

ICT Forum UNI Europa

**Diversity Management
in the European ICT-Sector
Opening up the road for social dialogue**

26- 28 September 2007
Ljubljana



uni • europa

Conference Report

Karin Hirschfeld
id.text, Berlin
October 2007
info@id-text.de

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Diversity management in ICT: an agenda for trade unions, industry and politics | 3 |
| 2. The initial position : equal opportunities and diversity management | 4 |
| 3. Children, career, teleworking ? Women in the ICT sector | 5 |
| 4. Grey-haired? Age diversity in the ICT sector | 8 |
| 5. Multinational ? Migration and mobility in the ICT sector | 9 |
| 6. Opening up the road : diversity in the social dialogue | 11 |



1. Diversity Management in ICT: an agenda for trade unions, industry and politics

Diversity is wealth – but it is a wealth that often remains untapped. This is especially true when looking at employment patterns in the ICT sector, an area that is seen worldwide as a job-creation machine and the symbolisation of modernity. The field is dominated by male employees, with only a few women to be found. Job opportunities and career openings, status within a company and salary levels illustrate the imbalance. The young predominate. Over 40 and the rust sets in. Foreign employees, willing to go to where the work is, also suffer discrimination. Integration in the established workforce is often difficult and fraught with tension.

Expectations predict that the ICT sector will need to rely more and more on a wider pool of workers. Employers are already complaining about shortages of experts – but at the same time they are ignoring the existing potential of workers outside their traditional horizon. Falling birth-rates and rising life-expectancy in the West's industrial nations exacerbate the demand for qualified workers. To maintain competitiveness, the need for companies to adopt long-term policies taking the diversity of (potential) workers into account and offering them equal opportunities is gaining in importance

More than 80 delegates from 18 countries took part in the 2007 ICT Forum, highlighting diversity management from different perspectives – gender, age and nationality. Both economic requirements and social responsibility show that the time has come to invest in diversity.



Peter Skyte

Peter Skyte from the British trade union UNITE and President of UNI-Europe's IT Committee put it this way: "Equality is a human right. Discrimination can not only destroy those affected

- it also has a negative influence on social development". Industry's responsibility must become long-term.



Bo Larsen

Bo Larsen, President of UNI-Europe's Telecom Committee, criticised that a number of companies are trimming existing corporate social responsibility values as part of short-term cost-cutting measures.



Bernadette Ségol

Political measures and legal regulations are an important step in ensuring diversity in the business world. But they do not go far enough in guaranteeing equal opportunities. This was stressed by **Bernadette Ségol**, Regional Secretary of UNI-Europe. A lack of diversity is socially and psychologically anchored: "Low diversity offers security. You are well acquainted with your peers' behaviour patterns".

Ségol underlined that, though diversity contains a great amount of productivity and creativity potential, it is often connected with potential conflicts and new challenges for management: "The promotion of diversity is of great interest for the economy, but it must be handled properly". The advantages of heterogeneous work-forces are not achieved without cost. They require changes in behaviour, new instruments and differentiated offerings for individual target groups. But once a company masters diversity, it can profit from great competitive advantages. Raising awareness for diversity and opening up the social dialogue are important trade union tasks.

2. The initial position: equal opportunities and diversity management

Unshaven, jeans, T-shirt, eyes glued on the computer. A world consisting of a screen and lines of code. This is the cliché of that highly intelligent eccentric – the computer freak. Whether this image of the high-tech expert corresponds to real life, whether the sector's conditions of employment allow for wider diversity and which are the next concrete steps in diversity – all of these were topics of **Juliet Webster's Background Report** (Work and Equality Research, London).



Juliet Webster

Webster's descriptions of the present situation show that diversity in the ICT-sector is just beginning. The female employment rate is much lower than in the economy in general. The EU average is 19%, with some countries only reaching 6%. Women are underrepresented in promotions. Pay differentials between men and women are generally high – in Great Britain for example 20%. Existing work patterns, often accompanied by extremely long working hours, make it difficult for women with family commitments to strike the right balance between family and work. Women returning to work after devoting time to their children's upbringing receive little support in reintegration. The consequence: "women hardly enter the ICT sector at all, and, if they do, they do not stay for long".

Age is another area where many ICT companies only focus on certain groups. "Age" starts early in this sector. Over forty? Even experienced workers have difficulties finding a new job. They are up against such arguments as not being so healthy, having difficulties learning, being over-qualified and therefore too expensive, no longer being highly productive. Working hour schemes such as part-time work or flexible work hours, that meet the needs of older workers, are hard to find. Just 20% of all ICT employees are under 45

– much lower than in other industry sectors.

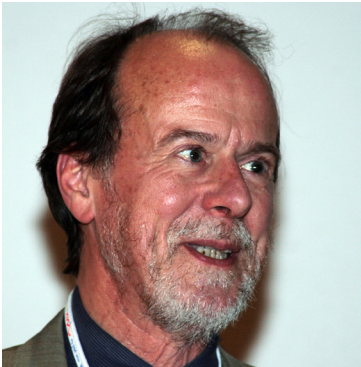
An important dimension in diversity politics is the treatment of migrant workers. They are "often engaged to plug holes where experts are missing and often serve as surrogates, compensating inadequate gender and age diversity management. Discrimination vis-à-vis native employees is commonplace. Salary levels are often below the local average and are sometimes used to undermine existing standards. The ICT worker from abroad is often highly dependent on individual employers, becoming very vulnerable to discriminatory practices.

Generally speaking, Webster finds the high-tech area surprisingly traditional on recruitment and retention policy. Highly segregated work-forces – "white, male and young" - are the result of missing diversity. The creative potential to be found in heterogeneous teams is ignored. Working patterns favouring just a few groups are predominant – but in general not sustainable. High attrition rates, burn-out syndromes due to high stress levels, long and unsocial working hours characterise the long-term effects of working in an ICT company.

Yet from a company perspective a heterogeneous work-force can be very attractive for a number of reasons: the supply of available workers is increased and a broader range of skills can be used. Diversity also allows a greater proximity to customers, as the workforce composition mirrors customer diversity. Last but not least, a company's diversity serves as an illustration of its recognition of social responsibility. Already companies are starting to use internal diversity for image-boosting marketing purposes – but beware of "bumper stickers". In addition a good diversity policy protects employers from accusations of discriminatory practices.

A diversity management focused on the need for (and the needs of) heterogeneous workforces should encompass the following areas: recruitment, staff development and retention, flexible withdrawal from employment and integrative organisation cultures. Importance should also be attached to a constant monitoring of diversity management. In all these fields, trade unions can play a leading role – whether by highlighting best practices or coaching executives, proposing equal treatment measures in training or developing comprehensive action plans. Sustainability must be key, states Webster. Diversity practices are always under threat in times of recession – especially when they are not firmly anchored in a company's organisation.

Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland, gave a speech on **Equality Policy on a National Level**.



Bob Collins

The Commission was founded in 1998 as an independent public body and has the mission of promoting equal opportunities and fighting discrimination. In the past 50 years an increasing political commitment to promoting equality can be discerned. In the EU and on a national level there are a number of laws connected with different aspects of inequality – race, physical handicaps, religion or sexual inclination. However experience shows that “a law’s implementation is often the biggest challenge”. This is the reason for the Equality Commission’s work being so multi-faceted. It engages actively in advising politicians and is heard on a number of themes. It maintains tight links with employers. It commissions research spotlighting individual aspects of discrimination and equality. It offers legal advice to citizens facing discrimination, following certain cases right up to the European Court. Although Collins sees wide scope in promoting diversity-friendly behaviour and practices, success remains fragile. He still finds players who see diversity not as an enrichment but as a problem. Progress in equality matters is still often seen as a “good weather” theme that can be hauled in in stormy weather. Collins describes the fact that the ICT sector - as the symbol of modernity - still practices homogeneity instead of diversity, as an anachronism and a distinct “irony”. “We still have a lot of work in front of us, convincing companies that diversity and equality are to their own economic advantage”.

Areas in which trade unions can **push diversity management in companies** were shown by **Shoji Morishima**, President of the NWJ, the trade union for NTT employees in Japan, and Chairman of UNI-Telecom.



Shoji Morishima

The NWJ has been able to make out and influence positive developments in Japanese companies, especially with regard to age and gender diversity. These include more clearly defined career development paths for middle-aged and older employees. NTT Data has been operating a Career Development Programme since 2005, offering experienced workers without managerial aspirations motivating perspectives. It enables a systematic assessment of workplace-related skill requirements, certification of personal skills and a mapping of employees to certain specialist positions. The perspective of a high-level certification is seen as a way of motivating employees at the end of their hierarchic career ladder to continuing personal development, thereby building a long-term association with the company. To increase female retention and promote family/work balance, the NWJ is successfully working with such instruments as parental leave and part-time working while the children are young. Experience shows that “women carry more responsibility for their children’s upbringing than men”. Some 45% of women expressed problems in achieving the right balance between work and family. Tele-working is seen as one possibility of allowing women to care more for their children while working. Current discussions are centred on the introduction of a system regulating women’s return to work after taking time out for their families.

3. Children, career, tele-working? Women in the ICT Sector

Bill Taylor, Political Advisor of the British Communications Workers Union (CWU), presented an overview of **gender-related inequalities in British ICT companies**.



Bill Taylor

Women make up 46% of the total British workforce, but only 19% in the ICT branch and decreasing since 2001. The causes for not finding more women in the ICT sector go back a long way – beyond entry into the profession. While over half of university students are female, only a quarter of IT courses are filled by women. “Which university course is followed plays a decisive role in choosing a future career”, stated Taylor. “But many women see the ICT sector as a male-dominated domain”. And there is a certain amount of justification in such a view. Male compensation is on average 20% higher than female compensation. Women are rarely found on an executive level. There is a lack of female role models – combined with very traditional recruitment policies. The culture of long working hours is oriented towards male life patterns without family obligations. Yet a diversified workforce is of major macro-economic interest. To encourage more women to seek jobs in the industry and gain the right qualifications, the CWU is fighting for measures on a number of different levels: flexible working hour schemes, equal pay, transparent salaries, networking women or promoting the motivation to gain technical qualifications at the youngest age. As a positive example, Taylor pointed out the 2005 state-assisted programme CC4G (Computer Clubs for Girls), in which 3,000 schools and 100,000 girls took part. The objective was to interest girls in ICT and promote talent at an early stage. Success can be witnessed by the rise in schoolgirl participation in ICT courses. Media campaigns are also focusing on improving the sector’s image and motivating young women to enter the profession.

Jackie Jones, head of Business Improvement at Openreach, reported on the **recruitment campaign for women in telecommunications**.



Jackie Jones

Openreach is a British Telecom subsidiary providing telecommunications services for BT and other telecom providers. The company operates in a strongly expanding market with a high demand for engineers. The work-force is “predominantly white, male, middle-aged and long-serving”. Women are underrepresented in technical positions. This is to be changed. “We would like to mirror the society we are serving”. The „Open2all“ initiative started by Openreach in 2006 is aimed at recruiting more female telecom engineers. The programme has three core areas:

- **recruiting:** new channels and forms of advertising are being used to target women; HR managers are receiving diversity training (“recruiting is not always unbiased”). Re-designed selection tests aim at a fairer selection of applicants.

- **role definitions:** these are being adapted to permit a better work-life-balance – in particular via flexible and child-friendly working hours.

- **the organisation’s culture:** this will be subjected to a long-term change programme offering women a friendlier work environment. The programme will include tolerance training, employee communication measures aimed at mutual respect and stereotype dismantling. The current recruitment campaign „Fresh Air“ is already showing success, with a significant rise in female recruitment. “But diversity does not come overnight”. Achieving a really heterogeneous workforce takes a long time.

Berivan Oengörür, a researcher working for the Swedish Employee Union SIF, gave a presentation on **gender-related equality in the Swedish IT sector**.



Berivan Oengörür

Although Sweden is one of the leading nations in equality, the IT sector remains a male domain. A gender ranking put the IT sector in 11th place. Qualified women soon reach the “glass ceiling” in their career development. 23% of the total IT workforce is female, but only 10% of managerial positions are occupied by women. As a result of the economic recession at the turn of the century, the female share of students in technical courses decreased to its present 18% - in the 1999/2000 boom it had reached 29%. Oengörür findings state that the advantages of a higher female participation in IT would be immense: women bring in other skills. In addition they can help increase companies’ market responsiveness: “women know better what women want – and women make up 50% of all customers”. Up to now, “it was the men who interpreted what IT should look like”. Women executives are more suitable to understand the needs of female employees: they can offer them better career perspectives while at the same time setting an example themselves. Oengörür views the sector’s long working hours as a central point. But finding the right balance between work and family and facilitating re-entry after parental leave are just one side of the coin. To achieve true equality, it is “very important to re-integrate men into the family life”. Equal opportunity means opening up the male role and enabling men to take up their family commitments.

In the following **debate and work-groups**, the delegates discussed which measures would help increase the presence of women in the IT sector and offer greater equality. It was found that there were only a few effective short-term measures – such as media campaigns or advertising. Fundamental and “crisis-resistant” chan-

ges call for deep-going adaptation with long-term horizons.



- To encourage more women to enter the IT sector, diversity concepts must start at school. Girls – even at the nursery stage - should be given the opportunity to acquire technical skills. But a lot has also be done to strengthen women’s self-confidence in a predominantly male domain. It is an investment in the future.
- At the same time the image of scientific/technical studies as a male domain must be adapted. **Media campaigns** can help make women aware of technical occupations. As shown by Jackie Jones in her BT example, this can be quite successful.
- To promote diversity in companies’ recruitment policies, recruitment decision-makers should examine their existing selection criteria. “You have to change a recruiter’s mentality, if he is to hire people unlike himself”. In addition the composition of selection boards should reflect candidates’ heterogeneity.
- Just as important as the recruitment of women is their retention. They need to be offered an attractive workplace and development opportunities. To achieve a long-term **retention** of female IT employees, a policy taking family considerations into account is needed: family-oriented working hours or tele-working, parental leave and re-entry guidelines. Meeting and training times should take account of (part-time) parents’ **working hours**, thus permitting them to fully participate in internal decision-making processes and opening up development opportunities. Generally speaking, the whole culture of “long working hours” needs to be re-examined, as it is a family burden not just for women: “Excessive working hours are a problem for everybody”.

■ The previously male-dominated IT sector must be subjected to a cultural change to make diversity normal. Diversity training for employees – and managers in particular – can help promote respect for the working patterns and behaviour of “others” and dismantle clichés. Female and male role definitions help strengthen self-confidence and can inspire emulation. Women in managerial positions balancing family and work act as an example, just as working fathers who adapt their working hours to the needs of their children.

4. Grey-haired? Age diversity in the ICT sector

For many, advancing age is becoming an employment barrier. This is especially true in the IT sector, an area symbolised by youth, a high rate of innovation and permanent learning. Union Network International’s **Gerhard Rohde** and **Maria Schwarz-Wölzl** from Austria’s Social Innovation Centre presented a report on the current **statistics** and on the **European “Mature” project** with its objective of improving employment prospects for older citizens.



Gerhard Rohde, Mirjana Oblak and Maria Schwarz-Wölzl

Although it is a well-known fact that European populations are growing older, most companies seem to be running the risk of falling into the “demographic trap”. In line with a decreasing “supply” of young graduates, the importance of older employees should be increasing. “The message is very clear: the economy needs more 50+ employees”, states Gerhard Rohde. But at present just 14% of all companies have a strategy for recruiting such employees – as shown

by a Manpower survey. A mere 21% of companies have retention policies for older employees.

Age-discrimination in the IT sector often hits the headlines. While in the economy on a whole, the 50+ employment rate is decreasing, the picture painted by the IT sector is much more dramatic. A survey of Great Britain, the Netherlands and Germany shows employment levels sinking much earlier. A marginal 5% of all IT positions are occupied by 55+ employees. Age is seen by many as a negative criterion in the labour market.

From an economic point of view, a homogeneously aged workforce – whether young, middle-aged or old – is a risk. An old workforce represents a “layer of clay” for the career aspirations of younger colleagues. A wave of retirement can drain an employer’s stock of know-how. A very young workforce will often suffer from high fluctuation, with head-hunters hungry for such freshly qualified, mobile workers. Though a balanced age structure is a prerequisite for a company’s sustainable development, it is seldom achieved.

„Employers are called upon to proactively face up to the demographic challenge”, said Maria Schwarz-Wölzl, coordinator of the Mature project. To achieve a balanced age profile in its workforce, a company must adopt various tactics: foremost is age-diverse recruitment. Lifetime learning for employees of all ages enables continual development. The offer of need-related working hour schemes and alternative job offers is a means of retaining older workers. “Promotion of good health at work is another “must” for companies facing up to the demographic challenge”.

The EU-sponsored Mature project has the objective of promoting age diversity in employment. The focus has been placed on companies’ recruiting policies. Project activities target all players influencing recruitment. Various instruments are on offer: An *e-Learning-Platform* for HR professionals should help support age diverse recruitment. Elements include *awareness-building*, the development of a company-specific business plan and its implementation in recruitment practice. A Toolbox offers 270 items for use along the entire recruitment process: assessments, check-lists, guidelines, good practice examples or statistical data.

In both the **plenary session and the working groups** the delegates discussed what should be the priorities for promoting age-related equality in the ICT sector. It soon became clear that age diverse policies require a change in thinking – not just in business but also in the trade unions themselves. In the past, the unions had actively supported many early retirement schemes. “There are incentives for older employees to leave a company, but none to motivate him to stay on”. A delegate remarked that this has led in Germany to a mentality where “55 is considered the right age to stop working. Carrying on to the age of 60 is not even thought of”. The high work pressure results in many employees being glad “to finally be able to stop”.



- In an age diverse HR policy, working conditions must be adapted to the capabilities and needs of older employees. These include flexible offers to reduce the amount of time spent working. To this end, one of the unions’ main demands is the offer of **flexible working schemes**. But first of all it is seen as necessary to find out the needs of older employees – for example via deep discussions between employers and their workers or trade union surveys.

- Younger employees and their older colleagues offer a company different **skills**. The young, straight from university, will know all about the latest technologies, whereas the older have their experience and specialised knowledge. It is a question of recognising and exploiting older workers’ capabilities – for example via suitable career paths or mentoring.

- Skills acquired with age and experience can be used systematically: older workers are ideal for developing specific **offers for same-generation consumers**. In an aging society there are many senior citizens experiencing difficulties mastering

new technologies – and this itself can be a major new market.

- Experienced workers need to keep their skills up-to-date. It is imperative that they are encouraged to become involved in **life-long learning**. Knowledge gets out-of-date very quickly in the technology sector. Focusing just on their existing skills and experience can become a high employment risk factor for older workers.

- Job descriptions free of age bias are necessary if older applicants are to be considered when **recruiting new employees**. Terminology such as “young, dynamic,...” automatically disqualify the older. Training HR professionals to view the older as valuable resources is another ingredient of an age diverse policy.

- The relatively **high salary levels of older employees** is seen by many employers as a major impediment in recruiting members of the older generation. While obviously a delicate topic for trade unions, it was also raised. As one delegate put it: “We should start examining the concept of salary raises based on seniority. Age alone should not necessarily warrant a high salary level”.

All delegates agreed that there is still a lot of convincing to be done before companies become attracted to the idea of more age-diversity. Economic advantages need to be clearly shown, as well as today’s necessity of accounting for the demographic development in tomorrow’s business strategies.

5. Multinational ? Migration and mobility in the ICT sector

The ICT sector is characterised by a well-developed globalisation of markets, company organisations and work processes. Job relocation to emerging nations such as India or China or East European “near-shoring” already attract high media attention. **ICT specialist immigration to Europe** has also gained in importance. In her presentation, **Jane Millar**, scientist from the University College of London’s Migration Research Unit, focused on the question of how both employer and employee interests can be upheld in immigration policy.



Jane Millar

Her speech centred on the USA, Great Britain and Australia, countries where immigration is playing an increasingly important role in the ICT sector

One country at the top of the list for mobile ICT workers is Great Britain. Almost one quarter of issued work permits are connected with ICT jobs, and numbers have almost doubled since 2000, with the biggest contingent being Indian professionals. Internal company transfers are of major importance – some five times higher than in other sectors. The majority of these mobile professionals are male and relatively young. Companies are increasingly expanding their recruiting activities to foreign students.

There is widespread agreement that immigration of highly-qualified workers is necessary to guarantee future growth – with accompanying positive effects on employment. “There are a number of discrepancies between what politicians are saying and the actual experiences of ICT experts”, said Millar. In practice, immigration can endanger the opportunities of native workers, while the mobile ICT experts are often employed under less favourable conditions than their native counterparts.

At the same time US, British and Australian immigration regulations are geared towards creating a balance between employers’ needs and protection of employees against unfair competition and exploitation. A number of criteria are in use. Jobs should only be offered to offset staff shortages and not to displace existing employees. To avoid undermining existing employment standards, salaries and working conditions must be comparable with existing levels. According to Millar however, evidence shows that, although these regulations are suitable as stop-gaps in times of labour shortages, they tend to be one-way streets. There is insufficient monitoring, especially regarding frequent internal company transfers. Infringements are rarely followed up.

Remuneration of mobile workers is often below local levels. The objective of upholding all sides’ interests is “systematically not achieved”.

To also protect workers within the framework of immigration policy, there are certain points to be addressed on political, business and trade union agendas. One prerequisite is the availability of enhanced data – including expert shortages – and greater transparency. Also necessary are effective monitoring systems and sanctions on infringements. A serious and enlightened debate on the subject is only just starting: “The time has come for an open discussion”.

In both the plenary session and the working groups there was agreement that the trade unions have a major role to play in the debate on ICT professional immigration. Although it can be expected that Europe’s labour markets will become increasingly reliant on immigration, many native employees are greatly concerned about this development. It is the job of trade unions to counteract these anxieties and let workers know that their needs are in good hands. “As trade unions we are not against immigration. We support it. But it must be handled properly” stated one British trade unionist. “We want to protect the interests of both native and migrant workers”. A number of principles were defined both in the working groups and the plenary session aimed at a balanced immigration policy. There still remains however a need for internal debate on individual points – such as immigration control.



■ Migration should always be seen in relation to **gender and age diversity**. Companies often resort to taking on qualified workers from abroad to counteract existing local deficits in staff recruitment and development. A coherent diversity policy should not just be based on “quick help from abroad”, but should be looking at using existing potential.

- There must be a general guarantee that salaries and working conditions for foreign ICT professionals be on a par with **local standards**. By doing so, immigration can be prevented from becoming an exploitation and social dumping instrument. Wage transparency, effective controls and sanctions on infringement are key points here. Equality also means equal participation and voting rights within companies. This is a principle not yet introduced in every country.
- Greater focus should be given to the **integration** of foreign experts. Immigrants should not be treated as mere workers, but as individuals with a private life and family ties. Regarding them from a purely economic and instrumental perspective can lead to problems later. A large number of delegates were in favour of giving such professionals and their accompanying family members unlimited residence and work permits.
- Trade unions have much to offer with regard to integration and **support of migrant experts** – for example in explaining workers' rights, providing legal aid or assistance in language courses. It is important to specifically address foreign experts and to find out their exact needs. Trade unions would like to counteract any tension and mistrust via a greater involvement of foreign ICT experts.

Professional immigration is a top topic on the political agenda. Europe is discussing a “Blue Card” on similar lines to the US Green Card. Trade unions see this initiative as an important social dialogue theme and want to actively become engaged in the debate to make sure that employees' interests are adequately represented in the immigration concept.

6. Opening up the road: diversity in the social dialogue

More diversity in companies is one of the major goals in the coming years for politicians, employers and trade unionists. A major, though not exclusive, focus will be on the ICT sector. It is not just a matter of socio-political and value-related considerations. Diversity is of fundamental interest for every company, as in the near future they will all be competing for human resources

in short supply. Various cornerstones were fixed in a **discussion panel**.

Maria Schwarz-Wölzl from the European Mature project pointed to the comprehensive importance of diversity: Every individual is “different”, having different identities according to situation or stage in life. Merely confining “diversity” to certain groups – be they women, migrants or others – is too short-sighted and the reason why a number of traditional female empowerment programmes have failed. The spotlight must be on the person, not on his group affiliation”.

Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland, drew the following conclusion: “Diversity is not a generous present for have-nots. Diversity is a 21st century imperative”. It concerns both economic interests and the “recognition of a person as an individual and not just as a business entity”. Responsibility for diversity is not just in the hands of politicians, but in those of every company and every individual.

Laurent Zylberberg from French telecom operator Orange and the European telecom operators' association ETNO sees employers' awareness for diversity themes growing. “In the telecom sector with its numerous multinational companies, we already find cultural diversity. But this is often not reflected in management” – where executives from a single country often dominate. Companies must both plan for tomorrow's employment situation and act on today's constraints. Social dialogue can lead to joint development of certain themes, with alliances being struck and good practices promoted.

Robert Killer, chairman of T-Systems' enterprise works council, explained how multi-faceted diversity questions can be. Average age in the German subsidiary of former monopolist Telekom is way above 40. “Due to cut-backs, hardly any young workers were recruited. The older workforce is unhealthy for the company”. Some 100,000 jobs were pruned in the last few years. Programmes such as „Girls Day“ target girls' interest for technical professions – with some major successes. An intensive knowledge transfer with trade unions could help to move such a theme forward.

Chadia Bendada, diversity advisor of the Belgian trade union LBC-NVK, reported on Belgian employers' institutionalised and systematic support for diversity management. Employers and trade

unions. Though we have different interests, we have the same goal”. But diversity also belongs on trade unions’ internal agenda. Though membership is heterogeneous, the majority of activists are white, male and older. “If we carry on like this, there will come a time when we will be talking about target groups that we don’t really know”, warned Bendada. “We must speak with people, not about them”.

In the working groups, priorities for a sustainable diversity management were defined and consequently presented in the plenary session. In addition, how to address new member groups and develop social dialogue on diversity were discussed. The following points were defined as central aspects of a common agenda:

Rethinking - offering equal opportunities

A multi-level approach is required in order to offer equal employment opportunities, development perspectives and working conditions to people from different backgrounds, age and gender. Unbiased recruitment and employee integration, incentives for life-long learning – especially for older employees – and flexible working schemes are some of the measures needed. Other measures must enable people with family commitments or older people to take up positions of responsibility. The whole topic of “extreme working” must be subjected to fundamental examination.

Diversity in trade unions

Trade union representatives should first look at themselves in the mirror. How much diversity is there in their own ranks – women in decision-making bodies or migrants’ participation? Rethinking must start at the roots: “We must practice what we preach”. Trade unions must demonstrate their value to previously neglected groups by collective contracts or specific services. At the same time more opportunities for participation by new member groups should be established. Another important ingredient: specific marketing activities and targeted campaigns.

Reach collective agreements and monitor the rules

Certain diversity topics – such as life-long learning for everybody or recruitment policy – should be better addressed in wage settlements or company agreements. Diversity policy can address a

number of different levels – its focus can be in a company or a sector, national or European. An important trade union task is also the monitoring of existing diversity and equality regulations. UNI Europe plays a central role in lobbying and developing the social dialogue on diversity. Trade unions are stressing the importance of social dialogue for employers. They can benefit not just from social peace but also from the free “management consultancy” offered by the unions.

Expand knowledge and demonstrate added value

Employers will only accept diversity when they are convinced of its economic advantage. To achieve this, more reliable data and facts are required. UNI Europe can support the knowledge transfer and the information exchange between trade unions, thus supplying important discussion help. The initial focus must be on convincing employers of the long-term wisdom behind diversity. Many companies have only a short-term planning horizon, unsuitable for such sustainability themes: “It is our job to make it clear to companies how much profit they will forego when they have a shortage of employees who could produce it”.

Attractive employers?

Positive examples of successful diversity-friendly companies can play a major motivating role for other companies, inviting emulation. Trade unions would like to support good practices – and brand-mark negative examples. Labels or rankings showing a company to be an “attractive employer” can also help in promoting diversity. These must not just be “bumper stickers” but “lived” in companies – and this must be monitored. This is another area where UNI Europe can play a central role in gathering and transferring know-how.

Diversity is a long-term project for politicians, companies and trade unions. “We have a long way in front of us”. There are still a number of questions to be debated within the trade unions; implementation roadmaps and multi-level activities are needed – not least in the unions themselves. With all this work in front, it was worthwhile casting a quick glance backwards. Both in the ICT Forum’s plenum and panel a lot of women and a lot of different ages were to be seen. This would not have been the case just a few decades ago.



uni • europa



UNI-Europa
Secrétaire régionale : Bernadette Ségol
Email : uni-europa@union-network.org
<http://www.uni-europa.org>

Published with the financial support of the European Commission
DG Employment and Social affairs