

# Neutral and Inclusive Communication in Corporate Environments

## WP3: Development of the Inclusive Training Pack

### D3.1 Diversity Communication Panels

#### (KEAN)

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## Introduction

### Purpose of the document

The present document is formulated to consolidate the findings derived from five National Diversity Communication Panels and one International Panel, as integral components of the activities under T3.1 Diversity Communication Panel. The overarching objective is to enrich the development of the Inclusive Language Training Pack, which is the main output of WP3. Each partner coordinated a panel within their respective country, inviting experts from corporate sectors alongside representatives from diverse groups. The Diversity Communication Panels created the space for representatives to share specific needs, advantages, and requisites concerning the adoption of neutral and inclusive communication language within corporate context.

The collected knowledge from all national panels is presented in summary in this document based on the national reports provided by each partner. Each country section covers the following topics:

- Challenges of diverse groups and benefits for organisations related to the adoption of inclusive and neutral communication.
- Actions to include in the Action Plan in applying inclusive and neutral communication.
- Training development for various corporate functions in the organization.
- Definition of benchmarks to evaluate the level of adopting inclusive and neutral communication.
- Definition of KPIs to measure the level of adopting inclusive and neutral communication.
- Other requirements and recommendations to apply inclusive and neutral communication.

### Organising Diversity Communication Panels

KEAN has developed specific guidelines for coordinating the events, which were structured into two parts. The first part commenced with an overview of the NICE program objectives, description and a presentation highlighting key insights extracted from the NICE comparative report. Additionally, attendees were briefed on best practices concerning the implementation of neutral and inclusive communication, drawing from the comprehensive analysis presented in the document titled "From Words to Actions," as part of WP2. Next, representatives from diversity pillars articulated their respective challenges and requirements, with the objective of fostering diverse and inclusive work environments within corporate settings.

The next part of the national Diversity Communication Panels was dedicated to discussions on the practical application of neutral and inclusive communication across various corporate functions, directly addressing the previously identified needs. Furthermore, discussions encompassed the formulation of monitoring mechanisms, inclusive of benchmarks and KPIs, designed to gauge the level of adoption of inclusive language practices. The active engagement of both groups within the Communication Panels enabled the exchange of expertise and insights.

The last segment of the events contained a Diversity Communication Panel discussion involving all participants. The primary aim of this dialogue was to organise a consortium of national experts in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) domain, with a focus on addressing three core themes:

- Identifying corporate processes and functions necessitating integration of inclusive communication.

- Identifying key areas of training on neutral language and inclusive communication, encompassing specific topics, vulnerable groups, and other pertinent categories warranting inclusion in NICE training materials.
- Formulating indicators and benchmarks to assess the implementation of inclusive language within workplace contexts.

## Analysis of National Communication Panels

This section provides a summary of the national communication panels by country, based on the provided national communication panels reports provided to KEAN upon the conclusion of the panels.

### Bulgaria

The Diversity Communication Panel in Bulgaria was implemented on November 7, 2023, at the office of Shell Bulgaria in Sofia, with the attendance of 21 representatives from profit and non-profit sectors, whose profile is presented in detail in the national report by the Bulgarian partners. At the beginning of the session, Bulgarian partners presented the NICE program and objectives and Maria Stoyanova discussed the publication "*From Words to Actions: Enhancing Inclusive Communication in the Workplace*" developed under WP2, providing inspiration on inclusive communication actions in the workplace.

Following, three representatives from non-governmental organisations, Sofia Lyateva, Blagovest Iliev, and Rayna Sokolova, highlighted the challenges faced by specific communities in professional communication that need to be addressed into the Action Plans for inclusive working environments. Specifically, for underrepresented groups of LGBTQI+ community, Roma, and people with visual impairments.

Sofia Lyateva shared particular issues of biased language, discrimination, the lack of awareness about gender identities and pronouns within the LGBTQI+ community and the legal barriers faced by transgender individuals in changing their sex. Blagovest Iliev, representing Roma communities, addressed the media's role in reinforcing biases and stereotypes against Roma, leading to their marginalisation and discrimination in the labour market. Moreover, the discrimination during recruitment due to fears of discomfort among other employees was noted. Closing Rayna Sokolova, a psychologist, shared experiences of people with visual impairments, highlighting inadequate workplace behaviours and communication challenges. She stressed that workplaces are often not adapted to the needs of individuals with visual impairments, and employees lack knowledge about appropriate attitudes and communication with diverse disabilities.

The importance of inclusive language training in corporate environments, specifically focusing on processes involving direct interactions, both internally among employees and externally in corporate relations. Corporate operations and HR functions are important to be the first group of employees that have attended D&I training including recruitment, onboarding and training, PR, corporate communication, legal departments, upper management, team leaders, marketing and sales, and all employees. Participants, representing large multinational companies, acknowledged their privileged position in having established global policies for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, they recognized the need to consider national nuances, and best practices to be tailored taking into consideration the local communities, as these may react differently to certain issues. They highlighted the importance of adapting global policies to address local needs and the sensitivity of language, especially in Bulgaria.

Moreover, Bulgarian language has plenty of challenges in applying neutral language, due to grammatical gender. Different approaches of neutral and inclusive languages, such as adding feminine endings to masculine words or using neutral plural forms are indicative and can be presented as alternatives, allowing companies to choose the most suitable one. Training can support achieving the highest standards of inclusive communication in various common situations.

The next topic that was captured in the Diversity Communication Panel discussion, was regarding the main themes and the format of neutral and inclusion communication trainings, highlighting that modules should not be divided per underrepresented groups (e.g. Communication with Roma) as putting focus on the vulnerable groups is making it special, which is counterproductive and does not facilitate their inclusion.

It was suggested that the training can consist of different modules, allowing participants to sign up for themes of interest and can be formulated to interactive online sessions lasting 1 to 3 hours. Each module should comprise three main parts: a video lecture, self-learning theory, and a practical task simulating relatable communication scenarios. Additionally, group exercises enhance interaction and improve learning outcomes. One important element that was brought on the discussion, was to divide the NICE training into basic and advanced levels. Basic training should be accessible to all employees and cover fundamental concepts like unconscious bias and illustrate real-life instances of exclusionary language. Additionally, the advanced training should be mandatory for managerial roles, and offer more in-depth knowledge for those responsible for managing people and interactions.

Participants recommended a focus to enhance individuals' sensitivity in detecting instances of non-inclusive communication, since many people are unaware when their communication lacks inclusivity, and addressing unintentional biases requires awareness and recognition. The importance of accepting and challenging these biases is a process of actively engaging in fostering inclusive communication practices.

Main topics for skills development modules that were identified are:

- Active listening
- How to give/receive constructive feedback
- How to ask questions politely when you are not certain how to address a person.
- Training that exemplifies that every individual is different in some respects beyond ethnicity, sexual orientation etc., but at the same time we have a lot in common too.
- Neurodiversity should also be included as a topic in the training, covering some of the most neurodivergent conditions and tips on how to modify the work environment in order to fit to different needs.
- A dictionary or glossary of terminology (it can include definitions, examples of exclusionary language and expressions with corresponding suggestions for their inclusive form).
- How to create an inclusive and authentic environment in professional meetings.
- How to react when you are a witness or a subject of discriminatory language in the workplace - building a culture of intolerance to exclusionary communication.

As a next phase of the action plan, the definition of Benchmarks and KPIs is necessary to measure and monitor Neutral and Inclusive Communication adoption level. Main practices that can be implemented within corporate environment are:

- Counting the reports for discriminatory or offensive language submitted to the Human Resources or another responsible department handling internal misconduct.

- Incorporating questions on inclusive language into regular employee evaluation surveys, with the data stored and analysed as an indicator.
- Tracking the number of employees who have completed training on neutral and inclusive communication.
- Introducing questions about inclusive communication in exit interviews.
- Inclusive communication to be part of the team leader evaluation – this can also be a KPI.
- Inclusive communication to be part of the employee performance score.

Regarding specific KPIS, there are many challenges of insufficient analysis within corporate organisations of regularly obtained data and employees that often do not receive feedback from the management, and thus do not feel that their voices and opinions matter and are considered. Therefore, it's important to involve the feedback from all employees to shape a real view of the adoption level of Neutral & Inclusive language within the organisation.

## Cyprus

The Diversity Communication Panel in Cyprus was organised by the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) on November 23, 2023, aiming to gather insights from national experts, students, and experienced managers on neutral and inclusive communication in corporate workspaces. The primary focus was to collect data and define structural elements for training, including identifying corporate processes suitable for inclusive language. The panel also aimed to recognise the target groups for training, establishing indicators and benchmarks, and outlining essential topics to be covered. Overall, the Diversity Communication Panel aimed to unite diverse perspectives with expertise to enhance inclusive communication practices in various professional settings.

The application of neutral and inclusive language in the workplace has a great importance for Cyprus, emphasising its application in both internal interactions, among employees and external communication with entities in corporate relations. Acknowledging the advantage of multinational corporations - such as PWC and CYTA which are based in the country, with well-established global policies in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies - the challenges faced by national companies, small-medium enterprises (SMEs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and public sector institutions vary. Multinational organisations benefit from sophisticated global policies that set common standards for employees worldwide, providing a robust framework that smaller enterprises may lack, in addition to access to resources and knowledge. Moreover, despite the advantages of global policies, the importance of considering national-level policies is high, as global corporate policies may not be universally effective. Moreover, various language-specific challenges in Cyprus, specifically related to the grammatical gender in the Greek language create barriers to inclusion and equality. Participants explored various approaches to neutralise language, such as adding gender-specific markers or using neutral plural forms.

Trainings for all employees should be applied in organisations, creating awareness on the benefits of neutral and inclusive communication, and clarifying the practices of its use. Based on grammatical restrictions, the topic of using inclusive pronouns must be addressed, revealing the noticeable uncertainty and confusion surrounding its use. Other topics are the skills to detect non-inclusive communications, active listening, skills to constructive feedback, develop inclusive conversations, cultural awareness, and the development of a glossary of terminology with examples of exclusionary language and suggestions for inclusive alternatives.

Regarding the training format, the recommendations included interactive trainings of a moderate duration to keep the engagement and the option to select topics based on function and needs. A two-level training should be developed, one basic and one advanced, where the first can be accessible to all employees, receiving the basic knowledge of inclusive communication, covering fundamental concepts and real-life situations demonstrating exclusionary language. The advanced training can be addressed to corporate functions, responsible for managing people and interactions, providing more in-depth knowledge. Furthermore, the trainings can be enhanced with the development of a General Training KIT available in Greek and English as a manual for the organisations.

Benchmarks and KPIs within organisations are a challenging topic, and various practices were identified during the Diversity Communication Panel in Cyprus, focusing on tracking and analysing the reported incidents of discriminatory or offensive language, internal surveys to measure the adoption of neutral and inclusive language and embed a relevant KPI to team leadership's evaluation. One challenge that organisations need to overcome is the lack of feedback from management team and the limited analysis of available data regarding internal inclusive communication.

## Greece

The Diversity Communication Panel was organised in Athens on November 22, 2023, with experts from Diversity & Inclusion (D&I), HR management and Communications sectors, and representatives from various diverse groups. Representatives from the LGBTQI community, people with disabilities, women empowering organisations, and immigrants' communities, corporate executives included HR managers, Communication managers, D&I experts, marketing managers, and corporate affairs representatives.

During the Diversity Communication Panel, participants outlined strategies and measures for integrating neutral and inclusive language practices within corporate operations, customised to suit distinct requirements and procedures. The active involvement of senior management is pivotal to foster a corporate culture that embraces diversity and inclusivity, and the participation in trainings to be aiming to address the unique needs of diverse demographics with a particular emphasis on adopting inclusive communication strategies. Moreover, collaboration with NGOs can provide specialised knowledge in this domain and support organisations develop a feasible action plan and adopt a neutral and inclusive corporate culture. This can be supported with initiatives encompassing guidelines and methodologies to identify non-inclusive language, strategies to incorporate neutral terminology, and the enhancement of communication competencies.

Important knowledge specifically, for LGBTQI+ community, was shared by Anna Apergi, the President of the Greek Transgender Support Association, who addressed the issue of gender inequality in the Greek language, particularly emphasising the common use of the male pronoun to refer to all individuals. She illustrated upon the profound implications of inclusive communication, citing the saying, "The limits of my language define the limits of my world." Attention was drawn to the underrepresentation of transgender individuals in workplaces and educational institutions, and the need to advocate for tangible measures in enhancing inclusivity and linguistic sensitivity in both language usage and organisational protocols, with a visible effect. These measures encompass the modification of data within organisational systems concerning to parental nomenclature and signatures. Additionally, the revisions to recruitment procedures and the urge to invite employees inform themselves with appropriate terminology for transgender individuals as well the adoption of neutral language was suggested.

From the pillar of disabilities, Mr. Evagelos Avgoulas explained the practical approaches tailored to diverse disabilities (including auditory, visual, and physical impairments) aiming to foster enhanced



communication within the workspace. Moreover, knowledge of available guidance through online platforms for executives and citizens can offer a wealth of practices able to increase accessibility to various demographic groups.

The event concluded in an interactive dialogue among participants concerning the extent of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) practices within organisational contexts, alongside strategies for their seamless integration into corporate culture. Participants underscored the necessity of a tangible Action Plan portraying allocated resources and establishing regular oversight mechanisms. This plan should encompass delineations of a thorough budgetary allocation, the establishment of a communication infrastructure across the organisational hierarchy, and the implementation of a structured training schedule. The proposed strategy advocates for the initial engagement of senior management and leadership teams, acknowledging their pivotal role in facilitating the infusion of inclusive communication practices and nurturing a corporate environment that champions diversity and inclusivity. Training programs must be an integral part of the Action Plan, designed to encompass the advantages of a diverse work environment, along with opportunities for organisational advancement. Additionally, the training should equip employees with the ability to identify and address non-inclusive communications through specific communications framework with guidelines for both internal and external communications. Lastly, the implementation of customer-oriented actions to promote inclusive communication in the external environment, thereby positively impacting the overall business environment.

In Greece, the level of adoption of inclusive communication varies, however, monitoring progress has proven challenging with difficulties in tracking and evaluating progress. Therefore, the group identified specific benchmark actions which are presented below:

1. Diverse representation in both total workforce and managerial roles, tailored to specific job requirements.
2. High engagement levels of personnel across the company.
3. Active involvement of leadership teams in promoting D&I practices and Neutral & Inclusive Language.
4. Training of personnel in fundamental D&I management principles and Neutral & Inclusive Communication.
5. Development of a specific Action Plan addressing D&I and neutral communication.
6. Allocation of a specific percentage of the entity's budget towards D&I initiatives.
7. Internal research to gauge the adoption of inclusive language within the organisation.
8. Application of neutral and inclusive communication practices across all organisational functions.
9. Incorporation of D&I policies and practices within the organisation's Code of Ethics.
10. Ensuring accessibility for employees.
11. Integration of D&I considerations into Performance Management.
12. Maintenance of up-to-date policies related to D&I.
13. Implementation of neutral and inclusive language practices throughout the entire recruitment process, from job announcements to induction.
14. Adoption of neutral and inclusive language in both internal and external corporate communications.
15. Utilisation of updated systems with inclusive informational parameters and the use of neutral communication language.

In conclusion, the experts advocated for a defined set of KPIs to assess the degree of adoption of neutral and inclusive language. These indicators should be precise and transparent, comprehensible to all teams within the organisation, and subject to regular monitoring intervals.

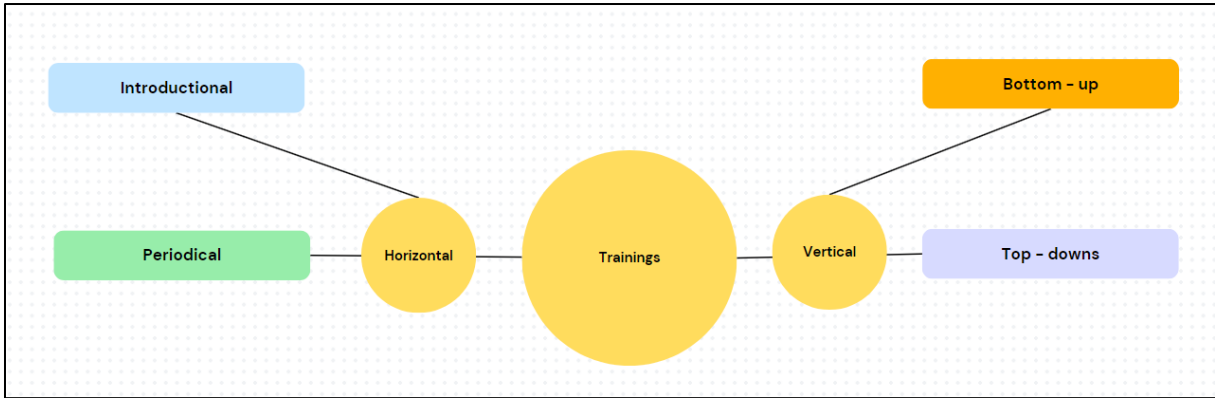
1. Internal anonymous research, employing questionnaires or quizzes, to gauge feelings of inclusion within the organisation, attitudes towards diversity pillars including sexual orientation, and behaviours related to inclusivity. This should include qualitative input to provide deeper insights into communication practices.
2. Analysis of employee demographics by role and function, considering diversity pillars.
3. Tracking and addressing incidents of discriminatory behaviour within the organisation.
4. Assessing employees' compliance with the organisation's diversity policies.
5. Monitoring the percentage of employees participating in mandatory D&I training.
6. Evaluating the accessibility level of systems and facilities for all employees.
7. Assessing the implementation of D&I practices within Performance Management systems.

## Lithuania

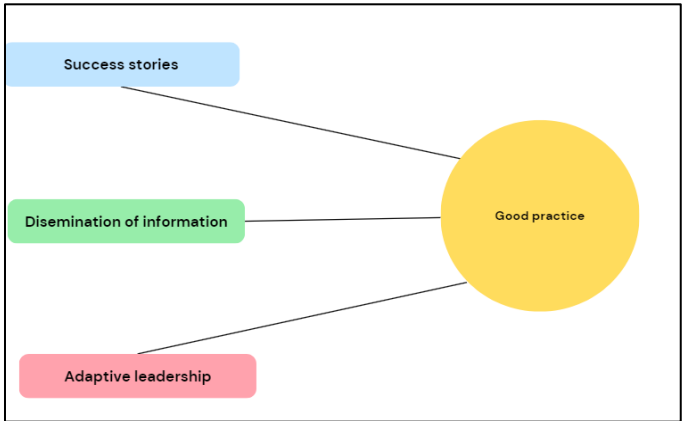
The Diversity Communication Panel was held face-to-face on October 25, 2022, with 13 participants representing diverse social groups. The panel started with the introduction of the NICE project, outlining its objectives and progress. Facilitated by professional sociologist Gintė Martinkėnė, the discussion delved into personal narratives concerning inclusive communication, ensuring confidentiality to encourage openness.

The discussion identified several problematic areas within the working environment for various diversity pillars, including inaccessible facilities, discriminatory communication and behaviour, structural fragmentation, lack of information and knowledge, hypercare, and societal attitudes stemming from historical legacies. These barriers hinder the successful integration of vulnerable groups into both the workplace and society in general. However, public education from an early age could address societal perceptions and behaviours, particularly regarding disability and the connection between social cultures that could tackle discriminatory attitudes and promote the employment of individuals from marginalised groups. The discussion underscored the importance of holistic organisational systems encompassing relationships, communication, accessibility, training, and values raising the recognition of every individual's inherent worth and the continual pursuit of learning to foster an inclusive organisational culture and success within the workplace.

The training approaches that the group recommended act in various levels and follow both horizontal and vertical strategies. Horizontal training, initiates with employments and continues periodically, while integrating discussions and creative workshops to enhance effectiveness. Moreover, periodical training can anticipate such incidents of exclusion and support employees affected by disability. Specifically, an example was shared by a participant that experienced a shift in communications due to disability, prompting a job change. On the other hand, the vertical training strategy focuses on a hierarchical system, providing training to employees, managers, and leaders. This inclusive approach fosters social responsibility competencies across all levels. Vertical training also emphasises knowledge sharing between management and employees.



Distinctive theories and concepts of the key values of equality, a unique worldview, tolerance, knowledge, greater acceptance, openness, human dignity, inclusion (but not integration), would be important to be included in the training program, as well as how to inspire through concrete examples of organisations and good practices that can be replicated by other organisations.



The main themes that were discussed related to diversity pillars of disability, gender and age and the need for all employees to get more educated about the needs of these groups. One strong example they shared, was a story of an educator with a disability who goes to school and educates people about disability while having a visible disability herself. Once, she was walking in a supermarket and a mother said to her child: “Just do not go near her, she might be aggressive” and the child replied: “But she is my teacher”.

A distinguishing example of a co-created tool was the result of the Lithuanian Diversity Communication Panel, with a self-evaluation tool for companies to check the level of inclusive communications they apply. The questions have been formulated to provide a comprehensive insight into the topic of inclusive communication and can be applied at various levels while searching for associates, on-boarding a new member, and within internal and external communications.

**Searching for an employee:**

1. Are there no words that could indicate the preferred gender?
2. Is there a balance between words that are more associated with femininity and masculinity?
3. Is the work group for which the employees are being sought not described homogeneously, e.g.: "female", "male" or "youthful"?
4. Is there an assurance that equal opportunities will be ensured when looking for an employee(s)?
5. Can different people identify with the chosen job advertisement visual?

6. Is it possible to inform the organisation about a person's disability, if one wants to?
7. Is it possible to specify pronouns a person would like to be addressed by?
8. Are the organisation's values and work culture presented?
9. Does the job advertisement clearly state the functions and nature of the job? If it is an entry level position, can a person who has not worked in a similar job understand the job functions?
10. If the work can be done by a person with reading, perception challenges, or intellectual disability, is the text of the advertisement written in an easy-to-understand language?
11. Is the language chosen during the job interview understandable and acceptable to people of different generations? For example, elderly people can be put off by unnecessary anglicisms, very informal communication.
12. Is it possible to have a job interview in a more relaxed format? For example, individuals with disabilities, neurodivergent individuals may need more time or introductory questions.
13. Is there an opportunity to prove one's competence not only during the job interview, but also by completing the task? (Not all people are good communicators and not all jobs require it, but it is evaluated during interviews.)

### ***Onboarding:***

1. Is it possible to include pronouns by which the person would like to be addressed in the email signature? Is this common in the organisation?
2. Is the person familiar with the abbreviations used in the organisation?
3. Is the employee introduced to information about the organisation's values, code of ethics, inclusive language guidelines (if any), reporting channels? Is this information easy to find?
4. Is there direct communication with the person in order to find out their individual needs?

### ***In a workplace:***

1. After hearing or reading an insulting comment, do employees, especially managers, react and correct or express their disapproval?
2. Do employees know how to report offensive comments? Is there a secure and confidential whistleblowing channel setup for this? Is the whistleblower informed about the progress and results of the complaint investigation?
3. Is the most important and infrequently changing information presented to employees in different formats considering the fact that some may prefer video, others may prefer audio?
4. Are document templates prepared considering readability (accessibility) recommendations?
5. Do managers clearly express their support for inclusive communication?
6. Are training sessions organised to introduce employees to different D&I topics?
7. Does the organisation have neutral and inclusive communication guidelines? Do people know where to look for information about inclusive communication?
8. Does the speech focus primarily on a person, for example, a person with a disability?
9. Does celebrating religious holidays in the office, such as Christmas, alienate co-workers who do not follow that religion? Can they celebrate their holidays?
10. Does everyone understand the language used in the office? If there are several foreigners working, do people around them speak a language they understand?
11. Are the organisation's values clearly communicated and reminded to employees?
12. Has the organisation assessed the availability of its Information Communications Technology? Are you planning to improve it?

### **Communication outside**

1. Doesn't advertising encourage negative attitudes, stereotypes about different groups in society?
  - a. Aren't broad generalisations being made about a group of the society?
  - b. Are the representatives of the social group presented as distinct and unique personalities?
  - c. Isn't belonging to a social group the most important and defining part of character?
2. Has the organisation evaluated the accessibility of its website? Are there plans to improve its accessibility?
3. Is the vocabulary chosen in communication gender-sensitive? i.e. isn't the masculine gender considered neutral?
4. Are representatives of various groups consulted before portraying or writing about them? Are they part of your team?
5. Is key information about the organisation that rarely changes presented in an easy-to-read language?
6. If success stories are presented in the communication, are they presented by people from different groups of society?
7. Does the communication depict persons of various ages, genders, body types, skin colours, with or without disabilities, etc?

### **Romania**

The Diversity Communication Panel in Romania was held on November 8, 2023, virtually via Zoom, bringing together 22 participants including experts in diversity management, communication, HR, and sustainability fields. The detailed participants profile is presented at the Romania National Diversity Communication Panel Report. The session consisted of brief presentations by special guests followed by open discussions, focusing on defining structural elements of the training such as target groups, indicators, benchmarks, and key topics. The virtual format was chosen for its inclusive nature, allowing signatories of the Romanian Diversity Charter from across the country to participate.

The event was structured into two parts, starting with the presentation of the collaborative regional publication - *From Words to Actions: Enhancing Inclusive Communication in the Workplace* - developed under WP2. Moreover, the six guest speakers who represent both private and non-governmental sectors, provided insights regarding the core components of inclusive and neutral language, linguistic nuances, barriers to inclusivity, and the unique requirements and expectations of two marginalized demographic groups within the workplace: namely, the LGBTIQ+ community and individuals with disabilities.

The topics and practices for the adoption of a corporate communication language outlined various corporate functions and departments essential to foster inclusive communication within organisations. These encompass HR, which includes Recruitment, Talent Management, and Learning Specialists, pivotal in shaping organisational culture. Public Relations and Corporate Communications, covering Public Affairs, Employer Branding, and Internal Communication, play a crucial role in disseminating inclusive messaging both internally and externally. Legal and Compliance Departments, dealing with drafting and verifying official documents, hold significant sway over the administrative language adopted by a company. Upper Management is defined as key decision-makers crucial for setting the tone and ensuring alignment with inclusive communication practices throughout the organisation. Team Leaders have the role of indispensable frontline representatives, responsible for cultivating an environment of openness and guiding employees in embracing inclusive communication

practices. Marketing & Sales divisions were also acknowledged for their role in shaping external messaging. Ultimately, the collective contribution of all employees was also fundamental to fostering a culture of understanding and respect, wherein diverse perspectives are valued, and every individual feels heard and included.

Communication retains the pivotal role of both a vehicle for shaping attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours, and a mirror reflecting societal norms and aspirations. Language, as a potent tool, not only conveys information but also serves as a barometer of prevailing societal norms, influencing perceptions of normalcy and acceptability. Recognising the profound impact of language, it becomes imperative to apply it responsibly, for fear that it becomes a medium for discrimination, underscored by an awareness of the biases inherent in linguistic expression. Language, as an organism, exhibits dynamic characteristics, perpetually evolving and adapting to meet the evolving needs of society. The emergence of new lexicons is indicative of these societal shifts, underscoring the interconnectedness between language and human experiences. Embracing inclusive language practices fosters an organisational culture characterised by inclusivity, thereby facilitating individuals in realising their professional and personal potential. It is impressive to acknowledge that inclusive language is not governed by rigid rules but rather is informed by individuals' perceptions and sensitivities, necessitating a nuanced approach rooted in ongoing dialogue and community engagement within corporate settings.

Training topics can cover and convey various themes, involving the complicated interaction between language and identity. The topic of Language & Identity, fosters a language that respects diverse identities, acknowledging its profound impact on shaping perceptions and individual sense of self. Delving deeper, the conversation underscored the topic of Inclusive Communication Techniques, ranging from avoiding gendered language to championing inclusive pronouns and embracing respectful terminology. Cultural sensitivity in language is another crucial issue, necessitating an understanding of cultural nuances and the ways language can influence various cultural groups within organisational contexts. Intersectionality in language was also a focal point, recognising the complex intersections of diverse identities and the nuanced ways language can impact individuals situated at these intersections.

Effective feedback and communication foster an inclusive environment beneficial to growth while mitigating the risk of marginalisation, though there is a need for employees to be trained on this topic. Moreover, the trainings can touch on identifying and addressing microaggressions in language, fostering an environment characterised by mutual respect and appreciation. Real-life case studies and scenarios can also be considered as pedagogical tools to facilitate a deeper understanding and application of inclusive language in varied workplace contexts.

Regarding the organisation's engagement, it is the leadership's role to promote inclusive communication practices throughout the organisation, emphasising the need to educate leaders on their pivotal role in modelling inclusive language behaviours. Finally, ensuring language accessibility for all individuals, including those with disabilities, was observed as vital. This involves avoiding ableist language and proactively considering accessibility needs in linguistic expression.

Benchmarks and KPIs for measuring and monitoring the adoption of neutral and inclusive communication in corporate spaces, were analysed in the last part of the panel, revealing the specific actions that must be incorporated in organisations' strategies.

- Employee Feedback and Surveys: Regularly conducted surveys or feedback mechanisms focusing on employees' perceptions of communication inclusivity, understanding, and comfort with the language used.

- Training Participation and Engagement: Tracking participation rates and feedback from employees engaging in training sessions on inclusive language and communication.
- Inclusive Language Metrics: Development and tracking of specific metrics related to the use of inclusive language in official communications, documents, and presentations.
- Diversity Representation in Communication Materials: Analysis of representation in organisational communications, ensuring diverse perspectives and identities are included and represented appropriately.
- Inclusive Language Usage in Recruitment: Evaluation of job descriptions, recruitment materials, and interview processes to ensure they employ neutral and inclusive language to attract diverse candidates.
- Accessibility Consideration: Assessment of communication materials for accessibility, ensuring they cater to individuals with disabilities in terms of language and format.

The definition of KPIs followed, aimed at evaluating the efficient adoption of neutral and inclusive language within organisational discourse. These encompass measuring of pronoun usage, particularly in written correspondences such as emails and presentations, as well as the conscientious adoption of gender-neutral language across various platforms including job descriptions, policies, and internal communications. Furthermore, the sensible incorporation of diverse and respectful terminology concerning to a spectrum of social identities such as race, ethnicity, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Establishing mechanisms for feedback and reporting allow for the identification and rectification of instances of linguistic insensitivity, with particular attention paid to tracking the frequency and nature of reported incidents. The participation rates and comprehension levels of employees in inclusive language training programs were also designated as significant metrics for assessment. Finally, external perception and feedback mechanisms were highlighted as instrumental in gauging the broader perception of the organisation's language and communication practices, incorporating insights from clients, partners, and customers to further enhance inclusivity.

## National Panels Summary

Total number of participants

Country	Number of Participants	Profile and Corporate functions	Experts
Bulgaria	21	CEO, Communications, PR, Corporate Affairs, trainers, Directors, HR, Board of Directors, Analysts, Talent acquisitions, DEI expert, Marketing	LGBTQI+ community, Roma, and people with visual impairments
Cyprus	12	Directors, DEI experts, Trainers, students, Program managers	Corporate environments and Diversity & Inclusion experts
Greece	16	HR Directors/Managers, Communications, PR, Corporate Affairs, D&I trainers, Creative Director, DEI experts, Marketing	LGBTQI+ community, Women empowerment, people with visual impairments, different ethnicity and migrants



Lithuania	13	Sociologist, experts, D&I experts, representatives from various groups	LGBTQI+ community, people with visual impairments, people with disabilities
Romania	22	Educational Expert, Trainers, D&I Experts, D&I Ambassador, HR Leads/Managers, Data Analysts, Talens Acquisitions,	Linguistic experts, LGBTQI+ community, Job acquisition expert, Business consultant, Corporate experts on inclusive language

### Time period of implementation

The implementation of all Diversity Communication Panels, ranged from October 5 to December 5, 2023. The National Diversity Communication Panels were organised either in physical presence, on-line or in a hybrid model to ensure the successful implementation and the quality of outcomes.

### Analysis of the International Diversity Communication Panel

The International Communication Panel was held online on December 5, 2023, with the participation of representatives from European Diversity Charters, HR management experts, corporate executives, D&I specialists, and representatives from diverse groups. Led by KEAN and facilitated by the NICE partners, the panel showcased program activities and insights collected from national Diversity Communication Panels, focusing on training topics, methodologies, and benchmarks for fostering neutral and inclusive language in workplace settings. Through dynamic discussions, representatives of diversity groups provided valuable insights into the unique needs and specifications relevant to inclusive communication within workspaces. Additionally, representatives from marginalised groups such as those pertaining to mental health and LGBTQI communities contributed vital perspectives on the distinctive needs of each demographic.

The discussion on mental health specifics and the persistent stigmatisation prevailing within corporate environment was meticulously addressed by Kotryna Sipko, a distinguished representative from Lithuania's NGO "Mental Health Perspective". Sipko expounded upon the imperative of cultivating inclusive communication practices in tandem with mental health considerations. Challenges regarding mental health illnesses, shed light on the universal occurrence of such conditions and the pervasive challenges individuals are encountering. Sipko precisely illustrated various scenarios to underscore the unique needs and circumstances of individuals struggling with mental health issues, thereby emphasising that employees often overlooked the presence of such conditions. Critical to the discussion were reflections on the language employed to describe individuals, with emphasis placed on the inadvertent yet very demeaning usage of terms such as "abnormal," "psycho," "mental," "crazy," "weak," and "unstable." Particularly within professional spheres, where actions often take precedence over the psychological well-being of employees, this linguistic sensitivity holds profound significance. Moreover, attention was directed towards the imperative of fostering an environment helpful to open and secure communication for individuals contending with mental health challenges, thus advocating for a workplace culture marked by empathy and clarity.

May Zanni, representing Women Act, delineated their initiatives aimed at amplifying women's presence in leadership roles within Greek politics, striving to foster gender equality in representation and voice. She underscored the inherent gender disparities predominant in communication practices and stressed the importance of elevating women's visibility in various spheres, including corporate boards, conference panels as speakers rather than mere facilitators, and within the realm of politics and public discourse.



The second part of the International Communication Panel deployed a focus on the development of actions to apply neutral corporate communication language. Luiza Banyai, an experienced HR consultant, conducted a thorough analysis of the multifaceted elements strengthening the effective communication within corporate spheres, emphasising the pivotal role in fostering diverse and inclusive environments. She underscored the great impact of communication dynamics on employee connectivity, visibility within the organisation, and the important role of recognition related to the organisations' performance. Recognising the imperative to achieve a meaningful change is rooted in acceptance, Banyai elucidated the critical role of leadership in bridging the chasm between the aspiration for equal and secure environments and the pragmatic execution by management teams.

Additionally, Banyai examined the issue of the intergenerational gap, shedding light on the tangible disparities in communication agility, style, and tools that exist today across five distinct generations within contemporary organisational frameworks. This divergence poses significant implications for internal communication strategies and presents challenges in fostering employee engagement. To mitigate these challenges, Banyai emphasised the pivotal role of HR in ensuring uniform understanding of corporate messaging and D&I policies among employees, both internally and externally. To bridge the intergenerational gap and cultivate a foundation of inclusive communication, participants advocated for the implementation of "Reverse Mentoring Programs," facilitating knowledge exchange and mutual learning between different generational cohorts. Such initiatives serve to bolster diversity efforts and foster inclusive communication practices across diverse age groups.

Furthermore, participants identified various barriers hindering the implementation of inclusive and neutral communication within corporate settings, notably unconscious biases and the limitation to address discriminatory incidents in the workplace. To address these challenges, participants advocated for the development of specific mechanisms to provide employees with a safe and anonymous platform to state concerns, thus fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue and inclusivity.

Trainings emerged as a critical strategy in fostering a culture of neutral communication language and D&I practices within organisations. The multilayered nature of organisations' functions requires the implementation of two distinct levels of training: a foundational program tailored for all employees and an advanced curriculum for targeted groups. Additionally, incentivising employee's participation in training initiatives can act as a catalyst for enhancing engagement and commitment. The identified target groups for advanced training included the Leadership team, HR department, policy making team, Customer Service team, Marketing, PR, Communications, Business Development managers, Marketing & Product development teams, and Managers' teams.

In terms of thematic focus, the trainings were envisaged to concentrate on inclusive communication guidelines tailored for diverse groups, supplemented by illustrative examples and supportive materials such as videos and images. A creative approach to training sessions, fosters active involvement from all teams asked to share personal experiences, exchange practices, and collaboratively produce engaging content, including humorous videos designed to elucidate complex concepts in an accessible manner. Furthermore, internal workshops can disseminate knowledge on a smaller scale, ultimately culminating in organisational transformation towards a more diverse and inclusive environment.

Recommended training topics incorporate neutral and inclusive communication across various diversity pillars, skills development in applying inclusive communication techniques, improving communication skills to foster equitable discussions and interactions, creative expression guidelines promoting the use of neutral and inclusive language, strategies for handling diverse customers and cultivating empathy. Moreover, the creation of personalised guidelines based on individual examples, guidance on organising workshops centred around inclusive communication, and description of

“appropriate” communication practices against “inappropriate” within the framework of a diverse and inclusive corporate culture.

Benchmarks serve as indispensable standards for evaluating an organisation's adherence to neutral and inclusive communication practices and these are derived from exemplary practices in the corporate sphere or tailored to the unique internal dynamics of an organisation's transformation journey. Both offer a comprehensive framework for evaluation. Outlined below are the recommended benchmarks:

- Diverse corporate environment that is sensitive to cultural differences.
- Company policies and behaviours compliant with legislation.
- Leadership team engaged to D&I practices.
- Leadership team aware of the employee's diverse backgrounds.
- Inclusive communication reporting through surveys.
- Company vision and values have incorporated D&I.
- Trained employees in basics of neutral and inclusive communication.
- Diverse representation in communication channels.
- Set up mechanisms for anonymous feedback sessions and reports.
- Company has a coach for neutral and inclusive communications.
- Regular monitoring of organisation's state/level.

A significant barrier highlighted for companies pertains to effectively monitoring progress in the adoption of inclusive communication practices, particularly in instances of non-inclusive communication where multiple factors and perceptions are at play. To address this challenge, a set of KPIs can be applied, tracking progress both at the company level and within individual teams.

- Percentage of trained personnel.
- Rate of the organisations' engagement with D&I practices and neutral communication.
- Tracking percentage level of discriminative communication incidents and those that were addressed.
- Percentage of women and other diverse groups in the board, managerial roles, conference panels and communication material.
- Gender biases detector results in job advertisements.
- Corporate policies compliance level with legislation.

Country	Number of Participants	Profile and Corporate functions	Experts
All partners countries	30	Communications Expert, Corporate Affairs, HR associates, Analysts, Talent acquisitions, DEI experts, Marketing, researchers	LGBTQI+ community, Mental health, women empowerment, and HR business consultant

### Diversity Communication Panels - Feedback & Evaluation

The participants of the National and International Diversity Communication Panels were asked to submit a feedback questionnaire for the sessions. All participants expressed high satisfaction with the comprehensive coverage of topics, as well as the quality of discussions and the content generated during the panels. Additionally, there was an overall satisfaction with the events' structure and

facilitation throughout the duration of the panels. Notably, attendees highlighted the value of presentations from representatives of diverse groups that are important for the organisations they work for. Furthermore, participants emphasised the generation of valuable insights and actionable steps for fostering inclusive communication language within corporate environments during the panel discussions. Specific topics they found important are related to improving employment relations for individuals with disabilities and specific steps on how organisations can act.

## Conclusion

The convening of National and International Diversity Communication Panels assembled a cadre of experts from corporate entities and representatives from marginalised communities. United by a shared objective, the participants collaborated to enable the integration of neutral and inclusive communication practices within workspaces, with the overarching goal of fostering equitable opportunities for all individuals.

The insights gathered from these events are concentrated into actionable recommendations for the formulation of a comprehensive Action Plan, for the adoption of Neutral and inclusive communication language that is built on the specific needs for under-represented groups. A successful Action Plan is characterised by its specificity and detail, and is clearly disseminated among corporate entities, accompanied by precise Benchmarks and KPIs to meticulously monitor, and evaluate its implementation and effectiveness.

In many workplaces, there is a notable absence of practices tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals, compounded by a widespread lack of awareness among employees regarding appropriate attitudes and communication with respect to disabilities, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. Numerous problematic aspects within the work environment have been identified, ranging from physical barriers like inaccessible facilities to instances of discriminatory behaviour and biased language, through the perpetuation of stereotypical societal attitudes inherited from historical legacies. Such attitudes serve as significant barriers to inclusion for individuals who could contribute significantly to the corporate landscape.

The necessity for a comprehensive Action Plan, coupled with the establishment of regular oversight mechanisms, highlights the commitment towards tangible progress in promoting diversity and inclusion. Collaboration with NGOs possessing specialised expertise serves as a testament to the recognition of the multifaceted nature of these issues and the importance of leveraging external resources. The emphasis on linguistic sensitivity, from avoiding gendered language to acknowledging intersectionality in language, reflects a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding inclusive communication. Additionally, proposed modifications to organisational systems and recruitment procedures signify a proactive approach towards creating environments conducive to inclusivity. The suggestion for executives learning plan through D&I experts' guidance, underscores the importance of continuous learning and adaptation to accommodate diverse demographic groups effectively. Furthermore, advocating for increased visibility of women across various domains highlights a commitment to addressing gender disparities, and the implementation of "Reverse Mentoring Programs" promotes an intergenerational dialogue. These initiatives collectively contribute to fostering a culture of inclusivity and equity within organisational settings, ultimately enhancing collaboration and productivity across diverse demographic groups.

Trainings in both internal employee interactions and external corporate relations is the main pillar of the Action Plan for applying neutral and inclusive communications. Crucial corporate operations and functions, including HR with Recruitment, Talent Management, and Learning Specialists, Public

Relations/Affairs, Internal communications and Corporate Communications and Leadership team, were identified as pivotal for D&I training implementation, in addition to Business Development managers, Marketing & Product Development teams, and Managers' teams, emphasising the need to consider national nuances and tailor best practices to local communities.

The methodology to develop a comprehensive approach is structuring training modules into basic and advanced levels of training, involving various organisational levels and roles. Basic training should be accessible to all employees and cover fundamental concepts, while advanced training should be mandatory for managerial roles, offering in-depth knowledge. Training approaches should cover both horizontal and vertical strategies, with a focus on enhancing skills to detect and implement inclusive communication practices. Discussions in Lithuania highlighted the importance of addressing diversity pillars such as disability, gender, and age, emphasising the need for continuous education among all employees. Effective feedback and communication training were identified as essential for fostering an inclusive environment conducive to growth and mitigating the risk of marginalisation. It is crucial to recognise that the adoption of inclusive language practices may vary across different contexts, necessitating consideration of local linguistic needs and cultural nuances in training implementation.

The process of benchmarking the integration of neutral and inclusive communication has unveiled a spectrum of methodologies and practices for assessment within corporate settings, including, inter alia:

- Diverse representation not just across the entire workforce but also within managerial roles, meticulously tailored to meet specific job requirements. This initiative is complemented by a concerted effort to reinforce engagement levels among personnel throughout the company.
- Leadership teams have an active role in advancing D&I practices and advocating for the adoption of neutral and inclusive language within the corporate culture.
- Personnel are equipped with comprehensive training in fundamental D&I management principles.
- Implementation of neutral and inclusive communication techniques.
- Specific Action Plan that addresses the involved interaction between diversity, inclusion, and neutral communication strategies.
- Assigned budget is set towards D&I initiatives.
- Internal research to assess the uptake of inclusive language.

Policies related to D&I are seamlessly integrated into the organisation's Code of Ethics and consistently updated to reflect evolving best practices.

- Accessibility for all employees is ensured, and D&I considerations are seamlessly integrated into Performance Management systems.
- Neutral and inclusive language practices are diligently implemented throughout the recruitment process and in both internal and external corporate communications.
- Systems equipped with inclusive informational parameters underscore the organisation's dedication to fostering an environment of inclusivity and equity.
- Employees are culturally agile and aware of cultural differences.

In conclusion, the establishment of KPIs encompassing both qualitative and quantitative measures is essential for evaluating and fostering diversity and inclusion within organisations. By regularly monitoring these indicators, organisations can gain valuable insights into their progress, identify areas for improvement, and cultivate a culture of inclusivity that benefits all employees. These KPIs

should include targets of incidents of discriminatory behaviour, level of compliance with diversity policies, a target of employees' participation in training programs and assessment of accessibility levels. Furthermore, the tracking of specific metrics related to inclusive language usage in official communications, documents, and presentations, as well as percentage of diversity representation in communication materials. These efforts, contribute to creating a more inclusive workplace conducive to the success and well-being of all employees.