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Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in the private sector in Albania:

Perspectives and Practices

Report

Report: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the Workplace in Albania: Practices and Perspectives | July 2025

This report is developed in the framework of the project Business for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion implemented by ICC Albania in cooperation with Streha Center and supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



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Executive Summary

Business practices for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in the workplace

This brief report presents preliminary findings from a pilot survey on current business practices conducted recently in Albania related to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Its aim is to highlight key trends and provide the private sector with practical recommendations. The survey sought to shed light on how companies implement EDI policies in the workplace, identify existing gaps, and establish a baseline for further EDI policy development.

Although the survey aimed for broader participation, the response rate was very low. As a result, the collected data does not allow for broad generalizations or strong trend analysis. Nevertheless, the limited responses suggest that while awareness of EDI principles is growing, formal implementation across businesses remains inconsistent — particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Key observations:

- Although EDI topics are present in organizational discourse, they often have not yet been translated into clear strategic priorities, visible leadership commitment, or well-structured and institutionalized actions.
- More efforts should be put in place to expand these efforts into later stages of the employment cycle, beyond recruitment, in order to build a truly inclusive culture at all organizational levels.
- Data collected indicates that the most common challenges do not stem from a lack of willingness but rather a lack of structure, collaboration, and concrete support within companies.
- At the national level, coordination and collaboration among various actors, such as businesses, business associations, and policymakers, in raising awareness and developing policies in this field are lacking.

Key recommendations:

Support businesses with practical tools for implementing EDI policies:

Launch awareness campaigns and distribute concrete, tailored materials for the private sector, such as practical guides, real-life examples, and models of best practices, that can help businesses effectively implement the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace.

Support for businesses committed to EDI:

Consider offering grants, fiscal incentives, or advantages in public procurement to businesses that demonstrate clear commitment to implementing EDI policies.

Capacity-building programs in the field of EDI:

Encourage investment from chambers of commerce, business associations, and other key actors in the development of training and mentoring programs to support SMEs in designing and implementing EDI strategies.

Improved data collection:

It is recommended to repeat the survey in collaboration with stakeholders, aiming to increase the number of participants and broaden its geographical scope, in order to provide a more in-depth and representative analysis of EDI practices in the country.

Although the current findings are limited, they underscore the need for ongoing support and strategic guidance to promote more inclusive work environments. Achieving long-term results in the field of EDI will require continued business engagement and alignment of policies at both sectoral and institutional levels.

About the report

At a time when the topics of equality, diversity, and inclusion are gaining importance globally, businesses in Albania are also being called upon, due to market changes and growing demand from younger generations of employees, to be open and willing to incorporate these issues into their agendas.

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SURVEY DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION

The pilot survey on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion was conducted through a questionnaire designed to gather perspectives and experiences on how these issues are perceived and addressed by different businesses in Albania. The survey was uniformly distributed to around 50 companies representing a wide range of sectors and sizes, including large, medium, and small enterprises, taking into account both the number of employees and the revenue they generate. The survey was disseminated by email between February and May 2025.

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SURVEY PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

The survey was filled out by Human Resources and Legal departments representatives, with the majority of participants coming from large companies (more than 250 employees), while some responses were also received from small and medium-sized enterprises (1–25 and 101–250 employees). The companies are active in various sectors, including banking services, manufacturing, trade, legal services, and finance.

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PARTICIPATION AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Despite our open call for participation, the response rate from businesses was relatively low. Based on ongoing discussions with business community representatives, several reasons were identified for the low participation rate, including: i) lack of interest in the topic, ii) lack of time, and iii) lack of awareness about the importance of the issue. Nevertheless, the data collected from the surveys that were filled out provides valuable insights and reinforces our previous observations from roundtable discussions and engagements with business representatives conducted between 2024 and 2025.

Context

Why is this the right time to talk about EDI in Albania?

In a rapidly changing world, where globalization, technology, and demographic shifts are reshaping workplace dynamics, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are no longer “nice-to-have” accessories, but a necessity for sustainable development and long-term success.

But why is it crucial to discuss this now in Albania?

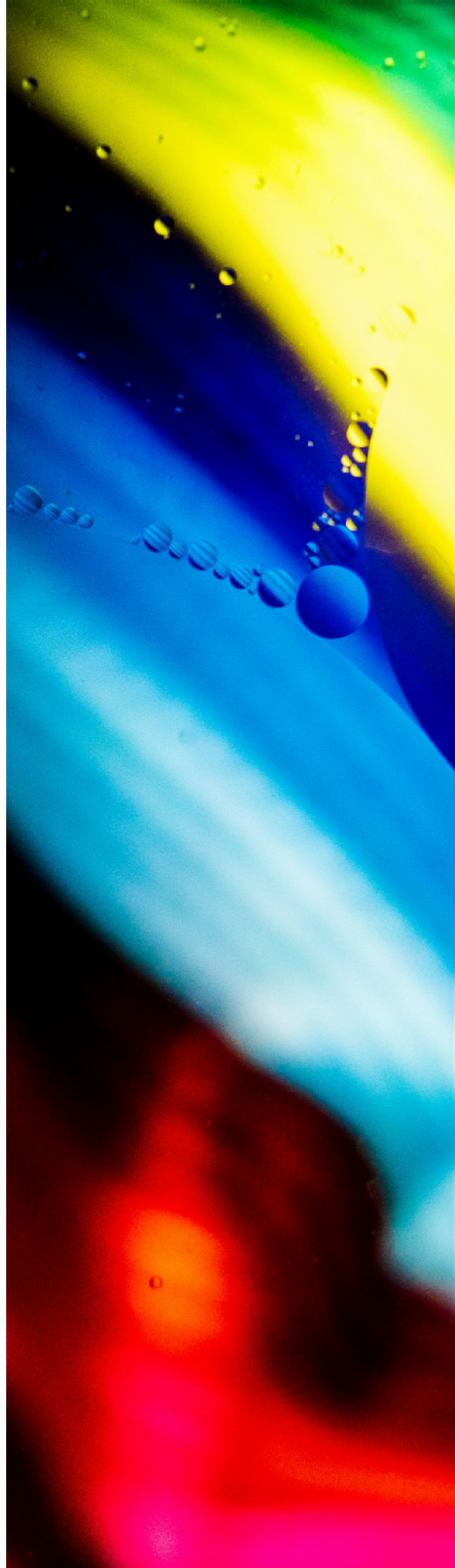
Firstly, due to current conditions in the country, businesses are facing workforce shortages, driven by rising youth emigration and the emergence of a new generation of employees who expect a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

Secondly, most businesses operating in Albania are small or medium-sized often lacking formal EDI structures, unlike international companies operating in the market, which already have clear and integrated EDI policies. This creates a significant gap between modern practices and the local reality.

Thirdly, while Albanian law prohibits discrimination in the workplace, many people still feel unsafe expressing their identity. This can be attributed to persistent prejudice, limited awareness, and a prevailing culture of silence around these issues.

The limited national data on this topic, combined with the low response rate to the survey, underscores the need for broader dialogue and shared reflection on EDI in Albania. This document seeks to offer straightforward insights and practical guidance to help businesses deepen their understanding of equality, diversity, and inclusion, and explore tangible steps they can take to incorporate these principles into their organizational practices.

The next section provides an overview of the pilot survey findings, aiming to shed light on the current landscape of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion within businesses operating in Albania.



Definitions: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

What do we mean by each of them?

This document is based on the analysis of three key concepts related to creating a fairer and more open work environment: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

Due to the absence of specific definitions for EDI terms in the Albanian legal framework, this document refers to definitions drawn from academic and international organizations sources.

Providing definitions for each of these concepts, as outlined below, helps establish a shared and foundational understanding for interpreting the findings and the analysis that follows.



Equality refers to the principle that all individuals have equal rights and opportunities regardless of race, gender, or other aspects of personal background. In today's context, equality is closely linked to the concept of "equal opportunities." This includes ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunities, and advancement for all individuals, while also striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have historically led to unequal treatment. Equality does not mean that everyone receives the same thing, but that each person receives what they need in order to succeed. ^{1,2,3}



Diversity represents the variety of identities, perspectives, and experiences that individuals bring to a workplace. Diversity includes, among other things, cultural and ethnic background, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, life experience and socio-economic status, age, physical and mental ability, etc. It also encompasses differences in values, working styles, caregiving responsibilities, hierarchical levels, and roles at work. ^{4,5}



Inclusion goes beyond numerical representation. It refers to active, intentional, and ongoing efforts to create environments where all individuals feel welcome, included, and a sense of belonging—where they are treated with respect, supported, and valued. Inclusion means adapting to different needs and perspectives, embracing and celebrating differences, promoting open and respectful dialogue, and empowering individuals to bring their authentic selves to the table without fear of discrimination or exclusion. ^{6,7}

¹ University of York, <https://www.york.ac.uk/about/equality/edi-glossary-terminology/equality/>

² Transforming enterprises through diversity and inclusion International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2022, pg.8.

³ UN Global Compact, <https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action/dei>, aksesuar në 2025.

⁴ Transforming enterprises through diversity and inclusion International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2022, pg.8.

⁵ UN Global Compact, <https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action/dei>, aksesuar në 2025.

⁶ Transforming enterprises through diversity and inclusion International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2022, pg.8.

⁷ UN Global Compact, <https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action/dei>, aksesuar në 2025.

Findings

I. Awareness and commitment to EDI in the workplace

The first part of the survey included a series of statements designed to understand how aware the participating companies are regarding Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), as well as their level of commitment to building an inclusive and fair work environment for all.

The statements focused on several key aspects, such as:

- The existence and implementation of EDI policies;
- Leadership commitment to promoting diversity;
- Equality of opportunities for professional development;
- Support for the LGBTQ+ community;
- Freedom to express identity in the workplace;
- The ability to report cases of discrimination or harassment.

What were the most common attitudes reported?

The data analysis shows that most participants agreed with the statements presented, indicating a good level of awareness about EDI issues.

However, in some cases, responses were more reserved or cautious. For a number of statements related to the institutional inclusion of EDI within organizational policies and culture, answers tended to be moderate, often characterized by “neutral” or “somewhat agree” positions.

These include:

- Our company embraces EDI policies for all employees, including gender, origin, sexual orientation, race, and disabilities;
- An inclusive work environment is one of our company's core values;
- Our leadership team actively promotes diversity and inclusion initiatives;
- Our company ensures equal opportunities for career and professional development for all employees, regardless of identity;
- Company efforts to support LGBTQ+ employees are effective;
- Employees feel free to discuss LGBTQ+ issues in the workplace.

These responses suggest that although EDI topics are present in company discourse, they often have not yet been translated into clear strategic priorities, visible leadership engagement, or well-structured and institutionalized actions.

II. Concrete initiatives implemented regarding EDI

Participants were asked to indicate which of the listed initiatives related to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are currently being implemented in their companies. The list included various options, ranging from inclusive recruitment to mentoring programs.

Based on the collected data, the most commonly used practices, ranked by the highest number of responses, are:



**Inclusive
recruitment
practices;**



**Inclusive training
programs;**



**Flexible/
adaptive work
environment**

The results clearly indicate that many companies have begun to show commitment in the early stages of the employment cycle, particularly through efforts to ensure a fair and open recruitment process for all. Companies that have started inclusion training are more likely to implement inclusive recruitment practices as well, indicating that initial interventions in one aspect of EDI can encourage the spread of these practices into other areas of the employment relations.

This shows that when issues of diversity, equality, and inclusion are purposefully integrated into organizational strategy, initiatives do not remain isolated but develop in an interconnected manner, contributing to building a more sustainable and structured approach.

However, there is still room to expand these efforts into the later stages of the employment cycle, aiming to build a truly inclusive culture and integrate EDI at all levels of the organization.

III. Main challenges in implementing EDI initiatives

Survey respondents were asked about the biggest challenges their organizations face in implementing policies and initiatives related to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). The data shows that the most common challenges are not related to a lack of willingness, but rather a lack of structure, collaboration, and concrete support for their implementation.

The five most frequently mentioned challenges were:

- **Lack of partnerships with external organizations:** This indicates a lack of cooperation with institutions, NGOs, or networks that could offer expertise, support, or communities engaged in the field of EDI.
- **Need for broader initiatives to engage employees:** Existing employee engagement practices, especially considering ongoing market changes and new employee expectations, need to be adapted to new elements. Therefore, companies need to expand their approach by experimenting with new and more inclusive forms of engagement.
- **More training and awareness programs:** From our perspective, even when there is a desire to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, companies struggle with developing effective understandable, applicable training modules with long-lasting impact. The lack of content tailored to the local context, practical resources, and expertise in designing inclusive training makes this a distinct challenge. Beyond content, many companies express the need to identify tangible and concrete benefits from investing in EDI, so these programs are not seen as “nice to have” but as an essential part of business development.
- **Stronger leadership engagement:** Without direct involvement and personal example from leaders, EDI efforts tend to remain just statements.
- **Better recruitment practices:** Companies expressed the need to improve how they recruit in a fair, transparent, and inclusive manner.

Unconscious bias

Another significant yet often underrecognized challenge is that prejudice is not only manifested in obvious or deliberate forms. It frequently occurs unconsciously, especially when company staff have not personally experienced similar situations or fail to realize that a comment or decision may prejudice a particular group.

Unconscious bias can also occur in situations such as:

- A young person not being taken seriously due to the argument that “they lack experience”;
- A female employee returning from maternity leave being prejudiced as “not having enough time to lead a project”;
- An older individual being excluded from discussions about technology because “they are not the right generation.”

These examples demonstrate that just because something has not happened to us personally, it does not mean it does not exist or that prejudice is not present. Therefore, companies should be more open and understanding in addressing this issue.

IV. Expected benefits from the implementation of EDI policies

When respondents were asked whether they believe the implementation of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies would yield positive outcomes for their organizations, all responses were affirmative. Furthermore, the majority highlighted tangible benefits, underscoring that EDI is not merely an ethical consideration but a strategic approach that facilitates organizational development.

The most commonly noted benefits include:

- **Enhanced employee motivation and engagement:** Employees who feel respected and valued for their authentic selves demonstrate increased commitment and greater willingness to contribute.
- **Improved internal climate and collegial relations:** An inclusive work environment fosters a culture of respect and understanding, which reduces conflict and promotes collaboration.
- **Establishment of a fair and meritocratic culture:** EDI policies help mitigate biases and support the creation of equitable systems for evaluation and professional advancement.
- **Increased creativity and innovation:** A diverse range of experiences and perspectives stimulates new ideas and more effective problem-solving approaches.
- **Strengthened employer brand and corporate reputation:** Organizations demonstrating a commitment to EDI are more attractive to talent, particularly younger generations, and benefit from an enhanced reputation in the marketplace.
- **Mitigation of legal and reputational risks:** The adoption of clear policies aids in preventing discrimination and fosters a safe environment for all employees.
- **Positive societal impact:** Several respondents emphasized the role of businesses in generating broader social benefits beyond the confines of their organizations.

This constructive and pragmatic perspective reflects a growing recognition within the business community of the critical role EDI plays in building modern, efficient, and sustainable organizations. The primary challenge moving forward lies in transitioning from awareness to concrete action.

Recommendations

The initial steps towards building a more inclusive culture

Creating a more open and inclusive work environment does not necessarily require major interventions from the outset; often, a few small and well-considered steps can bring about a tangible change. However, the commitment of companies alone, no matter how important, is insufficient to produce sustainable change. To foster meaningful progress in the fields of equality, diversity, and inclusion, coordinated efforts are needed at all levels of the economic and political system.

Businesses play a crucial role in integrating inclusive practices into their organizational culture and operations; business associations serve as influential platforms for disseminating best practices and supporting members through capacity building; meanwhile, policymakers are positioned to provide an enabling environment through legislation, incentives, and structural reforms.

The recommendations below are tailored to each of these stakeholders, aimed at promoting sustainable and systemic progress in the area of EDI.

For businesses

For many companies, the topics of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are often perceived as abstract, complex, or difficult to address, particularly as they relate to social experiences that are not always visible or easily quantifiable. However, with the right approach, these principles can be translated into concrete and impactful organizational practices. Below are several key recommendations focusing on three core areas of EDI implementation that can be adapted by businesses of any size.

Inclusive recruitment goes beyond simply hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds. It involves designing a process in which every candidate, regardless of origin, appearance, or perspective, has a fair and equal opportunity to succeed. This requires a structured, transparent, and bias-free approach at all stages, from job posting to final selection. Key questions for evaluating inclusiveness in recruitment may include:

- Is the language used in job advertisements neutral and welcoming to all candidates, free of gender, age, or cultural stereotypes?
- Is the selection process structured around clear, objective criteria to minimize the influence of unconscious bias?
- Are interviewers trained in inclusive interviewing techniques and aware of potential subjectivity in evaluations?
- Is there diversity within the selection panel to mitigate the “similar-to-me” effect?
- Are assessment tools, such as personality tests, applied ethically and not used to exclude candidates based on personal fit with a current manager’s style?

Common areas where bias may appear:

- Job announcements are often the first indicators of unconscious bias. Requirements such as gender (“female/male preferred”), age (“under 30”), or appearance (“well-groomed,” “presentable”) still appear in some listings. These criteria not only violate the principle of equal opportunity but are irrelevant to the qualifications required for most roles today.
- Job interview processes may include inappropriate or discriminatory questions that violate inclusive recruitment practices. Questions related to marital status, family planning (e.g., “Are you planning to have children soon?”), caregiving responsibilities, sexual orientation, religion, or health status are not only invasive but may also constitute grounds for discrimination. Interviews should remain focused on a candidate’s qualifications, experience, and potential for the role.

Inclusive training should extend beyond senior management and involve all levels of the organization. These programs help cultivate a workplace culture that values inclusion and respect,

addressing real-life scenarios and challenges employees face in their daily work.

Key areas for training include:

- Awareness of unconscious biases. Trainings should help employees and managers:
 - Recognize their own hidden biases, whether related to gender, age, ethnicity, or socio-economic background;
 - Understand how such biases influence daily decisions, including task delegation, performance evaluations, and promotion opportunities;
 - Apply practical strategies to reduce bias in the workplace.
- Intercultural communication and respectful relationships:
 - Promote the use of neutral, inclusive language;
 - Foster active listening, creating space for understanding and respectful dialogue.
- Understanding equality versus equity and what it means to tailor support based on individual needs;
- Building diverse and collaborative teams with shared ownership and mutual respect;
- Developing emotional intelligence in interpersonal relations;
- Encouraging intergenerational understanding and collaboration across age groups.

Workplace flexibility encompasses more than just the option to work from home. It reflects a broader commitment to creating an environment that respects employee individual needs and enables a healthy work-life balance. Common forms of flexibility include:

- Personalized working hours (e.g., varying start and end times to accommodate personal needs);
- Hybrid work models (a combination of on-site and remote work);
- Opportunities for planned short-term leave for personal or family matters;
- Support for employees who are caregivers (to children, elderly parents, or family members);
- Investment in technological infrastructure to ensure remote work is effective and accessible.

Additional Good Practices can be (1) Establishing open forums for employees to share suggestions and feedback on various organizational issues; (2) Creating internal interest groups (e.g., for young professionals, parents, or minority communities) to build community and support within the workplace; (3) Encouraging employee-led initiatives, particularly around socially significant observances such as Mental Health Awareness Week, International Women's Day, or Diversity Week, with activities that reflect the values and lived experiences of staff.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the success and sustainability of EDI initiatives. An inclusive leadership style goes beyond acknowledging the importance of diversity, it embodies these principles in daily decision-making and behavior. Examples of inclusive leadership in action:

- A manager who ensures all team members have an equal voice in meetings, refrains from dominating the conversation, and intentionally includes quieter or more introverted colleagues;
- A leader who is mindful of their language, avoids discriminatory expressions, and fosters an environment of mutual respect;
- A senior executive who participates in EDI training not merely as a symbolic gesture, but as a genuine effort to learn about and better understand the diverse perspectives of their team.

When inclusion is embraced at the highest levels of an organization, with intentionality, consistency, and awareness, it is far more likely to permeate the workplace and become a natural and enduring part of the organizational culture.

For business associations and chambers of commerce

Beyond individual companies, private sector support organizations such as business associations and chambers of commerce play an important role in promoting inclusion and equality in the workplace. Below are several concrete recommendations these stakeholders may consider:

1. Fostering dialogue with policymakers

Business associations can play a key role in building bridges between the private sector and public institutions by organizing regular roundtables to address issues and challenges related to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). This helps ensure that the voices of businesses are reflected in relevant policy and legislation, and that their concerns are addressed more effectively.

2. Providing training and networking opportunities for members

Through the organization of workshops, thematic trainings, and inter-company networking events, associations can help translate EDI concepts into actionable practices. Joint capacity-building programs can be offered to allow companies to share experiences, challenges, and practical solutions.

3. Developing practical guidelines and compiling good practices

Chambers of commerce and business associations can create clear, concise guidance documents with practical steps for implementing EDI in businesses, supported by examples from local or international companies. Such resources are particularly helpful for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that may lack the capacity to develop comprehensive strategies in this area.

For policymakers

1. Strengthening the enforcement of existing legislation

Existing laws related to gender equality, the employment of persons with disabilities, and anti-discrimination are often not effectively enforced. Policymakers can take steps to enhance transparency and accountability, for example, by increasing the frequency of inspections, requiring mandatory reporting, and applying penalties or other measures for non-compliance.

2. Using financial mechanisms to promote EDI

The government can incentivize businesses that implement equality and inclusion policies through grants, tax relief, or preferential criteria in public procurement. This would be particularly motivating for SMEs, which often perceive EDI as an “additional cost.”

3. Supporting research and data collection on EDI in the labor market

The state can finance or coordinate periodic national studies on equality and inclusion in the workplace, providing disaggregated data by gender, age, disability status, and more. Such data would contribute to evidence-based policymaking rather than relying on assumptions or perceptions.

4. Establishing public support structures

For example, the creation of a national EDI unit for employment, or a public platform where employers can report initiatives and progress, would support coordination and the sharing of good practices across sectors.

Conclusions

How can we build more inclusive practices within our organizations?

Progress in the field of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is not only a moral and social imperative, it is also a strategic priority for sustainable economic development and the long-term competitiveness of businesses. Organizations that embrace EDI principles benefit from increased employee engagement, greater innovation, and more informed decision-making, factors that directly contribute to their overall performance and resilience.

However, data collected to date indicate that many businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are still at the early stages of implementing EDI practices. The limited response rate to the recent survey constrains the breadth of insights, but it also serves as an early indicator of the real challenges businesses face. These include limited awareness, a lack of internal capacity, and a low perceived relevance of EDI initiatives in the current market context.

To shift this reality and advance toward more inclusive practices, consistent and coordinated action is required across multiple levels. Businesses must be supported with practical strategies, actionable tools, and replicable examples. Business associations should take a more proactive role in building capacity and disseminating good practices, while public policy must aim to directly support enterprises through incentives, clear guidance, and effective implementation tools.

One of the most critical steps forward is the improvement of data collection mechanisms. There is a need for dedicated and inclusive surveys that not only identify existing gaps and challenges but also serve as a foundation for designing more accurate, applicable, and context-specific policies tailored to the realities of businesses in Albania. To make this possible, businesses must be encouraged and made to feel engaged in the process, seeing their participation in surveys and data collection not as an administrative burden, but as an investment in their own improvement and the advancement of the sector as a whole.

Ultimately, only through collective, data-driven, and results-oriented action can we build an economy and workplaces that reflect the values of a fair, inclusive, and sustainable society for all.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN ALBANIA: PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES | REPORT

Disclaimer:

This report is based on a targeted, qualitative dataset gathered through voluntary survey responses and roundtable discussions. While the sample size does not support broad statistical generalization, the insights reflect the informed perspectives of engaged participants and are supplemented by expert analysis.

The findings and recommendations herein are intended to offer directional insight, spark discussion, and support strategic thinking. They represent a thoughtful synthesis of participant input and market understanding, rather than definitive or universally applicable conclusions.

Readers are encouraged to view this report as a valuable lens into current themes and considerations, while also applying their own judgment and context. We make no warranties regarding completeness or accuracy and disclaim liability for any decisions made based on this content.

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About ICC Albania

ICC Albania is the National Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in Albania since 2012. ICC Albania is the representative voice of ICC in Albania and provides mechanisms for the Albanian private sector to engage effectively in shaping international policy, standards and rules. Through a unique mix of advocacy, solutions and standard-setting, we promote international trade, responsible business conduct and a global approach to regulations, in addition to providing market-leading dispute resolution services.

About Streha Center:

Streha Center is the first and only residential center for LGBTIQ+ individuals in Albania and the region. Since 2014, it has provided safe shelter, emergency support, and multidisciplinary services to those facing violence, discrimination, or homelessness. With 24/7 care, rural outreach, and a national hotline, Streha empowers LGBTIQ+ youth to rebuild their lives. It also promotes inclusion through awareness, training, and advocacy for equality and workplace diversity.



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