

EMEA DIVERSITY NEWS 16

Year End 2007
Editorial

The holiday season is approaching and the year 2007 is coming to end. This time of the year is accompanied by lots of formal and private events, family meetings, and cheerful moments with our loved ones. Organisations are preparing for their annual accounts and many projects are ceasing. Yet, we should not assume that every colleague or friend shares the same holiday tradition. Our world is diverse and so are the different holidays and customs: Christians celebrate Christmas, Jews celebrate Hanukkah, Muslims celebrate the Feast of Sacrifice and some people just don't celebrate this time of the year at all. But what we all have in common, is the sincere interest in diversity related issues. In the words of Mahatma Ghandi: "You must be the change you want to see in the world."

In this month's issue of EMEA DiversityNews, we explore various facets of diversity. We report on developments and organisations such as a Dutch insurance company, that will offer special healthcare policies for its LGBT clients. In the EU, a closing convention marked the end of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All and a new European Platform for Jewish Muslim co-operation was launched in November. In Northern Europe, the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) is searching for Best Practice companies for Diversity in the workplace, while in Sweden Stockholm's most prestigious department store had to remove racist dolls from its window's displays. Last but not least a new study states that more and more women are earning their place at the top table of British business even though there are still only three companies with female chief executives in Great Britain.

The editorial team of EMEA DiversityNews is curious about your thoughts and perspectives on Diversity and on our work. What could we improve, which topics have not yet been covered? We look forward to receiving your comments and suggestions by email:

newsdesk@europeandiversity.com.

Enjoy reading the year end issue of EMEA DiversityNews!

Season's Greetings

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DIVERSITY DIMENSIONS

New European Platform for Jewish Muslim Co-operation

On 27 November 2007 the new European Platform for Jewish Muslim Co-operation was launched at the European Parliament in Brussels. The Platform aims to facilitate co-operation, dialogue and partnership between Jewish and Muslim communities at local, national and trans-national levels within Europe. It also intends to increase the visibility of and to empower existing Jewish Muslim initiatives. Furthermore it's members want to initiate and promote new opportunities for dialogue and co-operation between Jewish and Muslim communities.

The Platform is supposed to be a step to create good relations between these two cultures in Europe, through supporting direct contact between communities. Planned projects include joint religious diversity training and an annual award for successful initiatives. Open to new members and countries, the Co-operation Platform is currently facilitated by CEJI – A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe with the guidance of a joint Jewish Muslim Steering Group, made up of twelve representatives of Jewish and Muslim organisations from six European countries. For additional information please visit the website: <http://www.ceji.org>

Insurance launches health insurance for LGBT

A Dutch insurance firm plans to offer special healthcare policies for its LGBT clients. The policy has been worked out in co-operation with the COC Dutch gay rights group, and will be available from the beginning of 2008. Dawn Betteridge, Social Services Director at the Schorer Foundation, which offers advice and information to Dutch LGBT people is happy about the development. "Options are always a good idea, different people, different needs. And however we can highlight whatever specifically plays a role for gay and lesbian people the better." Betteridge added that one of the problems that gay and lesbian patients often face in the healthcare system is the assumption that they are heterosexual. In this respect, she says, the new policy will have an important educational effect. A simple question from a doctor, for example, to a lesbian woman about whether or not she is using the contraceptive pill will set a tone for future discussions that she is going to have with that healthcare professional.

In addition to alerting care providers to patient's sexuality, the policy may offer more specific benefits as well, with access to clinics and practitioners that are especially welcoming to gay clients, and recognition of same-sex partnerships. AGIS, the insurer will start to offer the new policies in January 2008.

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES

Aon's Global Diversity initiative continues to grow

Aon's goal for its global diversity initiative is to create a world-class magnet for talent that nurtures the background, skills and creativity of the company's 43,000 colleagues around the world. Since 2006 Aon, one of the leading provider of global risk management services, has launched two global metrics for measuring success on its diversity objectives - more women in senior management positions within the company, and four regionalized diversity strategies - with the objective of embracing the client needs and talent imperatives of each community served by Aon, and to cascade these strategies from the executive level all the way down to the newest employee.

Aon was also named by The Human Rights Commission Foundation as one of 195 major U.S. businesses to receive a 100 percent rating in the Foundation's 2007 Corporate Equality Index. The Index rates employers on a scale from 0 to 100 on their treatment of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees, consumers and investors. Aon's rating can be found on the Human Rights Campaign website at <http://www.hrc.org/cei>.

Scottish accountancy firms attempt to address gender gap

Accountancy firms in Scotland are attempting to address the profession's gender gap with a range of flexible working initiatives. According to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland (ICAS) adjustments will be made to support women to progress in the profession, as for example allowing them to take part in promotion assessments while on maternity leave.

The Herald Tribune reports that the organisation believes that accountancy firms need to embrace flexible thinking and address the needs of women more substantially. Isobel Sharp, president of ICAS and a partner at Deloitte, told the Herald Tribune: "We have to get across the message that having children is not in any way a disadvantage." A growing number of women are being trained and qualified as chartered accountants in Scotland and the number of female managers is almost in line with the admission of female students in related courses. This development indicates that younger women are breaking through the glass ceiling.

Yet, the study also points out that a discrepancy still exists in senior management positions in accountancy firms, as well as at partnership levels, particularly in larger firms. Just ten per cent of partners in the big four UK accountancy firms are currently women. Furthermore the survey indicates that more flexible working is needed, such as part-time positions or job sharing. Firms should pursue a cultural change within their organisational environment as well as a more proactive and positive marketing of the flexible message to employees.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Closing of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

Under the motto “Celebrating 2007!” over 700 participants from all 30 countries involved with the European Year gathered in Lisbon on 19 and 20 November to close the Year with an official conference. The Closing Conference celebrated the effective implementation of the Year and looked back on the numerous diverse and enriching activities that took place across Europe.

It also provided a perfect opportunity to identify which of these activity programmes will be continued and therefore become the legacy of the Year in the future. The Conference was attended by national anti-discrimination and equality authorities, national social partners, national NGOs and also by a delegation of NGOs and social partners that operate EU-wide. Moreover, representatives of EU institutions joined the festivities. The day continued with panel discussions on diversity and equal opportunities and on the Year’s legacy. Day two kicked off with another panel discussion entitled "Paving the way towards equality for all”.

To wrap up the closing conference, the winners of the honorary awards were announced following a competition organised for the Year's National Implementing Bodies during the conference. The aim of the competition was to present the most informative, interesting and awareness-raising initiatives created by the National Implementing Bodies of the participating countries over the course of the year. The prize for the best audiovisual entry went to Poland, the prize in the category of information material went to Portugal, the prize in the category for visual initiatives went to Belgium.

Denmark’s only company prize for Diversity in the workplace opens this December

From December onwards Danish companies can compete to win Denmark’s only company prize for diversity in the workplace. In 2003 The Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) launched The MIA-prize. MIA is the Danish acronym for "Diversity in the workplace". The annual prize celebrates Danish private and public companies that through company policies and management have noticeably contributed to the promotion of diversity and equal treatment in the workplace.

Each year a jury of experts evaluates the competing business to find winners in three categories: small/medium public and private workplaces, large public workplaces and large private workplaces. The MIA-prize jury will select winners on grounds of what concrete actions they have taken to strengthen diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all – regardless of gender, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability and sexual orientation. DIHR's MIA-prize and diversity project was initiated on the basis of two EU-directives on equal treatment and with support from the EU.

BUSINESS CASE

New research debunks traditional myths about age in the UK workforce

The findings of a survey commissioned by Jobcentre Plus lift the lid on the benefits of employing a diverse workforce for both employers and individuals. Across the board, the results show that working in a mixed aged workforce is important for both older (66%) and younger (65%) UK workers with all recognising the benefits of working with people of mixed ages.

Lesley Strathie, Chief Executive, Jobcentre Plus commented: “The research shows that having the right balance of age and skills can bring numerous benefits to establishing a complete workforce for both employers and employees. Both older and younger workers appreciate and learn from the qualities each brings to the workplace.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, the research shows that the first and foremost quality younger workers think their older colleagues bring is experience (94%) whilst reliability (66%) and understanding (63%) also featured highly. Comparatively, nearly two thirds of older workers are impressed by their younger co-workers ability to learn quickly, be flexible (61%) and give them energy (51%).

The research also reveals some interesting gender and regional variations in workplace perceptions. Whilst younger and older colleagues enjoy working together, women were more likely to give positive feedback about the qualities their co-workers bring to the workplace than men. Overall, despite differences in age, differences in attitudes and the contribution of different skills to the workplace, the vast majority (95%) of older workers enjoy working with their younger colleagues.

More and more women are earning their place at the top table of British business

A new survey reveals that more and more women are earning their place at the top table of British business. Yet, in a quarter of all companies female directors are entirely missing. According to the Cranfield School of Management’s Female FTSE report, the number of women holding directorships at FTSE 100 companies reached three figures for the first time with 100 women sharing 123 positions between them. The total number of female directorships counts 11% and there are still only three companies with female chief executives (Drax, Pearson and Anglo American).

However in 2007 the situation has slightly improved: One in five of all new board appointments were female – this may not sound a lot, but it’s the highest percentage since the Cranfield School of Management started conducting the survey in 2000. Sainsbury’s and British American Tobacco are leading the way (30% of their board members are women), closely followed by AstraZeneca, British Airways and ITV. There is another positive development to be noticed: it appears that more women are in the talent pipeline just below board level, which promises well for future appointments. The

report states this progress is due to some prominent business leaders championing the cause of gender diversity. For companies, increasing the proportion of female directors is more than just an act to achieve equality; it will also give them access to a broader array of skills and send out a positive message to those lower down in the chain.

MEDIA & WEB BITS

Second EU-Africa Summit in Portugal

Seven years after the first meeting of heads of state and government from the European Union and Africa, in Cairo, the II EU-Africa Summit was held in Lisbon on 8 and 9 December, where representatives from the 80 countries that comprise this partnership, as well as heads of the regional institutions from both continents were present. The Summit sought to take into account the deep changes that affect Africa, Europe and the world during this period, by launching the basis for a long-term strategic partnership, and supplying the necessary tools for a joint work on the big global issues. Besides the approval of the two documents that shape the new EU-Africa partnership - the Joint Strategy and the Action Plan - , it was hoped that during the Summit there will be an open discussion of the five central themes of this mutual relationship: peace and security; democracy and human rights; trade, infrastructures and development; migrations and energy and climate change.

International Equality and Diversity Conference on exploring Good Practice

The British Council, in partnership with ORC Worldwide, is planning a one-day conference addressing the challenges of mainstreaming diversity in a global environment. This special event will bring together leaders and practitioners from organisations around the world to discuss the challenges impacting the equality and diversity agenda in international organizations. Participants will share insights into good practice through relevant case studies from around the world. This conference will be primarily of interest to organisations in the private and the public sector operating in an international environment. It will take place at the headquarters of the British Council in London on February 26, 2008.

MISCELLANEOUS

'Understanding Islam' online course for British police officers

Police officers from the Territorial Police Command of the British Metropolitan Police on London will be trained by the new online course “Understanding Islam: An Introduction” in future. It is designed for all learners who would benefit from understanding the historical context of Islam and

the complexities of the culture. Chief Superintendent Dave Grant, who has the lead for faith issues for the Metropolitan Police, praised the course for its depth of knowledge about Islam and will be seeking it to be core training for Metropolitan Police officers. Developed by an esteemed group of Islamic scholars, led by Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, the course creates a foundation for understanding, mutual respect and constructive engagement, and teaches students new skills to affect more positive interactions, whether they are conducting business in an Islamic country, teaching Islamic students or working with Islamic people.

Store Removes 'Racist' Dolls

Stockholm's most prestigious department store, Nordiska Kompaniet (NK), has had to remove a set of black ragdolls from Christmas window display after receiving a number of complaints from concerned customers. A visit to NK's Christmas displays has been a part of Stockholmers' staple holiday traditions ever since 1915. This year's theme was "A dream Christmas". Puppies, dragons and polar bears danced side-by-side with sugar plum fairies and what appeared to be golliwogs. When the windows were first available for public consumption, one featured three of the black dolls emerging from a Christmas package. The store got plenty of mails in which customers complained about the black dolls who looked like golliwogs. A golliwog is a black ragdoll that was inspired by black face minstrel dolls. Blackface Actors in American minstrel shows and comedies often stereotyped black people as bumbling idiots. The British golliwog was originally a literary character created by English author and illustrator Florence Kate Upton in the late 19th century. For this reason the ragdolls or in this case the golliwogs were considered to be racist and inappropriate. The golliwog character was also used as the mascot of British jam manufacturer James Robertson & Sons from 1910 until the company's products were boycotted as offensive in the early 1980s. The dolls were immediately removed from the window and replaced by other toys.

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