



## **What is Diversity?**

Understanding diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing people's individual differences and the unique contribution that each of us can bring to all aspects of society, including business.

However, the concept of diversity is wider than exclusively a moral imperative or societal goal. An initial focus on anti-discrimination law, encouraged and supported by international initiatives such as the [UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#), and the ILO's [Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention No.111](#), has broadened over time. Contemporary efforts in this area are increasingly centred on a holistic and more sophisticated concept of inclusion.

There is now considerable global discussion on the value of embracing diversity in the workplace, and specifically on better harnessing the contributions of previously excluded or undervalued groups. This is most meaningful when efforts transcend public relations or legal compliance and involves making a business case for new ways of operating and approaching employment.

## **Why is Diversity an issue for Business?**

Workforce diversity is a key issue for business, affecting a company's growth and performance strategy. It can be best viewed as enhancing a sustained competitive advantage, on the understanding that business will be most effective when fostering an inclusive workforce environment that draws on the maximum pool of talents and experiences.

For business, harnessing workforce diversity means, *inter alia*:

- Recruiting and retaining the best people, regardless of their origin, gender, age, etc.
- Increasing employees' individual capacity and talents
- Better understanding and responding to the needs of a diverse marketplace and the community
- Enhancing economic performance by improving company decision-making and innovation capacity
- Working more effectively across different cultures and organisations
- Building broader trust for your company, services and products
- Developing a sustainable global organisation
- Addressing human rights values

## **How can Business engage?**

- Make a strong managerial commitment from the top to non-discriminatory practices
- Develop clear procedures and company policies (internally and externally)
- Provide training and raise awareness across all levels of the organization
- Assess and monitor progress towards measurable targets
- Address employees' complaints of discriminatory practices
- Support community efforts on inclusion and equal opportunities

## What is the IOE Position on Diversity?

The IOE recognises that workforce diversity increases business efficiency, productivity and sustainability and therefore positively impacts economic performance and society as a whole.

The IOE works to support its members in all countries, at all stages of development, to promote a wider understanding of the benefits of workplace diversity and to equip them to engage with domestic law and regulation in drafting diversity policies and practices that are not only legally compliant, but fully realise the operational and productivity benefits.

Nevertheless the workplace is not the only arena where appreciating social diversity can be nurtured and achieved. Any solution towards equality should start at grassroots level, including in schools, colleges and universities; in homes through parenting; and in the media, popular culture and practices.

## How is the IOE engaging?

- The IOE works in collaboration with the [International Federation of Business and Professional Women \(BPW International\)](#) to build partnerships for developing strategies, to share networks and intercultural understanding on the joint promotion of workplace diversity, gender equality and women's empowerment across the business community.
- The IOE provides members with the opportunity to participate in frequent and relevant high-level international platforms and workshops on leading diversity issues such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, disabilities and HIV/AIDS.
- The IOE works in collaboration with the [ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities \(ACT/EMP\)](#) to provide first-hand support and guidance at country level.
- The IOE works cooperatively and participates in global policy framework discussions with the [Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD, BIAC](#), to jointly advance the business case for gender diversity and women's economic empowerment.
- The IOE supports the adoption of [ILO Convention on Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\), No. 111](#), and promotes the [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#), which include the non-discrimination in respect of employment and occupation and inform the labour principles of the UN Global Compact.

## For more Information and Answers to your Questions

Please visit our website [www.ioe-emp.org](http://www.ioe-emp.org). If you do not find what you are looking for, please contact the IOE's Adviser on diversity: Amelia Espejo: [espejo@ioe-emp.org](mailto:espejo@ioe-emp.org), or call +41 22 929 00 19.