



Seminar 'The role of the public sector in diversity movement'

Event Report

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Welcome Message

Welcoming words by Szabolcs Schmidt Head of Unit, Non-discrimination and Roma coordination, DG Justice & Consumers

The meeting started with welcoming words from Szabolcs Schmidt, the Head of Unit of the Non-discrimination and Roma coordination Unit, who greeted the representatives of the Diversity Charters and the representatives of the local authorities to the Seminar, which was hosted by CSR Europe in Brussels.

He reminded that the [EU Platform](#) was created to promote diversity and equal opportunities in Europe, mainly targeting private enterprises. However, already in 2015 the [6th EU Diversity Charters Annual Forum](#) in Luxembourg underlined that the activities of the Charters should not be limited only to the private sector but should also be extended to the public authorities, which are a very important employer and a multiplier for the diversity movement.

This is the why this meeting tried to: (1) encourage the Diversity Charters to work more closely with cities, municipalities an regions; (2) understand the specific needs and challenges faced by local authorities in creating an inclusive society.

Interactive Panel – The integration of third-country nationals at local level

Open discussion with the speakers: Marie-Astrid Balcaen (city of Gent, Belgium), Jacques Spelkens (Engie), Sonja van Lieshout (Randstad) and Karen Julie Fink (city of Odense, Denmark).

Even though migration policy is mainly decided at national level, cities and municipalities have a key role in the concrete integration of third-country nationals. As a matter of fact, cities provide a wide array of critical services to newcomers, including language training, skills assessments and orientation, mentoring and placement services, vocational education and training, housing, etc.

In particular, Ms. Marie-Astrid Balcaen from the city of Gent (Belgium) addressed the issue of the integration of third-country nationals in the labour market.

In Gent, 1 in 5 citizens has foreigners' origins. In the last decades, the local administration has decided to focus mainly on two target groups: (1) second and third generation of migrants with Nord-African background; (2) intra-European migrants, especially with Roma and Bulgarian origins (often not educated and with no previous work experience – very challenging to integrate them in the labour market).

The main suggestions that can be drawn from her experience are:

1. **Tailor your approach** to the specific needs of the target group (methods and projects that work for one group might be completely wrong for another).
2. **Deliver the information as close as possible to the people** (at the key locations where newcomers are) and make this info easily accessible – e. g. “anchor” figures (mediators with Roma and Bulgarian origins hired by the municipality to create a link with these communities).

3. **Do not forget the higher educated migrants** (recognise their skills and degrees – e.g. [Eminentea](#): a project that tried to prepare highly-educated migrants to job interviews).
4. **Engage employers** to make sure they guarantee equal opportunity at the workplace. A good way to do is through positive imagining (e.g. [Ambassador project](#) – young people with North African or Turkish background that share their success stories in schools and with potential employers).
5. **Create innovative partnerships** with companies, NGOs and academia.

The need for **innovative private-public partnerships** was highlighted also by Ms. Sonja van Lieshout from Randstad Holding, a leading global staffing and recruitment company. In particular, she described three projects currently implemented by her company:

- **Entry Hub (Sweden)**: stakeholder dialogue to support refugees in their interaction with potential employers (Randstad helps them to assess their skills, create a CV, have interviews, etc.). The project started in Stockholm as a pilot and is now expanding to other six cities.
- **Refugees Pilot (the Netherlands)**: pilot with the Dutch government to support refugees in finding a job in the Dutch labour market.
- **Korta vägen 1 (Sweden)**: collaboration between Randstad, universities and the Public Employment Service to support non-EU highly educated professionals on the Swedish labour market.

Another company's perspective was provided by Mr. Jacques Spelkens from Engie, a French multinational electric utility company that is implementing several programmes for the integration of third-country nationals at local level. For instance, as part of its [diversity strategy](#), the company started to work on the integration of refugees and migrants through sport:

- **Integration through sport**: Engie created a partnership with the **Belgian Football Club Kraainem FC** to help young refugees by offering them to play football in mixed teams (Belgians and foreigners), giving them French classes and also allowing them to meet with potential employers. This project proved to be very successful because sport is a very good and innovate way to fight stereotypes and create social bonds.

In addition, the company was also facing some difficulties in finding non-specialised technicians to hire on the Belgian labour market. Therefore, in 2014, they launched a new project in collaboration with some Belgian local authorities:

- **Social Enterprise "Nouvelle"**: a 18-month program for migrants that give them technical know-how, language training, help in finding a home and a school for their children, etc. After having attended a cycle of 6 months for 3 consecutive times, participants get a certificate that proves their skills and 25% of them remain in the company.

The topic of **lack of local talents** was also raised by Ms. Karen Julie Fink from the [International Community Odense](#) (Denmark)), an initiative aiming at welcoming international employees and their families to Odense, helping them to settle and introducing them to social networks and activities around the city.

The main goal of this initiative is to attract and retain international workers to compensate the lack of talent and skills in the local labour market. Odense has an emerging IT sector but companies struggle to find IT engineers. Thus, the city needs to take advantage of the potential among the foreign-born, a group with unique competence needed for innovation and growth.

Among its activities, the International Community Odense also promotes the Danish Diversity Charter and has 63 signatories, mainly small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This means that these companies have on average a very low level of experience in recruiting international talents. Therefore, the International Community Odense acts as a sort of centralised HR department, to help them with the hiring process and explaining the value of a diverse workforce.

However, the collaboration between private companies and local authorities is not always easy:

- **Challenges from the perspective of the local authorities:** it is not easy to attract companies with the theme of diversity. Bigger companies are easier to engage because they have professional recruitment systems and more resources but SMEs and micro companies are particularly difficult to convince. A good idea to reach them is to try “sneak in” diversity during meetings about other topics.
- **Challenges from the perspective of the companies:** local authorities are often suspicious towards companies (they think it is not the private sector’s role to propose new collaborative projects on inclusion). In addition, the agenda of a local authority on diversity is often different from the diversity agenda of a private company (business environment is more fast-paced).

To respond to these challenges **the role of the Diversity Charters is essential**. As a matter of fact, this panel highlighted that many civil servants and companies’ representatives face similar challenges concerning the integration of legal migrants but most of them hardly get the chance to learn from each other’s work.

“We need more co-elaboration of solutions between companies and local authorities. The Diversity Charters can be the bridge that connects these two actors”.

The Diversity Charters can, therefore, have a key role in this process by putting in touch different local authorities as well as local authorities and companies to share info and create innovative partnerships to deepen the integration of third-country nationals into society.

1st Breakout Session – Local authorities as employers: specific challenges and best practices

Municipalities are often one of the largest employers or even the largest single employer in their area and should therefore strive to become a role-model in terms of workplace diversity and inclusion.

Some good practices in this field were presented by the city of Milan (Italy), which is very committed to diversity and inclusion, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups. An example of this is for instance:

- **Project Book Box:** the city of Milan hired people who have autistic spectrum disorders to work in public libraries as librarians.

In addition, Milan was also the winner of the City Access Award 2016, the European prize for making cities more accessible to people with disabilities and older people, thanks to its commitment to accessibility which goes above and beyond what is required by Italian and European law. A few concrete examples of this engagement are:

- **Casa Puglie:** a housing and residential centre created by the public administration for people with autism and their families. The city of Milan, in cooperation with local NGOs, has also launched “**Casa Betti**”, a house where people with disabilities can live independently.
- **Inclusive Playgrounds:** project to revitalize the outdoor play environments to make them more inclusive for people of all ages and abilities.

Moreover, another good example was offered by the city of Annemasse (France) that has been very engaged in the fight against discrimination in the last years and has launched [several initiatives](#) to foster diversity, among them:

1. **Diversity Charter:** Annemasse was one of the first public signatories of the French Charter and managed to encourage around 100 local companies to do the same. This is not an easy task as the local authority often needs to contact directly companies and actively promote the Charter’s activities to get them on board.
2. “**Forum de l’emploi**”: this job fair gathers once a year people looking for a job and public and private companies offering job opportunities. Around 50 new jobs were created last time and around 10-15 new companies sign-up to the Charter every time.

1. **Which are the differences and the specific challenges when it comes to defining and implementing a diversity policy in a private company and in a public authority?**

Although Diversity Charters were initially created and tailored for private employers, public employers seem to become more and more interested in joining them. This poses new challenges as the public and private sectors have different approaches in terms of diversity.

For instance, **private companies enjoy more flexibility** than public employers when it comes to implementing diversity practices. While public entities must sometimes go through a rigid top-down process to implement new diversity practices, private companies can simply put them in practice through a smoother internal process. In addition, it is more difficult to know who is responsible for diversity matters in the public sector than in a private company (CEO, CSR manager, etc.).

Another challenge faced by the Charters is how to strengthen the interaction between private companies and public sector. To do so, it is crucial to first define **what public employers want from private companies, and what private companies expect from public authorities**. Public authorities are usually trying to impose their own diversity practices to the private sector, while the latter has often a strong expertise already in this field that could certainly benefit to public employers (as it was highlighted by many participants, in many cases private companies do sometimes even better than the State itself).

Finally, another challenge for public employers is the fact that the sector is highly politicized and diversity issues are therefore subject to a changing political agenda (e.g. the recent raise of populist parties in many European countries). Signing-up to international programmes (such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) appears to be an interesting solution for cities to have a longer-term commitment to diversity that goes beyond the electoral cycle.

2. **What actions can a local authority implement to be coherent with what they ask to private companies regarding diversity (through social clauses in public contracts, etc.) compared to what they actually do as employers themselves?**

Taking the example of Gent, diversity policies can be developed for the staff of the city itself. In Gent, 10 different [actions to foster diversity](#) have been implemented to tackle racism, gender equality, LGBTI and anti-discrimination in general.

In order to better tailor these policies to the needs of the local context, it is essential to first assess the composition/degree of diversity of the staff of the local authorities themselves. This is extremely important because only with data and figures it is possible to know which the starting point is and push forward the diversity agenda.

In addition, the publication of the results of these surveys can also be an opportunity for the city to promote its activities and position itself as a role model for other municipalities. This is, for instance, what happened in Annemasse with the publication of a report on gender equality between its employees.

Finally, some private companies use targets in order to hire diverse people that match their own customers' diversity: the diverse background of the candidates is in this case is seen as an added-value to match customers' expectations and justify such targeted campaigns. **In the same way, public authorities should have staffs that reflect the society they represent.** Therefore, targets should be seen and used as a way to match "customers'" expectations, whatever it is the public or private sector.

3. If large cities attract quite easily a very diverse population and, thus, diverse candidates and workers, how can a small city in a rural territory attract a diverse workforce?

Numerous participants recognised that attracting workforce in rural areas is a challenge in itself, even without considering the diversity aspect.

A pressing issue to make rural areas more attractive are the infrastructures: small towns must build strong infrastructures (e.g. childcare, accessibility for disabled people, etc.) **in order to become more attractive for everyone.** This would also help them to improve the image of the territory by demonstrating that the place is **inclusive**.

In addition, rural areas have a great potential for integrating newcomers. While in big cities citizens are constantly competing to find houses and decent jobs, in rural areas accommodations are cheaper and it easier to meet new people and build social connections.

Finally, being recognized as a welcoming city is crucial for the development of any city. An open climate has been proven throughout history to attract investors and innovators, granting social, cultural and economic benefits.

The Diversity Charters should therefore target rural areas to help them to develop a diversity plan. To do so, it is advisable to start with gender and age-related issues, as these two topics are relevant for all public authorities (no matter the size or the location).

Main recommendations:

- **Local authorities should engage in long-term international programs to ensure that diversity stays up in the political agenda despite the changing political context.**
- **Conduct surveys about the composition of the staff of local authorities and then set up specific targets to improve the results.**
- **Start the "diversity journey" from gender equality and age management.**

2nd Breakout Session – Local authorities as multipliers for the diversity movement: specific challenges and best practices

Besides being an important employer, local authorities are also responsible for the provision of essential services, including education, housing, health care, etc. This is why the diversity strategy of cities, municipalities and regions should take into consideration and reflect the needs of a population that is increasingly diverse in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

A good argument to convince them to do so is to frame diversity as an instrument for economic growth. Traditionally, the main arguments to support the inclusion of different groups into society (e.g. migrants, LGTB, people with disabilities) were mainly based on topics related to democracy and human rights. However, these are not the only aspects that should be considered. The Stockholm County Council, for instance, published a report in 2012 on how **diversity should be used as a tool for creating conditions for regional economic growth.**

As a matter of fact, the OECD Territorial Review of Stockholm (2006/2010) found out that:

- The city sees diversity on the labour market as an asset.
 - Changing attitudes of employers,
 - Providing more efficient validation of immigrant skills.
- The city should concentrate resources regionally to combat youth unemployment.
 - Creating a regional arena to help young people to work;
 - Developing apprenticeships programmes.

Therefore, diversity should be considered as a resource both within the local authority and in the whole region to spur innovation and economic growth.

In addition, local authorities can also become a multiplier for the diversity movement by publicizing the activities of the Charter. This is, for example, what regularly happens in Germany, thanks to a collaboration between the 'Charta der Vielfalt' and some local authorities (such as, for instance, the Economic Region Heilbronn-Franken GmbH). The aim of these partnerships is to organise **signing events for the Charters** in territories that would have been otherwise difficult to reach for the Charter's staff alone.

This seems to be a win-win collaboration, as the local authority can show its commitment to diversity while the Charter can benefit from the good connections of the public authority with local employers.

1. Public authorities are in charge of providing key services (e.g. childcare, schools, transports, housing, etc.) that have an impact on the access to employment for everyone: how this responsibility is translated into concrete actions to provide the best services possible to the largest part of the population?

Many initiatives were presented, especially regarding the administrative support to migrants that don't have the language/bureaucratic skills needed to integrate in the country of arrival. For instance:

- In Estonia officials will soon be hired for the first time by the public administration to provide bureaucratic support to third-country nationals. In some German cities this service already exists, even though these activities are often provided by volunteers.

- In France, refugees were facing problems with the post offices: they could not get their papers because they did not have an ID. Therefore, the national post office company (“la Poste”) joined forces with an NGO (“France terre d’asile”) to help these people by [providing support](#) throughout the whole administrative process.

In addition, to make sure that public authorities provide the best services possible to the largest part of the population, **public procurement** seems to be a very effective tool. In France, for example, there is a law imposing binding social clauses for public procurements. This means that cities can reserve contracts to companies that comply with certain diversity criteria. This is a very powerful instrument that cities can use to strengthen the inclusiveness of their labour markets.

However, this rule creates a lot of challenges for SMEs, which normally do not have as many resources as bigger companies to invest in diversity policies. Therefore, signing the Charter becomes an easy way for SMEs to prove that they are eligible for such kinds of procurements.

2. Can you describe how the relationship between the Diversity Charter and the local authorities is in your country when it comes to promote the Charter?

When it comes to the relationship with local authorities, there is a very high degree of heterogeneity among the Charters: some of them are used to work with public authorities (both at national and local level) while some others do not have a lot of experience in this field yet.

One Charter that is very active on this topic is, for instance, Luxembourg. There, when it comes to implementing the Diversity Charter, some cities are particularly involved and even members of the Charter’s Working Group (e.g. the city of Luxembourg) while some others (especially the smaller ones) are not really engaged.

The first goal of the Charter is therefore to gain new signatories. To achieve this goal, the **local authorities that are already engaged should share the message with their peers**. In addition, although local authorities have a lot of infrastructures to organize events, they are not yet independent actors when it comes to promoting diversity. As a consequence, more work needs to be done to position local authorities as leaders in this field.

Another good example of cooperation between a Charter and public authorities comes from France. There, two strategies in particular have proved to be successful:

- **Offering very flexible partnerships to the local authorities:** tailoring the message and the activities to the specific needs of that city/region.
- **Decentralising the activities of the Charter through local offices:** rather than being based only in Paris, the French Charter decided to go local opening 5 regional offices.

If the creation of multiple regional offices is not possible, a good alternative is provided by the collaboration with local NGOs or local authorities. This is, for instance, what has been implemented in Germany, where the Charter has partnered up with local organisations (e.g. the [Welcome Center Heilbronn-Franken](#)) to benefit from their connections with SMEs on that specific territory (connections that the Charter itself, being based only in the capital city, cannot develop alone).

Finally, another good strategy to engage with public authorities is the organisation of “Diversity Days” to celebrate what the city/municipality/region is already doing on diversity. From the experience of many participants, this appears to be a

good way to create a first contact with the public authority that can then develop in a more structured cooperation. In this regard, it is important to underline that the narrative used by the Charter should not be about “integrating” but about making sure that everyone can be a part of an “**inclusive society**”.

3. Can you give us examples of actions implemented by local authorities to create a network of actors and leaders on the territory in order to improve diversity at the workplace: job fairs, meeting with various actors (NGOs, companies, local authorities, etc.), communication campaigns on innovative best practices regarding employment, etc.?

Ms. Isabell Bommert from the Welcome Center Heilbronn-Franken, an institution financed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and Housing Baden-Württemberg, mentioned two initiatives:

- **The organisation of job fairs** where local companies can meet public authorities with the aim of supporting highly educated refugees who need to improve their English and German skills. As a general rule, job fairs for targeted groups (migrants, disabled, etc.) seem to be a very effective tool but, to maximise their benefits, it is important that the country has the right cultural context and support system.
- **The organisation of [webinar series](#)** on how to employ refugees. The choice of organising webinars rather than physical meetings proved to be very successful in order to reach companies that don't have the resources (in terms of time and budget) to physically travel to attend a seminar.

Finally, all participants recognised that there is a strong need to share good practices between private and public sector, as both actors have developed interesting and effective practices over time. Therefore, any project that puts them in touch is considered to be as highly beneficial.

Main recommendations:

- **Go local and tailor your message to your target (big/small city, rural/urban area, etc.).**
- **Remove the word “integration” and welcome “inclusion”.**
- **Consider the private sector as a facilitator in the implementation of public initiatives.**

Outcomes & conclusions

The objective of the Seminar was to establish a dialogue between diversity charters, companies and local authorities to understand how these three actors can better work together to promote the diversity movement.

Local authorities play a very important role as policy-makers, employers, service providers and buyers of goods and services. Therefore, their involvement is of primary importance to foster the diversity agenda. However, to date, many Charters do not have strong connections with them yet as they tend to focus more on the private sector.

Through many concrete examples and success stories, this Seminar tried to invert this tendency by providing useful suggestions and allowing participants to reach a common awareness on how to work more closely with cities, municipalities and regions.

Participants

No.	Country	First name	Surname	Organisation
1	Belgium	Pierre	Burton	Actiris
2		Gilles	Lenaerts	Commune of Koekelberg
3	Czech Republic	Pavel	Kučera	Byznys pro společnost/Business for Society
4	Denmark	Sandra	Wolter	Foreningen Nydanske
5		Karen Julie	Fink	International Community Odense
6	Estonia	Kelly	Grossthal	Eesti mitmekesisuse kokkulepe / Estonian Diversity Charter
7		Artjom	Suvorov	Vice-Mayor of Tartu
8	France	Sylvie	Savignac	Les entreprises pour la Cité
9		Laure	Hajjar	Les entreprises pour la Cité
10		Isabelle	Ucar	Conseillère Municipale déléguée à la lutte contre les discriminations, City of Annemasse
11	Germany	Kerstin	Tote	Charta der Vielfalt
12		Isabell	Bommert	Welcome Center Heilbronn-Franken
13	Hungary	Márta	Szigeti Bonifert	Hungarian Business Leaders Forum
14	Ireland	Maria	Hegarty	Equality Strategies
15	Italy	Veronica	Nisco	Sodalitas
16		Angelica	Vasile	City of Milan
17	Poland	Marzena	Strzelczak	Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu
18		Michał	Mazur	City of Warsaw
19	Spain	Anna Maria	Hurtado	Fundación Alares
20		Rosario	Maseda García	Tenchnical Advisor from the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality
21	Sweden	Katarina	Önell	Diversity Charter Sweden
22		Evert	Kroes	Stockholm City Council