

TOP management setting an example, objectives, commitments, supporting programmes – these are ways to develop diversity and inclusion at workplace and in the society

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The current Covid-19 pandemic changed or accelerated the way companies and organizations approach working conditions of different groups of people at work. These changes involve flexible forms of work, support to inter-generational cooperation, conditions for working parents with children, women in particular, employees acting as informal carers or promoting women to management positions.

These have been some of the conclusions reached by speakers and panellists from multinational and Czech enterprises who attended the international conference **European Diversity Day** held on **21 May 2021**. Both Czech and international speakers agreed that developing and promoting diversity at workplace and in the society cannot be done unless personal example is set by top management in companies and organizations and unless there are clear objectives and commitments.

“If you want to change the environment, you have to shake it up. Things have to start at the top. If the top management upholds the change and sets up clear objectives, then it becomes reality,” said **Thomas Schäfer**, CEO at **ŠKODA AUTO, a.s.** in the Czech-German discussion panel.

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on labour market is also shown in preliminary results of a small survey carried out by **Business for Society** among employers. Some changes of working conditions, such as giving more flexibility to their employees, have been made by 80 % of interviewed companies – these changes mainly include work from home and flexible working hours. Employers say that another big challenge for the future, apart from supporting well-being and work-life balance of their employees or promoting on-line work and improving team communication, is the general development of diversity and inclusion in the corporate environment.

According to Corporate Affairs and Communications Director of **Plzeňský Prazdroj, a.s.** **Ms Pavlína Kalousová** the pandemic accelerated things that seemed impossible before. In a way, Covid-19 turned into an opportunity for many companies. She said that if companies wanted to promote diversity and inclusion, they should set up motivating objectives. *“By 2023 we want to have 40% of management positions held by women. However, this figure has to be complemented by other activities – strong communication, regulations, but also tools such as support given to parents returning back to work after maternal/parental leave. Awareness-raising is necessary because men often do not realize what obstacles women at work have to deal with,”* explained **Pavlína Kalousová**.

According to HR Director **Klára Escobar**, **MONETA Money Bank** does not see diversity as an empty word either. In her opinion, the pandemic has completely eliminated limits between work and private life and companies will have to learn how to deal with this new situation in the future. *“We had to keep our branches open and we tried to find an appropriate way of asking our staff to be flexible. We have expanded possibilities of home office work, we top up the income of single parents who had to stay at home with their kids on childcare benefits, we support LGBT families, we have a development programme tailor-made for women in management positions,”* **Klára Escobar** said

during the conference. *“I am really proud of the fact that by the beginning of June **30 % of our management positions** will be held by women. Since last year it was zero, we see this as a great success,”* she adds.

In spite of these positive news, the conference attendees were also told that when it comes to gender equality, the Czech Republic is not doing particularly well in the long term. This has been also confirmed by international indexes. *“Recently published Global Gender Gap, which is an index of Global Economic Forum, shows the Czech Republic on the 78th place of 156 countries. In the EU we are approximately on the 23rd position of 27 member states,”* says **Radan Šafařík**, Director of Gender Equality Department of **Czech Government Office**. Yet, **Šafařík** believes that various studies in countries such as **Sweden** or **the Netherlands** show that gender equality can have a positive impact on many areas of family life. *“Parents in these countries, men in particular, spend more time with their children and thus have better relations with them, especially in teenage years. Studies also show that possibilities of parental leave for men and shared care of children have a positive impact on the quality of partners’ relationship,”* he adds.

According to **Christoph Israng**, Ambassador of **the Federal Republic of Germany to the Czech Republic**, Germany is also rather lagging behind when it comes to the number of women in management positions. Nevertheless, some effort has been made to change the situation. *“The German government joined German Diversity Charter that was established in 2006. It has been also joined by most public administration bodies and ministries. In 2015 we put together an act that ensures equality between men and women in management positions. It is currently discussed by the parliament and it is likely to undergo some changes,”* says **Christoph Israng**.

In the Czech-German discussion panel speakers shared their experience from multinational companies, particularly the German ones, that have business activities in the Czech Republic. There was an agreement that the main challenge for real development of diversity is how to change a mindset not only in the corporate environment but in the society as a whole. According to **Sabine Weinheimer-Hoepermans**, Vice President for HR in **CGI Central & Eastern Europe**, people’s views on diversity have been “pre-set” already during their upbringing. *“These are things that we have been hearing since our early childhood. That’s why diversity and inclusion in everyday life must become key issues for the whole society. Only in this way they can become an integral part of our DNA,”* she said in the panel discussion.

The experience from **Commerzbank** has shown that in a healthy work environment there is a strive for talents regardless of their gender. *“In Prague we employ over 350 IT experts from more than 40 different countries. In this way Prague is our most diverse working environment. In the long term we have been trying to attract talents from various backgrounds.”* said **Sven Gohlke**, Regional Board Member for **Central and Northern Europe of Commerzbank**. *“We have a programme to promote inclusion of people at workplace. But it is still very much necessary to change the whole corporate culture. Everyone in the company must be willing to uptake the change,”* he added.

Another driving force to promote gender equality in the Czech Republic is to be found in the Government Strategy that has been briefly introduced by **Radan Šafařík**, Director of Gender Equality Department at **Czech Government Office**. Working conditions of women should be improved for instance by childcare that will have to be accessible to children below 3 years of age. It should also make a positive impact that part-time jobs and home-office become legal requirements.

According to the current figures, there is still much to be done in the Czech Republic to improve the situation and increase the proportion of women in management positions of firms, companies and organizations, both Czech and international ones, as well as in the national and local administration bodies.

Business for Society as a national coordinator of **European Diversity Charter** in the Czech Republic helps companies and public administration bodies set up procedures and strategies to promote diversity and inclusion at work and in the corporate environment, to create opportunities for talents, mutual internal networking, inter-generational cooperation as well as sharing good practice among companies and organizations.

On the eve of the conference **Armin Borries, Vice President of Deutsche Börse Group** said: *“Diversity is the essence of life!”*

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE: This was already the sixth year of **European Diversity Day** conference that is always held under **European Diversity Month**. *This event represents the most significant event to share corporate and community experience, trends and current challenges in the field of diversity and inclusion in the Czech Republic.* The conference agenda focused particularly on international cooperation, current experience and trends, future of work and it also reflected on the impact of Covid-19 on employers and people at work. The conference was organized with the support of the **European Commission**, in cooperation with **German Diversity Charter** and in partnership with companies **Vodafone CZ** and **MONETA Money Bank**.

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BpS – Business for Society is the largest alliance of companies promoting responsible and sustainable approach to business in the Czech Republic. Thanks to our involvement in the international structures, we have been following the latest trends in sustainability, localizing international standards and opening new topics that should be tackled by Czech companies. We are the National partner organization of CSR Europe, the European platform for corporate responsibility that has joined together over 10 000 companies from member countries, promoting their social responsibility and sustainability.

*BpS joins many important companies with more than 250 000 employees and thousands of suppliers with significant influence on the society. Companies associated in BpS are leaders in the field of sustainability and responsibility. We help companies integrate responsibility and sustainability into their business activities. We open discussions with stakeholders, and we support exchange of experience and good practice. As **the national coordinator of European Diversity Charter**, BpS is a member of the European platform under **DG Justice** and it collaborates with other EU member states and with the European Commission in the field of diversity and inclusion at labour market and in the society. We regularly attend various workshops and conferences, while being also involved in preparation of expert materials at the European level.*