

Context - Employee Sounding Board

In 2020, CSR Europe - with the support of the King Baudouin Foundation and the Prince Philippe Fund - launched and developed the project **Business Uniting Talents 2030** BUT2030 *to address the lack of diversity in the Belgian workforce by fostering corporate Ethnic Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I)*. Thanks to the collaboration with AGC, AXA, Engie, Atelier Jean Regniers, Janssen, L'Oreal, Solvay, Telenet, and Port of Antwerp, BUT2030 achieved remarkable results in the first twelve months of its implementation.

On 16 March 2022, as a final milestone of the project, CSR Europe organized a roundtable at the Royal Palace on "*Promoting Business Action on Ethnic Diversity*". The King has continued to show his interest and engagement in the project, and has been a key driver for the advancement of BUT2030. During the event, the participants shared their experience in promoting ethnic diversity and the next steps - including how sector federations will play a key role in encouraging more companies to initiate practical actions toward racial equality. In continuation of the *Way Forward Statement*, together with the King Baudouin Foundation, Prince Philippe Fund, and VBO-FEB, **CSR Europe** has decided to start a spin-off of the original Business Uniting Talent 2030 project and this time involve the Belgian employer federations with focus on Multicultural Diversity & Inclusion.¹

As two workstreams will continue to work on this topic, the employees' point of view remains a crucial element. Therefore, the now Employee Sounding Board will act as an advisory board to the project and provide crucial insights on how to step up the activities.

On 24 May 2023, the former Employee Resource Group was invited to reconvene and assist CSR Europe in developing an optimized procedure for best organizing the upcoming Employee Sounding Board. This procedure will consider input and feedback from employees within the participating companies involved, as well as sectoral federations and CSR Europe. The virtual meeting was guided by interview questions targeting the previous ERG Meeting, the follow up of the project and the future project.

Questions

Previous BUT2030 ERG Meeting

1. What were the key takeaways from the previous ERG meeting?
2. What would you have done differently while organising the previous ERG meeting?

BUT2030 Project & Follow up

1. How were the companies' initiatives sustained following the conclusion of BUT2030 in 2022? Have you noticed any changes within your company?
2. In terms of personal benefits, what positive impact did the project bring you personally ?
3. Looking back at BUT2030, what aspects should be further emphasized in the project and what aspects should be reconsidered?
4. What are your thoughts on the term about the term of Multicultural Diversity with special focus on people from non-EU backgrounds instead of Ethnic Diversity?
5. What kind of activities would you like to see incorporated into companies' strategies?

¹ Project rebranded: *Multicultural Diversity & Inclusion (MD&I)*, previously known as *Ethnic Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I)*

Future Employee Sounding Board

1. In your opinion, what aspects of the organization of this Employee Sounding Board Group at both sectoral and cross-sectoral level would you personally like to see changed or improved?
2. From your perspective, which issues should be discussed and prioritised in the next Employee Sounding Board Group?
3. In your opinion, what elements or factors would enhance the value to the Employee Sounding Board Group?
4. Would you prefer the Employee Sounding Board Group to be organised virtually or conducted in person?

Summary & Takeaways

1) Continue the conversation with employees of non-EU background

During the discussion, several elements were brought up that highlighted the need to continue the conversation with other employees and establish an Employee Sounding Board. The board would invite *experts, representatives from SMEs, HR, and other employees with a non-EU background* to make the group larger and listen to others' stories and challenges. Ideally, the group should meet twice a year at a sectoral or cross-sectoral level in a *face-to-face setting*.

2) Implement recommendations to all companies, including the small ones

One of the outcomes of the previous project was the recommendations drawn out of the Employee Resource Group. To pick up where we left off, it is crucial that *these recommendations are shared with everyone and that all companies can implement them*, including SMEs, to address the challenges faced by individuals from non-EU backgrounds. The group also suggested drawing attention to the list in the Company Workstream and discussing its *progress*.

3) Focus on communication and providing regular updates on the project

To keep all stakeholders informed, the group emphasized the need for regular communication through a *monthly or quarterly newsletter*. This would be shared with both workstreams and employees, allowing everyone to understand the *progress and status of the project* and all its activities.

4) Multicultural diversity in upper management is a crucial topic to discuss

In the next meetings of the Employee Sounding Board, it would be interesting to bring back the list of recommendations and use them as discussion points. Alternatively, an important topic to highlight is how to foster multicultural diversity within *upper management*. Role models at the top of organizations are crucial in inspiring the *next generations* and ensuring industry-leading profitability and innovations.

5) Involve upper management and CEOs for real impact

In the previous edition of the project, we learned that bringing together CEOs of both, companies and sector federations together with workers from non-EU backgrounds provided significant momentum. This had a further impact on the steps taken by companies to promote multicultural diversity. The group suggests organizing such inspiring moments more often to try to truly understand both sides and bring about *impactful changes in organizational structures and strategies*.

Next Steps

1. **Share the feedback and insights** from the group and discuss with the Company and Sectoral Workstream to establish the Employee Sounding Board at both sectoral and cross-sectoral levels;
2. Identify **experts** with non-EU backgrounds with relevant expertise on D&I and engage them to participate in future meetings;
3. Increase efforts to include **SMEs** and **raise their awareness** of the topic. Also, consider how to involve them in the next Employee Sounding Board session;
4. Share the **list of recommendations** from last year's Employee Resource Group with the **sector federations**, bring this back in the discussion of the 'Company Workstream' and suggest starting the Employee Sounding Board with topics from that list.