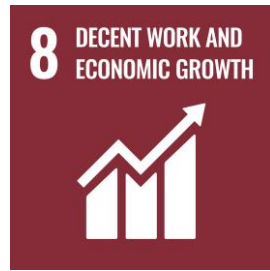


Dimensions of Diversity

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to become more diverse and inclusive representing the world they live in today. Here we explain some of the main terms and types of the various dimensions of diversity and different aspects of human identity in the workplace.

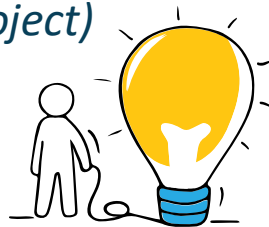
Gender | Race | Culture | Age | Neurodiversity
Ability & Disability | Religion and Belief Systems
Nationality and Citizenship | Language
Socioeconomic Status | Sexual Orientation
Educational Background | Ethnicity
Cultural Background and Heritage
Parental Status | Family Status
Marital Status | Remote and Flexible Work Arrangements





01 Gender

'Diversity in the workplace fosters innovation, enhances decision-making, and reflects the varied perspectives of society, leading to stronger teams and better business outcomes'. (DARE Project)



Definition: "Gender" diversity refers to the social, cultural, and personal roles and characteristics associated with being male, female, or non-binary.

Goal: Ensure representation and equal opportunities for individuals of all genders, including men, women, and non-binary individuals so everyone has equal access to opportunities, resources, and respect. Gender in the workplace influences the dynamics, creativity, innovation, decision-making, ethics, and opportunities creating a more professional, dynamic and reputable environment. This can be achieved through hiring practices, promotion opportunities, pay equity, and workplace culture. Strategies for promoting gender diversity and inclusivity in the workplace aim to create environments where all individuals, regardless of gender.

Why: According to [Eurostat](#), women accounted for 46% of the total employment in the European Union in 2020. In 2021, there were 6.9 million female scientists and engineers in the EU, 369 800 more than in 2020, accounting for 41% of total employment in science and engineering.

According to the most recent [Eurostat statistics](#), in 2018 the gender pay gap stood at 14. % across the EU27, with Luxembourg recording the lowest gender pay gap, at 1.4 per cent, and Estonia the widest, at 21.8 per cent. The gender pay gap in the EU has significant variations across member states.

02

Ethics and Culture >>>



Definition: "Ethics" in the workplace involves fairness and integrity in decision-making, while "culture" encompasses shared beliefs and behaviours. Together, they shape an environment where integrity and collaboration thrive.

Goal: Embrace individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to promote inclusivity and respect for different traditions and perspectives. Create an ethical workplace culture where employees uphold integrity, respect, and fairness in all interactions. This fosters a positive environment where trust is cultivated, diversity is embraced, and collaboration thrives, ultimately leading to increased employee satisfaction and company success.

Why: Europe is home to a diverse population, with over [75% of its residents](#) living in urban areas, contributing to cultural diversity. According to a study by [the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(ERA\)](#), ethnic minorities often face discrimination in employment in many EU countries.

03

Age >>>



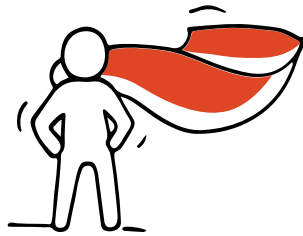
Definition: "Age" is an individual's chronological years since birth. It recognises the value of contributions from employees across different age groups, enabling an inclusive environment.

Goal: Creating an environment that respects the varied needs and perspectives of workers, regardless of their age. Recognise the value of employees across different age groups, from millennials to Generation X, baby boomers, and beyond, to leverage their unique skills, perspectives and experiences. Promote age diversity and combat ageism. Ensure fair treatment, equal opportunities and career development.

Why: [Europe](#) has an ageing population, with a growing number of older workers remaining active in the labour market. The share of people aged 55 years or more in the total number of persons employed in the EU-27 increased from 12 % to 20 % between 2004 and 2019. In 2019, 48 % of all working men aged 65 years or more in the EU-27 were employed on a part-time basis compared with 60 % of women aged 65 years or more. According to Eurostat, the employment rate of people aged 55-64 in the EU increased from 38.4% in 2009 to 58.7% in 2019.

04

Ability & Disability >>>



Definition: "Ability" diversity represents an individual's skills and talents to fulfill job responsibilities effectively. "Disability" refers to impairments, whether physical, cognitive, or sensory, that may hinder certain tasks or activities.

Goal: Create an inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities or different abilities, including physical, cognitive, sensory, or mental health conditions. Remove barriers and provide accommodations to enable employees with disabilities to contribute. Implement policies and practices that reflect the same. Promote awareness and understanding of disabilities among employees.

Why: The [European Commission](#) estimates that around 15% of the EU population has a disability. According to Eurostat estimates, that equals to 101 million people or one in four people adults in the EU. The EU has implemented legislation such as the [European Accessibility Act](#) to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

05

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity >>>



Definition: "Sexual orientation" refers to an individual's romantic or sexual attraction to others, while "gender identity" is one's internal sense of their own gender.

Goal: Create an inclusive workplace by acknowledging and respecting the diverse sexual orientations and gender identities of employees, ensuring they feel valued and supported. Support employees regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) individuals. This may include implementing policies to prevent discrimination, providing education and training, and offering support resources for LGBTQ+ employees.

Why: The [EU Agency for Fundamental Rights reports that LGBTQIA+](#) individuals face discrimination and harassment in various areas, including employment, in many EU countries. [Several EU countries](#) have enacted laws protecting against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

06

Religious and Spiritual Belief Systems >>>



Definition: In the workplace, "religious belief systems" encompass organized sets of beliefs and practices associated with specific religions, while "spiritual belief systems" are personal beliefs centered on meaning and purpose in life.

Goal: Create an inclusive workplace by respecting and accommodating diverse religious and spiritual beliefs, practices and perspectives by ensuring employees can practice their faith or spirituality without discrimination. Ensure accommodation and inclusivity for all faiths and philosophies. This may include providing flexible scheduling, prayer or meditation spaces, and fostering understanding among colleagues of different beliefs.

Why: Europe has a [diverse religious landscape](#), with Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other religions practised across the continent. Religious discrimination and intolerance remain significant challenges in some European countries. [European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination \(EPRID\)](#) aims to contribute to the collective promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief in the world as defined by Article 18 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

07

Language >>>



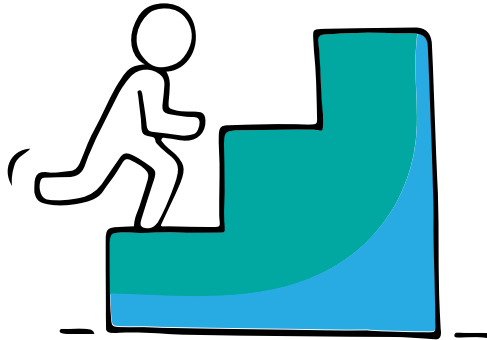
Definition: "Language diversity" refers to employees who speak different languages or dialects, reflecting a variety of linguistic backgrounds and cultures. It encompasses differences in primary languages spoken, proficiency levels, and communication styles among individuals.

Goal: Embrace language diversity by accommodating multilingualism, promote effective communication across language barriers, and leverage linguistic skills to enhance collaboration and inclusivity within the workforce. Implement language-inclusive policies, such as providing translation services or language training, ensure a culture of respect and appreciation, and promote cross-cultural understanding and empathy.

Why: Europe is linguistically diverse, home to [24 official languages](#) with over 200 languages spoken across the continent. Language barriers can cause misunderstandings that lead to conflict, frustration, offence, violence, hurt feelings, and wasting time, effort, money, and the lives of the people. This can have a big impact—this [report](#) noted that language barriers lead to miscommunication, decreased productivity, difficulty during group collaboration, prevent managers from feeling respected and cause challenges in collaboration.

08

Socioeconomic



Definition: In the workplace, "socioeconomic" refers to the interplay between social and economic factors shaping individuals' positions in society. It encompasses variables like income, education, and occupational status.

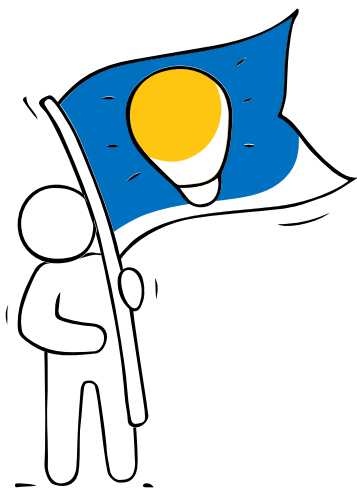
Goal: Recognise that socioeconomic diversity is crucial to enable inclusivity. Recognise and value employees from different socioeconomic backgrounds, including individuals from diverse income levels, education levels, and family backgrounds. Create an equitable workplace where individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunities for advancement and success. This involves implementing policies and practices that address systemic barriers, provide support for skill development and education, and promote inclusive hiring and promotion processes. This will enable companies to harness the full potential of their workforce and contribute to social mobility and economic equality.

Why: [Income inequality](#) is a concern in many European countries, with variations in income levels and wealth distribution. In 2022, the highest levels of inequality in terms of disposable income in the EU were in Bulgaria (38.4), Lithuania (36.2) and Latvia (34.3). On the other hand, among the EU Member States, income was most equally distributed in Slovakia (21.2), Slovenia (23.1), Czechia (24.8) and Belgium (24.9).

Access to education and employment opportunities can vary significantly based on socioeconomic background. The socioeconomic status of a family is determined by family income, parental education, parental occupation, and social status in the community, [in 2022](#), more than 40 % of persons aged 25-34 years in the EU had completed tertiary education. In 2022, almost 84 % of persons aged 20-24 years in the EU had completed at least an upper secondary level of education.

09

Educational



Definition: "Educational" diversity in the workplace refers to the variety of educational backgrounds, experiences, and qualifications that employees bring to their roles. It encompasses differences in academic disciplines, levels of education, certifications, and training programs completed by individuals.

Goal: To leverage educational diversity and enhance company performance and innovation by tapping into a wide range of knowledge and perspectives. Embrace individuals with varied educational backgrounds, including those with degrees from different fields, vocational training, or alternative educational paths. Implement inclusive hiring practices that value diverse educational backgrounds, provide opportunities for continuous learning and skill development, and promote a culture of collaboration and knowledge-sharing among employees. This can create a dynamic and adaptable workforce capable of meeting evolving challenges and driving success.

Why: [Europe has a well-established education system](#), offering diverse educational pathways, including academic and vocational training. In [2021](#), 43.9 % of all graduates from vocational programmes in upper secondary education in the EU were female, while the share was higher (61.2 %) among graduates from vocational programmes in post-secondary non-tertiary education.

Access to education and training opportunities may vary across different regions and socioeconomic groups. [Ireland](#) is holding its own at the top end of the EU educational attainment ladder. More than half of 25 to 64-year-olds (53pc) in the country have a third-level qualification, the highest in the EU, and it compares with a 27-country average of one in three (33pc). [Sweden](#) has one of the best education systems in the world—the country known for its high standard of living and excellent education system. In 2023, the number of international students in Sweden was over 41,967.

10

Cognitive and Neurodiversity



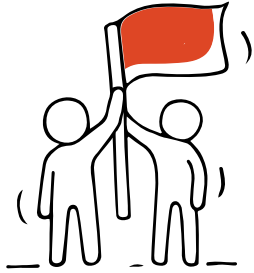
Definition: In the workplace, "cognitive diversity" refers to differences in thinking styles and abilities among individuals, while "neurodiversity" recognises the range of neurological differences, including conditions like autism and ADHD.

Goal: Leverage the strengths of all employees by embracing their cognitive and neurodiversity. Recognise and value their unique strengths, perspectives and diverse cognitive profiles. Create an inclusive environment for such individuals with diverse cognitive abilities, learning styles, and neurodivergent conditions such as autism, dyslexia, ADHD, and others. Do this by implementing inclusive hiring practices that value diverse cognitive profiles, provide appropriate accommodations and support, and support a culture of acceptance and understanding among colleagues. Promote a workplace where all individuals can thrive regardless of their cognitive differences, companies can unlock innovation, creativity, and productivity.

Why: Neurodiversity is increasingly recognised and supported in [European workplaces](#), with initiatives aimed at accommodating individuals with diverse cognitive abilities and neurodivergent conditions. Awareness and understanding of neurodiversity vary across different European countries and industries. It is thought that about [15 to 20 %](#) of the world's population is neurodivergent. This includes up to 10 % of people with dyslexia, 6 % with dyspraxia, 5 % with ADHD, and 1–2 % with autism.

11

Geographical



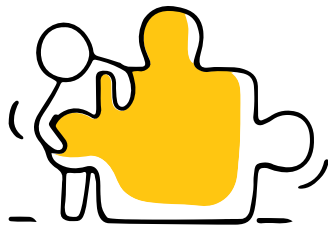
Definition: “Geographical diversity” refers to the representation of employees from different geographic locations, regions, or countries. It encompasses variations in cultural norms, customs, and perspectives that arise from individuals' diverse geographical backgrounds.

Goal: Embrace geographical diversity by recognising and valuing the unique contributions and viewpoints of employees from various locations, different geographical regions or countries, acknowledging their diverse perspectives and experiences, share their insights and expertise. This will enhance innovation, and creativity, and improve global competitiveness. Implement practices that accommodate diverse communication styles, customs, and holidays, and support cross-cultural understanding through training and awareness initiatives.

Why: The European Union consists of 27 member states, each with its own unique cultural, social, and economic characteristics. Cross-border cooperation and collaboration is essential for leveraging the diversity of perspectives and experiences across different regions. [Cross Border Cooperation \(CBC\)](#) is a key element of the EU policy towards its neighbours. It supports sustainable development along the EU's external borders, helps reduce differences in living standards and addresses common challenges across these borders.

12

Family Status



Definition: In the workplace, “family status diversity” refers to the acknowledgement and accommodation of employees with varying family structures, responsibilities, and caregiving roles. It encompasses individuals who may be single, married, in domestic partnerships, divorced, widowed, or caregivers to children, elderly relatives, or individuals with disabilities.

Goal: Support employees with diverse family structures and caregiving responsibilities, including parents, caregivers, single parents, and individuals with eldercare responsibilities. Implement policies and practices that support work-life balance, provide flexibility, and ensure equal opportunities for career advancement, regardless of employees' family responsibilities.

Why: Family structures vary across Europe, the [most numerous type](#) of households in the EU in 2022 were single adult households without children, (71.9 million) followed by couples without children (48.2 million), and couples with children (30.6 million). [The Work-Life Balance Directive](#) is an EU law which aims to make it easier for EU employees to balance paid work, private life, and caring responsibilities.