organizational development, fostering growth and motivation across all generations in the workplace. By creating a nurturing environment, mentoring enables individuals to embark on a journey of personal and professional advancement, leveraging the wealth of diverse perspectives and experiences. Mentors generously impart their wisdom, expertise, and insights to mentees, offering guidance to navigate career paths, acquire new skills, and access invaluable perspectives not readily obtainable through formal training programs. Through this exchange, trust is built and nurtured across generations.

It serves as a powerful vehicle for developing essential competencies such as active listening, patience, compassion, understanding others, motivating others, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Mentoring relationships also foster collaboration, as mentees gain

access to their mentor’s network, allowing them to connect with other professionals and expand their own spheres of influence and communities.

In addition to delegation, coaching for performance, and tutoring, mentoring forms a robust toolbox for managers to cultivate more effective, accountable, and engaged teams. It provides managers with the necessary support and knowledge to create a conducive environment for the development, growth, and psychological safety of their team members, thereby creating more space and time for their overall professional advancement.

Future-proofing companies requires the implementation of effective and authentic succession planning and leadership development strategies, aimed at cultivating the next generation of leaders. Mentoring, when combined with other accelerated development tools, plays a pivotal role in nurturing high-potential employees and preparing them for crucial leadership positions. By pairing emerging leaders with seasoned mentors, organizations can ensure a seamless leadership transition and maintain continuity in a consistent and motivational manner.

Mentoring in the workplace has proven to be a transformative practice that drives growth, engagement, and overall success. It possesses all the essential ingredients to become a core competency for all employees within an organization.

Finally, to maintain a healthy “path for growing together” among all five generations, organizations should carefully consider their policies, practices, and business processes, with a focus on building a culture of inclusion. This involves fostering an environment where every employee feels valued and supported. Leaders should serve as role models for inclusive behaviors and hold individuals accountable for their actions. By doing so, organizations can create a culture where diversity and inclusion are celebrated and embraced throughout the entire workforce.

Conclusion: As companies navigate the ever-changing landscape of the future, it becomes increasingly crucial to develop core competencies that foster growth, effective communication, and adaptability. Among these competencies, mentoring emerges as a critical factor that not only helps reduce bias and stereotypes but also supports retention and engagement within the workforce. By fostering knowledge transfer, leadership development, talent growth, collaboration, diversity, and inclusion, mentoring programs play a pivotal role in shaping the success of organizations. Forward-thinking companies that invest in mentoring initiatives create a culture of continuous learning, empowerment, and collaboration, positioning themselves as leaders in the evolving business landscape.

All in for inclusive and equal parental paid leave at Sanofi

Sanofi's integrated Diversity & Inclusion strategy is driven by the overarching objective of making a global positive impact on its workforce, its workplace, and its communities. The company's strategy is covering some of the key strands of diversity: gender, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, age, and disability, at the core of which lies the ambition to reflect the diversity of its communities. In line with this, a global standard for inclusive and equal gender-neutral parental leave was implemented across the globe, including Romania, as of January 1st, 2022.



About Sanofi

Sanofi is an innovative global healthcare company, driven by one purpose: to chase the miracles of science to improve people's lives. The company's teams across the world strive to transform the practice of medicine, turning the impossible into the possible for patients. Sanofi provides potentially life-changing treatments and the protection of life-saving vaccines to millions of people, and affordable access to medicines in some of the world's poorest countries. Scientific discoveries don't happen overnight or without hard work. But the determination to find answers for patients motivates Sanofi to develop breakthrough medicines and vaccines. And to never settle.

Diversity and Inclusion issue addressed

To serve local communities in the best way, Sanofi strives to reflect their reality and diversity, unleashing employees' best selves every day, to transform the practice of medicine for the better. Thus, diversity and inclusion are critical enablers of the company's business strategy, being fully integrated with its people strategy, as well as the broader commitment to society.

"For Sanofi, for our leaders, for our managers and for me, diversity means taking advantage of our collective difference and embracing each individual particularity that our employees bring to the team. Inclusion refers to offering and sharing with others the feeling of belonging, mutual respect, and personal value. By allowing our employees to have access to flexible work arrangements, embracing and promoting an inclusive culture within the organisation and providing

workplace accessibility to all, we advance in creating a work environment where we can bring our best selves, and where all get to shine unconditionally," highlights Roxana Cîlțea, Head of Human Resources Sanofi Romania.

At Sanofi, Diversity & Inclusion is not a lonely journey! It is about ALL – leaders, managers, and employees – because ALL are responsible for assimilating and actively promoting Diversity & Inclusion principles. The strategy created and implemented in this regard has been co-created with a cross-section of employees around the world and it's co-owned by every leader and employee, and integrated into everything Sanofi does.

Only ensuring Sanofi engages a diverse workforce in a healthy workplace, can the company provide its best for patients in Romania and around the world. The global paid parental leave at Sanofi is, thus, one of the measures implemented within the company to fulfil the duty of caring for employees' wellbeing, allowing them to spend time dedicated to their growing families and afterwards advancing in their career.

To bring the diversity of communities to the forefront and stimulate inclusion of all even further, Sanofi is continuously committed to focusing on three distinct pillars: building a representative leadership, creating a work environment where employees can bring their best selves, and engaging with diverse communities. The global parental leave is associated with the second pillar of Sanofi's Diversity & Inclusion strategy, dedicated to supporting employees on each step of their professional life and allowing them to be themselves, thrive and fulfil their full potential.

In Romania, mothers have access to 126 days (18 weeks) of paid maternity leave (85% of it covered by the state), while fathers are entitled to only 10 to 15 days of paternity leave, if the father follows a documented childcare course. Given the local context and the differences in the maternity and paternity leave options across Europe and the entire globe, Sanofi introduced the global gender-neutral parental leave, starting with January 2022, which was already accessed by Sanofi's male colleagues in the CSE MCO (Central and South Europe Multi-Country Organization).

Thus, Sanofi is on the move towards a world that better understands and fulfils all employees' needs for a healthy life, both at work and in the family.

Planning and Objectives

Through Sanofi's gender-neutral parental leave, all birthing and non-birthing parents who are permanent employees have the right to 14 weeks off, fully paid, including any other leaves related to the birth already legally defined/offered by the state. This was an essential move for Sanofi, but it is also simply the right thing to do for an organization led by the purpose of fair and equal treatment towards its employees.

Hence, all Sanofi employees, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation, are entitled to 14 weeks of parental leave, fully paid by the company. The purpose is to offer a paid parental leave that is consistent across the company and is designed to support families by allowing every parent to have enough time to prepare for and welcome children to their family.

By offering parental leave to everyone, not just women, Sanofi is guaranteeing equal rights for all employees, and giving people the freedom to choose the childcare arrangements that work best for them when welcoming a new child in the family. This is another important step in creating a truly diverse and inclusive environment, where everyone can bring their best selves to work and feel genuinely included.

Activities implemented

The leave covers not only any employee who is welcoming a new child or whose partner is welcoming a new child, but also in case of childbirth, adoption, surrogacy, or due to a custody of a child, no matter which country they are working in, as long as the employee is recognized as the child's parent as per local legislation or practice, at the starting date of when their parental leave would begin.

Also, the parental leave can be taken in one or two blocks, scenario in which the leave can be structured in two periods

of eight and six consecutive weeks, both blocks being taken within a 12-month window. And, above all, if two parents happen to be Sanofi employees, they are both eligible to take the leave as long as they are legally registered parents/have parental responsibility of the child.

Sanofi is trying to help improve gender parity in the workplace and reduce the gender bias that can occur after giving birth. This is another important step on the company's journey to a better work environment, a better business, and better outcomes for all.

Impact and outcomes

The benefit of paid parental leave will give Sanofi employees the freedom to determine the childcare arrangements that work best for them as a family and provide quality time to better bond together. A step forward for driving equality in the workplace and greater choices beyond.

Pioneered in Latin America since 2020, we have seen first-hand the concrete and positive impact such local policies can have in the life events of employees becoming parents. Additionally, in one year since its implementation, 16 of Sanofi's male colleagues in the CSE MCO (Central and South Europe Multi-Country Organization) have accessed the gender-neutral parental leave option.

Lessons learned

Parental leaves have the advantage of strengthening not only the relationships of parents with their children, but also the partnership with their significant other. Sharing more of the responsibilities of being a parent and investing in qualitative relationships was shown to bring stability within the family.

And because diversity and inclusion are multi-faceted topics, providing the same rights and opportunities to all employees will equally contribute towards helping managers, who make decisions on hiring, promoting, and developing talents, not to apply biases about parental leave only being taken by women. Another step forward to supporting Sanofi's ambitions of gender balance.

There is still a lot to do to build a workforce that fully reflects the societies we live in, but Sanofi is on the move. The company's approach to parental leave is concrete proof point of its determination to make the Diversity & Inclusion ambitions a reality across the world, together, All in!

Breaking down barriers through education and awareness

Monica, what does it mean for you to live a good life?

In my pursuit of beauty, I have found that building meaningful relationships with others is essential. It allows me to connect with different perspectives and to learn from the experiences of others. It also gives me a sense of community and belonging, which is important for my overall well-being.

Ultimately, I believe that living a good life is about finding a balance between our individual pursuits and our connections with others. It is about cultivating a sense of purpose and meaning, while also finding joy and fulfillment in the everyday moments of life.

In the editorial you wrote for us three years ago, you called yourself “A little alien in Bucharest”. Do you still feel that way or has anything changed for someone living with a disability in the Romanian professional and social landscape?

I still feel somewhat like an alien in Bucharest, perhaps because I've always viewed the world in a particular way, with my attention focused on the subtle essence of things. However, I do believe that changes are happening at a slow pace for people with disabilities in Romania.

There is more awareness about disability issues, and more efforts are being made to create inclusive environments both in the professional and social spheres. Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go in terms of breaking down stereotypes and barriers, and ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to resources and opportunities. I don't forget this because I often encounter the puzzled look of people who seem to have not yet had the opportunity to meet or to imagine to some extent the existence of a person with a disability. That look speaks of pity, curiosity, fear, sometimes contempt, where there should only be a natural willingness.

The disability experience has a medical and a social aspect. What do you think are the most common misconceptions and prejudice for people with disabilities and for those without one, when it comes to disability and inclusion?

To achieve true inclusivity, it is important not only to change individual attitudes, but also to address systemic barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in society. This includes ensuring accessible transportation, housing, and workplace accommodations, as well as addressing the lack of representation of people with disabilities in media



Monica Radu works as an IT Analyst in Groupe Société Générale and she is a certified counselor for personal development. As a disabled person and wheelchair user for 25 years, she enjoys sharing her experience and observations, in order to contribute to a better understanding of the issues regarding the professional path of a disabled person.

and leadership positions. By actively working towards these goals, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

Another important aspect of inclusivity is the need for education and awareness. Many people may not be familiar with the experiences of individuals with disabilities and may not know how to properly interact or accommodate them. Through education and awareness, we can break down barriers and create a more understanding and accepting society.

It is also important to involve individuals with disabilities in decision-making processes that affect them. This can be including them in policy discussions and consulting them on issues that directly impact their lives. By giving them a seat at the table, we can ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are taken into consideration.

Ultimately, achieving inclusivity requires a collective effort from all members of society. It is up to us all to challenge our biases and work towards a more just and equitable world for individuals with disabilities.

Has your own perspective on disability changed over the past years?

As I continue to learn more about disability and the experiences of people with disabilities, I have come to appreciate the importance of disability representation in media and other forms of public discourse. Seeing people with disabilities represented in a positive and accurate light can help to break down stereotypes and promote greater understanding and acceptance. I have also realized the importance of advocating for disability rights and accessibility, both on an individual level and on a larger societal level. This includes pushing for more accessible infrastructure, policies that promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities, and greater representation in decision-making processes.

Overall, I believe that my evolving perspective on disability has allowed me to approach life with a greater sense of empathy, understanding, and openness to diverse experiences and perspectives.

What do you think are the hardest things for employers to understand regarding the design of an inclusive workplace and culture?

I think one of the biggest challenges for employers is simply understanding the needs and experiences of employees with disabilities. Many employers may not be familiar with the specific accommodations and support that are necessary for different types of disabilities, and may not know how to create an environment that is truly inclusive. Additionally, there is the complementary but equally essential issue of ingrained biases and stereotypes surrounding disability. Often, disability, which involves a difficulty experienced by a particular person, may be taken personally by a potential employer who feels unjustifiably uncomfortable with the disability. In fact, it is within their power to alleviate the burden on the person with a disability through acceptance and understanding and by having the courage to move towards that common ground where both parties' interests converge on an equal footing.

You mention in your book (Dantele interioare) that conscience should be something taught in schools. If you were to train managers and HRs on disability, what would be the three most important things you would build upon?

Understanding the diversity within the disability community is crucial for effective inclusion. This involves recognizing that disabilities can be visible or invisible, and that individuals with disabilities have different needs and preferences. Accommodations and support should be tailored to each individual's unique situation.

Creating a culture of respect and inclusion in the workplace involves more than just implementing policies and procedures. It requires fostering an environment where everyone feels comfortable to be themselves and where differences are celebrated. This can be achieved through education and training, open communication, and creating opportunities for diverse perspectives to be heard.

Being proactive in identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion is an ongoing process that involves continuous feedback and improvement. It requires a willingness to listen to employees with disabilities and to work collaboratively

with them to develop solutions. This can involve making physical changes to the workplace, providing training and support, and creating opportunities for career development and advancement for employees with disabilities.

You have recently founded the Monica Radu Association. Would you tell us about your decision to take this step and the mission of the association?

I founded the Monica Radu Association to create positive change in the disability community in Romania. After experiencing my own injury and navigating the challenges of living with a disability, I felt a strong desire to help others who may be going through similar experiences. The mission of the association is to promote inclusion, accessibility, and empowerment for people with disabilities in Romania, by providing resources, support, and advocacy.

Can you share with us some of the best practices regarding disability and inclusion in Romania? What is something that we can learn from other countries on this matter?

One important step is to raise awareness and educate the public about the diversity and capabilities of individuals with disabilities. This can help break down stereotypes and stigma, and promote greater acceptance and inclusion. Additionally, providing reasonable accommodations and accessibility in public spaces and workplaces can help individuals with disabilities participate more fully in society.

In terms of learning from other countries, there are many examples of successful disability inclusion practices that Romania could adopt. For instance, some countries have implemented quota systems for hiring people with disabilities in the public sector, ensuring that a certain percentage of jobs are reserved for individuals with disabilities. Other countries have implemented accessibility standards for public spaces and buildings, which can greatly improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

You have gained a deep understanding of life and on what truly matters. What would you tell a person living with a disability who has lost hope?

I would encourage them to focus on their strengths and abilities, and to seek out resources and support that can help them achieve their goals. It's important to remember that living with a disability does not define who you are as a person, and that with determination and hard work, you can still achieve your dreams. Surrounding oneself with a supportive community and focusing on what is possible rather than what is not, can be a powerful way to overcome adversity and find purpose and fulfillment in life.

Interview by Ioana Bîrdu

Women@Renault Romania

Renault Group Romania is committed to providing an inclusive, respectful, and discrimination-free workplace where everyone feels valued. By actively promoting gender diversity, the company aims to achieve a better gender balance while embracing all forms of differences. To foster gender diversity as a performance enhancer and empower women across all roles and levels, the Women@Renault Romania network has been relaunched. With nearly 500 members, this network is the first within the Group to actively involve top and middle management and includes members from blue-collar employees.

**Renault
Group**

About Renault Group Romania

Renault Group in Romania encompasses all aspects of vehicle construction, contributing to strong economic performance and a wide range of roles across various areas such as customer surveys, design, engineering, testing, manufacturing, logistics, marketing, business services, after-sales, and financing. As the leader in the local market with the Dacia and Renault brands, Renault Group employs 15,000 professionals who innovate and uphold high standards of professionalism in offices located in Bucharest, Mioveni, Titu, Pitesti, and Oarja. While each job within the team is unique, all members share a common passion for cars and the exciting challenges this industry presents.

Diversity and inclusion issue addressed

Diversity is an integral part of Renault's organizational culture, embracing a broad spectrum of roles and individuals with diverse backgrounds. Our Diversity & Inclusion policy is founded on principles that ensure respect for all individuals and prohibit any form of discrimination throughout their professional journey, including recruitment, training, remuneration, and career advancement, aligned with our Zero Discrimination policy. Our human resources policies prioritize skills and performance, aiming to integrate, develop, and support employees equitably.

Our Diversity & Inclusion strategy and roadmap are built upon four pillars. First, we strive to ensure fair and respectful treatment for everyone. Second, we promote an inclusive work environment where every individual feels valued and included. Third, we facilitate the integration and advancement of women within the company. Finally, we are committed to increasing the representation of women at all levels, across all locations. To

achieve gender balance, we ensure that 50% of shortlisted applications for job positions are from women.

We uphold the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities in decision-making processes and human resources management. This encompasses various aspects, including recruitment, training, remuneration, and professional advancement.

The Women@Renault Romania Network plays a crucial role in achieving our diversity and inclusion objectives. Through this initiative, Renault Group Romania aims to promote gender diversity as a performance driver and enhance the presence of women in all roles and at all levels.

Planning & Objectives

The reactivated Women@Renault Romania, unveiled during the "Success is an Attitude" event, has now nearly 500 members, actively engaging top and middle management, as well as blue-collar colleagues. This initiative seeks to enhance women's confidence, shift gender diversity mindsets, raise awareness among managers and employees, promote the automotive industry as an attractive option for women, recognize the value of women within Renault Romania, develop female talent, and foster idea exchange.

Increasing the representation of women in key positions is a strategic objective at the company level, with Women@Renault playing a vital role in achieving this goal through its initiatives. The CEO of Renault Group Romania and the HR Director of Renault Romania have been strong advocates and supporters of this initiative since its inception.

On March 26, 2021, the network was officially launched with 150 founding members, comprising women in key positions from various professions. The launch event, hosted by the General Manager of Renault Group Romania and the Human Resources

GM of Renault Group Romania, emphasized the significance of diversity and the pivotal role of women in our society. Attendees had the opportunity to share their experiences, learn about the group's diversity policies, and discuss strategies for maintaining a work-life balance.

Activities implemented

Over the course of its two-year existence, the Women@Renault Romania network has orchestrated numerous initiatives aimed at raising awareness among management and employees about the significance of gender diversity. These actions have sought to foster a shift in mindsets, bolster the development and recognition of women, and boost their self-confidence.

Success is an Attitude Event: This event aimed to empower and change perceptions by showcasing successful women both within and outside of Renault Group Romania. It featured inspiring role models and a panel discussion where accomplished women shared their experiences and insights on personal reinvention.

Webinars on Unconscious Bias D&I: Through open and sincere discussions, these webinars explored unconscious biases related to age, disability, and gender. By raising awareness of stereotypes and their influence on decision-making, the aim was to foster a more inclusive and creative work environment.

Get to know me as I am Awareness Campaign: This week-long campaign shared inspiring stories of resilience, perseverance, and courage in the face of biases and obstacles. Interviews with colleagues with disabilities, including Monica Radu, Romania's first Paralympic archery woman, served as powerful examples of overcoming challenges.

Promoting Role Models: The "8 March all year" campaign highlighted the contributions of women across various departments by showcasing the entire production process through their eyes. From design to manufacturing, logistics, quality, and support functions, it aimed to celebrate and recognize the valuable work of women in diverse roles.

Talent Development Actions: Mentorship programs were designed to support the professional growth of female talents in critical phases of their careers across different departments. Additionally, female leadership trainings organized at the corporate level focused on enhancing leadership skills for both emerging talents and women in managerial positions.

Valorisation Events: The Renault Group Romania Diversity Gala, held annually for the past two years, recognized and rewarded 23 individuals from all levels and divisions for their contributions to the company's success and commitment to supporting diversity. This prestigious event, attended by approximately 300 people, has become an annual tradition.

Community Involvement: She Leads Tomorrow, a

leadership program by Renault Group Romania and the Leaders Foundation, empowers young participants with essential skills for the future, fostering a strong sense of community. She Drives Science united 70 aspiring scientists and tech enthusiasts, exploring inspiring stories in science and technology careers.

Impact and outcomes

The first D&I survey, conducted from June 15th to July 7th, 2022, revealed significant insights. The majority of employees, 86%, feel comfortable and have a strong sense of belonging at work. The top priorities for Renault Group Romania's D&I focus are Gender, Age, Health issues or disability, and Social Origin, with slight variations in ranking. Employees highly appreciate the concrete actions on D&I by leadership, with approximately 73% acknowledging their visibility at both global and local levels.

Noteworthy achievements include annual events with 250 guests on average, featuring over 150 individuals, including successful women, recognized professionals, top management, and special guests. The Renault Romania Diversity Gala honored 23 colleagues for their contributions. The Women@Renault Romania network has grown significantly, with nearly 500 active members.

The CEO and HR Director actively support these initiatives, demonstrating their commitment to the Women@Renault Romania network and broader D&I efforts in Romania.

Lessons learned

The implementation of the Women@Renault Romania network was facilitated due to the fact that the actions organized were sponsored at the highest level in the enterprise. However, as was natural, a project that aims to change mentalities has faced, over time, precisely the resistance of these mentalities.

One challenge was that it is a network open to all professional categories, including women in manufacturing (blue collars). In the case of the latter, the challenge continues in terms of maintaining communication since they do not have access to the web platform and the intranet, and the communication is done only through the display or through the hierarchy and HRBP. Moreover, organizing events for them is conditional on shift work schedules.

Another challenge was the awarding of prizes at the Gala, for representatives from all departments and especially from all hierarchical levels, the same prize being awarded to a woman in managerial position and to a woman from the manufacturing line.

Championing Diversity for Success: A Conversation with Gabriela Crețu, Sales Vice President at Ursus Breweries

In a world where diversity and inclusion have become critical factors for success, businesses are seeking leaders who understand the transformative potential of embracing differences. Gabriela Crețu, the Sales Vice President at Ursus Breweries, is one such leader who has been at the forefront of driving diversity initiatives within the company. With her passion and commitment, Gabriela generously shares her expertise and insights on the transformative power of inclusion and the pivotal role of leadership in fostering diversity in the workplace.

As a leader in the beer industry, how do you see the role of diversity and inclusion in driving innovation and growth for Ursus Breweries?

Diversity and inclusion are beneficial in all areas of the business bringing different perspectives, using strengths of each member of the team, supporting work environment, talent acquisition and retention, addressing new consumers and new opportunities, driving efficiency, all these ensuring the sustainability of the business and its further leadership.

How does Ursus Breweries ensure that employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and included in the workplace, and what steps is the company taking to continuously improve in this area?

We initially focused on educating ourselves as leaders of the company and more recently extended this effort to the entire organization. This allowed us to establish a shared understanding of the challenges posed by diverse backgrounds. Once we gained this understanding, it became our responsibility to take action. Consequently, we conducted a comprehensive review of our company's processes to identify areas where diversity was lacking and implemented measures to address those gaps. We also developed a framework to actively support and promote diversity within our organization. Improving the work environment has been another important aspect of our efforts, and we prioritize continuous training for our leaders and managers.

In what ways does Ursus Breweries promote the representation of women in leadership positions, and what benefits does this bring to the organization?

I am proud to say that at Ursus Breweries, we have achieved a strong representation of women in leadership positions. Our



Executive Committee boasts a 40% female representation, which is above the company average. However, we acknowledge that there are specific areas such as Sales and Manufacturing where the percentage of women falls below our desired level.

Promoting women's representation is an integral part of our DE&I and Sustainability strategies. We have implemented various initiatives to address this issue, including mentorship programs, support for employees returning to work after maternity leave, endorsement of women in leadership roles, mandatory consideration of gender diversity in the recruitment process, and the customization of the work environment to support the needs of our diverse workforce.

What do women contribute to the business? In addition to a diverse range of skills and capabilities, women bring a unique perspective, empathy, varied management styles, and a touch of creativity and sensitivity.

How do you think the beer industry as a whole can do a better job of promoting diversity and inclusion, particularly when it comes to addressing some systemic challenges and biases?

First and foremost, we must unite our efforts and act collectively, positioning our brands and products as inclusive options for all. Brands also have a significant role to play in advancing this agenda and have the power to drive meaningful change in Romanian society.

How important is it for you to set an example as a leader in promoting diversity and inclusion within Ursus Breweries?

As the leader of a large team, my example has the potential to create a significant impact, not only on my team members but also on their families and ultimately on society. As previously mentioned, the Sales department lags behind in terms of women's representation in leadership roles. I am living proof that it is possible, and it is my mission to empower and support women in reaching these positions.

What exciting plans does Ursus Breweries have for promoting diversity and inclusion in the future, and how do you plan to make these plans a reality?

Diversity and inclusion cover a wide range of topics, and to effectively address them, we have chosen to focus on several key areas. These areas are women's equity, disabilities and disadvantaged backgrounds, LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and combating age discrimination. While we have common actions across these areas such as improving the work environment

and updating recruitment and HR policies, we also have specific initiatives tailored to each area. These include a young women recruitment program, a re-boarding program for individuals returning from parental leave or extended breaks, a women mentoring program for the Sales and Manufacturing departments, partnerships with NGOs to support disability and disadvantaged backgrounds, and a regional LGBTQ+ working group. We are also continuing awareness activities to foster understanding and acceptance. To ensure the success of these plans, we are involving the entire organization by calling for volunteers to assist in developing and implementing these activities. We are pleased to see an enthusiastic response from our employees thus far.

What advice would you give to other leaders who are just starting out on their own diversity and inclusion journeys, and what are some of the key lessons you have learned along the way?

Everything begins at the top, so the initial step is to educate and empower leaders and managers to effectively drive the diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda. Additionally, it is crucial to bring in individuals who have faced real challenges to engage in open conversations with the organization. Lastly, it is important to distribute the responsibility for diversity and inclusion throughout the entire organization, rather than confining it to specific areas such as HR or leadership.

Interview by Dana Oancea

Top management should be the quickest to challenge their biases and to understand what we can do to become inclusive

Cristina, why do you do the things you do?

I'd like for future generations to not have to go through the same hardships as too many of us before. For this to happen, we need to make it happen. I feel most purposeful when I get to see real change and progress, and I can see it being helpful for someone in the community. Challenges we 'sweep under the rug' or avoid addressing don't just fade away. Along with the dialogue / discourse, we need concrete action to turn our daily approach into an inclusive pursuit. We hardly even talk about the LGBT-QIA+ Community within organisations or in our society. The topic is still seen as 'taboo'. There is still a lot of misinformation going around. This breeds the ground for frequent discrimination, from offensive jokes or otherwise aggressive discourse to even acts of violence. This, in turn, perpetuates injustice and a lot of hurt. Within the organisational environment, this translates into inequality and sometimes abuse or other forms of discrimination.

I decided to come out after many years of witnessing how hard it can get for members in the community to find their peace.

On your personal website you mention you believe in the force of the questions that we choose to say. What is a question that's been important to you lately?

If I have to choose a single one, it would be: "Do we really grasp the real need for inclusion within organisations and its immediate, quantifiable benefits?" My experience so far tells me we're not quite there yet, and I say that from the viewpoint of the communities who are still being continuously marginalised and overlooked.

You describe your professional history as a narrative of strategic vision through people and about people. What have you learnt about yourself and about being human in the past years?

I learn something new every day, I'm a very curious being and I think every encounter is an opportunity to uncover a different perspective. Over the years, I've learned that it's never too late to find what is meaningful to you and gives you purpose. Then there are a lot of 'unknown' hardcore allies of the LGBTQIA+, not only in organisations, but also in society, and these are not the bystanders, they are the people who get involved. One last



Cristina Săracu is involved in consulting and volunteering projects, in both organisational and educational areas. In 2022 she founded Incluziune pe Bune [Inclusion for Real] – an NGO involved in promoting inclusion through concrete, coherent and impactful actions and projects. In this interview we go deeper into the topics of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in Romanian workplaces and pick her brain on the practical steps organisations can take towards implementing cohesive and applied strategies.

thing, a simple rule that comes very much in handy when you're trying to get a team to work effectively: "Treat others like you would like to be treated".

How would you describe the current state of LGBT+ inclusion in Romanian workplaces, and what are some of the challenges that individuals in the LGBT+ community face in the workplace?

Unfortunately, real inclusion is almost non-existent within organisations, except for a few foreign companies that have begun implementing cohesive projects. In the context of Romanian shareholding, discrimination is sadly a major issue. Within the vast majority of organisations, it is a topic we are still refusing to bring up and discuss.

You have started Inclusion for Real to help companies on their journey towards being more inclusive. What is your biggest challenge when discussing D&I with them and what do you think is the least understood thing about this?

The toughest challenge is the "not now" mindset – "We want to do it, just not now, it's not the right time", but it hardly ever is 'the right time'. Without giving it a shot, you can't know what's possible and what not. If you don't listen, there is no way to build even minimal knowledge on the topic and this is, sadly, where we are currently situated.

Why is it important for an organisation that finds itself at the beginning of this journey to understand bias in the workplace and the impact it has?

Support from top management is vital. Top management positions should be the quickest to challenge their own biases and to understand what we can do to become inclusive. This support coming from the level of top management helps inclusion become part of the core strategy. It's just as important to assign a person who can dedicate themselves to these projects entirely. It is a full-time job, if you truly wish to notice a real transformation in the area of organisational inclusion, and, much like any department, it requires resource allocation and budgeting.

For a company to be truly inclusive, it is not enough to make a statement regarding D&I, it needs to take concrete actions. What are some of the policies and practices that companies can put in place to support LGBT+ employees?

The first thing we should do is gather enough information about LGBTQIA+, in order to understand what we are discussing and why. Inclusive communication is a priority. Starting with the job application form or the interview, the candidate should be allowed to inform us on the pronouns they use from the get go: she/her, he/his, they/them, or any other pronouns or neo-pronouns.

During the interview, upon meeting the candidate, we shouldn't assume what names they'd like to go by, but rather ask them politely how they would like to be addressed to.

I wouldn't generalise policies and practices. In my experience, a customised approach can be of even greater help to the organisation adopting it. But in the context of coming up with an inclusion strategy and a plan, we should consider the identities, the domestic lives, or any relevant detail of the community members.

What gives you hope when it comes to LGBT+ inclusion in the Romanian organisational and societal landscape? Can you share any success stories or examples of companies in Romania that have implemented effective LGBT+ inclusion policies and practices?

What really gives me hope are the allies I've met over time in organisations. They are the ones making things happen, they 'walk the talk'. One of the first success stories I was happy to be a part of was that of Adina Alionte, at Societe Generale Global Solution Centre Romania. Adina has been building up for a few years now, and her results are tangible. What has me marvelling at her approach is her uninterrupted journey of understanding LGBTQIA+ related topics to the smallest details. And there are many other such extraordinary people, who have voluntarily taken on a project coordination role like this. There are nearly no organisations holding a dedicated D&I paid role in Romania, and by organisations I refer to companies holding hundreds or thousands of employees in Romania. Isn't it important enough to budget a job role for D&I?

What role do you see Romanian companies playing in promoting LGBT+ inclusion and acceptance in society, and what steps can they take to be leaders in this area?

Knowledge breeds acceptance and concrete, continuous action breeds change – practically, a new behaviour leads to inclusion.

Companies and other organisations (NGOs, universities, Public Administration, etc.) hold a crucial role in adopting inclusive approaches, whenever the latter become ingrained in the organisational culture and in their strategic approach. When discrimination of any kind is unacceptable in the workplace, society changes. Most of our behaviours are directly influenced by the environments we spend most time in. It is essential to address the LGBTQIA+ topic on an organisational level and to find concrete solutions, so that we can then track the progress and continue the process. When there's a will there's a way.

Interview by Ioana Bîrdu

IKEA's "Acceptance Starts at Home" campaign—a step closer to a more inclusive world



On the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT), IKEA aims to highlight its commitment to advocating for a fairer and more equal world, where individuals within the LGBT+ community feel welcomed, respected, and appreciated for their true selves. IKEA firmly believes that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, deserves fair treatment and equal opportunities. This year, on IDAHOT, IKEA SEE is launching the "Acceptance Starts at Home" campaign, which calls for greater inclusion and acceptance of the LGBT+ community at home, wherever home may be. This campaign is yet another step in IKEA's long-standing mission of standing up against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia.

About IKEA

The first IKEA company was founded by Ingvar Kamprad in 1943 in Småland, southern Sweden. What began as a small mail-order business in rural Sweden has since evolved into a renowned global home furnishing brand that offers affordability, design, and comfort to people worldwide. Despite its remarkable growth from humble origins, IKEA has remained steadfast in its vision: to create a better everyday life for the many people.

In Romania, the Swedish company operates under Ingka Group, which is a strategic partner in the IKEA franchise system. IKEA Romania has two stores in Bucharest, Baneasa and Pallady (with Pallady being the largest IKEA store in the South-Eastern Europe region), with another store in Timisoara set to welcome its first customers on June 8.

Diversity and Inclusion issue addressed

IKEA is a firm believer in the fact that everyone has the right to a place they can call home. And a home goes way beyond just four walls or a roof over your head. A home should also be a place where we feel safe and accepted, a place where we feel like we belong.

This year, to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia on May 17, IKEA South East Europe is launching the "Acceptance Starts at Home" campaign. "Acceptance Starts at Home" is a social

impact campaign, that aims to help the many people create compassionate, inclusive homes, and communities. The campaign comes as a natural continuation of IKEA's previous efforts in the region to facilitate better lives for the LGBT+ community. It is also the company's third campaign in a row calling for greater inclusion of LGBT+ people.

"Acceptance Starts at Home" is based on a recent IKEA SEE survey. The survey was carried out from April 8 to May 3, consisting of qualitative interviews and a quantitative online survey, among young LGBT+ population in four capital cities in SEE (Ljubljana, Zagreb, Bucharest, and Belgrade).

According to the survey, most of the young LGBT+ population does not feel fully welcomed and appreciated at home after disclosing their sexual orientation. They face various forms of non-acceptance. In 60% of cases, it is a question of subtle or non-verbal signs, such as shame of other members of the household. Young people from the LGBT+ community consider these subtle signs even more difficult than verbal signs or physical aggression.

When it comes to Romania, the survey showed that over 90% of the young LGBT+ population in Bucharest does not feel fully welcome and appreciated at home after disclosing their sexual orientation. Moreover, 84% LGBT+ people hide their sexual orientation or gender identity from their family members. This is why IKEA wants to do more and inspire people to make their homes and communities welcoming

places, defined by compassion and equality, that are open to all.

Planning & Objectives

“Acceptance Starts at Home” is an essential part in IKEA’s mission to plead for greater inclusion and acceptance at home and encouraging as many people as possible to do the same.

The campaign has two main objectives. First, IKEA aims to make the wider community aware of the problems faced by LGBT+ people, primarily young people after coming out.

Secondly, the company aims to encourage people to do more and become advocates for inclusion and make their homes and communities more welcoming, so that everyone, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, can feel included.

Activities implemented

IKEA’s efforts to be a strong ally to the LGBT+ community are constantly evolving and improving. In 2017, the company launched a global LGBT+ inclusion plan that aims to create a consistent way of working with LGBT+ inclusion across all Ingka Group organizations and countries.

Later, in 2020, IKEA expanded its global business commitment even further, to promote an inclusive culture that values individual differences, while also promoting diversity and equality. The company developed a global Equality Plan that reaches several layers: co-workers, business practices, and society as a whole. This plan, called the Ingka Equality Plan (FY20-24) is a testament to IKEA’s commitment to take a bold stand for equality for everyone and reflecting it in all of its practices.

The Ingka Equality Plan sets out a roadmap on how, as an employer, IKEA can reflect the many dimensions of its surrounding communities, including physical and mental abilities, age, nationality/ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

To this end, IKEA’s actions are divided to embrace all areas of diversity. For instance, with the help of the Ingka Includes survey, the company managed to collect quality data through a voluntary and anonymous self-identification survey. In return, the results are of crucial help when it comes

to measuring diversity performance at IKEA and inform corrective action at all levels of the organization.

Moreover, IKEA has been working for over a decade to ensure gender equality. Today, the company has reached gender-balanced leadership across top leadership and country retail management teams, and it is constantly expanding its approach on equal pay for work of equal value to include all ethnicities and other underrepresented groups where legally possible.

This year on IDAHOT, IKEA SEE launches the “Acceptance Starts at Home” campaign, calling for greater inclusion and acceptance of the LGBT+ community at home, wherever they are.

As part of this campaign, a rainbow flag will be raised in front of the IKEA stores in South East Europe region, in order to support the LGBT+ community. Also, in a bid to create the most inclusive work environment possible, the company sets out to provide its co-workers with additional education, to contribute to their education and prevent any unconscious biases about different identities. In cooperation with associations in the region, IKEA co-workers will have the chance to ask anything they are interested in, as part of the human libraries’ activity.

Last, but not least, for three years in a row IKEA Romania has been donating to associations that advocate for LGBT+ rights, such as Association Accept, hoping to enable them to make their places of work as pleasant as possible.

Impact and outcomes

At IKEA, the belief that equality is a basic human right, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is at the core of the company’s actions. Because IKEA’s vision has always been, from its early days, to create a better everyday life for the many people, the company plans to continue to use its voice, scale, and reach to send a loud and proud message about why it is important for all LGBT+ people to feel safe and free to be themselves.

Using its size and influence, IKEA constantly advocates for LGBT+ rights beyond the walls of the iconic blue box. With the help of other companies, civil society, IKEA co-workers and customers, IKEA is committed to be an inspiring force for positive change, by supporting legislation and investing

in education and awareness campaigns that tackle LGBT+ stereotypes.

The impact of IKEA’s efforts in this regard extends across many levels, one of which is the global LGBT+ inclusion plan, that ensures a workplace and environment that welcomes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

IKEA has also joined Workplace Pride Foundation and Stonewall’s Global Diversity Champions programme, organizations that are both focused on LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace. The company has also co-created and endorsed the UN Standards of Conduct on tackling discrimination against LGBT+ people in the workplace and in the community.

Last, but not least, IKEA is a proud member of Open for Business in 2020, a business coalition whose purpose is to advance LGBT+ inclusion and provide a response to the growing backlash against LGBT+ inclusion in many parts of the world.

Lessons learned

IKEA has always stood for the many people, not willing to discriminate, because equality is a human right and the company’s values are aligned to it. IKEA is committed to respect human rights throughout its operations, both internally and externally, because people deserve to feel at home, not just at IKEA, but everywhere.

In its journey of developing as a meaningful and trusted brand, IKEA has learned how important it is to create a fully inclusive work environment, while also contributing to a positive change in all areas of society. This is why LGBT+ inclusion at Ingka is about committing to creating an inclusive work environment, where all LGBT+ co-workers feel welcomed, respected, and appreciated for who they are, becoming aware of any unconscious biases towards people of different sexual orientations and gender identities and taking actions to minimize them, as well as creating an infrastructure that enables fair treatment of everybody, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The importance of considering intersectionality in the D&I efforts: A conversation with Iulian Stoian



Iulian Stoian is the Head of the Public Policies Department within the National Agency for the Roma, under the Government of Romania. He is a committed human rights activist who has volunteered for various NGOs advocating for vulnerable groups, including the LGBT and Roma minorities. In this interview, we had the opportunity to engage in a thought-provoking discussion with him, exploring topics such as intersectionality and his ongoing efforts to foster a more inclusive society.

Mr Stoian, what excites you about a new day?

The fact that we live in an open, imperfect, yet still perfectible democratic society, where we could bring a minor change. In a few words: to put some bricks to an acceptant society's edifice!

As a supporter and advocate of disadvantaged groups, including LGBTIQ+ and Roma minority, what does your effort look like in practice and what are the hardest walls you need to face?

My current position of civil servant is directing me to focus mostly on specialised training or mentorship for youth activists and other stakeholders, be they LGBTIQ+ and/or Roma or not. I also act as a volunteer in helping community-led organisations in their strategic planning and disseminating funding opportunities that are suitable for them. Most of my time, as anyone else, I take the opportunity to spread human rights-related messages, campaigns, initiatives, in short, I act as a multiplier of inclusion messages in social media. This is aimed at creating an alternative discourse, inclusive and respectful with the difference, to the widespread stereotypical and prejudicial public speech about minorities. These are the toughest walls we need to break every day, and this will require an entire 'army' of dedicated activists to combat the existing waves of hate...

How would you explain intersectionality to someone who's not familiar with the term and how are Roma people, and in particular the young, coping with it? Do you know any good practices or programmes that support them?

The concept of intersectionality is easy to explain while comparing someone's identity with... an onion! We all have layers of identity – from gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, citizenship, ethnicity(ies), to mother tongue, religious beliefs, disability, visible or not, political or civic affiliation, or level of education, age, personal backgrounds, residence etc. This sum of attributes might be expressed simultaneously or can influence us in very personal ways. Even musical tastes might place us in a particular category which is intersecting with other grounds, and such intersections might place us in a vulnerable group or other, or might predispose us to become victims of discrimination (multiple, intersectional), hate speech, or worse, hate crime motivated by stereotypes and prejudices. From this perspective, anyone is vulnerable, because the stereotypes and prejudices are feeding the hate mechanisms in ways we cannot predict. Even

the perceived affiliation with a minority group might place one in the position of victim of hate.

Most of the time, the coping mechanisms are related to the self-hate, or the hate of the self minority group someone is belonging to, in an effort to be accepted by the majority. This is visible, for example, in the case of Roma students accessing the affirmative action measures in education, which are finally denying their ethnicity, in an attempt to blend with the majority students.

Why is it important to consider intersectionality in the context of D&I efforts?

In today's society, when the concept of "dictatorship of political correctness" is widespread, we all need to learn and spread the simple definition: political correctness = respect for the other, as any of us are individuals with multiple identities. "You're against political correctness? You're against the concept of respecting the other!" This is a simple attitude that should be present in interpersonal communication, when interacting with those spreading or relativizing the hate while using the political correctness argument!

Can you share some examples of how individuals' intersecting identities can impact their experiences in the workplace, and how organisations can address these challenges?

Hate in the workplace is widespread and it is not affecting only the members of the vulnerable groups. For example, the moral harassment of women for not being in relationships, or women with challenges imposed by the standards of beauty, weight, or those with minority political views. Imagine a lesbian co-worker in a traditional-oriented team, which creates psychological pressure to attend the company's event with the "significant other", while all assume that this one is/should be a "he". All the frustrations she accumulates while deciding to come out or not in front of a team that informally expressed homophobic comments. That is why we all need to cultivate a culture of respect for diversity in order to create safe spaces for all. And this is not possible only with the company's set of values and statutes that is adopted formally, but it comes with a community of practice. Creating safe spaces for all minorities or for diversity in all its forms is paramount for a successful working place.

How can companies move beyond a "one-size-fits-all" approach to diversity and inclusion to create a more inclusive environment that takes into account individuals' intersecting identities?

Well, this could start with the adherence to a set of values, such as Diversity Charter, or enrolment of the company in global awareness raising campaigns, participating in thematic events; the job interview is another place where you can convey a message about the values a company are committed to; also, retreats where team members could be encouraged to show their hobbies, and share their interests and involve others! And encouraging the staff to attend events such as gay pride parades, sponsorship of such events, and informing the team we are supporting this event or another, and they are encouraged to attend: these are subtle ways of

In an older [interview](#), you said that Roma people were and will continue to be the constant losers of the transition game as long as children are not exposed to multiculturalism, to a diverse and more tolerant society. What kind of steps do you think schools and parents can take to educate their children on these matters?

Indeed. The lack of exposure to diversity during the Communist regime is paying off nowadays. Children are as 'sponges', absorbing equally hate and respect, depending on the chance they have in their families. Let's not forget that the discrimination is taught at home, replicated in school and the circle of friends, and 'validated' by the society. I met numerous members of the younger generation shamefully acknowledging their parents are racists or homophobic, but these are exceptions, as the Romanian school system is not ready to cultivate critical thinking in their students. We all will advance when we are

learning, both in school and families, the simple lesson of respect for the other.

What do you think is the role of the youth in creating an inclusive society and what does it mean to you to be a responsible member of the community?

The younger generation is more connected to the “progressive ideas”, such as diversity, democratic principles, equity and equality and the fact they have access to the humanity knowledge at a click distance is encouraging. The multiplying effect of social media is welcomed, provided that the youth are taught to recognize the hate speech, the stereotypical and prejudicial discourse and will be able to confront it in a non-violent manner. I strongly believe that modern technology will be of great help in learning the values of respect for diversity for the future generations!

What is something you would like Romanian policy makers and practitioners to change about how they think about Roma issues?

Well, as a policy maker and practitioner in this field, I might dare to recommend for each and everyone of us:

Be more aware of your own stereotypes and prejudices and don't let them influence your work or actions!

Confront prejudicial speech each and every time you are recognizing – be it in a document or in public discourse; even in your own discourse! Think critically!

Create a space for free expression for members of minority / vulnerable groups and do not ‘confiscate’/appropriate their speech! You are not an ally if you're dressing as a Roma woman and posting on social media, for example, but rather when you're offering your allocated time for speech! Be genuine!

You have an Akita dog, named Kara. What do you think dogs can teach us about love and acceptance?

Well, dogs with their loyal and affectionate nature are teaching us unconditional love, compassion and acceptance. They are standing by us when showing them a simple humane gesture. Dogs are helping humans to become better and are shaping the love and acceptance in our relationships with others.

Interview by Ioana Bîrdu

Kaufland's A.C.C.E.S. program—a step closer to a more inclusive world

Kaufland's A.C.C.E.S. (Employment of Candidates with Special Requirements and Developments) program aims to hire and successfully integrate people with disabilities into its team, focusing on three main pillars. Firstly, creating recruitment channels for people with disabilities. Secondly, implementing effective communication and internal training programs, including online courses on how to communicate with colleagues with disabilities and role-play workshops. And thirdly, adapting to the physical and mental needs of people with disabilities to become a more inclusive employer.



About Kaufland

Kaufland is a German hypermarket chain, part of the Schwarz Group, the leading retail chain in Europe by retail sales and one of the biggest employers present in Romania since 2005, with over 16.000 employees and more than 160 stores on the market. Kaufland obtained the “Top Employer” title in the last 8 consecutive years and works continuously towards ensuring employee and customer happiness and satisfaction, by providing quality products and services, while staying true to its values: performance, dynamism, and fairness.

Diversity and Inclusion issue addressed

In Romania, more than 890,000 people are affected by disabilities to varying degrees, although the actual figure is likely much higher. The vast majority of these individuals fail to integrate socially and professionally into the community, leading to negative effects on their quality of life and development. In 2019, Kaufland launched the A.C.C.E.S. program through a pilot phase, which aimed to address this issue. Impressed and inspired by the results of the pilot launch, Kaufland has decided to become a key ally of people with disabilities who are seeking a career. Currently, at each Kaufland Romania location, there is at least one employee with special needs, and the team includes 450 colleagues with disabilities. Additionally, another 500 varied roles are available across all Kaufland Romania stores. Through the A.C.C.E.S. program, Kaufland aims to combat the double burden faced by people with disabilities: the challenge of physical disadvantage and the persecution of social disadvantage.

Planning & Objectives

Community outreach has always been one of the main pillars of Kaufland's business, and the A.C.C.E.S. program is yet another way Kaufland wishes to bring value to the communities within it operates. The future of the program includes the following main objectives:

- Ensuring the integration of people with disabilities into the Kaufland team and developing an organizational culture based on accepting and encouraging diversity.
- Adapting Kaufland's workspaces to increase the inclusion capacity for people with disabilities, both employees and customers.
- Educating Kaufland team members, Kaufland customers and the society in general regarding inclusivity, by increasing the presence of people with disabilities among us. Thus, reducing the level of preconceptions associated with them.
- Transforming Kaufland into a reliable partner of people with disabilities, as well as of state institutions and associations whose activity is centered towards integrating people with special needs into society.
- The employment of more than 500 people with disabilities in the next period of time and the international expansion of the program in the Schwarz Group.

In addition to these objectives, Kaufland wishes to provide transportation for all the employees with disabilities and to implement the A.C.C.E.S. program in Moldova without any additional costs, after a complete analysis of the investments made in Romania and the way of working (tools used, changes, approach, etc.).

Kaufland also wishes to make its website more accessible

for people with disabilities by implementing a graphics and interactive augmented reality store map, website audit accessibility for blind and deaf people, Kaufland Card application audit accessibility for the blind, braille public space signage (toilets, offices, etc.), audio description within the common areas for the blind people (shop, toilets, access, etc.), and voice interpretation of online documents on its website.

Activities implemented

Recognizing the importance of fostering a welcoming and inclusive work environment for everyone, including people with disabilities, Kaufland focuses on providing the space, guidance and growth opportunities each employee needs. Additionally, Kaufland strives to provide people with disabilities access to normality, social life and financial independence, through the A.C.C.E.S. program.

The pilot stage of the project included finding and/or creating suitable positions for people with disabilities within Kaufland, starting with the recruitment process, as well as analyzing the team integration processes, in that way being able to identify the changes and solutions necessary for improving it.

The first step was to implement internal trainings for the Kaufland team at all company levels. Subsequently, Kaufland organized 7 events for recruiting and promoting the program in the 5 cities included in the pilot phase - Bucharest, Sibiu, Cluj, Timisoara and Craiova – complemented by a recruitment program supported by DGASPC, as well as the help of several associations and NGOs.

The conclusions drawn following the effective implementation of the program have been relevant to the evolution of the project. One of the most promising scenarios (employing people with locomotor disability as cashiers) bumped into the reality of the fact that the wheelchairs did not fit behind the cash registers as they were configured then, an issue Kaufland has solved by implement 13 cash registers for people with disabilities in 13 Kaufland stores.

Additional to becoming a signatory of the Romanian Diversity Charter and a funding corporate partner of the Romanian Diversity Chamber of Commerce and, Kaufland has also communicated the objectives of the A.C.C.E.S. program through brochures, posters, videos and dedicated radio spots, as well as articles and dedicated press releases.

In 2021, Kaufland launched the Accessibility Hackathon challenge, the largest hackathon dedicated to people with disabilities in Romania, with the aim to develop a tool to help people with disabilities better integrate into their workplaces. Forty-two teams have registered and 26 have made it into the final. They've benefited from mentoring from business leaders, social and tech professionals. The best project, the Vocalio app, dedicated to improving communication processes for people with speech and hearing impairment, won the \$16,000 grand prize.

In May of 2022, to celebrate the EU Diversity Month,

Kaufland has created a [unique series of video-interviews](#) with the beneficiaries of the A.C.C.E.S. program, where they had the chance to share their stories.

Over time, Kaufland has shown its support for Romanian sports competitions, celebrating performance. The BRD-Kaufland Wheelchair Tennis Open, the DHL Carpathian Marathon, the Wheelchair Basketball Tournament, the BERAFLOR Cup and the National Wheelchair Pool Competition are just a few of the sporting events Kaufland has supported in 2022.

Impact and outcomes

So far, one of the most impactful results has been the employees' almost immediate change of mentality after coming into contact with their new colleagues with disabilities, realizing the fact that they all carry, often without knowing it, a considerable amount of prejudice when it comes to those who are different from them. It then became obvious that the internal training for working alongside colleagues with disabilities is just as important as the recruitment effort itself, especially in a society that unfortunately often prefers to isolate instead of to integrate these people.

From 2019 until now, Kaufland has expanded its team with 450 employees with disabilities and has another 500 job opportunities available at the moment. On an average, Kaufland has 60 candidates with disabilities per month, and provides shopping carts for customers using wheelchairs in over 50 stores in Romania. So far, the retailer has invested 79.000 Euro in implementing 13 cash registers for employees in wheelchairs and for setting the best practices for the entire Schwarz Group.

In addition, Kaufland has partnered with several associations and NGOs and supported various events, campaigns and projects dedicated to integrating people with disabilities into the workplace and into society as a whole.

Lessons learned

Kaufland is committed to continuous evolution, and the valuable lessons and unique perspectives of each new colleague have led to the realization that there is much to learn about disability inclusion in the workplace. Kaufland firmly believes that everyone deserves the chance to succeed and wishes to lead by example, promoting acceptance of differences by remaining flexible and open-minded.

Creating a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplace requires a long-term commitment from leadership, employees, and stakeholders. It is an ongoing process that demands continuous learning, listening, and adaptation. To achieve this, Kaufland is addressing biases, fostering a culture of inclusion, prioritizing diversity in recruitment and hiring, providing training, and measuring progress. Kaufland's ultimate goal is to create a workplace culture that values and respects individuals from different backgrounds and experiences while taking steps to remove barriers to equal opportunities and fair treatment.

IBM's Journey in Fostering Neurodiversity and Inclusion

In this interview, we speak with Gabriella Pacso, IBM EMEA Growth Acceleration Leader and IBM Diversity & Inclusion Champion at IBM, about the importance of neurodiversity in diversity and inclusion. Gabriella shares insights on IBM's approach to neurodiversity, progress made, and accommodations for neurodiverse employees. We also discuss IBM's efforts to train managers and colleagues, raise awareness, and the business benefits of recruiting and retaining neurodiverse talent.



How does IBM define neurodiversity and why is it an important concept in the field of diversity and inclusion?

Welcoming neurodiversity means being inclusive of people who see, understand and think about the world differently. In IBM, we champion Neurodiversity, a concept where neurological differences born with or acquired over time are to be accepted and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include autism, attention deficit, hyperactivity, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, Tourette syndrome and other neurological differences.

Unfortunately, neurodiversity is not well understood by the public. More than 40 percent of autistic adults are unemployed and the gaps begin to form early. When neurodiverse children struggle in the school setting, too often they grow into adults who struggle to find their way in a world that doesn't understand their challenges or their potential. But that could be changing.

IBM has a 112 years long history of disability inclusion and neurodivergent leadership. In 1914 we hired our first employee with a disability. Diversity is not about simply checking a box – there is a strong business case for prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion, and advancing the neurodivergent community globally is an integral part of that.

One of our founders, Herman Hollerith, was supposedly neurodivergent. He earned an engineering degree from Columbia University at age 19, seven years later he invented the Punched Card Tabulator, and at age 32, merged his Tabulating Machine Company with the CTR Company that evolved into IBM.

How has IBM incorporated neurodiversity into its D&I initiatives, and what progress has the company made in this area?

It's important that we set that tone not only in what we do and say, but also how we say it. Our decision to shift from using "People with disabilities" (PwD) to the more inclusive terminology "People with Diverse Abilities" (PwDA) is one more step to an even more inclusive IBM. We recognize the important talent and contributions of neurodivergent IBMers to our business, our clients, and our communities. This talent pool brings different perspectives, backgrounds, and ways of working, making us a more competitive, diverse, and inclusive company.

That's why we are dedicated to hiring neurodivergent people through our Neurodiversity (ND) @ IBM global program that includes neurodivergent friendly hiring and development opportunities and neurodiversity training for all employees. IBM hired over 70 neurodivergent talent in the last 2 years, in eight countries, with ND enablement available to employees in more than 30 countries.

What are some examples of accommodations or adjustments that IBM has made in the workplace to better support neurodiverse employees?

We are focusing on two areas related to neurodiversity in hiring: making the workplace more accessible for neurodiverse employees and developing hiring models to bring more neurodiverse employees into IBM.

While we have a clear plan to hire neurodivergent employees in various locations around the world, one challenge is identifying locations that suit neurodivergent candidates. The design thinking model in place at many IBM locations tends to be noisy and ever-changing. Due to sensory processing disorders and sensitivities to certain environments, autistics may encounter difficulties thriving in agile office spaces. However, with simple accommodations such as noise-canceling headphones or making sure their desk isn't on a main hallway with a lot of traffic, they can adjust more quickly and feel more comfortable in these settings, leading to increased focus on their work.

A bigger challenge is creating an environment where the neurodiverse can successfully apply for opportunities across IBM. The goal is to have a neurodiverse hiring process fully integrated into the standard hiring process within the next few years. Nothing is ever perfect, but we want to make sure we're providing equal opportunities regardless of factors related to neurodiversity. IBM has a long tradition of welcoming people with diverse abilities, and we've developed a very structured process for onboarding people living with various types of disabilities, like vision or hearing loss. We need to make sure we reach that same standard of quality for neurodivergent candidates.

How does IBM train managers and colleagues to work effectively with neurodiverse employees and ensure their success in the workplace? What steps is IBM taking to raise awareness and reduce stigma surrounding neurodiversity in the workplace?

Our Be Equal campaign promotes progress, and celebrates plurality of mind and being an upstander, as a role model or an Ally. IBM has significantly bolstered employee education programs that strengthen IBMer advocacy for diverse communities by addressing sexism, racism, bias mitigation, allyship, covering, leading with inclusivity, and other related topics. IBMers can earn badges like the Be Equal Ambassador Badge and The Neurodiversity Ally Badge, if they demonstrate a level of volunteer effort and advocacy representation which support IBM's diversity, inclusion, talent, and business priorities. These badges are commercially available and being used by companies around the world to support their employees in standing up for equality. A Be Equal Ally is more than a badge you earn or a class you take. It's continuous self-education and progress. It's a lasting commitment to our IBM core value of personal responsibility to others.

Neurodiversity 101, our internal education course, was completed by more than 4,800 IBMers in 61 countries, exceeding its goal. IBM also maintains private channels,

on the Slack messaging system, for neurodivergent and autistic IBMers, providing safe spaces to share experiences and resources, and to ensure their voices are heard.

IBM celebrates each year the International Day of Persons with Disabilities with numerous learning opportunities around the world, including a live accessibility training session. Over 2,000 IBMers earned the Accessibility Advocate digital badge.

In 2022, we launched the disability confidence and neurodiversity acceptance workshops, to increase the outreach, hiring, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities and neurodivergent individuals globally.

What are the business benefits of recruiting and retaining neurodiverse individuals to the company?

All organizations have people who are neurodivergent or have other cognitive differences, regardless of whether there is active recruitment of this talent pool. Being inclusive of neurodiversity at work has numerous benefits for business. First, your organization will be able to attract and hire from a large, talented, and previously overlooked talent pool. Dyslexic people, for example, likely represent around 10% of the world population. Neurodivergent people are also naturally adept in many skills that are critical to the future to work, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and analytical skills. Working in cognitively diverse teams creates a competitive advantage.

Committing to neurodiversity inclusion can also boost an organization's public reputation, which in turn can improve customer loyalty. Research has found that 87% of consumers would prefer to buy from companies that hire people with disabilities.

Another advantage of a neurodiversity-inclusive environment is that you can create a culture that values all employees for who they are and let them bring their whole selves to work. By taking simple steps to ensure that everyone is comfortable at work, you can boost productivity and retention throughout your organization.

Recruiting and retaining neurodivergent people can also have a significant social impact. Giving neurodivergent people the chance to have a meaningful career can significantly contribute to their sense of identity and wellbeing. Organizations that are neurodiversity-inclusive can also have an economic impact. Employing autistic people can save society money by reducing lost productivity and the need for adult care.

Ultimately, everyone benefits from hiring neurodivergent people, from employees to entire communities. In conclusion, the business benefits are likely a combination of these elements: an opportunity to hire new talent, support existing employees, enhance your organization's brand, and benefit the wider community.

Interview by Dana Oancea

Building a Diverse and Inclusive Future: EY Romania's DE&I Strategy

As a leading global professional services organization, EY places a strong emphasis on empowering its people through a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). With a network of over 300,000 colleagues worldwide, the company recognizes the value of different perspectives and experiences in driving innovation and delivering valuable client outcomes. In this context, EY has developed a robust DE&I strategy aimed at fostering a culture of belonging and driving positive change both internally and externally.



About EY

At EY, our purpose is building a better working world. The insights and services we provide help to create long-term value for clients, people and society, and to build trust in the capital markets. In a world that's changing faster than ever, our purpose acts as our 'North Star' guiding our more than 300,000 people — providing the context and meaning for the work we do every day. Through our four integrated service lines — Assurance, Consulting, Strategy and Transactions, and Tax — and our deep sector knowledge, we help our clients to capitalize on new opportunities and assess and manage risk to deliver responsible growth. Our high-performing, multidisciplinary teams help them fulfill regulatory requirements, keep investors informed and meet stakeholder needs.

We believe a better working world is one where economic growth is sustainable and inclusive. We work continuously to improve the quality of all our services, investing in our people and innovation.

EY Romania is fully aligned to the global purpose and values and with a

presence in Romania ever since 1992, it provides through its more than 1000 employees integrated services in all four service lines to clients ranging from multinationals to local companies. Our offices are based in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara, Iasi and Chisinau.

Diversity and Inclusion Issues Addressed

At EY, we strive to empower our people with the right mindsets and skills to build careers as unique as they are. Our more than 300,000 colleagues form a powerful network, rallied behind the company's purpose of building a better working world. We believe that diversity and inclusiveness mean growth, and that the ability to share and learn from different perspectives is key to delivering the best results to our clients.

We think about diversity broadly, as we are a global organization, and we are committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, with heightened focus on social equity, in order to provide access to resources and opportunities for all and create more inclusive work environments.

At EY we are creating an inclusive culture to enable women's potential to truly transform society, build a better working world and uplift social equity.

We seek to empower a diverse workforce by enabling women and girls to reach their potential through education, mentorship, innovation and entrepreneurial opportunities. Creating a workforce that will support the closing of the gender gap and nurture an equitable environment.

Planning & Objectives

A critical component of the Global EY DE&I agenda concerns the advancement of women. Based on our experience and the momentum of our Women. Fast forward (WFF) platform, EY is guiding how every person – women, men, trans women, non-binary and gender non-conforming people – and organization – corporations, non-profits, governments, schools and others – across the world recognize and advance women through specific commitments designed to accelerate change.

The WFF platform consists of three main pillars. The first pillar focuses on women entrepreneurs and includes the

EY Entrepreneurial Winning Women program, which is a community of almost 600 women founders working on a variety of projects, such as finding cures for diseases and protecting companies from cyber threats. The second pillar focuses on women in business and includes the EY Women Athletes Business Network, which celebrates the unique leadership skills of female athletes. Since 2016, EY has hired 19 Olympians and elite athletes, and you can learn how their success on the playing field translates to success in the boardroom. The third pillar is women and technology, and includes the Women in Technology (WiT) program, which aims to close the gender gap in technology and create an environment where girls and women are encouraged to enter, stay and thrive in the tech sector.

Accelerating equality is an economic imperative that creates higher growth, increased prosperity and stronger communities. This acceleration is key to building a better working world and helping our stakeholders to challenge: what more can they do to ensure that #SheBelongs?

Locally, at EY Romania we are fully aligned with the global direction and platforms. Furthermore, to ensure we cascade in practice the global mission we strive to ensure we are recognized as the most diverse and inclusive organization in our industry, by our people, our clients and within the market.

Our DE&I strategy for gender equality is founded on three strategic pillars. The first pillar is focused on ensuring that women have fair representation in our existing talent pools, including opportunities for development, promotions, and ratings. The second pillar is aimed at maintaining and growing female representation across all ranks and service lines, with a commitment to no regression. Lastly, our hiring targets at every rank must meet current quotas and contribute to a steady increase in the number of

women across all levels, ensuring that there is no gender dilution in our talent pools.

Activities Implemented

DE&I progress is thoroughly measured through the company's Global DE&I Tracker, a tool that tracks progress with consistent diversity and inclusion metrics and reporting across the EY organization, including gender.

We use employee listening tools, such as the EY People Pulse Survey, to better understand how people feel and what they need. We also use this tool to look at differences between demographic groups, including gender, to create consistent experiences for women and men.

Our pool of Partners, Principals, Executive Directors, and Directors (PPEDD) has set actionable goals to achieve diversity. These include intentionally building a diverse team to leverage the power of different perspectives and create equitable, visible opportunities and roles within the team, including mobility opportunities. They aim to create a culture of trust, belonging and openness with their teams that will inspire and engage people to consult with each other and feel valued for their differences, recognized for their contributions and perform at their best. Additionally, they are committed to supporting EY's diversity, inclusiveness, and equity goals by actively hiring, engaging, developing, and advancing a diverse mix of people across a wide range of differences, experiences, and backgrounds.

Last but not least, in 2022, EY Global has implemented a standard pay equity analysis methodology across all locations, ensuring that each member firm uses a consistent methodology to assess pay levels for all genders.

Impact and Outcomes

We are seeing positive results in our efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity at EY. Globally, women now make up 48% of our workforce, with 33%

represented in our top decision-making body. Over the past three years, we have seen an increase in the number of women in senior ranks from 26% to 28%, as well as an increase in women Partners and Principals from 22% to 24%. Our overall attrition rate for women has been 1-2% lower than for men. Locally, our year-to-date female retention percentage is 76.1%, and our female promotions percentage is 68.9%. Women also represent 60.8% of our total number of Partners, Principals, Executive Directors, and Directors.

Lessons Learned

EY is committed to accelerating gender equality in the workplace. We are proud of the steady progress we have achieved so far, but we will continue using our collective voice, as well as the tools and resources at our disposal, to address systemic disparities and call for change.

Everyday #SheBelongs

EY calls on all EY people and networks to make sure that #SheBelongs. We believe that gender equality is not a problem to solve; rather gender equality is the solution to business and society's most complex challenges. This year we celebrated one of these special days, International Women's Day, externally and across our organization globally – to drive awareness of the importance of gender equality.

By thinking differently, acting differently and engaging differently we can all help ensure that #SheBelongs. #SheBelongs is more than a hashtag – it's a reminder that today more than ever, women belong at all levels of decision-making. We are proud to take an active role in advocating for women and leading by example so that #SheBelongs.

We believe that small actions really do make a difference, as each of us can, in turn, inspire others to act. Today and every day – don't wait. Join us and let's progress #WomenFastforward.

Insights on Data-Driven Diversity Management: An Interview with Julia Kreyler-Valsky, co-founder of Inclusion Indicator

As a passionate advocate for evidence-based diversity management, Julia Kreyler-Valsky co-founded the Inclusion Indicator with the goal of helping organizations leverage their data to become more inclusive. With a love for analyzing and interpreting data, Julia is committed to providing valuable insights that drive measurable change. In this interview, Julia generously shares her expertise and insights on data-driven diversity management.



What role do you think data and metrics play in assessing and improving diversity and inclusion in the workplace?

A vital role, no doubt about that. My partner Sonny always says, “if you can’t measure inclusion, you can’t manage inclusion”. The analysis of the status quo, which should always be the basis for any strategy development regarding D&I, is not possible without data. Also, the definition of an ideal outcome and the tracking of success or failure need metrics.

Why do you think so few companies currently measure diversity, and what do you think needs to change for this to become more widespread?

Many face a data dilemma: what can be regarded as datum, where do I find data sources and how are certain indicators connected to inclusive outcomes? Evidence-based work requires some definitory efforts and skills. It is not rocket science, but a new way of approaching D&I matters.

In your experience, what are some common challenges that companies face when trying to assess and manage diversity?

Many miss the most crucial first step: to define, what diversity and inclusion mean to them, in their specific corporate environment. What dimensions of diversity are relevant, and which fields of action they want to target. Instead, they fall prey to the famous action bias and just do something, anything really, that has to do with D&I in the broadest sense of the terms. Another challenge many companies face is to mainstream diversity and inclusion to all relevant areas in the organization, e.g. communications or strategy.

How can companies go beyond simply tracking diversity numbers and create meaningful change in terms of building a more diverse and inclusive culture?

One successful way is to follow experimental approaches when setting D&I measures. You can pilot certain measures, define the measuring unit of success beforehand – be it more females in leadership, higher sales, better team collaboration, higher motivational rates amongst employees etc. – and implement in small steps first. Then, you follow iterative circles and measure outcomes, learn from them and adapt measures accordingly. Accompanying communication is key to support and drive cultural change.

What recommendations would you give to companies who are looking to better measure their success in D&I initiatives?

Just do it! Bring all relevant stakeholders to the table and first define what it is exactly what you want to measure and how. Is data available or do you need to define indicators and variables? Be sure about the reliability and validity when measuring these variables. And, very importantly, have a clear data ownership and accountability framework in place.

What role do you think leadership plays in promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and how can leaders be held accountable for progress in this area?

Leaders play a crucial role in building an inclusive workplace. They need to mean it and have the right mindset, a pledge to fairness, excellence, and transparency if you will. In a nutshell, they need to understand the power of inclusion and walk the talk.

Interview by Dana Oancea

EU Diversity Month at Edenred: Celebrating Differences and Fostering Inclusion

Since 2021, Edenred has dedicated the month of May to celebrating diversity. The initiative was initially launched by the Romanian team and has since expanded across the network. Its primary goal is to foster an inclusive and diverse work environment that respects, values, and includes all employees, enabling them to thrive and achieve their full potential.



About Edenred

Edenred is a leading digital platform that provides services and payment solutions to millions of people worldwide. With a presence in 45 countries, Edenred connects 52 million users, 2 million partner merchants, and 950,000 corporate clients.

The platform offers a range of specific-purpose payment solutions that cater to various needs, including meal benefits, incentives like gift cards and employee engagement platforms, mobility solutions such as multi-energy, maintenance, toll, parking, and commuter options, and corporate payments using virtual cards.

The primary goal of Edenred is to enrich connections and enhance the well-being and purchasing power of its users, while also making companies more attractive and efficient. Additionally, the platform aims to vitalize the employment market and the local economy and provide access to healthier food, environmentally friendly products, and softer mobility solutions.

Edenred's 10,000 employees are committed to building a connected ecosystem for the world of work that is safer, more efficient, and more responsible every day.

Diversity and inclusion issue addressed

The Diversity Month at Edenred encompasses a range of engaging activities and initiatives designed to promote inclusivity and diversity in the workplace. These include workshops and training sessions focused on addressing unconscious bias, enhancing cultural awareness, and encouraging the use of inclusive language.

The program also aims to foster an environment that supports the recruitment and retention of diverse talent, facilitates the formation

of employee resource groups, and encourages open dialogue and feedback.

As a part of Edenred's commitment to creating an inclusive workplace, all employees receive Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) training. Additionally, the group's Code of Ethics incorporates various aspects of D&I, serving as a guideline for employees to promote a culture of mutual respect, growth, and inclusivity. The principles of non-discrimination and the right to respect and human dignity are at the core of Edenred's Human Resources policy.

Planning & Objectives

Edenred's approach to Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) focuses on promoting diversity across different demographics, including gender, age, and experience. The company recognizes the importance of creating a culture of inclusivity and has implemented various programs and initiatives to achieve this goal.

In Romania, this year's edition of the Diversity Month is centered around parenting. As a significant portion of Edenred's employees are parents, the initiative aims to raise awareness and promote a supportive workplace for working parents. Additionally, the company presents weekly "inclusion pills," which feature best practices and campaigns focused on D&I in a concise and accessible format, making it easier for employees to stay informed and engaged.

Edenred's efforts towards D&I align with its core values of promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace, where employees feel respected, valued, and supported. The company recognizes that a diverse workforce leads to greater creativity, innovation, and productivity, and is committed to fostering an environment that encourages diversity and inclusivity at all levels.

Activities implemented & Impact and Outcomes

To further support working parents, Edenred has launched the Parents Group @Edenred. This initiative aims to include parents in all the company's activities and events, helping them stay connected with the company and fostering a supportive workplace for parents.

The Parents Group @Edenred features an induction program for colleagues returning from maternity/paternity leave. Often, employees returning from parental leave can feel disconnected from the flow of the company, and returning can be complicated. The induction program helps to ease the transition and provides support during this crucial time.

Moreover, the group invites employees on parental leave to the company's most important events, such as kickoffs or the annual team-building. The Parents Group also organizes events and workshops dedicated to children and parents. For instance, there will be a workshop for parents that addresses the topic of bullying, enabling them to better manage this phenomenon. Additionally, a child-friendly relaxation area with a library of books on inclusion will be set up.

One of the significant initiatives undertaken by the Parents Group @Edenred is allowing children to come to the office if their parents do not have childcare, in case of emergency reasons. Moreover, the company celebrates "Take Your Child to Work Day" during the summer vacation, providing an opportunity for children to experience their parents' work environment.

At the end of May, the company will launch a drawing contest for children of employees, with the theme "The world around through the eyes of your child," celebrating International Children's Day

on June 1st.

As part of the Diversity Month, an internal video will be filmed to showcase how easily we label ourselves as people and how important inclusion and a safe environment are for each of us. The video will be promoted among colleagues and on social media, raising awareness and encouraging dialogue around the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Through the Parents Group @Edenred and other initiatives, the company demonstrates its commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace, supporting working parents, and creating a supportive environment for all employees.

Lessons learned

As a result of our efforts, we have seen an increase in employee engagement and satisfaction, as well as a more diverse workforce. This has led to a stronger company culture, where everyone feels a sense of belonging and is encouraged to bring their whole selves to work.

We have also seen that an inclusive environment fosters innovation and creativity, as people from diverse backgrounds bring unique perspectives and ideas to the table. This is why we believe that promoting diversity and inclusion is not only the right thing to do, but also a key driver of business success.

In addition to the benefits for the company and employees, we believe that promoting diversity and inclusion is also a responsibility we have as a corporate citizen. By setting an example and creating a more inclusive environment, we hope to contribute to a more equitable and just society as a whole.

Exploring Diversity and Inclusion with Simona Popovici, HR Executive Director at Renault Group Romania

In this interview, we have the honor of speaking with Simona Popovici, HR Executive Director at Renault Group Romania. With an impressive background in different working environments, Simona brings a wealth of expertise and insights on the pivotal role of diversity and inclusion in driving organizational success and fostering innovation. Her international mindset and experience working across diverse cultures and geographies have equipped her with cultural agility and a strong commitment to embracing diversity.

Simona, how does Renault Group Romania go about making sure that everyone feels included and valued at work?

It may sound like a classic, but in fact, it's all about "saying what you do and doing what you say." With this in mind, our aim is to provide a workplace in which everyone feels included, respected, and valued, free from all forms of discrimination. Everything begins with our values and working principles, which have been translated into easily understandable policies, procedures, and ways of working that can be followed and measured. Examples of these include the Zero Discrimination policy, the Code of Conduct, and the Recruitment process. We acknowledge that we are not perfect, but when we make mistakes, we take responsibility, correct them, engage in discussions, learn, make improvements, and move forward. It's an ongoing journey of learning and growth.

Can you give us an example of a program or event that Renault Group Romania has put on to promote D&I? How did people respond to it?

We have implemented several programs to promote diversity and inclusion and integrate them into our company's DNA. One notable initiative is the Women@Renault Romania network. Through this project, Renault Group Romania aims to foster gender diversity as a performance enhancer and enhance the representation of women across all trades and levels.

Women@Renault Romania strives to boost women's confidence in their abilities, challenge gender diversity perceptions by raising awareness among managers and employees, enhance the



attractiveness of the automotive industry for women, recognize and value women within Renault Group Romania, nurture female talent, and facilitate the exchange of ideas.

At the organizational level, our strategic objective is to achieve gender balance and increase the number of women in key positions. For the past three years, our recruitment efforts have resulted in a balanced ratio of 50 females to 50 males.

How does leadership support for diversity and inclusion initiatives impact employee engagement, retention, and overall satisfaction within the workplace?

Our engagement numbers are showing improvement, and we have observed a positive correlation between higher inclusion scores and higher engagement scores. We firmly believe that strong commitment to this matter at the highest level of the company is crucial for its overall success.

When leaders act with integrity and demonstrate emotional intelligence, they are more likely to inspire our people. Involving their team in the decision-making process helps enhance engagement and retention rates within the organization. Embracing diverse and inclusive values leads to greater employee satisfaction. Empowered employees are more likely to find happiness in their work environment, promoting their confidence and generating innovative ideas.

When people ask me about my perspective on this topic, I often share that diversity is power. It represents the power of embracing one's true self, fostering creativity, productivity, happiness, and overall well-being in all aspects of life. The world is inherently diverse, and by acknowledging and celebrating this diversity, we tap into inner strengths that help us thrive. Being diverse allows us to reflect the world around us and draw strength from it.

How do you know if you're making progress in promoting diversity and inclusion at Renault Group Romania? Are there any metrics or goals that you're working towards?

We prioritize pragmatism and practicality in our approach. Our objective is to have quantitative reference data to monitor the progress and outcomes of our diversity initiatives. To facilitate this, we maintain a library of reports that enable us to track various data points, including gender and age distribution, gender balance in recruitment and pay, and other relevant metrics. These reports inform our action plans to enhance diversity, and we discuss the findings at the highest levels of our organization, taking necessary measures as required.

In addition to quantitative measurement, we also recognize the importance of qualitative assessment. To gauge the impact of our actions, we have implemented a listening tool called Glint. This tool allows us to gather feedback from our employees on an annual basis, providing valuable insights.

We are committed to promoting inclusive behavior among all employees through mandatory training programs. We closely monitor the number of employees who have undergone training and conduct follow-up campaigns to encourage participation from all members of our workforce.

Furthermore, we adhere to regulatory requirements pertaining to Diversity and Inclusion. It is mandatory for every employee, regardless of their hierarchical position, to uphold the correct behaviors outlined in the Diversity Charter.

What do you think are some of the biggest challenges facing the automotive industry when it comes to diversity and inclusion, and how can these challenges be addressed?

In terms of inclusion, I think the most difficult to address are unconscious biases. We need to work with ourselves and become a little more aware and involved in this part of diversity, to value the benefits it can bring and, finally, to create a more inclusive environment so that biases disappear naturally. It takes time and sustained and conscious effort.

How do you see the role of diversity and inclusion evolving within the automotive industry in the coming years, and what strategies do you believe will be most effective in promoting progress and positive change?

In the rapidly changing automotive industry, characterized by technological advancements and evolving consumer demands, the embrace of diversity and inclusion has become increasingly critical. Diversity brings about power and cohesion, enabling us to achieve more collectively, and it holds significant value. I firmly believe that each of us has a unique place within a specific timeframe, where individuals with the right skills, motivation, and profile can thrive. It is essential to discover our purpose, find our rightful place, and experience fulfillment in our work.

I strongly advocate for transparent and equitable recruitment practices in all aspects. By fostering a workplace that values and respects diversity, companies can attract and retain top talent while gaining deeper insights into their customer base. Such an inclusive environment allows organizations to better understand and serve their diverse customer segments.

Interview by Dana Oancea

Awareness campaign: In Mega Image, we label products, not people.

At Mega Image, we strive to act with confidence and ensure that every colleague feels accepted and comfortable at work. We are committed to building an inclusive community that values diversity. This campaign is a key part of our D&I strategy, which aims to create a work environment where everyone can be themselves and reach their full potential. Alongside other initiatives such as signing the Romanian Diversity Charter, the #Megacom-munity promotes tolerance, respect, trust, and recognition every day. We believe in capitalizing on our differences and competencies to make our team stronger.



About Mega Image

Mega Image was founded in 1995 and is part of the Ahold Delhaize group. Our network currently includes over 900 stores across the country, 3 warehouses, and one headquarters in Bucharest. We are one of the largest retailers in Romania, with over 12,000 employees. We are guided daily by the values of integrity, courage, teamwork, care, and humor.

In #MegaCommunity, we focus on the power of “together” and caring for people through concrete actions and projects dedicated to our 12,000 #Megacollegues across the country. We believe that when we are together, we are Mega!

We are committed to creating an inclusive work environment where every colleague feels valued and has equal opportunities for growth and development. For almost 28 years, we have emphasized recognition of merit, professional development, benefit packages, and special discounts.

In 2023, Mega Image obtained the Top Employer certification granted by the Top Employers Institute, the world’s leading player in the field of certifications for excellent conditions offered to employees. The company achieved the best performance in aligning HR objectives with those of the business. This certification validates Mega Image’s efforts and involvement in actions and initiatives created specifically for our 12,000 employees in #ComunitateaMega.

Diversity and Inclusion issues addressed

Mega Image aims to become an employer of choice in the food retail industry and be perceived as a reliable partner with a people-oriented approach. We strive to build an inclusive community where diversity is appreciated. Through our Employer Branding program, which is integrated into our Diversity & Inclusion strategy, we aim to create a sense of belonging for our community and foster an inclusive mentality. We want everyone to feel accepted, comfortable, appreciated, and able to fully express their potential, regardless of gender, age, religion, nationality, social status, or disability.

Planning and objectives

The campaign is part of the “Mega for All” umbrella program, which is dedicated to Diversity and Inclusion and includes all our initiatives in this area. The objective of this campaign, which was coordinated by the Employee Experience Team, was to raise awareness about D&I and offer our employees the necessary tools to understand and discuss related topics.

Internally, we aimed to start a dialogue with our audience by defining the concepts of Diversity & Inclusion, unconscious biases, and stereotypes, in order to encourage an inclusive way of thinking and acting. We were aware of the risk of labeling people, whether consciously or unconsciously, as this goes against our values as a retailer.

In our team, we have colleagues with hearing disabilities, who are of vulnerable ages, or have diverse social statuses, and have had to overcome challenges of being treated differently and not being considered capable of interacting with customers. Therefore, we focused our attention on the following audience segments:

- People with hearing disabilities, who already form a micro-community in our Cluj Napoca stores
- Young people, through the implementation of a global program for employees under the age of 30
- Risk categories of social exclusion, with limited financial resources, through

our support of education via the “la Bacul cu Mega” program (which promotes the final high school exam) and Mega Image Scholarships (dedicated to employees’ children who have shown outstanding performance in school, arts, or sports).

The campaign was set for a period of 1 year for awareness and 2 years for roll-out. During the planning phase, an interdepartmental team was created with representatives from HR, Operations, Legal, and Marketing to discuss opportunities and activities, as well as a D&I council.

The campaign had three phases: the Teasing Launch, which involved a series of messages informing the Mega Community about what Diversity & Inclusion means, what biases and stereotypes are, and which are the vulnerable audience categories; the Revealing Phase, which involved messages communicated through all internal communication channels (e-mail, Intranet, TV network), a dedicated page on the Intranet, and the Launch of the True Stories Phase, which was dedicated to sharing inspiring examples of our colleagues from all working areas who have overcome biases.

Activities implemented

During the teasing phase, we launched a dialogue in the Mega Community by asking “What is Diversity?” and “What is Inclusion?” in the form of a contest. This was communicated via email, the intranet platform, and the TV network. We received over 130 answers and chose 20 winners who were awarded with own-brand products to support the concept of diversity & inclusion.

Based on this, during the revealing phase, we defined the concepts of Diversity and Inclusion in Mega Image and communicated the company’s commitment to these values. The goal was to support the process of awareness-raising among the Mega Community to overcome biases and stereotypes and to encourage accepting the differences that make us unique, fostering inclusive and tolerant behavior.

The Employee Experience Team, which coordinates the Employer Branding program and the Diversity & Inclusion strategy, presented the campaign slogan, “In Mega Image, we label products, not people!”, a promise made to ourselves and to those around us. We also revealed a series of visuals inspired by the daily activities of the business, which were promoted on all communication channels (email, intranet, TV network, and printed posters).

The campaign included the launch of an online event series called “Community Talks,” which created a safe and comfortable space for each employee to express their opinions on topics related to diversity and inclusion, exploring stereotypes and biases. All the initiatives were made available in the dedicated section of the Intranet.

The final phase, True Stories from Mega Image, consisted of a dedicated video and articles in the internal magazine, Community Journal, featuring stories from colleagues who, through their daily activities, had overcome stereotypes and biases. These included colleagues from stores and warehouses who had hearing disabilities, were of a different nationality, were the youngest or oldest member of the company, or had roles that people considered not to be designed for their gender.

Furthermore, the company signed the Romanian Diversity Charter and, paying attention to the socio-economic context and being aware of the conflict in Ukraine, we actively

supported refugees who arrived in our country. The support took the form of financial aid, volunteering through the “12 Acts of Kindness” internal volunteering program, and recruitment and integration of Ukrainian citizens into our team.

Over a year, the company welcomed the first colleagues of non-EU nationalities, with over 220 people from Nepal arriving to work in our stores and warehouses. We delivered an ethical training and guide for warehouse managers who were adding these colleagues to their teams. We welcomed our new colleagues with joy and warmth, creating a dedicated video featuring them that was sent throughout the company. In addition, the extraordinary efforts of two colleagues from Nepal were recognized during the warehouses’ annual recognition event.

Impact and outcomes

The main outcome was that in 2022, the score recorded for the “Inclusive Workplace” section of the annual internal engagement survey increased by two percent compared to 2021. We sent over 90 communications, newsletters, and dedicated articles, created a section on the intranet, and also added a dedicated section in the internal magazine with materials about the initiatives developed and stories of colleagues who have overcome biases.

We organized 5 events called “Community Talks”, which were attended by over 2,500 employees. The topics addressed were domestic violence (with guest speakers from the Executive Committee, A.L.E.G. Association from Sibiu, and journalists from “Decat o revista”), fair treatment at work, overcoming biases and stereotypes in the case of categories at risk of social exclusion (people with disabilities, where we invited Light into Europe Foundation), Pandemic vs. War: The Impact of the Social Context on Women (with guest speakers from the Executive Committee, She is Mom platform, and a psychotherapist), and responsible sustainability behavior (with guest speakers from the Executive Committee and Technical Department).

Also, colleagues with hearing disability were included in our EVP video and a dedicated section to Diversity and Inclusion was created in the new career site, [Cariera ta la Mega Image | Mega Image \(mega-image.ro\)](https://cariera.ta.la.mega-image.ro).

Lesson learned

Through all the initiatives we have carried out, we demonstrate our care for the employees and the communities in which we are present, and our concern for creating a comfortable environment through relevant and creative ways. Every day, we learn from the examples encountered in the Mega Community that prejudices can be overcome. We need to be tolerant, take care of each other, and act from a fair and inclusive perspective.

With transparent and continuous communication, we can change the mentalities and ways of acting of our colleagues and customers, and show that each individual must be valued for their uniqueness and helped to easily integrate into a different culture or professional environment. Together, we are Mega, and together, we can offer each individual a chance for a better quality of life!

IBM fosters a culture of conscious LGBTQ+ inclusion and active allyship

Standing up for diversity and inclusion in the workplace is part of who we are as a company and have been since our founding. For more than a century, IBM has been a progressive leader in diversity, advocacy and innovation. It is an integral part of our corporate culture and values.



About IBM

Inclusion is vital for our business and society. At IBM, we drive real progress by valuing and promoting individual differences while identifying barriers and creating equitable advancement opportunities for all stakeholders. We continuously evolve to be more inclusive, acting as the catalyst of systemic change for the world. Purpose and culture yield powerful and sustainable outcomes, motivating us to do our best work and bring our authentic selves to work. We foster conscious inclusion and active allyship, empowering every IBMer to make a positive impact on society.

Diversity and Inclusion issue addressed.

Individual LGBTQ+ lives, families, and experiences are all unique. What brings the LGBTQ+ community together is less a shared identity and more a shared struggle for acceptance and equality, with each segment of the community experiencing the struggle differently.

In some countries, criminalization continues to force LGBTQ+ communities to live underground and in the closet. In other places, advocacy and education have spurred significant progress. From legalizing same-sex marriage and adoption to writing equality into their constitutions, more than 150 countries now offer some form of legal protection for [LGBT+ people](#).

To gain valuable insights from the experiences and identities of the LGBTQ+ community, the IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV) partnered with Out & Equal and Workplace Pride to host the first Global LGBTQ+ Innovation Jam in April 2021. The findings of the event are captured in the [“Striving for Authenticity”](#) report, co-authored by IBM and Out & Equal, released in June 2021.

According to the [National Center for Transgender Equality](#), more than one in four transgender people have

lost a job due to bias, and more than three-fourths have experienced some form of workplace discrimination. As a result, transgender people see fewer opportunities for professional advancement.

Planning and Objectives

IBM is committed to provide a safe and welcoming environment to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and non-binary individuals. Our success in creating an inclusive culture has allowed us to attract and retain valuable talent.

Through our D&I journey at IBM, our goal is to provide a culture of inclusion and belonging for all IBMers. The purpose is to establish trust among IBMers by creating a more diverse workforce, cultivating a flexible work environment, enabling an inclusive culture, and advocating for equity, both inside and outside IBM.

We are channelling all our learning into outcome-oriented, rigorous actions focused on four strategic areas: advocacy for systemic change, allyship through training and support, employee experiences that champion diversity, and accountability through data transparency and AI-driven actions at every level of our company.

Activities implemented.

At IBM, we are committed to drive meaningful actions and create opportunities for diverse groups around the world. Here are some examples of our global initiatives for LGBTQ+ inclusion:

1. Our Be Equal campaign promotes, progress, and celebrates plurality of mind and being an upstander, as a role model or an Ally. IBM has significantly bolstered employee education programs that strengthen IBMer advocacy for diverse communities by addressing sexism, racism, bias mitigation, allyship, covering, leading with inclusivity, and other related topics. IBMers can earn

badges like the Be Equal Ambassador Badge and LGBTQ+ Ally Championship Badge, if they demonstrate a level of volunteer effort and advocacy representation which support IBM's diversity, inclusion, talent, and business priorities.

2. Since launching our [Gender Transition in the Global Workplace](#) framework and corresponding white paper in 2017, developed in partnership with the Human Rights Campaign, IBM has continued to evolve its support of transgender employees. Not all trans and nonbinary employees are able to change their legal name, so IBM updated its internal systems in 2021 to offer IBMers the option to use their chosen name as the default, unless there is a legal/business need for a legal name.

3. The Working Positively initiative, in partnership with SAP, aims to remove the stigma of HIV-positive employees and create awareness that this disease does not just impact the LGBTQ+ community but all communities. #workingpositively advanced a global effort through which more than 200 organizations have committed to a stigma- and discrimination-free workplace for employees living with HIV and/or other diseases. IBM won the Cultural Vistas Award in 2021 for this initiative.

4. At IBM, we provide the opportunity for employees to self-identify as LGBTQ+ to better understand the makeup of our workforce. By employees self-identifying, we can leverage the data and create solutions and network opportunities for our employees and continue to build a successful company. Today we have Self ID in 40 countries worldwide and we continue to update our Self ID options to be aligned to marketplace best practice.

5. IBM is committed to recruiting and developing employees from all backgrounds and fosters greater inclusion with our Business Resource Groups (BRGs), focused on specific IBMer communities. IBM also has a Senior Leader Council, co-chairs, and D&I Leadership Council leaders to support the objectives set in the annual strategy with the respective community. We have three global communities: women; people with diverse abilities (PwDA), including our neurodiverse community; and LGBTQ+. Our D&I communities support over 300 BRGs globally across 47 countries with over 32,000 IBMers actively participating in programs, events, and other D&I initiatives.

6. In Romania, IBM partners with Mozaik NGO to support the transgender community through events like the T-Jobs Conference. IBM provides speakers, mentors, and coaches to help participants improve their resumes and online presence for corporate job opportunities. IBM, in partnership with Mozaik also hosted special events to raise awareness and facilitate dialogue between leaders, HR professionals, and the transgender community.

Impact and Outcomes

Leadership action and accountability are critical to fostering an inclusive culture at IBM. Diversity is a business imperative, core to the company's culture, supported by formalized goals and measuring progress. Fundamental to our transformation is empowering every IBMer to exemplify the behaviours that foster a culture of conscious inclusion where innovation can thrive and individuals progress. At IBM, it is not enough for us to look different but sound the same. We are passionately dedicated to promoting, advancing, and celebrating plurality of thought from all backgrounds to activate collaboration and unleash innovation. And our collective actions translate into

88.3% of IBMers declaring that they can be their authentic selves at work.

In 2021, our LGBTQ+ community represented 9% of IBMers who had self-identified. This community is led by a council of executives and members of the community who drive change around a select few priorities that have been determined by the global LGBTQ+ community.

We still have work to do on this journey. And at IBM, we commit to continuously evolve inclusive behaviours and actions with our employees to drive systemic change for the world.

Lessons learned

While IBM has a rich heritage in diversity and inclusion, we are still learning, growing, and making progress. Here are few learnings from our journey:

Being more intentionally inclusive allows LGBTQ+ employees to bring their authentic selves to work, fostering creativity, engagement, and dedication. But respecting every person decision to be out or to remain private is critical to the safety and autonomy of LGBTQ+ employees.

Creating a sense of belonging starts with building a culture that doesn't tolerate discrimination, but it cannot stop there. From explicit policies that are consistently enforced to regular training and education sessions to gender affirming benefits, organizations must clearly demonstrate that they're committed to supporting LGBTQ+ team members.

Listening and learning from LGBTQ+ individuals help leaders identify areas of improvement, but it's important not to put the burden of fixing the system on those already carrying the heaviest load. Allies, especially those at the executive level, need to be prepared to step up and champion important changes.

Developing the LGBTQ+ leadership pipeline is essential. Sponsorship and mentorship programs elevate the voices of out members of the community and help address the leadership gap. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) play a vital role in talent development, internal education, and leadership growth.

Implementing an optional self-identification program for the LGBTQ+ workforce enables better understanding of their needs, tracking professional development, and benchmarking success.

Setting clear expectations for employees, communicating the need for respect and the business value of belonging, is crucial. Make education modules on LGBTQ+ inclusion accessible and refresh them regularly to incorporate evolving perspectives. Train mid-level managers on handling bias in the workplace and build accountability for diversity, equity, and inclusion goals into performance reviews. Offer guidance on how to use inclusive language, such as gender-neutral pronouns.

Leveraging the power of the company brand eminence for positive change can support LGBTQ+ rights worldwide. Partnering with associations and NGOs, issuing position statements, and engaging in direct lobbying efforts are impactful ways to drive progress.

Inclusion is a conscious decision that goes beyond diversity. To unlock people's creative potential, IBM emphasizes infusing inclusion into every aspect of the organization, including talent selection, development, programs, policies, and values, shaping the culture over time.

We should first build a strong theoretical base and prepare professionals before expecting to see inclusive cities

Iris is an architect specializing in accessibility and inclusive design while coordinating the NGO she founded in 2015 - AMAIS. The NGO's main focus is creating an equitable society for people with temporary, context based or permanent disabilities by applying the principles of inclusive design through: architecture, technology and social projects.



Iris, for someone unfamiliar with the term, what is inclusive design and what impact does it have on people's lives?

Inclusive design is an ongoing process, an approach that reduces social segregation, stimulates empathy and the ability to listen to other people and understand their diverse needs. It challenges us to discover and overcome our biases. It requires an understanding that standards and norms are necessary and mandatory to know, while also accepting that our bodies, needs, and abilities are changing throughout our lives and rarely fit into a single box or category. It is a way of creating spaces, products, courses, apps etc. that are accessible and easy to use by a diverse range of users, regardless of abilities, age, gender, belief, race, social status without the need of special adaptations. It starts by identifying exclusion and involving people that have felt it in the process of identifying and implementing solutions.

You will find out more about the topic in the book we are publishing and launching this June, "Inclusive Design: Empathy exercises". More information will soon be available on [our blog](#).

Why did you choose inclusive design? On a first look, it seems to be a truly challenging field in Romania.

My interest in this topic started while I was in my last year of Architecture University, doing research for my diploma subject. I am a Millennial, so it is easy to understand the somewhat vigilante spirit that stimulated me to strive to find a topic that might have a beneficial impact on the community as a whole, something that I would be able to continue researching and working on even after finishing school. During a break from this research, I was taking a walk through one of Bucharest's parks and I noticed a couple of blind people with their baby in a stroller. At that moment I realized that during my six years of university, the topic of designing for somebody who cannot see never came up. A lot of architects and designers like Juhani Pallasmaa or Kat Holmes raise the concern that a far too big amount of the contemporary world is built out of images and visual information, and that architecture has lost most of its

complexity. This is something that I have also felt as a student. There is a lot of pressure to have great renderings, good looking iconic projects and not so much interest shown to other social and physical aspects of our projects. Back then, that was the day I realized that all the discussion we had in the design workshops about accessibility came down to ramps and, most of the time, at the very end of the project. Bringing not much joy to me or my colleagues. Thus, I started looking for as much information regarding people with disabilities and the involvement architects have on this topic. Quickly after, I discovered the isolation phenomenon that people with disabilities face in Romania due to at least two reasons. A subjective one - the attitudes of people without disabilities towards those with disabilities. People without disabilities tend to take too much pity on people with disabilities or they are too afraid to talk to the person or of the topic of disability, or even completely ignore the person or the topic. An objective one - the unfriendly or completely inaccessible built environment. Space is a powerful instrument that can amplify or limit abilities even where there is no disability certificate.

The objective reason is also the main one for starting AMAIS and getting involved in this field of inclusive design. As architects we are partly responsible for the situation we are in regarding the accessibility of the built environment, so, I see it as my direct responsibility to get involved in this and use my knowledge as a designer to reduce social segregation.

During a conference in 2022, you mentioned a lack of resources in inclusive design, from literature to specialised professionals to government support. Why do you think this is the case and what would it take to change that?

We are at the beginning in this process of improving accessibility in different fields. This is an opportunity, because we are starting this decades after other countries like the US, UK or Japan have already begun. The only problem is, there is no patience, and we are trying to skip important steps. People expect immediate results, although we do not have enough professionals with expertise in this field (for instance architects or IT engineers specialized in accessibility). We are more focused on the end results - the accessible environment

- then on how we are supposed to get there. This is why I think we should take a step back and use this opportunity to learn from the experiences and obstacles that other countries faced along the way. We should first build a strong theoretical base and prepare professionals before expecting to see inclusive cities.

What is the difference between accessible and inclusive design?

Firstly, something that is accessible is not always inclusive, while something that is inclusive must be accessible and easy to use by a diverse range of people. For instance, standard tactile signaling improves orientation for people with visual impairment, but depending on how it is used, it can become an obstacle or create discomfort for parents with babies in a stroller, wheelchair users, people with balance issues and so on.

I think more important is the difference between accessibility retrofitting (which can be translated as "accesibilizare" in Romanian) and inclusive design. The first is required by law and has standardized solutions that help improve accessibility of existing spaces, products, apps etc. through adaptations for people with permanent and temporary disabilities. The second is not required by law (for now at least in Romania), it does not have precise requirements like an accessibility norm has (for instance particular dimensions for circulation areas) or a standardized recipe to apply, it is more focused on understanding people's needs, regardless of abilities, age, race, gender, social category, and involving them in the process of identifying solutions from the beginning of the project.

What would an inclusive designed workspace look like?

It would be a place where you can meet a diverse range of people, of different ages, abilities, genders, social categories that work together and feel welcomed, while also being directly involved in the development of that space. It is also, a place where people understand and accept that 100% inclusive does not exist for the moment, but that does not stop them to always try and understand the obstacles that other people might face and solve them together :)

What first steps can companies take towards embracing inclusive design in their offices?

The first step is recognizing exclusion. For that they can start by using forms or interviews/focus groups with their teams to understand the obstacles faced in their work environment. For better results I also recommend doing an accessibility analysis. They can find more info about these and how they could do them in our free guide, "[Public Spaces without Barriers](#)".

Since the pandemic there's been a preference towards working from home. How do you think an inclusive designed workspace would affect that choice and transform the working environment and human relationships?

Since there is no 100% inclusive right now, part of having an inclusive office culture is offering flexibility. Thus, hybrid working goes hand in hand with an inclusive mindset.

AMAI, the NGO you founded, is an inspiring source of projects and services focused towards building an inclusive and equitable society. Can you share any examples of companies in Romania that have implemented inclusive design policies and practices?

DEI and more recently IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) is clearly a worldwide trend right now. Thus, a lot of companies have started different programs related to this. I have not yet seen companies that are willing to invest in accessibility and inclusive design research like Google does in the US or UK, where they have accessibility hubs, or Microsoft, also in the US. Some companies that we know of that have taken steps towards this process are Kaufland, Google, Accenture, Societe Generale, ING Tech and NN.

Interview by Ioana Bîrdu

What makes You unique?



As a leading professional services organisation, PwC is committed to diversity and inclusion (D&I). The company's "What makes You unique?" campaign, which was conceived and driven by PwC employees, is designed to promote awareness and understanding of D&I issues such as gender, age, cultural diversity, and career experiences. By focusing on each of these areas, the campaign highlights the stories that make PwC's employees unique. We aim to create a culture of inclusion, an environment where people can be their true selves, sharing their unique perspectives while knowing their contributions are valued.

About PwC

PwC is one of the largest professional services organisations in Romania, offering a range of services such as audit, consulting, tax and legal services. However, the organisation's core purpose goes beyond providing services. PwC is committed to building trust in society and solving important problems. At PwC, our values form the core of organisational operations and guide how employees interact. Diversity is a key element of PwC's operations and culture.

"We are all different, and this is what makes us strong. In today's business environment, the combined emotional intelligence of diversity is impossible to achieve through any combination of people who look and think alike. Inclusion though is a choice, which at PwC we consciously embrace." – Dinu Bumbacea, Country Managing Partner, PwC Romania.

A firm with purpose depends on people with purpose. PwC's global community of solvers is 328,000 people strong, representing different races, ethnicities, genders, backgrounds, religions and beliefs. But together, we're one firm united by our purpose and values.

Creating trust and solving important problems can only be achieved by people helping each other and identifying the core concerns at hand. We know that the future success of our firm is contingent on equitable experiences for our people. From recruitment to partnership, we're working hard to give every person an equitable opportunity to grow and to thrive as part of our community of solvers. We understand that establishing and maintaining a fair, equitable and welcoming environment for all people requires building a culture of belonging: a shift from awareness to empathy — while demonstrating inclusive leadership that cultivates trust among our people and our clients.

Diversity and inclusion issues addressed

PwC is committed to empowering its employees by recognizing, respecting, and appreciating their individual differences. The company strives to create a cohesive workplace that allows diverse employees to thrive and feel valued for their contributions.

The underlying issue addressed in PwC is raising awareness

on Diversity & Inclusion on different levels and topics, such as age, gender, cultural and even, professional experience. PwC's aim is to look at the uniqueness attached to each and every employee and raise awareness of the differences between us, but which are united by the common values we believe in. As such, the "What makes You unique?" program was designed to tackle these issues, in order to gain awareness and support the transition towards empathy and inclusivity.

Planning & Objectives

The 'What makes You unique?' campaign aims to heighten understanding of inclusivity and diversity within the workplace, with the ultimate objective of creating a more cohesive and accepting working environment.

PwC's D&I strategy focuses on three key pillars: Educate, Include, and Represent. These pillars are integrated into the company's policies to ensure the success of the D&I program and demonstrate the business opportunities associated with D&I.

The Educate pillar is built as a response to the existent qualitative and quantitative data, which revealed that understanding of diversity is rather low. As a result, the pillar is meant to cater to the actual needs of PwC employees in regard to knowledge and it acts as an enabler to further actions related to D&I.

The Include pillar is pivotal for creating an D&I culture in PwC, as only through the inclusion of various individuals and groups of interest in the firms' activities, will it ensure a true and visible representation. But more importantly, people will be able to identify themselves with the core values of PwC and reach their full potential in the firm.

The Represent pillar includes external initiatives and actions which are co-organised with NGOs and clients. We have a responsibility to help drive change outside our firm, including who we do business with, how we use our voice externally and the ways we lead in positively influencing society at large. Guided by our purpose to build trust in society and solve important problems, our community of solvers know we have an obligation to the communities in which we live and work. At a time in which establishing trust is more important than ever, we've worked to not only

support our communities directly but to empower our people to promote initiatives that align with their personal values. As we work to build that trust, we recognize that collaborating with other responsible business leaders striving for similar goals helps to benefit society as a whole.

Activities implemented

As a result of the 'What makes You unique?' campaign, PwC has successfully garnered attention and raised awareness across the organisation, by adhering to its three fundamental pillars.

Educate:

The campaign's 'Educate' pillar saw the identification of the need for knowledge that employees desired. In May 2022, multiple workshops were conducted to recognise the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. The 'Looking in Hindsight' workshops paved the way towards creating a more inclusive and cohesive workplace environment, giving cognizance to cognitive biases that hinder acceptance and equity.

Include:

The 'Include' pillar focused on the sharing of the stories and experiences of individuals from various career paths, gender, cultural, and age demographics. During diversity month in May 2022, four story-interviews were disseminated to tackle said topics and emphasise how diversity is integral to PwC. These stories were shared by the very people who make up the core of PwC and who deliver change. The impact of these interviews fostered discussion within the organisation, leading to the introduction of an D&I module in the onboarding process of new joiners.

Represent:

The Represent pillar was honoured and respected even before the campaign, when PwC was one of the founder signers of The Romanian Diversity Charter and also, by the active participation at dedicated events and activities. In 2022, our D&I Partner, Monica Movileanu, participated as speaker to the forum webcast during the EU Diversity Month where she shared her point of view about why D&I is important and how we can foster an inclusive leadership style.

Impact and outcomes

The impact of the D&I program within PwC continues to show and grow daily. Since the interviews on diversity went live, it stirred discussions within the company to continue the initiative.

As such, the Educate pillar continues to be supported through the introduction of an D&I module in the onboarding process of all new joiners within the company. Since this module was introduced, 80% of the participants found it

Very Relevant to be had during the Onboarding process and at the beginning of their journey in PwC. What's more, learning modules on biases and how to combat prejudices have been introduced in the local L&D curriculum, thus also contributing to the continuous learning process of the employees and creating a safe and cohesive working environment.

In 2023, PwC's D&I continues to grow and expand, with a renewed focus on the importance of diversity within teams and more so, on the creating an inclusive and welcoming workplace for everybody - the campaign continues on as "What makes You unique? Brings us together."

Lessons learned

Behind the success of PwC's campaign, much has been discovered and learned about how to tackle and implement the D&I program. A good and effective D&I strategy is one that starts at the top. From the start, it has been quickly made clear that the support of the top-management was mandatory in order to give credibility to the program. Under the leadership of the D&I Partner, Monica Movileanu, the program has received the much-needed support and it made the implementation much easier and appreciated within the company.

Another important lesson learned was inviting and including volunteers in the organisation process. Not only did they identify D&I issues much more easily and also, came up with innovative and right solutions for the campaign, but it extended the campaign further than an HR project - the project was now created by the employees for the employees. D&I efforts must be customised to our level of corporate readiness. Firstly, we must educate our people and build appropriate levels of awareness. Then we may advance to the next stage. When we get the knowledge, we can focus on conscious inclusion. We can then strongly connect with external stakeholders and represent inclusion and diversity values on the market.

Our diversity and inclusion strategy is more than a series of programs. It's as nuanced as the career journey itself. Our strategic interventions must aim to increase diversity and representation and leverage key moments within our people's progression to provide support, opportunities and a sense of belonging. A commitment to diversity and inclusion — both in our organisation and in our community — brings purpose to our business, ignites commitment in our people and benefits society. Using our own experience and insights, we can help make diversity and inclusion part of the strategy to drive generational impact and sustainable change for the future.

Shedding Light on Workplace Harassment: Breaking the Silence on an Unacceptable Reality

Until recently, sexual or moral harassment was a topic rarely discussed openly, often confined to street corners or hidden due to the fear of shame associated with it. Is this lack of discussion a result of inadequate education or a deeply ingrained mentality developed over the years? Even today, many individuals remain unaware of this issue or fail to recognize their potential roles as either aggressors or victims. Moreover, even if they do acknowledge its existence, they often lack knowledge regarding appropriate actions or the proper channels for seeking help. The dynamics change significantly when it comes to workplace harassment, which further complicates the matter, particularly when the harasser holds a position of authority. However, it is important to note that the situation can also be reversed, with employees themselves being the harassers.

As a Ph.D. expert and counselor specializing in Discrimination and Equal Opportunities, and having authored various articles on the subject, including the groundbreaking Implementation Guide of Law 167/2020 addressing workplace mobbing in the midst of the pandemic in Romania, I have been exposed to numerous delicate situations where harassment, as a grave form of abuse, is systematically concealed, even in the face of existing legislation. These incidents have highlighted the lasting impact of psychological stress on individuals, leaving deep scars on their mental and physical well-being. Notably, the work environment inevitably suffers, resulting in decreased productivity and jeopardizing the overall professional climate, thereby placing the company's operations at risk.

What can be done when victims are afraid to voice their concerns, and no one approaches you to report instances of deviant behavior

at work, despite the fact that workplace harassment is well-known among all colleagues within the company? The issue remains shrouded in secrecy, with discussions limited to hushed whispers or casual conversations over coffee.

Regrettably, certain companies lack a proper harassment policy, which allows for the occurrence of such cases. For instance, the abusive behavior of the same individual may manifest in various ways, or it may persist for an extended period without anyone within the company taking a decisive stance until the situation escalates. It is crucial to understand that such attempts to conceal such behavior can have detrimental effects on the employer's brand, resulting in severe reputational issues not only among candidates and employees but also among customers.

What should you do when nobody steps forward to report the problem? First and foremost, it is important not to remain passive. The prevalence of a toxic work environment is one of the significant challenges faced by employees in Romania.

In certain companies, there is a concerning tolerance for individuals displaying toxic behaviors that exceed acceptable limits. This creates immense pressure on employees. For instance, there is pressure placed on individuals to work overtime without receiving adequate compensation, and people are subjected to various forms of aggression, including violent behavior, hostile communication, threats, disdain, and offensive evaluations. Additionally, there is a tendency to encourage toxic behaviors by aggressive individuals who may not necessarily hold leadership positions. Numerous incidents of this nature occur regularly. An example of this can be observed in

the case of high-performing employees whose aggressive behavior is excused beyond what is deemed acceptable.

If specialists are aware of such behavior, it is crucial for them to take action even without an official complaint from the victim. In this regard, it becomes essential to ensure that the two colleagues involved (the aggressor and the victim) no longer have any interactions during work activities, if feasible. It is also important to thoroughly examine both individuals' behaviors and engage in discussions with the aggressor regarding the potential termination of collaboration should the harassment persist in any form. Such situations demand the dedicated attention of specialists in the field of Equal Opportunities. Moreover, managers need to be more vigilant about what is happening within their surroundings, as certain damage to the employer's brand may be irreparable or leave lasting traces that are challenging to eliminate and may require a significant amount of time.

Practices like cover-ups are contradictory to company values and principles. In today's competitive landscape, where talented individuals have the freedom to choose their employers, an organization that tries to conceal problems will undoubtedly not be among the top choices. The scarcity of talent further highlights the importance of maintaining a transparent and supportive work environment, where issues are addressed openly and effectively.

In Romania, under Law 167/2020, workplace harassment is not limited to physical acts but also includes psychological forms, with the law recognizing the impact of stress and exhaustion caused by such behaviors. This normative act acknowledges the broader scope of harassment and provides legal protection against psychological harm in the workplace.

Simultaneously, it is essential to emphasize that workplace harassment should never be covered up but rather promptly reported to the Expert in Equal Opportunities or the designated individual responsible for professional training in the field. These responsible parties are obligated to take immediate action and implement appropriate measures to address the reported incidents.

Consequently, in light of global advancements in safeguarding employee rights, Law No. 167/2020 has expanded its provisions to encompass the prevention and penalization of all forms of discrimination, stress, and physical exhaustion, classifying them as forms of moral harassment in the workplace. Nevertheless, the existing legislative framework in Romania may not be sufficient, particularly when considering the crucial significance of promptly ratifying and implementing Convention 190, in conjunction with Recommendation No. 206, aimed at eradicating violence and harassment in the world of work throughout Romania. The adoption of these international standards is vital to ensure a comprehensive and effective approach towards addressing workplace misconduct.

For this reason, the Romanian Ombudsman recently declared that the institution will seek to amend the Labor Code to address employee harassment and workplace violence more effectively. Furthermore, the Ombudsman has underscored the significance of ratifying and implementing Convention 190, making relevant observations regarding its importance in safeguarding workers' rights.

Currently, the responsibility for addressing employee harassment and workplace violence lies with the inspectors from the Territorial



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Labor Inspectorates, who are obligated to investigate any reports related to these matters.

However, there remains a lack of concrete actions or favorable conditions to encourage victims to come forward and report such incidents. Importantly, there is a notable absence of readily accessible guidelines regarding the right to work in a safe environment free from harassment, as well as the necessary steps to be taken by individuals who experience such situations.

The Romanian Labor Code necessitates further amendments regarding harassment and violence in the workplace.

The People's Advocate institution advocates for the completion of the Labor Code with more specific and explicit provisions addressing workplace harassment and violence. The Code was last updated in 2020 with the publication of Law 167/2020, which allowed employers to include provisions for resolving potential labor disputes, including discrimination, through mediation in employment contracts.

The proposal suggests that all employers with more than ten employees must designate specific job positions responsible for handling such matters, including those who report incidents to management or competent bodies. If such a clause is included in the employment contract, parties should attempt to resolve disputes through this procedure. Only if an agreement is not reached, can the employee resort to legal action. If an agreement is reached, written agreements may include clauses regarding employee compensation, thereby preventing future lawsuits. However, it is crucial to ensure that clauses aimed at protecting the employer do not excessively restrict the rights of the employee. These terms should be negotiated with the employee to avoid later claims of unfairness by the court.

Providing information, education, workshops, and periodic training on harassment is essential for employers, managers, and specialists in critical positions within regulatory institutions. Merely amending and supplementing legislation on harassment and discrimination is insufficient; fundamental tools for implementing these rules must be established by both employers and employees. Every company, whether public or private, should have anti-harassment policies in place, not just on paper but also in practice.

It is important to note that many organizations have included chapters describing workplace harassment and discrimination in their internal regulations. However, they need to be trained to take proactive measures and be open to applying these measures within the company. Moreover, there is a need for more specialists in discrimination (Equal Opportunity Experts) who can contribute to achieving these goals and actively implement anti-harassment policies in the workplace, fostering a positive and productive climate for both employees and employers.

A positive culture that promotes equality and tolerance of discrimination or violence inspires and supports employers and employees in fostering a productive work environment. Otherwise, a tense and toxic atmosphere can emerge, leading to a spiral of conflict, problematic behaviors, and dysfunctional organizational dynamics. These elements contribute to an unhealthy and unproductive work environment, leading to exhaustion, stress, health issues, employee absenteeism, and significant losses for the company over time.

“Including YOU!”, a D&I campaign with and about employees

In Carrefour Romania, we decided that D&I actions should be seen as an opportunity, rather than a challenge. We strongly believe in the importance of having a workplace where our colleagues have equal rights and opportunities beyond gender, age, ethnicity, religion, skills or experience. Our initiatives are developed around an inclusive long-term vision, which took the form of “Including YOU!”, an inspiring D&I campaign for employees. Our concept is meant to empower acceptance habits by making our colleagues aware of their own power and by involving them in concrete actions.



About Carrefour

Carrefour is one of the largest employers in Romania, with over 16,000 employees spread across 400 stores nationwide, including hypermarkets, supermarkets, proximity stores, and discounters, providing a range of shopping options. Carrefour has launched various initiatives to promote affordable healthy eating for both customers and employees. “Creștem România Bio” program has over 20 ongoing partnerships with farmers who produce bio products, with the number of local suppliers increasing by over 400 in the last two years. Currently, Carrefour works with 1,300 individual local producers, including 600 local farmers who supply fresh fruits and vegetables.

Carrefour’s Act For Good initiative is transforming traditional shopping into a personalized experience with a social impact. The Carrefour mobile app, launched two years ago, has gained 1.5 million active users. Carrefour is promoting a digital mindset among its employees, and all employees are part of the company’s transformation to become the first digital retail company in Romania. The Digital Retail Academy program launched in 2022 has resulted in more than 8,900 colleagues gaining new digital skills.

Diversity and inclusion issue addressed

First and foremost, diversity and inclusion are values that need to be well understood. Our objective is to translate these values into terms that resonate with our colleagues, enabling them to recognize the superpower that lies within each of them to contribute to an inclusive work environment and society. Achieving this objective will positively impact relationships between colleagues regardless of age, gender, seniority, or experience. To this end, we have decided to unify all initiatives developed in line with our values and scale the best practices from the local to the national level. Additionally, we recognize the need for a tailored approach that makes diversity and inclusion relevant to our colleagues.

Planning & Objectives

Before launching the “Including YOU” campaign, we established both internal and external objectives. We paid attention to the feedback from our colleagues and analyzed what engages them, as well as the impact of our messages. Our first step was to develop and launch the Diversity and Inclusion Policy, aligning all Human Resources procedures to positively impact our colleagues’ journey. This creates an environment where they feel motivated to get involved.

Following this, we began a strong communication campaign built around inspirational messages that raise awareness about the importance of each colleague’s role within the team, and how small gestures can create great changes. We have made a commitment to focus on better retention for colleagues with disabilities, and this can only be achieved through a team that understands the power of tolerance, acceptance, and empathy.

In the second phase, we moved from theory to practice, both internally and externally. Our primary objective is to motivate our colleagues to become Diversity and Inclusion Champions who inspire their team and community through their daily actions.

Activities implemented

Firstly, we wanted to offer our colleagues the opportunity to perceive diversity and inclusion through their own filters and to have the desire to contribute to protecting and consolidating the cohesion of their team. We went beyond standard key messages about the importance of embracing D&I values, and instead chose to spread inspirational messages through dedicated materials such as newsletters and visuals in all +400 stores and HQ. Examples of these messages include “Everyone deserves the chance to have a positive work experience, including YOU!” and “Talking about Diversity & Inclusion makes them exist!” By taking this approach, we aimed to sensitize our colleagues and create a motivational environment that allows them to be part of the campaign in their own way.

Secondly, we organized internal webinars, tailor-made workshops, and learning hours. We also developed employee engagement projects such as “Life Saving Pedals” in partnership with the Pastel Association. Together, we designed a volunteering project to support Ukrainians and people with disabilities. In 2022, we facilitated the transport of secondary medical personnel to the Municipal Hospital in Falticeni. At the beginning of this year, we contributed to improving the lives of children and adults with severe locomotor problems, both from the community and Carrefour World, by providing special automatic wheelchairs. Through this project, we aim to offer them a new chance to live with confidence and explore the world without barriers.

In Carrefour World, we believe that celebrating important and meaningful moments is crucial. Therefore, last year, we celebrated one year since we launched the D&I campaign by inviting our colleagues to a dedicated event in partnership with two NGOs who shared their expertise with our colleagues and presented the harsh reality through tailor-made exercises. Additionally, this year we launched the first D&I podcast in the retail industry.

The impact of our campaign went beyond Carrefour World by building dedicated projects with our partners. With the help of the AMAIS Foundation, we organized a workshop in one of our hypermarkets to better understand how to guide persons with visual impairments in the store. Based on this experience, we prepared a best practice guide that all our colleagues have access to as a learning resource.

In partnership with the KinetoBebe Association, we launched an internal and external survey to develop a nutritional guide for a healthy life. In this project, we involved psychologists, kinesiotherapists, and nutritionists who supported our mission to reduce national health problems such as childhood overweight and obesity. Additionally, we have developed the “Carrefour Academy” program in partnership with the FARA Foundation, which uses food-related education as a therapy method for children and young adults with disabilities.

Considering the size of the company (16,000 employees and more than 400 stores covering the entire country), our objective is to increase D&I awareness by continuing our podcast, training our colleagues, and involving them in even more initiatives that have an impact both inside the organization and in society.

Impact and outcomes

This year’s survey has shown an improvement in the perception of our D&I actions by our colleagues compared to the previous year. Carrefour World is committed to diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities for all colleagues. We have established a framework where over 71% of our employees are women, and more than 33% of them hold leadership positions. Additionally, we have committed to hiring new colleagues with disabilities, and our efforts have resulted in an increase from 1.9% in 2021 to 2.4% in 2022. We provide all our colleagues with support, including mentoring programs and individual plans, regardless of their unique differences. The “Including YOU” campaign has enabled us to extend our D&I actions throughout the organization with workshops, webinars, events, and learning hours. The positive impact of the campaign has been reflected in the decreased number of colleagues with disabilities resigning in 2022 compared to 2021, indicating that they feel integrated and happy to continue their journey within the company. We have also organized nine projects that contribute to the inclusion of children and seniors with disabilities and one project related to healthy eating for children. 46% of our colleagues have completed the survey that helped us develop the nutritional guide for families, and we work with four NGOs on our long-term D&I initiatives that have an impact on society and within the organization.

Lessons learned

We are not afraid to test new ideas, learn from our mistakes, and share the lessons we’ve learned. Standard communication materials, procedures, and targets are necessary to make lasting changes. Spreading inspiring messages about diversity and inclusion is not enough; concrete actions are needed to create meaningful experiences for our colleagues. Our motto is that no good deed is too small. It’s important to choose needs that we can support in the long run. We listen to our colleagues and give them opportunities to be part of real actions. This shows that employees need support from their employer and a working environment that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

“Profesii bine cimentate”: Empowering Diversity and Inclusion in the Cement Industry



In an era of advancing social consciousness and progressive values, the importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in every facet of society cannot be emphasized enough. Recognizing the need for greater gender equality and increased industry attractiveness for young female students, Holcim Romania has launched the transformative D&I program called “Profesii bine cimentate”(PBC). This educational initiative offers technical students a unique opportunity to explore the cement industry with the guidance of professional mentors from Holcim Romania. By providing a comprehensive learning experience through workshops, plant visits, and internships, the program aims to promote gender equality and diversity within the cement sector.

About Holcim Romania

Holcim Romania is a leading cement manufacturer committed to sustainable development and innovation. With a focus on environmental responsibility and social progress, the company has undertaken various initiatives to support the communities it operates in. The “Profesii bine cimentate” program reflects Holcim Romania’s dedication to fostering diversity and inclusion within the cement industry.

Diversity & inclusion issues addressed

The “Profesii bine cimentate” program addresses two key diversity and inclusion issues. Firstly, it aims to promote gender equality in the traditionally male-dominated cement industry. By actively involving and encouraging young female students to pursue careers in technical fields, the program challenges gender stereotypes and seeks to create a more balanced workforce. Secondly, the program aims to increase the industry’s attractiveness for technical students, demonstrating the exciting and rewarding opportunities available in the cement sector.

Planning & Objectives

The “Profesii bine cimentate” D&I program follows a well-structured project plan that encompasses various stages and activities. The project stages are as follows:

Registration period (2 months)

During this phase, interested participants are invited to register for the program. The registration period allows for sufficient time for potential participants to learn about the program and submit their applications.

Webinars facilitated by former participants and Holcim (female) employees

Holcim organizes three webinars during this period, inviting former participants and industry specialists to share their insights and experiences. These webinars serve as informative sessions and platforms for networking, further engaging and motivating previous participants to contribute to the program’s success.

Online Personal Development Workshops

The program kicks off with six online personal development workshops. These workshops focus on enhancing participants’ soft skills, including communication, teamwork, leadership, and self-confidence. The online format allows for flexibility and wider participation, accommodating 100 participants from 10 Technical Universities.

Offline Technical Workshops at Holcim Plants

Participants move on to the next phase of the program, attending seven offline workshops held at two Holcim Plants located in Alesd and Câmpulung Muscel. These technical skills workshops provide hands-on training and practical knowledge related to various aspects of the cement industry, such as production processes, quality control, and environmental sustainability.

Closing Event

This event serves as a platform to celebrate the achievements of the participants, recognize their efforts, and provide an opportunity for networking and further engagement with industry professionals. It is a significant milestone that marks the successful completion of the program.

Internship Program

Following the closing event, the internship program commences from July 15 to October 15. This phase offers 15 selected participants (30% female students) the opportunity to apply for internships with Holcim. The internship program allows participants to gain practical industry experience, choose their own learning paths, and further develop their skills within the cement company.

The program has two main goals:

Promoting gender equality: The program aims to inspire and empower young female students, encouraging them to consider careers in the cement industry. It seeks to break barriers and challenge the traditional dominance of men in technical roles. By fostering gender equality, the program aims to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce within the industry.

Increasing industry attractiveness: Through a

comprehensive learning experience, the program showcases the wide range of technical and professional opportunities available within the cement sector. It works to dispel misconceptions surrounding the industry and highlight its potential for growth and innovation. By doing so, the program strives to make the cement industry more appealing and enticing to aspiring professionals.

Activities implemented

The “Profesii bine cimentate” program encompasses a range of activities designed to provide participants with a holistic learning experience:

a) Soft-skills workshops: The program begins with online personal development workshops, engaging 100 participants from 10 Technical Universities. These workshops focus on enhancing communication skills, teamwork, leadership, and self-confidence, preparing participants for the challenges of the industry.

b) Technical skills workshops: Following the soft-skills workshops, 30 participants progress to technical skills workshops. These hands-on sessions allow students to gain practical knowledge and experience in various aspects of the cement industry, such as production processes, quality control, and environmental sustainability.

c) Cement plant visit: A visit to a Holcim plant provides students with a first-hand glimpse into the operations and technologies employed in the cement manufacturing process. This exposure helps demystify the industry and showcases the potential for innovation and career development.

d) Internship program: The pinnacle of the “Profesii bine cimentate” program is the internship opportunity offered to 15 participants. These internships allow students to apply their learnings, choose their own learning paths, and gain valuable industry experience. The program provides a supportive environment for interns to develop their skills, network with professionals, and explore potential career paths within the cement industry.

Impact & outcomes

The “Profesii bine cimentate” program has made a significant impact and produced positive outcomes for both participants and the cement industry at large:

The program has played a crucial role in fostering increased gender diversity within the cement industry. By

actively engaging and empowering young female students, it has contributed to the development of a more inclusive and diverse workforce. This has resulted in a pipeline of talented women who bring fresh perspectives and valuable contributions to the sector.

Furthermore, the program has successfully enhanced the attractiveness of the industry. By showcasing the exciting opportunities available within the cement sector, it has attracted more technical students and dispelled misconceptions about the field. Through highlighting the industry’s commitment to sustainability and innovation, the program has helped shape a positive perception of the cement industry among young professionals.

Lessons learned

The “Profesii bine cimentate” program has yielded valuable insights and lessons, which include the following:

Collaboration is a key factor in the program’s success. Partnering with academic institutions and engaging industry professionals as mentors has proven essential. This collaboration fosters a sense of shared responsibility and ensures the program’s sustainability.

The program empowers participants through hands-on experience. By providing practical learning opportunities, participants are able to develop skills, build confidence, and make informed career choices. This practical experience greatly enhances the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Continual evaluation and improvement are crucial aspects of the program. Regularly assessing the program’s impact and gathering feedback from participants allows for identifying areas that need improvement and informs the refinement of future iterations. Constant adaptation is necessary to maintain relevance and maximize outcomes.

Conclusion: The “Profesii bine cimentate” D&I program by Holcim Romania exemplifies the transformative power of comprehensive educational initiatives. By actively promoting gender equality, inspiring young female students, and increasing industry attractiveness, the program paves the way for a more inclusive and diverse cement industry.



ROMANIAN
DIVERSITY
CHARTER

Issuer

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ROMANIAN DIVERSITY CHARTER

Romanian Diversity Charter

The official launch of the Romanian Diversity Charter took place on April 18, 2018, making Romania the 21st country in the European Union to adopt a Diversity Charter and join the European Diversity Platform. Currently, the Charter has gathered 210 signatories, representing approximately 260,000 employees from companies, public institutions, and NGOs. These signatories have publicly committed to upholding the principles of the Charter, aiming to make diversity, equal opportunities, and social inclusion recognized and respected values in Romania. Under the guidance of the Charter, numerous initiatives have been implemented, including experience exchanges, workshops, debates, and learning and mentorship programs. Since 2021, the Charter and its signatories have jointly celebrated the EU Diversity Month, which aims to promote diversity in the workplace and society as a whole.

Partners



Research partner

