nice
Neutral and Inclusive Communication in Corporate Environments

FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS

Enhancing Inclusive Communication in the Workplace







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From Words to Actions: Enhancing Inclusive Communication in the Workplace

Comparative Report between Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, and Romania
2023

CSD
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF DEMOCRACY

This report examines the critical nexus of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) management and professional communication in European workplaces. It explores how public and private entities in five European countries - Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, and Romania - approach and integrate inclusive communication practices. The study emphasises the pivotal role of language in fostering diverse and sustainable workforces within a framework of tolerance and inclusion. Through comparative analysis, policy evaluation, survey, interviews, and best practice identification, the report seeks to raise awareness about the importance of Neutral and Inclusive Communication in Corporate Environments (NICE), while offering recommendations to overcome existing barriers.

Author

Maria Stoyanova, Center for the Study of Democracy and Diversity Charter Bulgaria

Contributors

Eleni Ploutarhou, Centre for Social Inclusion and Diversity Charter Cyprus

Marilena Stathopoulou, KEAN and Diversity Charter Greece

Aistė Brazdžiūnaitė, Lithuania Diversity Charter Association and Diversity Charter Lithuania

Dr. Daniela Jumanca, Forum for International Communications and Diversity Charter Romania

Design

Julia Bogdanow, Center for the Study of Democracy

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CNCD	National Council for Combating Discrimination in Romania
CSD	Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria
CSI	Center for Social Innovation LTD in Cyprus
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DE&I	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
DISC	Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness
EARNDI	Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion
EMEA	Europe and Middle East
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
EU	European Union
GO	Government Ordinance
HR	Human Resources
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KEAN	Cell of Alternative Youth Activities in Greece
LDCA	Lithuanian Diversity Charter Association
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Gender Diverse, Intersex, Queer and Asexual
NAPIF	National Action Plan for Gender Equality
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NICE	Neutral and Inclusive Communication in Corporate Environments

Introduction



In the face of recent global economic and health crises, trade conflicts, and various cross-border phenomena, the world's interconnectedness has become more apparent than ever. Multiculturalism, pluralism, and diversity, often considered abstract concepts, serve as the foundational pillars of the European Union (EU), carrying greater significance than mere terminology. The diversity in our societies is evident and it is reflected in our workplaces. The impact of the digital revolution, migration, and sustained efforts to promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination in the EU labour market has resulted in workforce that reflects this heterogeneity. Teams are now comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds, cultures, genders, ethnicities, races, abilities, and personal experiences. This trend is set to endure, making workplace diversity nearly inevitable. Consequently, organisations, companies and institutions should equip themselves with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to navigate the complexities of the modern corporate landscape.

Today, the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) management is widely acknowledged. The promotion of DE&I aligns with labour non-discrimination policies and stands as a priority for national governments, local authorities, and the EU itself. The EU's motto, **'United in diversity'** underscores the EU's commitment to these values, encapsulating the core principles listed in Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty. In essence, DE&I management calls for companies and organisations, both private and public, as well as governmental institutions, to cultivate a professional atmosphere that is tolerant and values the unique qualities of every individual. Establishing a culture of inclusion entails fostering an environment in which employees feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, enabling them to freely express their opinions and ideas, unleashing their full potential as professionals. Beyond being a moral imperative, DE&I practices in the workplace are increasingly embraced by employers for the manifold benefits they bring, including boosted innovation, creativity, market expansion, customer relationships, and more. In line with this, public and private organisations across Europe are adopting and refining their DE&I policies and practices to align with their specific organisational needs. As our understanding of DE&I deepens, new dimensions emerge, including the **integration of language standards that regulate workplace communication**.

Language possesses the remarkable ability to both unite and divide us. The notion that **language influences the way we think about reality, that it shapes our thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes**, is known as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, or the linguistic relativity hypothesis, a subject extensively studied in the academic circles since the 1950s. More recently, the

relationship between language, communication, business, organisational structure, and stakeholder engagement has been explored in conjunction with other areas such as DE&I management and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) strategies. In this context, language is examined as a key element of building diverse and sustainable workforce that thrives in an inclusive corporate environment based on tolerance and consideration of others. The significance of inclusive communication and neutral language has captured the attention of DE&I experts and other professionals working in fields such as public relations, human resources (HR), corporate communications, management, and even within governmental institutions. Yet, despite the growing awareness, the concept and practical implementation of neutral and inclusive communication often lack sufficient clarity and guidance.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists defines inclusive communication as an approach to communication which enables as many people as possible to be included in interactions, and acknowledges the diverse ways people comprehend and express themselves. It promotes the use of every available means of communication to understand and be understood. **Inclusive language** encompasses expressions that demonstrate respect, are free of bias, assumptions, and stereotypes.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to shed light on the current landscape in five case study countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, and Romania, in terms of their regulatory frameworks, perceptions and attitudes, and practical approach to fostering inclusive communication within workplaces. This study seeks to raise awareness about the pivotal role of inclusive and neutral language in corporate environments and to promote its wider adoption as a core facet of DE&I management. It offers a comparative analysis of these five national contexts, encompassing their policy and legal frameworks, the findings of a survey targeting professionals, and a compilation of promising practices. Additionally, the study addresses persistent barriers and challenges, proposing recommendations for future initiatives.



Methodology

The research for this report was carried out by the respective partner organisations in each of the study countries, as follows: the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) in Bulgaria, the Centre for Social Innovation Ltd (CSI) in Cyprus, the Cell of Alternative Youth Activities (KEAN) in Greece, the Lithuanian Diversity Charter Association (LDCA) in Lithuania, and the Forum of International Communications in Romania. These organisations represent and oversee the operation of the Diversity Charters in their respective countries.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach for data collection. The first part of the study consisted of desk research and a literature review aimed at obtaining relevant information within the country-specific contexts of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, and Romania, as well as at the EU and international levels. The research questions pertained to various aspects of the national contexts, including relevant legislation, policies, governmental and civic initiatives, and practices implemented by businesses. Data were gathered through searches in public internet databases.

The second part of the desk research and a literature review data collection involved an online survey with structured questionnaires containing closed and open-ended questions. The aim was to investigate the use of inclusive communication in different workplaces and collect best practices. The online survey was conducted between April and June 2023. The survey targeted the following categories of respondents: DE&I experts, executives, upper management members, managers, supervisors, employees, HR specialists, sustainability & corporate social responsibility (CSR) officers, and employer branding and communication experts. A total of 240 respondents participated in the NICE Survey 2023.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the online survey. From a statistical point of view, the survey cannot be deemed representative, as it was not distributed randomly but primarily among networks associated with the Diversity Charters in the examined countries. This raises the possibility of potential statistical bias, as a significant portion of the participating companies and organisations have already signed the Diversity Charter in their respective countries, indicating a prior engagement with the DE&I mission. To be precise, a total of 61% of the respondents across all countries indicated that they work for an organisation that is a Diversity Charter signatory. Nonetheless, the diverse range of respondents' profile in terms of nationality, age, gender, position, company or organisation size and type, as well as various industries help mitigate these potential biases and sufficiently captures prevailing perceptions and attitudes towards inclusive language in professional and workplace communication.

The third method for data collection was semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. It aimed to examine the business operations where the use of inclusive language is relevant and to collect examples of promising practices and inclusive language proposals. A total of twenty-five interviews, five per country, were conducted either face-to-face or virtually between May and August 2023. The interviewed experts were selected through a nomination procedure and selection criteria, with a focus on individuals working in companies operating in one of the focus countries who either hold a position as DE&I experts and whose work is related to the implementation of DE&I management in their workplaces or work in the fields of HR, communications, or management of the companies. The study consulted a diverse group of experts with the following roles:

- CEO: 1
- Chairperson of Board of Directors: 1
- Manager: 3
- HR: 4
- Communications and Branding: 6
- DE&I Consultant: 3
- Legal Advisor: 2
- Sustainability and CSR: 2
- University Professor: 1
- Administrator: 1
- Development Consultant: 1

The country-focused data were analysed and summarised in national reports, which served as the primary sources of background data used to compile this report. Additionally, the findings from research on best practices implemented by EU institutions, organisations and companies located outside the scope of the five focus countries were compiled into a common database, which also served as a source for this report.

Legal and Policy Landscapes of Inclusive Communication in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, and Romania

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the relevant national legal framework concerning inclusive language in the workplace is found in different normative acts regulating non-discrimination, employment, equality, and to a certain extent, the crime of hate speech. Notably, inclusive and neutral communication is not subject to a designated national law or policy, nor is it specifically addressed in existing legal and policy documents.

First and foremost, the principle of equality and non-discrimination is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. Its Article 6 ensures that 'there shall be no privileges or restriction of rights [of citizens] on the grounds of race, national or social origin, ethnic self-identity, sex, religion, education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status or property status'. Secondly, in Bulgaria, as in all other EU Member States, discrimination in the area of employment and labour is strictly forbidden by law. Particularly, the **Bulgarian Protection against Discrimination Act** contains a comprehensive set of legal provisions aimed at non-discrimination, equal treatment and equity at the workplace. The Act safeguards a comprehensive list of protected grounds, namely sex, race, nationality, ethnicity, human genome, citizenship, origin, religion or belief, education, convictions, political affiliation, personal or social status, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, property status. At the same time, this legislation directly and indirectly promotes DE&I practices in the workplace, for instance, by requiring workplaces to be adapted for the needs of **employees with disabilities** and employers to encourage individuals from underrepresented gender or ethnic groups to apply for specific job positions. Non-discrimination in the employment sphere is also guaranteed by the Bulgarian **Labour Code**. Specifically, Article 8 (3) establishes a prohibition against both direct and indirect discrimination in the context of exercising labour rights and duties.

The Protection against Discrimination Act obliges employers to prevent workplace discrimination and to promptly investigate and address all kinds of **workplace harassment**, including verbal harassment. It is important to note that Bulgarian legislation provides a general definition of harassment but does not specify what constitutes harassment in the workplace. According to national experts, the absence of a legal provision regulating the behaviour and attitudes in the workplace represents a significant gap.[1] The potential benefit of having such legal provisions is also acknowledged

[1] Interview I-BG-03.

at the international level. The Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (Convention 190) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) addresses violence and harassment, including gender-based harassment, in the labour world. As of 2023, Bulgaria has not ratified it despite the consistent calls to do so from national organisations like the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria and the Economic and Social Council.

In 2016, the Bulgarian parliament passed the Equality between Women and Men Act, which mandates the application of key principles of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in state policy. These principles encompass ensuring equal opportunities in economic and political spheres, providing equal access to all public resources, equal treatment, preventing gender-based discrimination, and combatting gender-related stereotypes within society.

In Bulgaria, certain severe forms of employment discrimination are criminalised. Article 172 of the **Criminal Code**, stipulates that 'a person who intentionally impedes another to take a job, or compels them to leave a job because of their nationality, race, religion, social origin, membership in a trade union or another type of organisation, political party, organisation, movement or coalition with political objective, or because of their next-of-kin political convictions, shall be punished by imprisonment for up to three years or by a fine of up to BGN 5,000'. The use of exclusionary language may constitute **hate speech**. Hate speech is addressed by Article 162 (1) of the Bulgarian Criminal Code, which provides that 'anyone who, **by speech**, press, or other media, by electronic information systems or in another manner, propagates or incites discrimination, violence or hatred on the grounds of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation, shall be punished by imprisonment from one to four years and a fine from BGN 5,000 to BGN 10,000, as well as public censure'. While the national legal system lacks a specific definition[2] of hate speech, the definition outlines in Recommendation No. 9 of 1997 of the Council of Europe is widely accepted. In practice, labelling workplace exclusionary language as hate speech may be challenging. However, it is noteworthy that very extreme forms of exclusionary and discriminatory language may constitute a criminal offense.

In terms of policy, the government promotes DE&I in the workplace through various national strategies. These include the **National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2030** which prioritises

[2] Hate speech is covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

building an inclusive labour market, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and ensuring productive employment and decent work for all. Additionally, the **National Strategy for Promoting the Equality of Women and Men 2021-2030** serves as a key policy document in the field of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The **National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030)** outlines goals related to equality, inclusion and Roma participation in employment, including efforts to combat stereotypes, negative public attitudes and hate speech against this minority group. Lastly, the **National Employment Strategy (2021-2030)** sets forth the main objectives of the mid- and long-term employment policy, with a focus on improving equal opportunities and inclusivity within the labour market.

The use of neutral and inclusive communication is not explicitly regulated as a separate issue but falls under the scope of various normative documents. Notably, there are no dedicated instruments adopted by public authorities specifically addressing neutral and inclusive language. This suggests that inclusive communication is relatively unfamiliar subject to national authorities. In Bulgaria, the matter of inclusive and neutral language remains relatively unexplored, with only a few initiatives implemented by actors from the private sector. For instance, the *Work It Out platform* has been created by the Bulgarian non-governmental organisation (NGO) GLAS Foundation. This platform unites a network of companies aiming to create more inclusive workplaces for LGBTIQA+ employees. As part of this initiative, an e-learning course has been developed, providing guidance on inclusive communication concerning LGBTIQA+ individuals. Additionally, the project seeks to enhance general awareness of inclusive language and to educate the audience on improving their communication skills through exercises, videos and practical activities. Another noteworthy example is the 'Academy for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion', launched by the Council of Women in Business in Bulgaria in collaboration with the Sofia University. The academy introduced a thematic module specifically focused on inclusive communication.[3]

In summary, in Bulgaria, the use of inclusive and neutral language is not subject to specific regulations; however, the existing legislation and policies provide the necessary framework for promoting inclusive communication in the workplace. Furthermore, the DE&I principles are increasingly being embraced and implemented by a growing number of companies, organisations, and institutions in the country. Advancing DE&I is ensured through various approaches employed by these entities, including the adoption of DE&I policies, the appointment of dedicated DE&I officers or

[3] Interview I-BG-01.

committees, the implementation of training programmes, active participation in awareness-raising campaigns, and becoming signatories of the Bulgarian Diversity Charter.

Cyprus

In the Cyprus context, the use of inclusive and neutral language is promoted in various existing policies, strategies, guidelines, and other acts. At the national level, Cyprus has adopted legislation and established institutions to promote equality and combat discrimination, which **indirectly contribute to fostering inclusive language practices**.

Uppermost, Article 28 of the Cypriot Constitution of 1960 enshrines the principle of equal treatment and the prohibition of any form of direct and indirect discrimination based on gender. The key legislation also includes the equal treatment in employment and occupation law (Department of Labour Equality Authority, 2004). The law prohibits discrimination in the workplace based on various grounds, including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. While it **does not specifically address language use**, it creates a legal framework for promoting inclusive practices, including on language-related issues. A key institution is the Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsperson). The Ombudsperson is an independent authority responsible for safeguarding human rights and equal treatment. This institution plays an important role in promoting inclusive language through its advocacy activities, recommendations, and investigations related to discrimination in the workplace.

Furthermore, there are several NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) in Cyprus that work towards promoting inclusive language and diversity in various contexts. While specific initiatives may vary, these organisations generally aim to raise awareness, provide guidance, and advocate for inclusive practices. One example of such an organisation is Cyprus Stop Trafficking. This NGO focuses on combating human trafficking, but also promotes the use of inclusive language when addressing issues related to victims of trafficking and marginalised groups. Another organisation, Accept LGBTI Cyprus, advocates for the rights of the LGBTIQA+ community in the country. It works towards the introduction of inclusive language practices in workplaces, aiming to create an environment that respects and acknowledges diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. These examples provide a general overview of the potential involvement of national

authorities, agencies, NGOs, and civil society organisations in promoting inclusive and neutral language in Cyprus.

In Cyprus, the national context of inclusive language at the workplace is influenced by various factors, including cultural, legal, and social aspects. Since Cypriot society is influenced by a mixture of Greek and Turkish cultures, *inter alia*, the cultural background plays a significant role in shaping the national context of inclusive language. Overall, Cyprus has legislation in place to promote equal treatment and prevent discrimination in the workplace, but it does not specifically address inclusive and neutral language. A 2016 report by the Cyprus Gender Equality Observatory demonstrated that Cyprus is still in the early stages of implementing inclusive language, especially when it comes to public authorities' communication practices. The publication has revealed that the vast majority of documents produced by the Cypriot Public Administration are worded in a way that linguistically reproduce the position of women in an unequal manner and consequently reproduce anachronistic stereotypes, on which the asymmetric relationship between women and men is based.

Greece

In Greece, DE&I policies are a high priority for Greek organisations, aiming to develop equal opportunities and safe environments. The Greek government has also been actively engaged in ensuring the right to equal opportunities and non-discrimination. The relevant national legislation, **Law 4443/2016 against discrimination in work and employment**, was adopted in 2016. It prohibits any form of discrimination in the field of employment and occupation based on race, colour, national or ethnic origin, genealogical origin, religious or other beliefs, disability or chronic disease, age, marital social status, sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

Article 4 of the Greek Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality, stating that 'Greek men and women have equal rights and obligations. However, gender equality emerges as a significant concern in the country'. It is underscored by the position of Greece at the bottom of the EU Gender Equality Index with a score of 53.4 out of 100 according to the European Institute for Gender Equality. Law 4604/2019 on Fundamental Gender Equality outlines core concepts, mechanisms, and institutions aimed at realising gender parity, integrating this principle into public policies and private life, and establishing a network of consistent structures across

the country to prevent violence against women. This legal framework is complemented by the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPIF) 2021-2025, structured around four Priority Axes, each addressing distinct thematic facets of gender equality policies. The NAPIF is adopted by organisations or entities to assess their processes, pinpoint gender biases, implement corrective measures, set goals, and monitor advancement through indicators. Furthermore, the **Law 4491/2017 on Legal recognition of gender identity - National Mechanism for the Preparation, Monitoring and Evaluation of Action Plans for the Rights of the Child and other provisions** regulates matters concerning gender identity and facilitates the legal recognition of gender identity. In addition, it provides transgender people with the right to have their gender identity recognised as an element of their personality and the right to have their personality based on their sex characteristics respected.

Another important step in promoting equality was taken with the enactment of **Law 4957/2022 on New horizons for higher education institutions: Strengthening the quality and functionality of higher education institutions and their connection with the society, and other provisions**. Article 218 of this law transformed the existing Committees on Equality, which were established in all universities, into Committees on Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination, expanding their mission and responsibilities. These committees aim to promote gender equality and combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, health/disability status, age, or sexual orientation at all levels of functioning and in all processes and activities within academia. The Committees on Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination contribute to preventing and addressing all forms of discrimination, as well as sexism and various forms of harassment within academic institutions. Their responsibilities also include empowering academics with knowledge of gender equality, LGBTIQA+ rights, combatting discrimination and harassment, reporting incidents of discrimination, sexual harassment, or gender-based harassment, and providing support to victims of such adverse behaviours when they report discrimination or harassment.

Even though equality remains up on the public agenda in Greece, the use of inclusive language is yet at a very early stage. Currently, there is no specific legislation on this matter at a national level, but various organisations and institutions are taking initiatives to develop and promote the use of such language. In 2018, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality - a government body for planning, implementing and monitoring the implementation of gender equality policies that is under the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family - published a Guide to Using Non-Sexist

Language in Administrative Documents. In higher education various institutes have developed action plans to promote gender equality. An important example is from the University of Thessalia, which requires the use of inclusive language in texts and public discourse, focusing on internal and external communications.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, there is no comprehensive legal base for the promotion and use of neutral and inclusive communication in the workplace. The national framework to some extent covers non-discrimination, equal opportunities, hate speech and accessibility of persons with disabilities.

The legal framework of equal opportunities in Lithuania is comprised of provisions in the **Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania**, the **Law on Equal Treatment**, the **Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men**, and the **Law on the Amendment of the Law on Administrative Proceedings**. Essentially, discrimination based on gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion is prohibited by law. Additionally, the provision of equal opportunities and the prevention of discrimination is ensured by the institution of the Ombudsperson. **This rather broad legal framework has some overlaps with neutral and inclusive communication even though they are not specifically regulated.** For instance, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men states that 'It is prohibited to specify requirements that give preference to one of the sexes in advertisements for employment, civil service or education'. Although the law does not mention neutral or inclusive communication, it essentially prohibits employers to publish job offers that describe the position using nouns and/or adjectives that are inflected in a way that indicates that one is speaking about women (masculine is understood as neutral) or to state a preferable gender. Violations can be reported to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. The Office also examines complaints about job postings, interviews etc. that indicate a preferable age or other protected characteristic.

Serious violations of the principles of neutral and inclusive communication might be considered hate speech. Hate speech, or incitement to hatred, incurs liability under Article 170 of the **Criminal Code**. It provides punishments for anyone who, with the intention of distributing, produces,

purchases, sends, transports, keeps things that mock, despise, incite hatred or incite discrimination, as well as for anyone who publicly mocks, despises, incites hatred or incites discrimination against a group of people or a person belonging to such a group because of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, skin colour, nationality, language, origin, ethnicity, social status, religion, belief or opinion. However, in practice, the prohibition of hate speech is not properly enforced: the practice of pre-trial investigation institutions and courts in evaluating cases of hate speech of a similar nature is uneven and inconsistent. It is noteworthy that this law as well as previously mentioned laws do not consider gender identity as a protected characteristic.

An important development came with the transposition of the EU Directive on the Accessibility of the Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies into the Lithuanian legal framework. It was necessary to improve the persons with disabilities' access to information and various services. In addition to the law, several guides were prepared to increase persons with disabilities' access to information. For instance, a guide focusing on the preparation of a text in an Easy to Read way, a guide on the accessibility of websites and mobile apps, and for accessibility of various types of media (video, text, sound).

The national authorities in Lithuania do not specifically promote neutral and inclusive communication through policy. Given that Lithuanian language has grammatical gender, it makes gender-neutral language very difficult to achieve. As per the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language, words are inflected in a manner that implies the use of masculine gender when describing groups of diverse people. However, the assumption that masculine gender is neutral has been challenged by various stakeholders.[4] On the other hand, public authorities fund projects and organise initiatives focused on equal opportunities for men and women and prevention of discrimination that are relevant to inclusive language.[5] For instance, the Department of Youth Affairs organises annual training activities on discrimination prevention for people working with youth. These training activities also concern non-discriminatory and respectful communication. Another relevant initiative is the Millennium Schools project co-funded by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. The project produced a guide on 'Universal Design for Learning' employing the principles of neutral and inclusive communication such as gender inclusive language, person first language, easy readability of fonts, colours and designs. This guide, while useful, is not mandatory and schools are not obliged but only

[4] Interview I-LT-04; Arlauskaite, N. et al. (2021) Vilniaus Universiteto Lyčiai jautrios kalbos gairės.
[5] Interview I-LT-01.

encouraged to implement its recommendations.[6]

It is important to mention that certain Lithuanian universities are actively advocating for gender-inclusive language. In 2021, the largest public university in Lithuania - Vilnius University - published a 'Gender inclusive language guide'. This guide emphasises that language and its usage reflect conventions and constructs that individuals, groups, and institutions employ to convey and shape perspectives. Gender-sensitive language is seen as a fundamental aspect of fostering respectful dynamics in both work and study environments. The guide also criticises the use of grammatical masculine gender as neutral calling it outdated and often discriminatory.

NGOs are the main advocates for neutral and inclusive communication in Lithuania.[7] Among the prominent examples in this field is the Media4change initiative. It monitors and analyses the way in which the most stigmatised groups in Lithuania are portrayed in the media. For instance, the initiative's most recent report published in 2023 shows that Roma and LGBTIQA+ communities are presented in negative context more often than in positive. To address this challenge, Association Trans Autonomy organised training activities for journalists on LGBTIQA+ representation. Furthermore, in 2023, experts from the Lithuanian Psychology Association LGBTIQA+ group, House of Diversity and Education and Sąmoninga Seima created a comprehensive glossary of LGBTQIA+ terms in Lithuanian with the objective to provide information to psychologists. This glossary was approved by the board of the Lithuanian Psychology Association. Similarly, the NGO Mental Health Perspectives created guidelines for communication about mental health called Words matter. How to talk and write ethically about mental health? The guide includes a general explanation of mental health, main terms, phrases that should be used instead of offensive terms, and suggestions of images.

In sum, the need for neutral and inclusive communication is acknowledged by the NGO sector, as organisations in Lithuania conduct research, publish guidelines, and provide recommendations. On the other hand, neutral and inclusive communication lacks mainstream attention, and national authorities have not yet established a systemic approach in this area. The existing legal framework is not comprehensive, although it gives the necessary grounds for the implementation of neutral and inclusive communication practices in the Lithuanian workplaces.

[6] Interview I-LT-01.
[7] Interview I-LT-01.

Romania

In Romania, non-discrimination is first and foremost a constitutional right, as set out in Article 16 of the **Romanian Constitution**, which guarantees the equality of all citizens without any privileges or discrimination. The country has also adopted specific laws against discrimination to ensure compliance with this principle. **Government Ordinance (GO) No. 137/2000** concerns the prevention and punishment of all forms of discrimination, while **Law No. 202/2002** focuses on the promotion of equal opportunities and treatment of women and men. Furthermore, the provisions against discrimination concerning employees are explicitly mentioned in the **Romanian Labour Code**, which outlines the rights and obligations of employers and employees. It includes provisions relating to non-discrimination, equal treatment and respect for human dignity. These provisions explicitly prohibit discrimination based on various grounds, including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation and age. These legal provisions establish the framework for combatting discrimination in different contexts. However, the country faces challenges not stemming from a lack of legislation but from inadequate enforcement of existing laws, often due to bureaucratic obstacles, and from prevailing social norms.

The National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) is the public authority responsible for handling discrimination cases. Individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination can submit a complaint to the CNCD through an administrative procedure or to competent courts. In court cases involving discrimination claims, the CNCD is asked to provide an opinion on the presence of discrimination. However, there are instances where the CNCD fails to respond in a timely manner, and judges have the discretion to determine if discrimination exists or not.

Overall, there is **no dedicated national framework solely focused on neutral and inclusive communication**. The broader legal provisions, along with guidelines and recommendations from international organisations, can contribute to fostering a more inclusive and respectful work environment in Romania.

In Romania, several NGOs and CSOs actively work towards promoting DE&I in different domains. Some organisations focus on specific areas such as gender equality, disability rights, or LGBTIQA+ rights. While a specific national framework for inclusive and neutral communication in the workplace has not been developed, these organisations often advocate for inclusive practices and raise awareness about the importance of using respectful and non-discriminatory language. Further cooperation between

national authorities, NGOs and civil society organisations can lead to the creation of clearer guidelines and policies to support the use of inclusive and neutral language in the workplace.

Comparative Analysis

The review of national legislative and policy frameworks in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania and Romania provides insights into the existing framework that enables inclusive language practices. **Common to these countries is that there is no law or policy that specifically addresses inclusive communication in the workplace. Instead, relevant laws and policies are found in the areas of non-discrimination, employment and labour, gender equality and criminal law.** Most notably, the use of inclusive and neutral language is implied by constitutional principles that prohibit all forms of discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics and which are found in all countries. Overall, all of the examined countries have adopted legislation and established institutions to promote equality and combat discrimination in the workplace, which indirectly contributes to fostering inclusive communication practices. All countries have adopted regulations on gender equality and equal opportunities. It is common that gender equality usually refers to women and men and does not include non-binary genders. In Greece, where gender equality has been a persisting issue, the national authorities have adopted more sophisticated legislation regarding gender identity. Such regulations are missing in Bulgaria and Lithuania.

The scarce engagement of public authorities in promoting and using inclusive language is evident in all examined national contexts. Apart from the Guide to Using Non-Sexist Language in Administrative Documents developed by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality in Greece, no other initiative or document introduced by a public body was found. It is the private sector that has a leading role in introducing inclusive communication practices, as well as in developing resources and awareness-raising initiatives. NGOs, CSOs and educational institutions in all countries have developed programmes to promote the use of inclusive communication in the workplace. Typically, these soft measures and initiatives target specific audiences and tackle communication techniques towards particular under-represented groups, such as the LGBTIQA+ people. In Lithuania and Greece, there has been a proactive engagement of public universities in establishing gender-sensitive and neutral language. Some large universities in these countries have adopted guides for inclusive communication as part of their gender equality policy frameworks.

Inclusive Communication in the Workplace: Cross-Country and Cross-Sectional Analysis

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the adoption of inclusive language practices can vary across different countries, organisations, and industries. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of inclusive communication in promoting DE&I in the workplace globally. The EU also puts focus on inclusive language as part of its continuous commitment to combat stereotypes and promote gender equality through equal treatment legislation, gender mainstreaming, and other measures. In this context, some EU institutions have adopted guidelines for gender-neutral and inclusive language, such as the Publications Office's EU Interinstitutional Style Guide, the Fundamental Rights Agency' Style Guide for Authors, and the European Parliament's Guide for gender-neutral language.

A growing number of companies and civil society organisations also recognise the value of inclusive communication in building more inclusive and respectful professional environment. Despite this, the issue of inclusive and neutral language within workplaces emerged as a distinct field quite recently, so it is still surrounded by uncertainty and ambiguity. The NICE Survey addressed these uncertainties.

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the results obtained from the fieldwork. The survey findings were supplemented by interviews with twenty-five DE&I experts, enriching the study with additional insights and practical perspectives. The findings illustrate the extent of understanding and awareness concerning the use of inclusive and neutral language within workplaces, the level of commitment demonstrated by employers in this field, the integration of training and skill enhancement programmes, and the various strategies adopted by companies and organisations in the countries in focus.



Scope of the NICE Survey

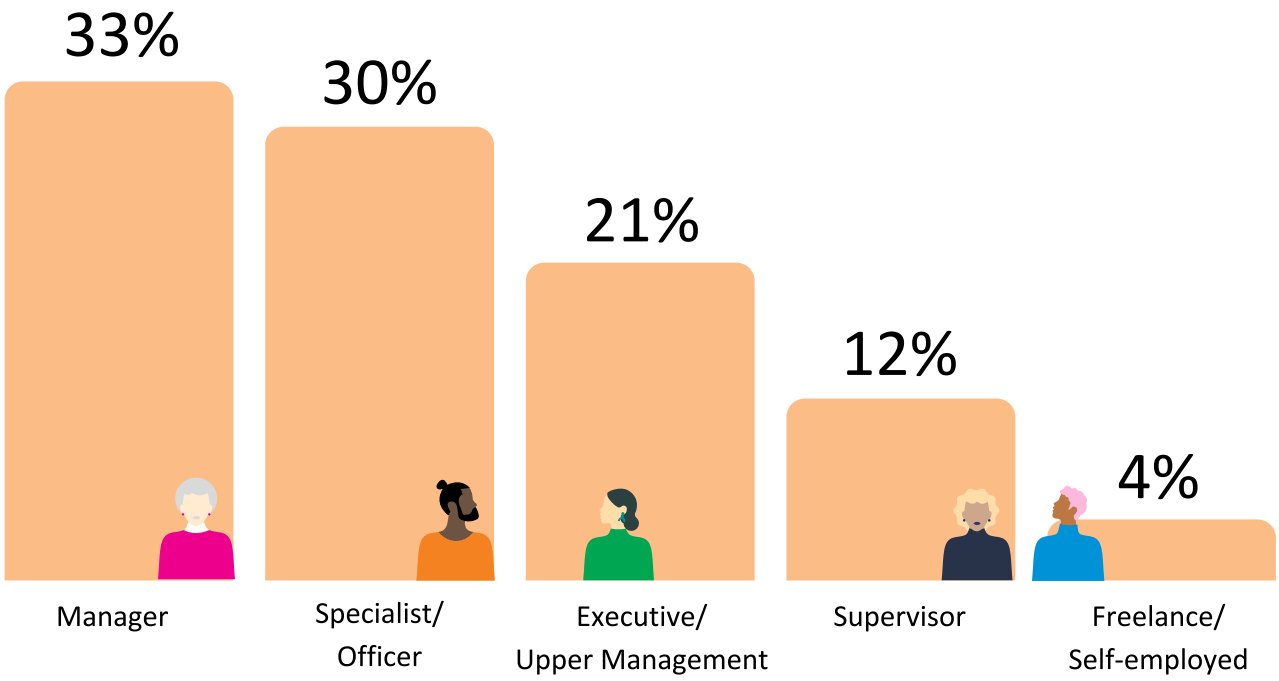
Survey responses:

240

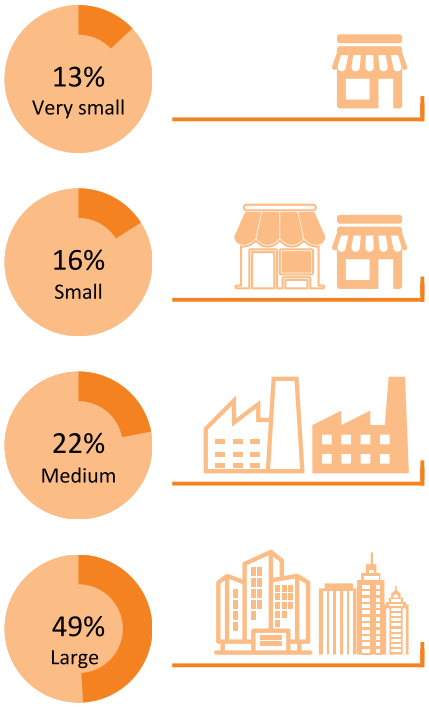
Country coverage:

5

Position:



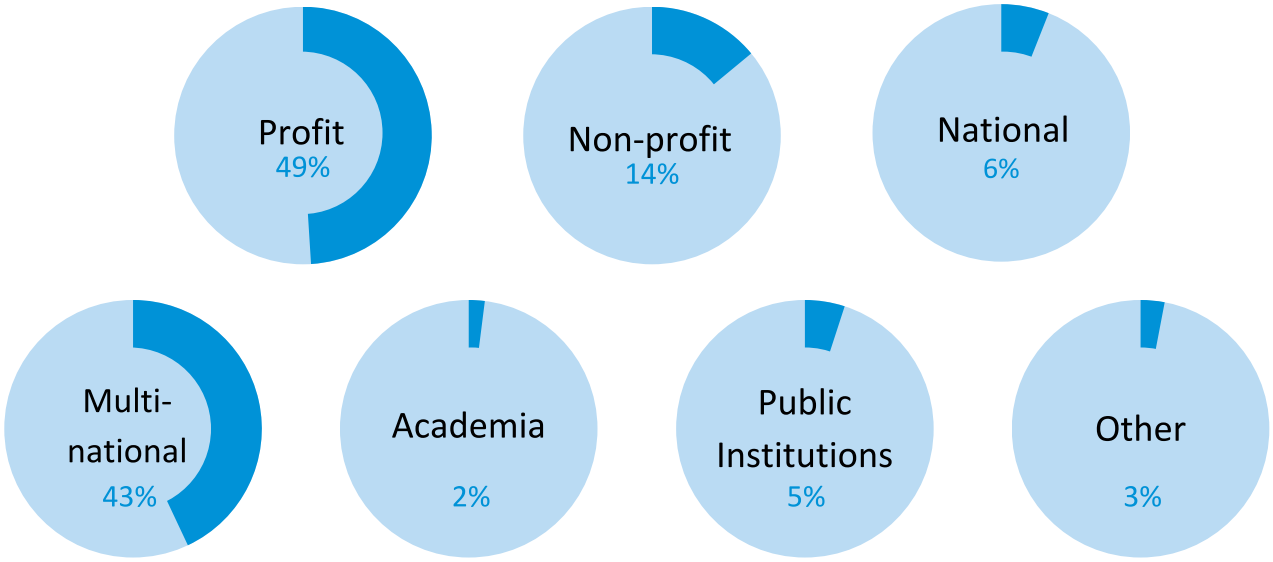
Size of company/organisation:



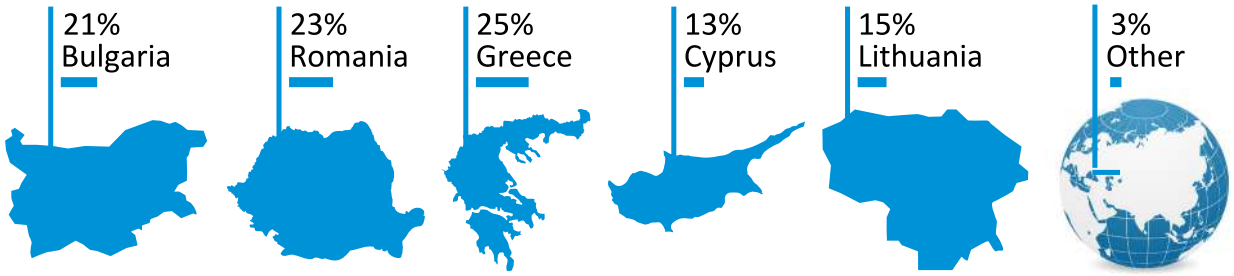
Type of industry:

1%	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing
3%	Chemical industries
14%	Commerce
2%	Construction
10%	Education
10%	Financial and insurance services
10%	Professional, scientific and technical services
10%	Food, drink
4%	Health services
1%	Tourism
1%	Mining
3%	Mechanical and electrical engineering
9%	Marketing
8%	Media
12%	Information and communication technologies
4%	Public service
2%	Transport
6%	Arts, entertainment and culture

Type of Organisation:

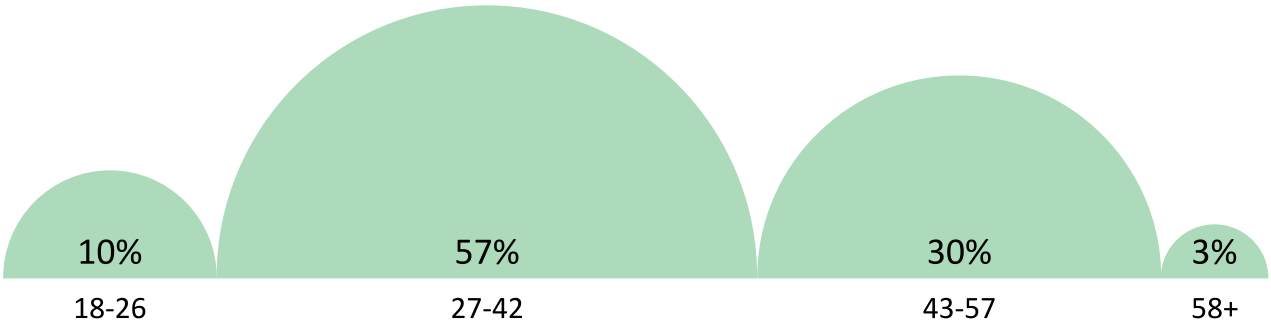


Nationality:



Demographic groups

Age:



Gender:



Awareness and Understanding

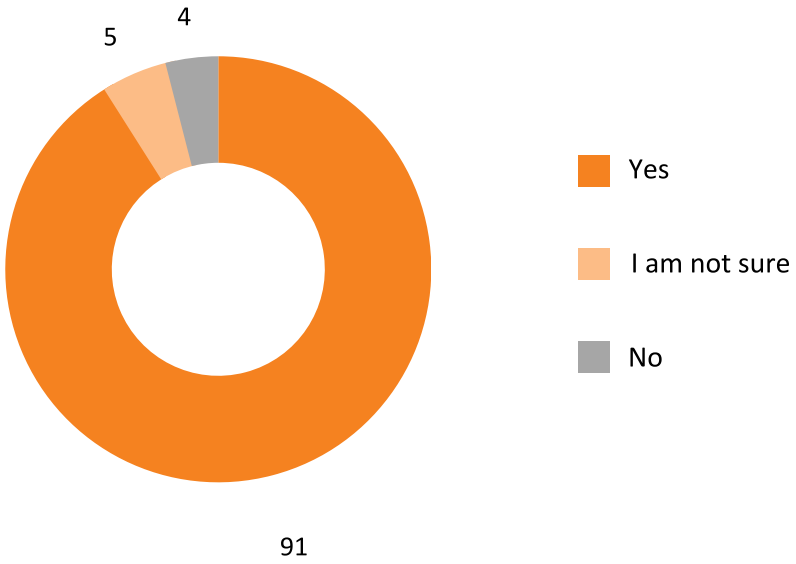
Attitudes and perceptions of inclusive communication at workplaces

This study examines inclusive and neutral communication in the workplace from the perspective of the DE&I management. DE&I policies have been around for a much longer time and many employees are familiar with the concept. This assumption is confirmed by the survey results where an overwhelming 91% of respondents stated that they are familiar with the concept of diversity and inclusion in the workplace (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Familiarity of Respondents with the Concept of DE&I

Q **Are you familiar with the concept of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) in the workplace?**

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

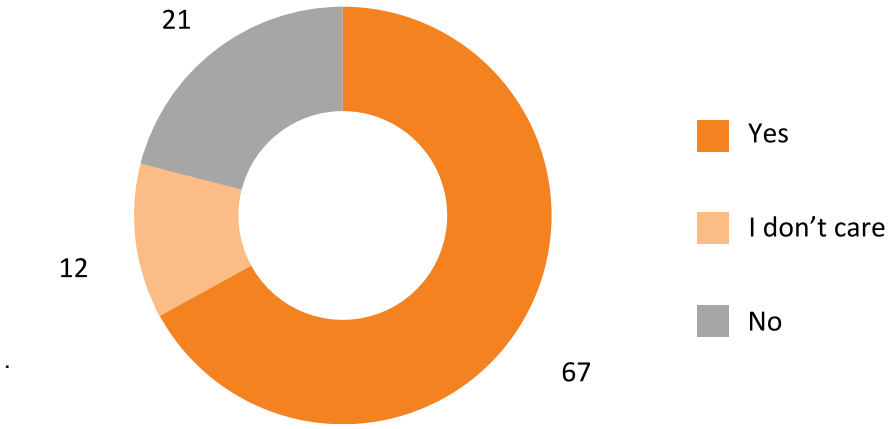
Furthermore, the majority of respondents – 68% indicated that there is a DE&I policy in their organisation (Figure 2). This shows a relatively high commitment of employers to build an organisational culture aligned with the principles of DE&I that fosters diverse teams, inclusive and accessible workplaces, as well as equitable work conditions.

Figure 2: DE&I Policies in Respondents' Organisations

Q

Are there any Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) policies in your organisation?

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

This is not exactly the case with the understanding and attitudes towards inclusive communication. The survey examines to what extent companies and organisations put a priority on inclusive work communication from the respondents' perspective. The responses regarding whether participants agree that their organisations prioritise the use of inclusive and neutral language in the workplace are diverse. While a substantial portion 'completely agree' (30%) or 'mostly agree' (30%) with the statement, there is a significant percentage that 'slightly agree' (23%) as well. A smaller percentage expresses different ranges of disagreement with only 5% who completely disagreed (Figure 3).

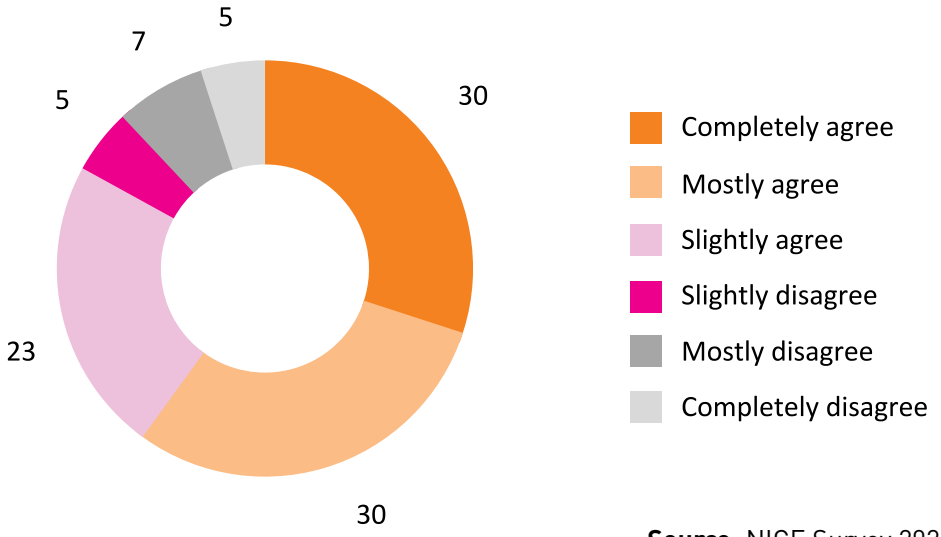
There is a range of responses across different segments, suggesting that **the prioritisation of inclusive and neutral language in the workplace varies based on the type of organisation, size, and country.**

Figure 3: Organisations' Prioritisation of Inclusive and Neutral Language in the Workplace

Q

Do you agree that your organisation puts a priority on the use of inclusive and neutral language in the workplace?

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

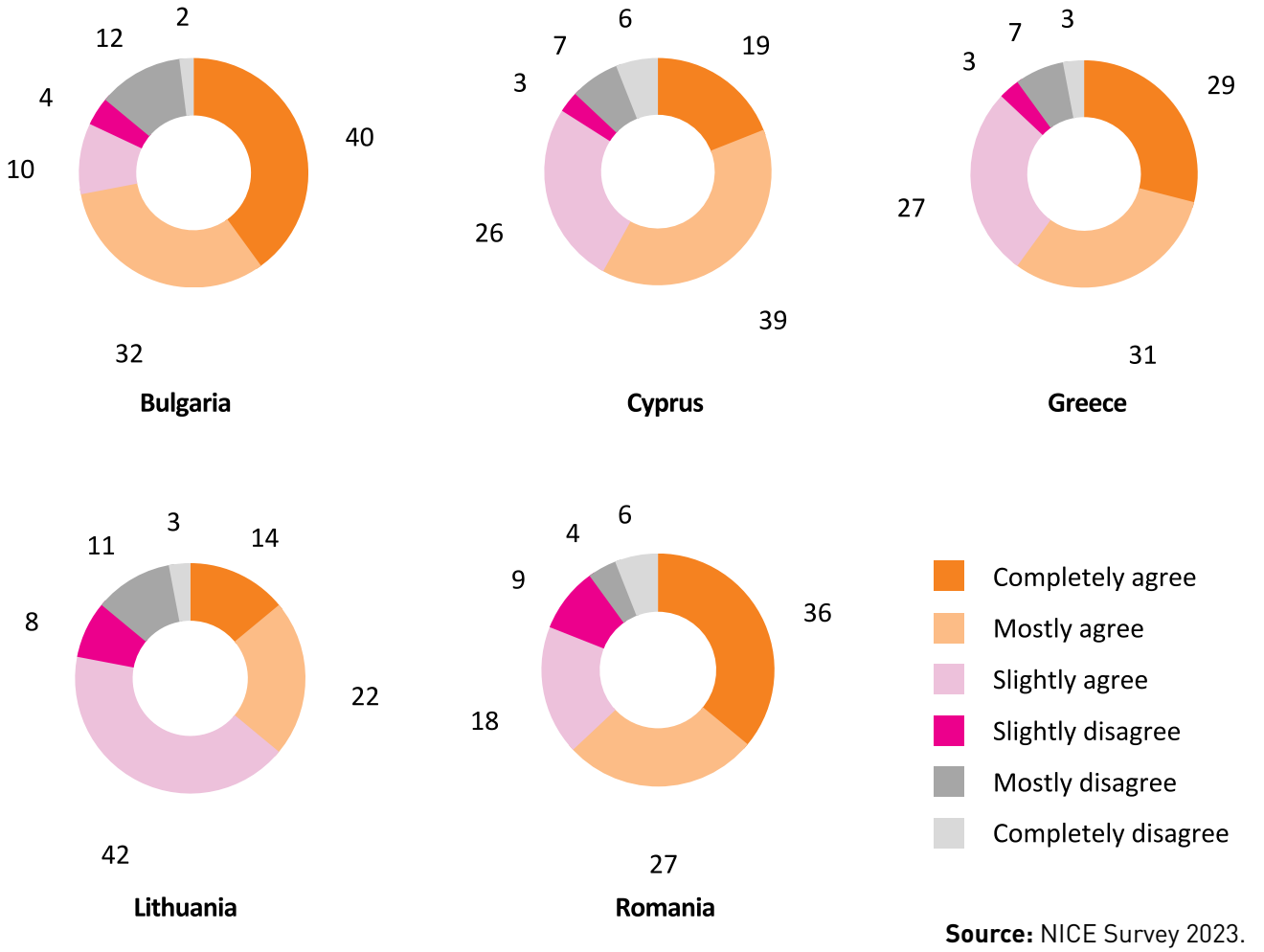
Profit and multinational organisations seem to demonstrate the highest levels of engagement with inclusive communication, according to the respondents. **Multinational companies are leading in prioritising inclusive communication**, particularly 40% of respondents working in such entities stated that they completely agree and 28% mostly agree with the statement that inclusive communication is a priority at their workplace. In the non-profit sector, around 47% 'completely' or 'mostly agree', and 26% 'slightly agree' that their organisations put emphasis on inclusive and neutral language. However, a significant percentage of 21% of NGO representatives 'completely disagree', which indicates contrasting perspectives within this sector. The responses from national companies and national organisations show a comparatively higher disagreement that inclusive language is a priority at their workplace. Around 14% to 29% express agreement, while 21% to 28% 'slightly disagree' or 'mostly disagree'. This is not surprising as national companies and organisations tend to build a more homogenous workforce compared to transnational companies that have branches around the world. Therefore, national companies are less inclined to invest in DE&I initiatives, including improving the use of neutral and inclusive language in the workplace.

This analysis of responses further delves into the results, categorised by country, to highlight trends and variations in perceptions and attitudes within different national contexts (Figure 4). It becomes evident that attitudes vary across these countries. Some countries, such as Bulgaria and Cyprus, exhibit relatively positive attitudes, marked by a combination of 'completely' and 'mostly agree' responses. In contrast, Lithuania and Greece display more diverse opinions with a notable presence of disagreeing responses. In Lithuania, a significant proportion of our sample (42%) 'slightly agree' while the combined percentages of 'slightly' and 'mostly disagree' (19%) suggest some level of skepticism. In Romania, the survey responses indicate a mixed stance toward the priority of inclusive and neutral language. Interestingly, when considering the 'completely agree' responses, Romania and Bulgaria together show the highest percentage at 40% and 36% respectively.

Figure 4: Prioritisation of the Use of Inclusive and Neutral Language in the Workplace across National Contexts

Q **Do you agree that your organisation puts a priority on the use of inclusive and neutral language in the workplace?**

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

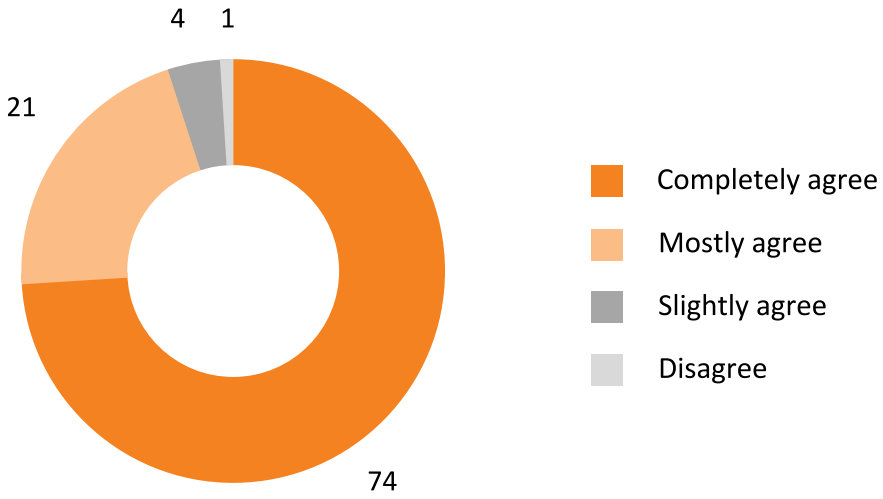
The survey also aimed to gauge the extent to which respondents personally recognise the importance of inclusive communication, thus shedding light on the prevailing attitudes towards forthcoming activities focused on this matter. In addition, the survey was interested in identifying which fundamental dimensions of inclusive language are most and least familiar to employees.

Overall, a significant majority of respondents, **73%, express that they value the use of inclusive and neutral language in the workplace** (Figure 5). A deeper analysis of responses underscores that the percpetions are influenced by both age and professional position. **Middle-aged individuals, particularly those in managerial roles and freelancers, exhibited higher agreement rates, indicating their awareness of the impact of inclusive language.** Participants aged 43-57 display the highest agreement, with an impressive 81% in completely agreeing. This trend suggests that individuals in the middle generational bracket, potentially with more extensive professional experience, understand the value and impact of inclusive language in the workplace. They are followed by the participants from the age group 27-42 (Generation Y or Millenials) with 73% in complete agreement. Interestingly, the youngest age group of 18-26, or Generation Z, show a slightly lower agreement with 63%. Contrary to common perceptions that younger people are more open-minded and tolerant, the results of the NICE survey are relatively similar to the findings of a recent research suggesting that Generation Z tends to be more socially liberal but less tolerant. Possibly, the results are indicating that younger respondents have less professional experience and are still developing their perspectives on this issue. Participants aged 58 and above demonstrate the least engagement with 33%, implying that individuals closer to retirement may not consider inclusive language as crucial.

Figure 5: Importance of Neutral and Inclusive Language in the Workplace

Q **Do you agree that the use of neutral and inclusive language is important in the workplace?**

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

The participants' professional positions further illuminate this topic. Freelancers show the most robust agreement, with 90% completely recognising the importance of inclusive language in professional communication. This can potentially be explained by the fact that freelancers often interact with diverse clients and environments, leading to a more cristalysed perception of the need to communicate in an inclusive manner and using neutral language. Supervisors and executives also demonstrate high recognition, both at 75%. This suggests that those in leadership and managerial roles recognise the significance of inclusive language as a pivotal element of the broader goals of fostering an inclusive workplace culture. Managers and specialists, with approximately 73% and 69% 'completely agree', respectively, highlight that professionals across different functional roles also recognise the importance of inclusive communication at the workplace.

Understanding diverse dimensions of inclusive communication

In the absence of a commonly accepted definition of inclusive language, the study used the following working definition based on prior scholarship and studies:

> Inclusive language (sometimes called non-discriminatory language) acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities. It is a language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory views of particular people or groups. It is also language that doesn't deliberately or inadvertently exclude people from being seen as part of a group.

Furthermore, the study focused on the five most common dimensions of inclusive communication, namely:

- Gender-neutral language – to avoid words and phrases that refer explicitly or implicitly to only one gender and ensuring, through inclusive alternatives, the use of gender-neutral language. ***Example:*** *Use Chairperson instead of Chairman or partner or spouse instead of 'husband'/'wife' when the gender is unknown.*

- Person-first language – to prioritise the person over the disability, diagnosis, or chronic condition. ***Example:*** *Use a person with a learning disability instead of disabled person.*

- Avoiding stereotypes and biases on a discriminatory basis - to avoid making positive or negative generalisations about members of a particular racial, social, gender, religious, ethnic, national or other group. ***Example:*** *Do not say 'Gay people are very creative'.*

- Inclusive pronouns – to avoid assuming the gender of the person they are talking to or about. ***Example:*** *Use gender-neutral pronouns such as 'they/them' in English instead of generic 'he/him'. Ask for other people's pronouns and share yours.*

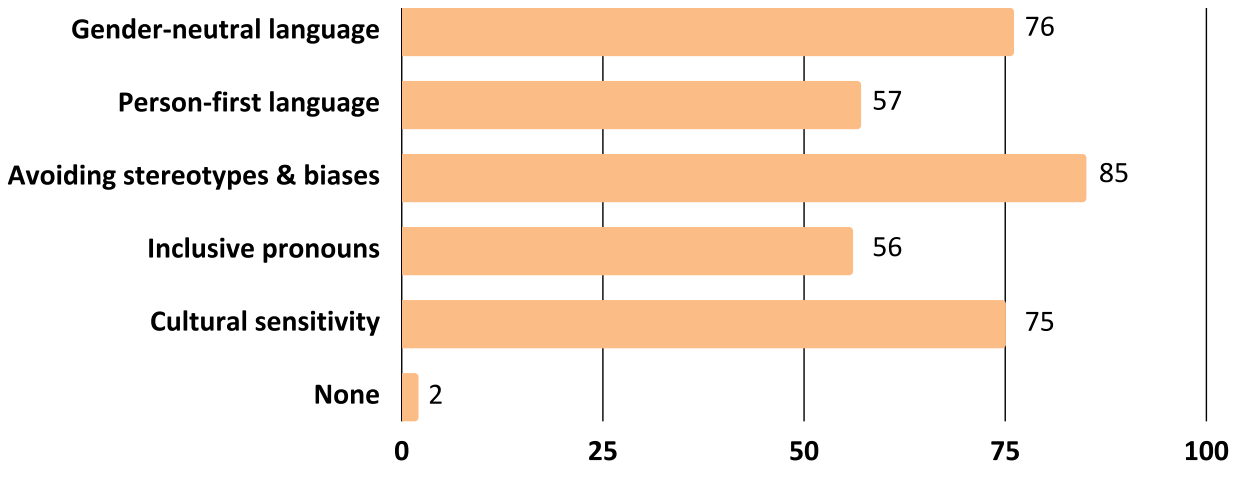
- Cultural sensitivity – to be aware and to accept the values, norms, and behaviour of people with cultures and cultural identities that

differ from one's own. ***Example:*** *Accepted forms of greeting vary in different cultures – a handshake, bow, and kiss on the cheek in certain countries.*

The survey asked participants to self-assess their familiarity with these dimensions. The overall results show a significant level of knowledge of the listed forms of inclusive language, as assessed by the respondents themselves. Most respondents indicated familiarity with the category 'Avoiding stereotypes and biases on a discriminatory basis' (85%), followed by 'Gender-neutral language' (76%), 'Cultural sensitivity' (75%), 'Person-first language' (57%), and 'Inclusive pronouns' (56%). Only a minimal percentage (2%) reported being unfamiliar with all proposed dimensions (Figure 6). Regarding age, the youngest age group (18-26) is most familiar with all dimensions except 'Person-first language', where familiarity is lowest at 50%. The next age group 27-42 exhibits consistently high familiarity with all dimensions, with 'Avoiding stereotypes and biases on a discriminatory basis' (85%) being the most notable. Similar to the previous group, the respondents aged 43-57 demonstrate robust knowledge regarding 'Cultural sensitivity' (78%) and 'Avoiding stereotypes and biases on a discriminatory basis' (86%). The oldest age group shows highest familiarity in 'Cultural sensitivity' (83%) and least in 'Gender-neutral language' and 'Inclusive pronouns' at 17% for both.

Figure 6: Familiarity of Respondents with Dimensions of Inclusive Language

Q **Which of the following dimensions of inclusive language are you familiar with?**
Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Implementation and Instruments

Internal policy

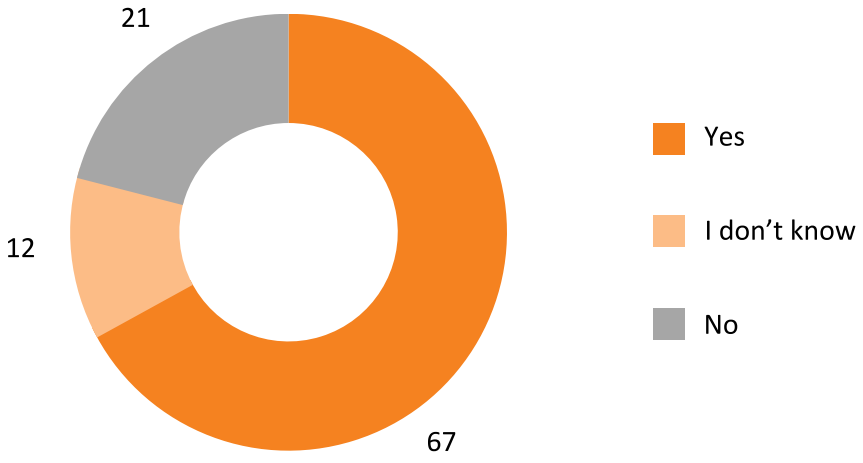
Internal policy typically contains the rules developed by a company, agency or organisation that govern its operations, including its mission, goals, roles, responsibilities, resource allocation, protocols, and administration. The implementation of inclusive language initiatives and practices is usually determined by internal policy documents that set communication and behavioural standards at work. These tools can take the form of an ethical code or code of conduct. In some cases, they are complemented by specific DE&I policies that address more explicit goals.

As previously mentioned, the majority of respondents to the NICE survey indicate that their organisations have adopted policies devoted to promoting and upholding the principles of DE&I (Figure 7). DE&I policies often serve as the primary framework for cultivating inclusive communication within the workplace. Therefore, it is important to take a closer look at the results revealing the existence of DE&I policies in different countries, types and sizes of organisations.

Figure 7: DE&I Policies in Respondents' Organisations

Q **Are there any Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) policies in your organisation?**

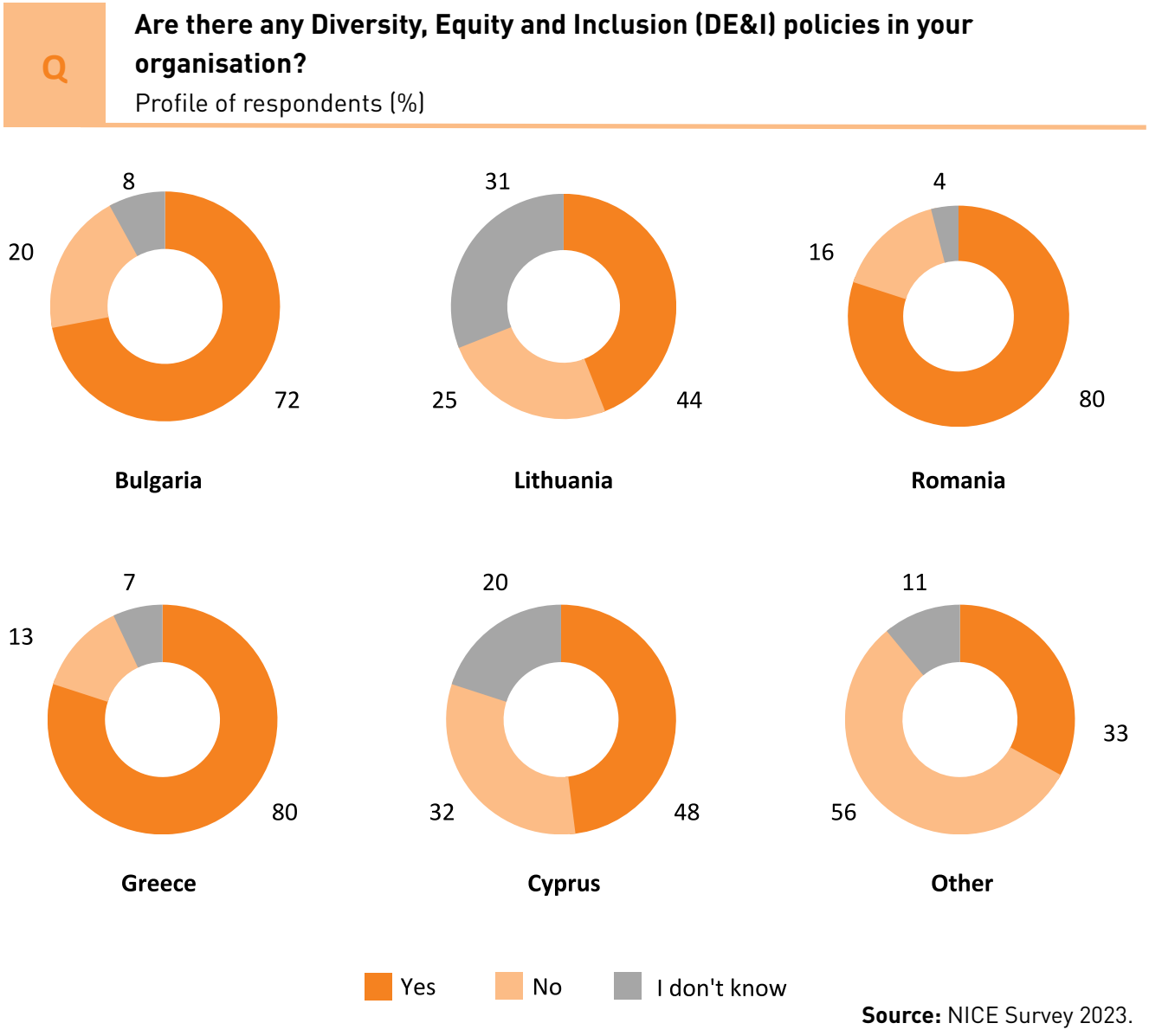
Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Among the surveyed countries, Greece (80%), Romania (80%) and Bulgaria (72%) have the highest percentage of respondents who indicate the presence of DE&I policies in their organisations. Respondents from Lithuania and Cyprus generally indicate that such a policy does not exist in their workplace or that they are unaware of its existence (Figure 8).

Figure 8: DE&I Policies in Organisations across National Contexts



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

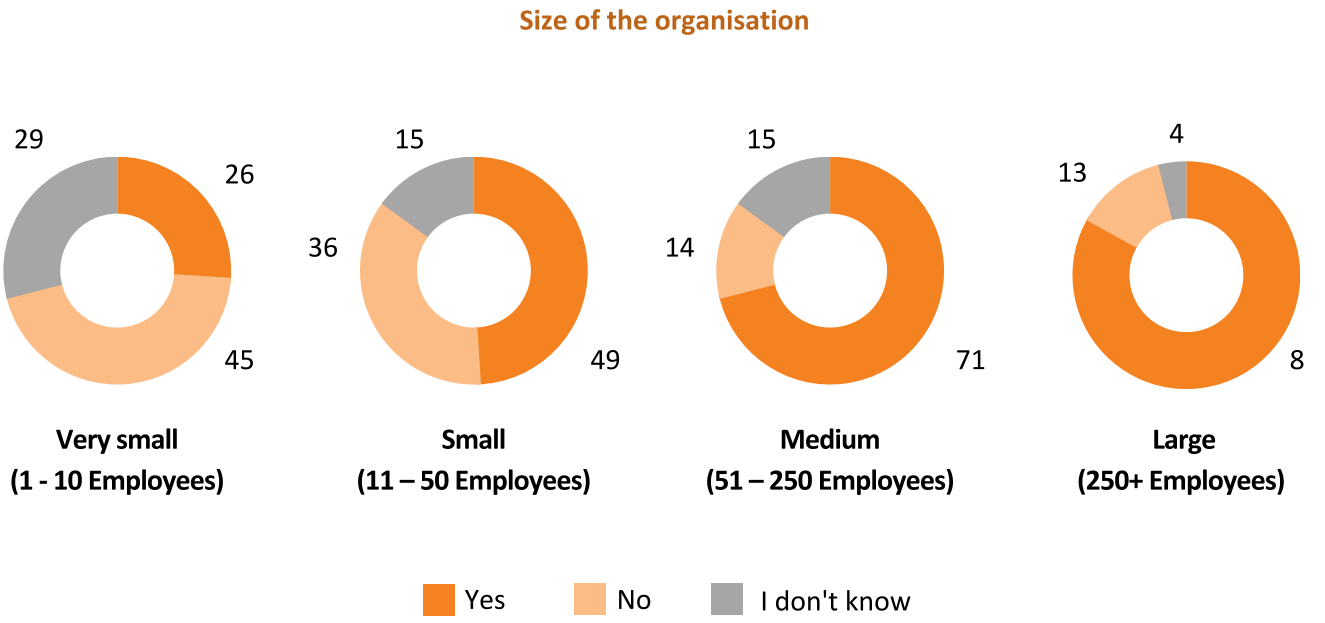
Among different organisation types, multinational entities exhibit the highest adoption rate of DE&I policies, with 88% responding affirmatively. In terms of organisation size, large organisations (250+ employees) show the most extensive availability of DE&I policies, with 83% confirming their existence. Additionally, in the profit vs. non-profit sector comparison, nearly 70% of those confirming the presence of DE&I policies work for

profit organisations, compared to only 38% in the non-profit sector. This suggests **that large multinational profit companies are leading in DE&I policy adoption.** Furthermore, there seems to be a correlation between the size of the organisation and the adoption rate (see Figure 9). Medium-sized organisations exhibit a moderately high rate at 71%, while small entities stand at 49%, and micro ones confirm DE&I policies at 26%.

Figure 9: DE&I Policies according to the Size of the Organisation

Q **Are there any Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) policies in your organisation?**

Profile of respondents (%)

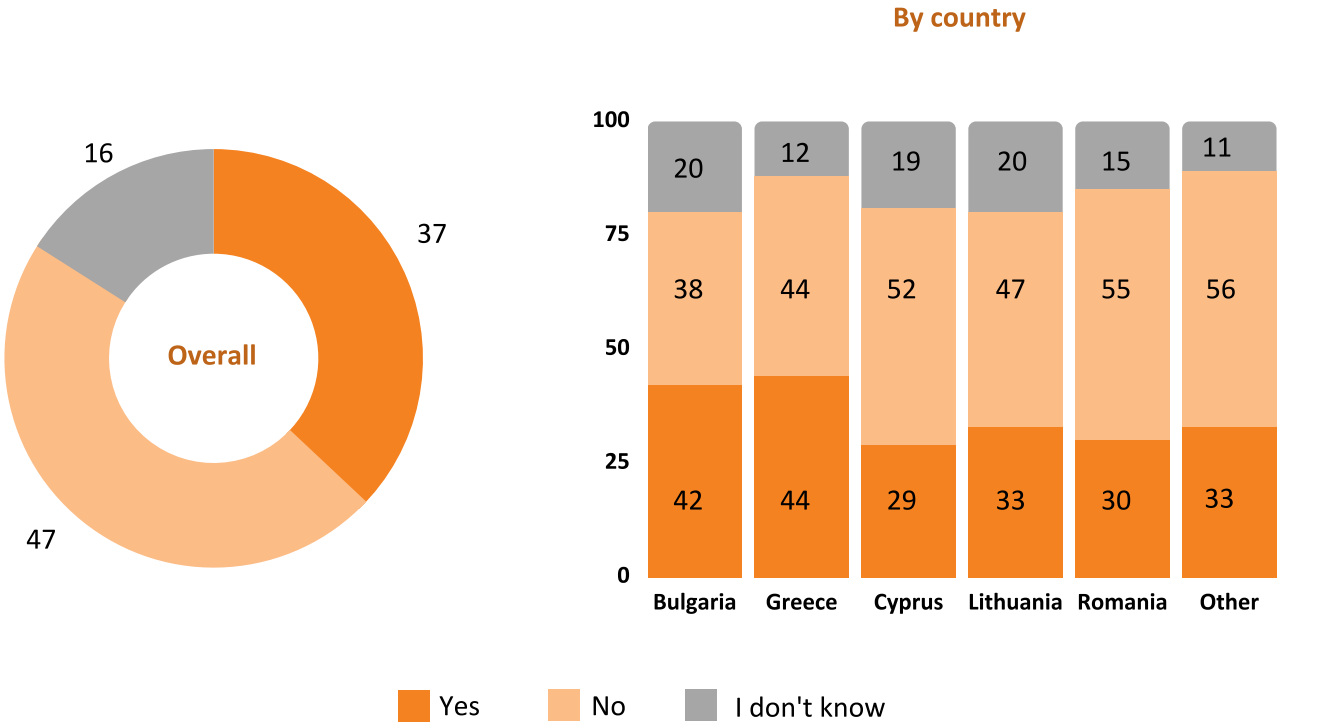


Source: NICE Survey 2023.

The development of specific guidelines can significantly aid in implementing inclusive communication and neutral language in the workplace. Although the importance of this issue is widely recognised, there is also widespread confusion about how to effectively put it into practice. Therefore, it is essential for organisations to adopt tools that facilitate the implementation of inclusive communication. The survey also investigated whether employers in the surveyed countries have taken steps to create such policies or guidelines. In total, only 37% of respondents of our sample reported the existence of instruments promoting inclusive language, while 47% responded negatively (Figure 10). This suggests that a majority of employers still lack such measures, despite 73% of participants recognising the importance of using inclusive and neutral language in the workplace (see Figure 11).

Figure 10: Instruments in Place Ensuring that Employees Use Inclusive Language 'Overall' and 'By Country'

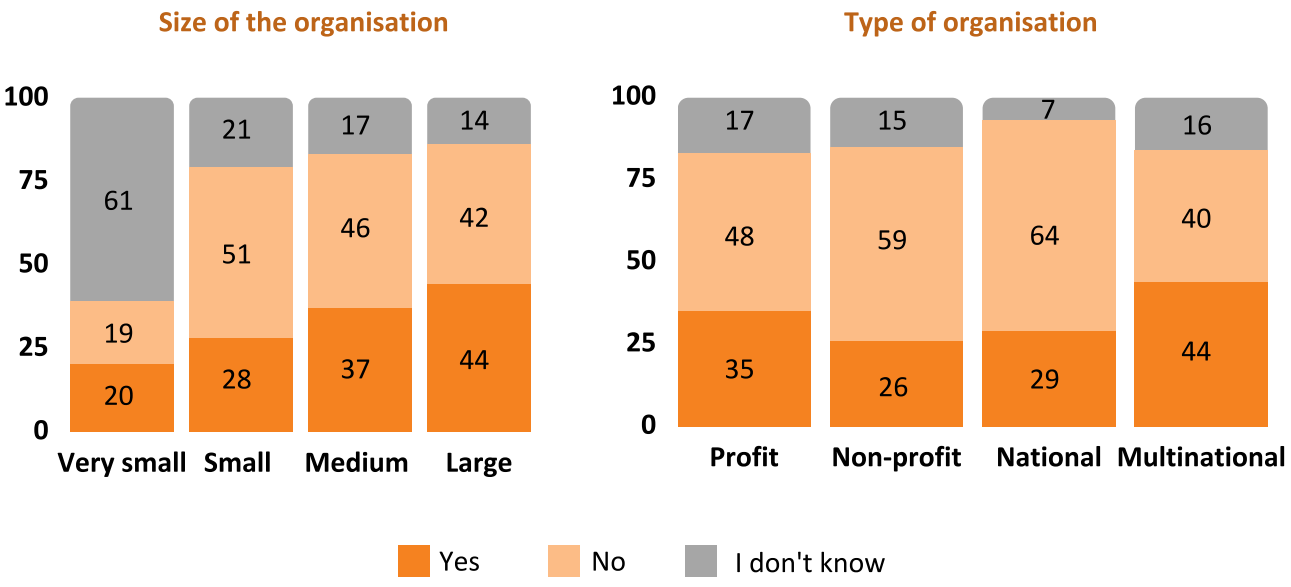
Q **Are there any instruments (e.g. policies, guidelines) in place to ensure that employees use inclusive language in their professional communication?**
Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Figure 11: Instruments in Place Ensuring that Employees Use Inclusive Language 'Size of the Organisation' and 'Type of the Organisation'

Q **Are there any instruments (e.g. policies, guidelines) in place to ensure that employees use inclusive language in their professional communication?**
Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Diversity and inclusion roles

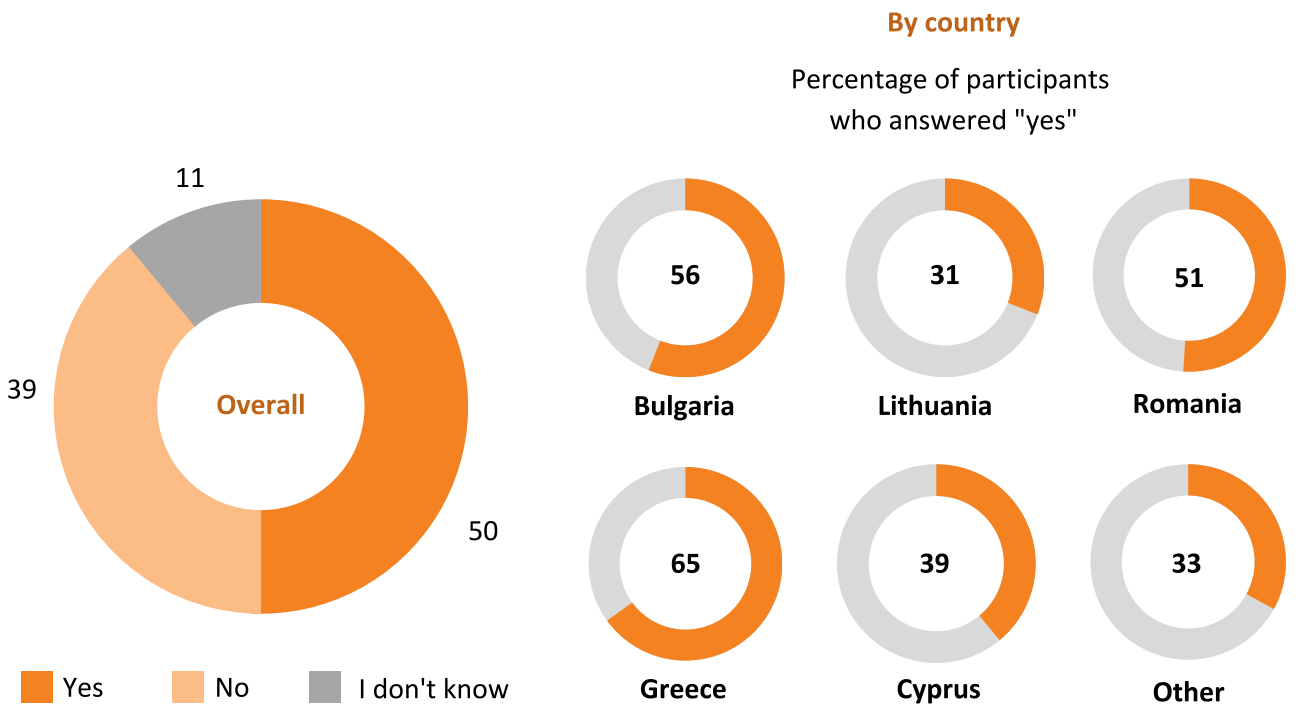
Recent studies reveal that companies across Europe are increasingly investing in DE&I roles and creating dedicated teams. LinkedIn data shows a 67% increase of DE&I positions in the Europe and Middle East (EMEA) region between 2015 and 2020. DE&I professionals specialised primarily focus on reducing workplace discrimination, promoting equality and fostering positive attitudes. They play a vital role in the development, monitoring and review of policies and strategies that ensure organisations, employees and stockholders are committed to DE&I principles, recognising them as corporate necessities. Therefore, DE&I officers are crucial for implementing internal policies and practices related to DE&I, including the initiatives related to inclusive communication.

According to the NICE survey data, half of the respondents indicate the presence of a person responsible for DE&I in their organisation. The appointment of DE&I officers varies among the examined countries. The majority of respondents from Greece (65%), Bulgaria (56%) and Romania (51%) report having a designated DE&I officer or a colleague responsible for DE&I management. However, the survey results suggest that the role of a DE&I specialist is less established in the workplaces in Lithuania and Cyprus (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Responsible Persons for DE&I Management in the Organisations

Q **Is there a DE&I officer or other person responsible for DE&I management in your organisation?**

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

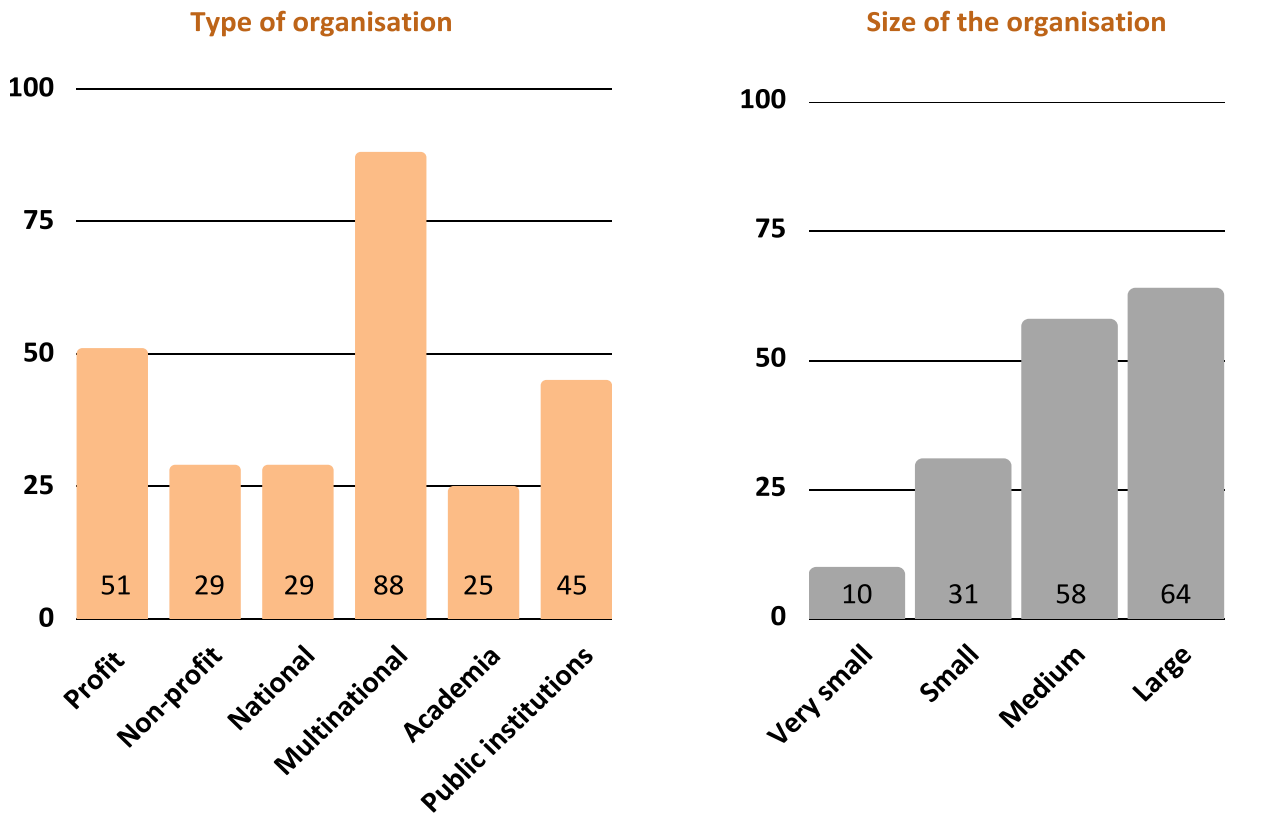
Looking at the type of organisation, profit organisations display a 51% affirmative response rate regarding the presence of DE&I officers, while non-profit organisations report a lower percentage at 29% (Figure 13). Multinational organisations lead the chart with 88%, followed by public institutions at 45%. Representatives of academia, on the other hand, report a relatively lower availability of DE&I officers, with only 25% indicating 'yes'. An interesting correlation between the size of organisations and the presence of DE&I officers has emerged. Larger organisations indicate a greater presence of such roles. Notably, large organisations showcase 64% positive responses, whereas medium-sized entities report 58%. In contrast, very small organisations have the lowest percentage at just 10%. This trend suggests that as organisations grow in size, they are more likely to establish DE&I officer positions.

Figure 13: Responsible Persons for DE&I Management in 'Type of organisation' and 'Size of the organisation'

Q

Is there a DE&I officer or other person responsible for DE&I management in your organisation?

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Reporting misconducts

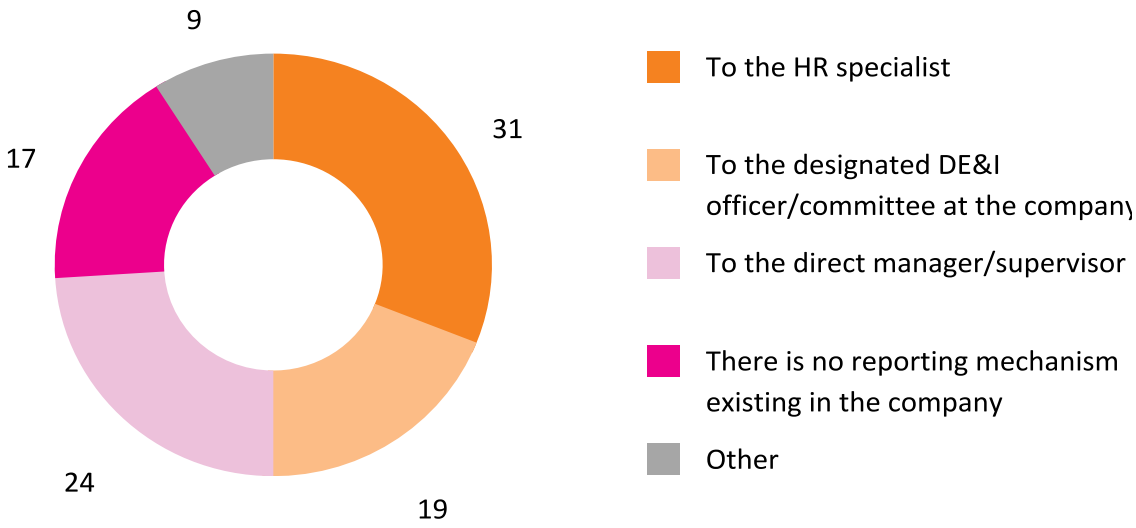
The opposite of inclusive communication and the most extreme forms of exclusionary language are verbal and psychological harassment, and the use of derogatory and discriminatory expressions. It is essential that employees have mechanisms to report instances of inappropriate and offensive communication in the workplace at their disposal. As one of the consulted experts pointed out, the best approach to establish a lasting culture of inclusive communication is an immediate reaction against misconduct.[8] The role of DE&I officer(s) can be key to spot and handle instances of communication-related misbehaviours at the workplace. The survey results show that 19% of the respondents state that they would report instances of offensive or derogatory language to the designated DE&I officer/committee, which highlights the emerging significance of dedicated diversity and inclusion roles in organisations. According to the NICE survey data, the HR specialists and direct supervisors are the most preferred points for employees to report such instances. This can be potentially explained by the fact that most workplaces have established such roles. Moreover, it is common for organisations to assign DE&I responsibilities to the existing HR departments instead of creating new dedicated units. It is noteworthy that a relatively high percentage of respondents, 17%, indicate the absence of any reporting mechanism in place (Figure 14).

[8] Interview I-BG-04.

Figure 14: Reporting Instances of Discriminatory or Offensive Language

Q

To whom would you report instances of discriminatory or offensive language?
Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Training and Skill Enhancement

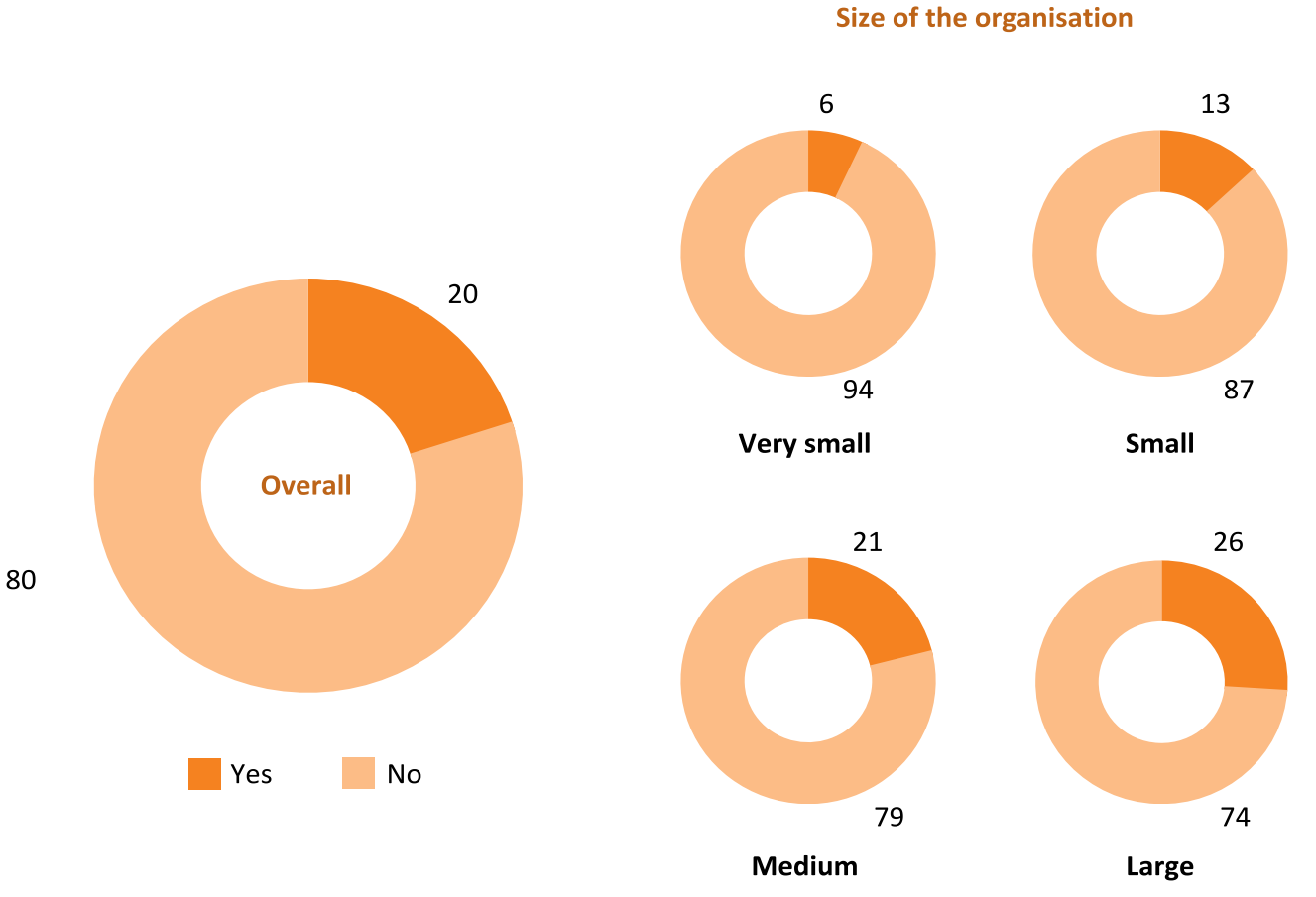
Inclusive language training: reality & expectations

As any other interpersonal skills, **inclusive communication can be learned and mastered.** Training in this area equips employees with valuable skills in our increasingly globally connected world. There are certain methods and techniques for effective inclusive communication in any format, whether face-to-face or online, verbal or non-verbal, textual or visual. In this context, the NICE survey explored the availability of such training among employees in the surveyed countries. Furthermore, it was interested to identify training needs that remain unmet.

Figure 15: Respondents Having Received Training or Guidance on the Use of Inclusive Language in the Workplace

Q **Have you received training or guidance on the use of inclusive language in the workplace?**

Profile of respondents (%)

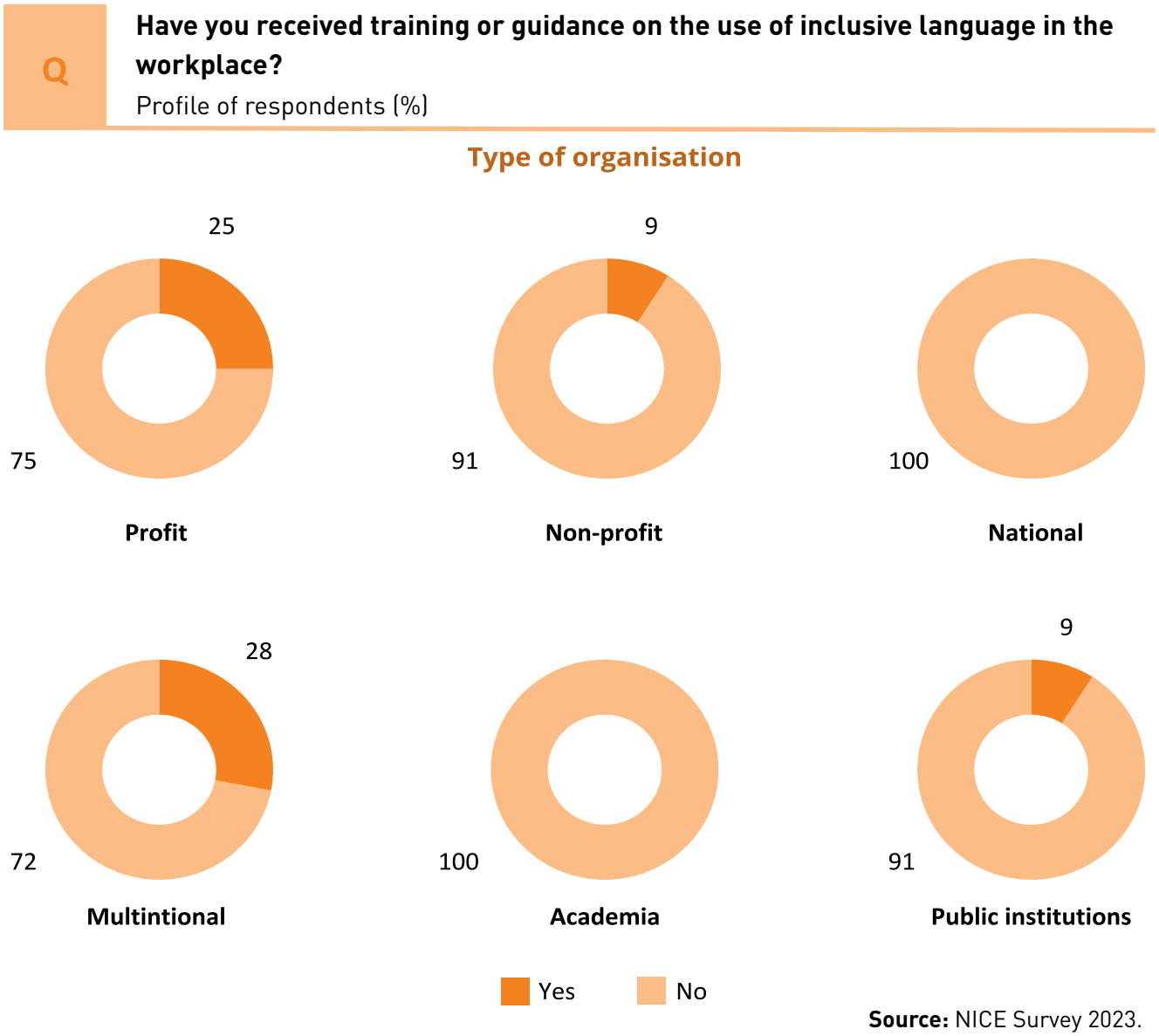


Source: NICE Survey 2023.

According to the survey data, only 20% of the participants confirm that they have received training or guidance on inclusive language, whereas a substantial majority of respondents, **80%, have not received any training in this area** (Figure 15). Similar to the above findings, a correlation exists between organisational size and the availability of resources dedicated to DE&I. In particular, among those responding positively that they have received inclusive language training or guidance, micro organisations are represented with the lowest proportion at 6%, followed by small organisations at 13%, medium organisations at 21%, and large organisations leading with 26% (Figure 15).

Among the different types of entities, the data shows that profit companies appear to prioritise inclusive language training the most. In contrast, non-profit organisations and public institutions have a lower rate of 9% each, while national organisations and academia show no instances of training reported (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Respondents Having Received Training or Guidance on the Use of Inclusive Language in the Workplace According to the 'Type of Organisation'



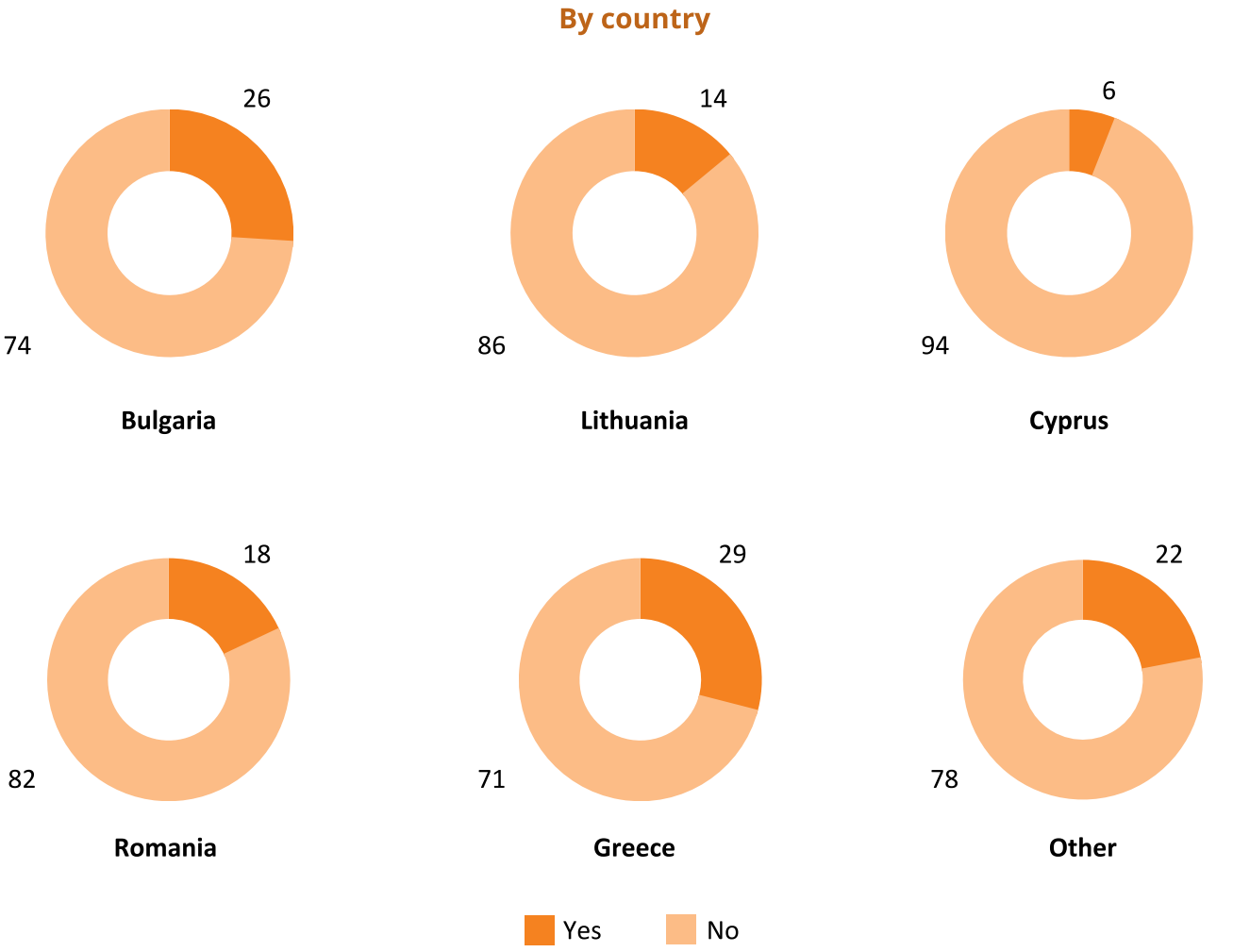
Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Disaggregated by country, the data reveal that the fewest respondents who have received training or guidance work in Cyprus and Lithuania (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Respondents Having Received Training or Guidance on the Use of Inclusive Language in the Workplace 'By Country'

Q **Have you received training or guidance on the use of inclusive language in the workplace?**

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Moreover, the people who have benefited from training or guidance on inclusive communication also report assorted experiences in terms of the content and delivery. In response to an open-ended question, the survey participants shared that inclusive language training is frequently part of broader diversity and inclusion initiatives, sometimes presented as a distinct module of internal seminars or workshops with external experts. Topics extend to sexual harassment awareness and overcoming unconscious biases. Some organisations have integrated such training into

the on-boarding of new employees, acquainting them with DE&I practices applied in their workplace. Occasionally, respondents reported that they had received guidance on using appropriate pronouns and incorporating pronouns in email signatures.

There is a striking contrast between the number of respondents who have received inclusive communication training and those who express enthusiasm to participate in similar trainings. Survey results reveal a strong desire for improvement in communication techniques related to inclusive and neutral language in professional interactions. An overwhelming 90% of participants respond affirmatively, indicating a widespread recognition of the importance of enhancing communication skills in this context (Figure 18). This sentiment is consistent across different age groups, with even those aged 58 and above expressing a significant interest in improvement (83%). Across various positions, the majority indicate their desire to enhance their communication skills, with some positions, like supervisors and freelancers, showing almost unanimous agreement.

Figure 18: Respondents Who Would Like to Improve Their Communication Techniques

Q **Would you like to improve your communication techniques on the use of inclusive and neutral language in professional interactions?**

Profile of respondents (%)

	18-26 years old	27-42 years old	43-57 years old	58+ years old
Yes	88	91	92	83
No	12	9	8	17

	Specialist	Manager	Supervisor	Executive
Yes	89	90	96	88
No	11	10	4	12

Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Geographically, respondents from Bulgaria, Lithuania, Greece, Cyprus, and Romania express a consistently strong desire for improvement at above 80% (Figure 19). Overall, these findings emphasise a widespread eagerness to enhance interpersonal skills in the context of inclusive and neutral communication.

Figure 19: Respondents Who Would Like to Improve Their Communication Techniques by Country and by Gender

Q **Would you like to improve your communication techniques on the use of inclusive and neutral language in professional interactions?**

Profile of respondents (%)

	Bulgaria	Lithuania	Cyprus	Greece	Romania
Yes	84	89	94	97	89
No	16	11	6	3	11

	Woman	Man	Other
Yes	94	80	67
No	6	20	33

Source: NICE Survey 2023.

This study also emphasises the content of training on inclusive communication, particularly one identifying the main areas of interest and potential audiences. The survey proposed eight pre-defined options[9] and obtained the following results: The need for understanding the rationale behind inclusive language use is strongly evident, with 40% indicating interest in learning why inclusive language is needed in professional communication (Figure 20). The highest demand for acquiring skills, with

[9] A) Why inclusive language is needed in professional communication; B) How to use gender-neutral language; C) How to communicate with people with different disabilities; D) How to effectively avoid the use of stereotypes and biases; E) How to use gender-neutral pronouns; F) How to communicate in multinational and multicultural work environments; G) Effective cross-generational communication; H) Dictionary outlining commonly used biased words/expressions; I) All.

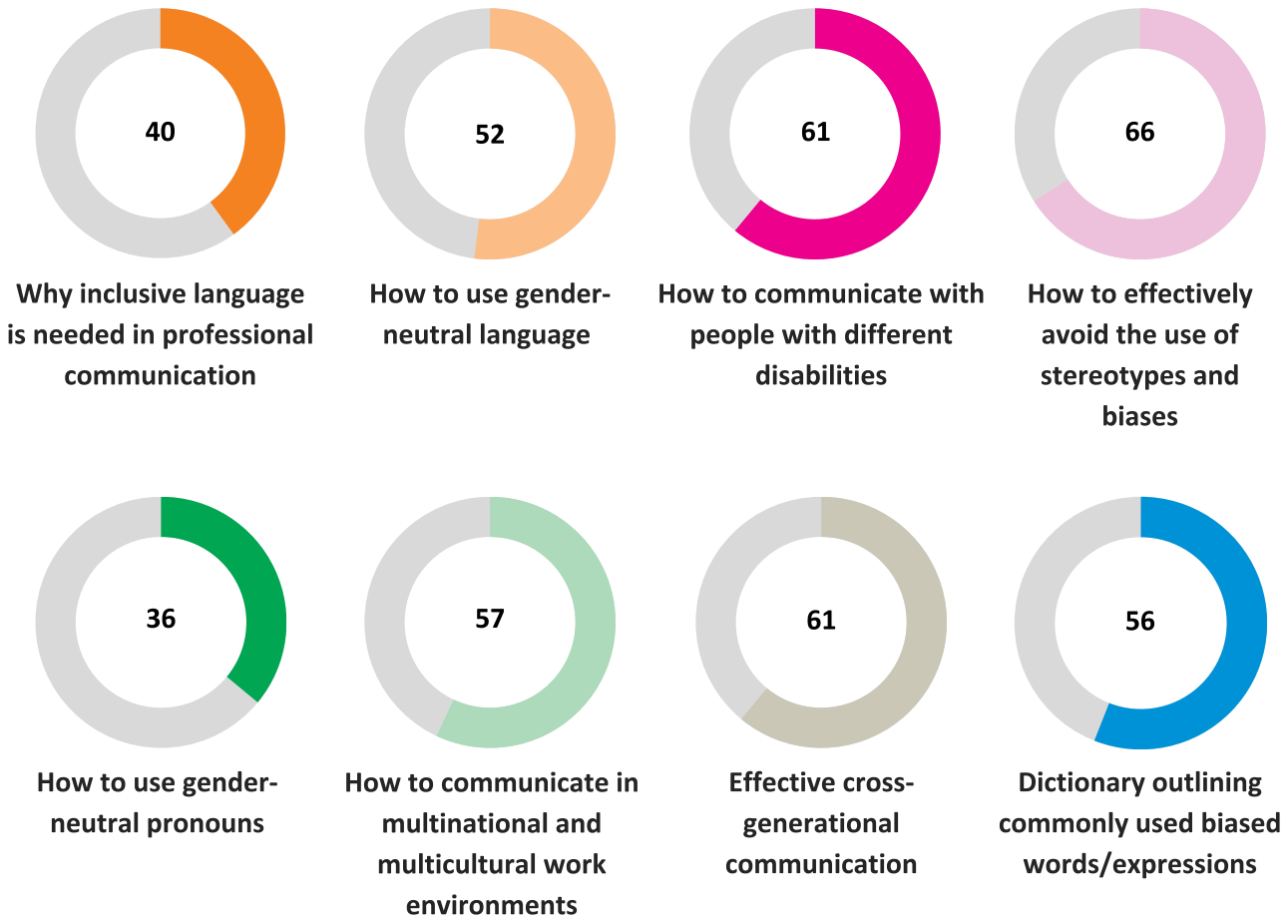
above 50% of positive responses, is pointed out in the areas of avoiding stereotypes and biases (66%), effective communication with persons with different abilities (61%), cross-generational interactions (61%), communication in multicultural and multinational environment (57%) and guidance in navigating controversial and biased terms and expressions (56%). A large portion of the respondents (52%) exhibit interest in mastering gender-neutral language usage. This highlights the shared recognition of the value of gender-sensitive communication in the workplace. Notably, gender-neutral pronouns attract the least interest among the participants with only 36% expressing willingness to learn about this topic.

Figure 20: Topics Respondents Would Like to Learn about in a Training on Inclusive Language in the Workplace

Q

What topics would you like to learn about in a training on inclusive language in the workplace?

Profile of respondents (%)



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

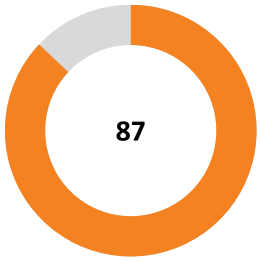
An inclusive approach to communication in the workplace requires engagement at all levels, from leadership to entry-level positions. This is the only way to establish a truly inclusive environment for all. For the most part, the majority of respondents confirm this conclusion, with 87% indicating that training on inclusive communication should be delivered to all employees (Figure 21). About a quarter of respondents, suggest that such training should target specific groups, such as HR specialists, management, or staff members responsible for communications.

Figure 21: People Who Should Receive Training on the Use of Inclusive Language in the Workplace According to the Respondents

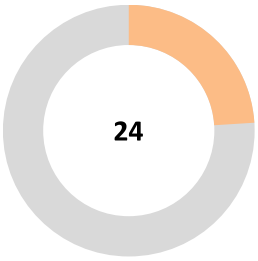
Q

In your opinion, who should receive training on the use of inclusive language in the workplace?

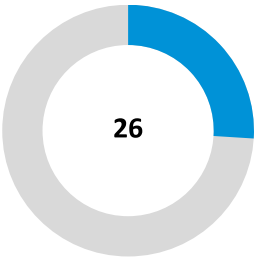
Profile of respondents (%)



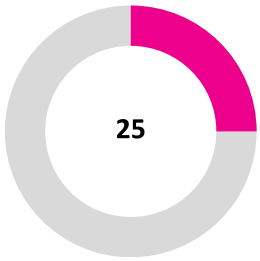
Think that all employees should receive training



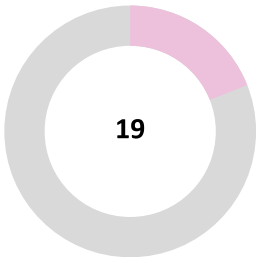
Think that the HR team should receive training



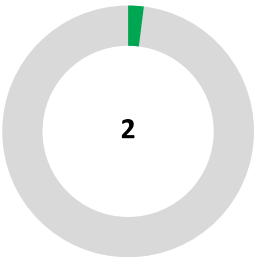
Think that the management team should receive training



Think that the communication team should receive training



Think that employees working with clients should receive training



Think that nobody should receive training

Source: NICE Survey 2023.

Promising Practices Fostering Inclusive and Neutral Communication in Professional Environments

The research found a plethora of practices implemented by companies, organisations and institutions that strive to make communication at the workplace more inclusive. The selected practices included in this report cover different approaches categorised into six distinctive subject areas: (1) inclusivity from the outset, (2) assessments, (3) education and training, (4) guides, toolkits and handbooks, (5) visually inclusive communication, and (6) reporting mechanisms.

It is useful to briefly note that the term communication covers various ways we exchange information with others. This can be verbal, i.e. using words – spoken (e.g. conversations, calls) or written (e.g. emails, adverts, reports). Non-verbal communication is generally not word-based and includes visuals (e.g. illustrations), body language and facial expressions, and intonation (e.g. volume, tone). The practices offered here primarily focus on verbal (word-based) communication but also touch upon non-verbal modes.

Inclusivity from the Outset

Some companies highlight that the grounds should be laid in the very beginning. This means that the employers should demonstrate its language standards from the job posting and during the on-boarding of new employees.

▶ Inclusive and neutral language in job postings

According to Forbes, a well written job description is one that speaks to diverse applicants while being specific about the skillsets required. Job postings may become a powerful tool for fostering an inclusive workplace culture right from the very start of the employment journey. Job descriptions should avoid gender-specific terms and biased language. Imposing discriminatory requirements is not just morally wrong but also against the law. Despite this, there is room for enhancement in the language used in job postings. For instance, it is recommended to avoid gender-specific terms like 'he' or 'she' and replace them with neutral words as 'the candidate'. Moreover, inclusive language may accommodate other characteristics as background. For example, replacing the requirement of 'x years of experience', with the phrase 'relevant experience' may attract more diverse applicants. To ensure that job postings are accessible to individuals with different visual needs, formatting, font, and colour should be adjusted accordingly. Last but not

least, the values of diversity and inclusion should be mentioned in the job advert, because that demonstrates the organisation's commitment and it is more likely to reach more candidates that align with their values.

Introduction to an organisation's behavioural norms with the help of a buddy

There is a general consensus that the use of inclusive language depends on the active engagement of the entire workforce. Some companies achieve this by taking the following steps: The company or organisation first ensures that the majority of their staff is aware of fundamental DE&I concepts such as unconscious bias, micro-aggressions, discriminatory language, etc. This creates a common understanding of these issues. Moreover, for this approach to be truly sustainable, the staff members are constantly encouraged to personally internalise the company's proclaimed values of respect, tolerance, and equality, and actively engage in upholding them in day-to-day interactions. One of the consulted companies shared that they achieve this through **mandatory initial training** that explains thoroughly the acceptable behavioural norms to new employees, as part of the on-boarding. Additionally, **newcomers are paired with a 'buddy'**, a more experienced colleague, who guides them through the integration into the work environment and helps them understand what behaviour is tolerated or not.

Company abbreviations explained

New employees are not familiar with the company abbreviations and may struggle at the beginning in a new workplace. One of the interviewed organisations in Lithuania decided to help new employees to get familiar with the abbreviations and make the on-boarding process easier. The organisation provides a glossary of the abbreviations used in the company. Moreover, they encourage employees to explain the abbreviation the first time they speak about it with a person that might not know it. This practice is used in general company's meetings that happen twice a month and becomes more and more common. Alongside helping newcomers, this approach also streamlines communication among various departments.[10]

[10] Interview I-LT-02.

▶ Indication of pronouns

An indication of the pronouns makes spaces more inclusive to non-binary people. Most of the consulted experts support the practice of indicating preferred pronouns in email signature or on the profile in internal communication platforms, such as Slack or Teams. This feature can also be integrated into the personnel management systems, allowing individuals the option to display or hide their pronouns from colleagues.[11] Ideally, non-binary employees should be included in a discussion with their co-workers to help them understand the necessity and benefits of this practice. An interviewee emphasised the importance of including different communities into discussions, especially those affected by it, because this personal approach to the topic of neutral and inclusive communication is able to evoke a sense of empathy.[12]

Assessment

It is challenging to measure language and the level of inclusivity in professional communication. However, different tests are applied to facilitate communication in the workplace and detect potential or existing problems. Some of the widespread evaluation practices are listed in this category.

▶ DISC assessment of personality types

The DISC (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness) assessment method is applied to gain a better understanding of employees' various personality types within a team or company. A multinational company based in Bulgaria shared that they apply this approach and it is a key part of their larger strategy to create a positive environment that encourages both effective communication and increased inclusivity in the workplace.[13] The DISC assessment, which is grounded in psychology, offers a comprehensive understanding of individuals' behavioural tendencies and communication styles. By categorising employees into distinct personality profiles, companies can tailor their communication strategies to resonate with each type. The application of the DISC assessment allows companies to develop more personalised communication approaches to their employees. Acknowledging and understanding that different personality types respond

[11] Interviews I-LT-02, I-LT-03, I-LT-05, I-LT-06.
[12] Interview I-LT-03.
[13] Interview I-BG-02.

more favourably to certain types of communication, could reduce misunderstandings and prevent instances of unconscious offensive language and behaviour. The DISC assessment may also foster the dialogue about the different communication styles, tendencies and needs that are unique to each individual. The DISC assessment's insights can contribute to building this safe space by helping colleagues understand each other's communication preferences and adapting their interactions accordingly.

Checklist of indicators

The ILO developed a guide to businesses to provide gender-inclusive services which also addresses gender-inclusive communication that should be applied in different work processes. The implementation of the recommendations is facilitated by detailed checklists with indicators that enable the user to easily assess their performance. Similarly, the Toolkit on gender-sensitive communication by the European Institute for Gender Equality offers a checklist to validate whether 'gender-savvy' language was used in written communication.

Internal survey

Although it is notable that employees might not be enthusiastic to fill out surveys, a Bulgarian company demonstrated a good practice of using an internal survey to foster inclusive communication. They included a set of questions inquiring about any communication challenges employees might have faced in the workplace. This was part of a broader survey conducted regularly among different samples of employees, which aimed to identify potential breaches of norms related to respectful behaviour at the workplace. The questions covered various forms of discriminatory attitudes, including verbal harassment and offensive language. By including a few questions about inclusive communication in surveys regularly distributed among employees, companies can effectively highlight this aspect on their agenda.

Bias detectors

Technical tools come in hand to help mitigate bias and the implementation of inclusive practices in the workplace. An organisation based in Lithuania shared that it uses technical tools as a reminder to consider biases when posting a description of a job opening, providing feedback, or preparing the annual evaluations of its employees. Particularly, messages appear on

the digital communication platform reminding the author to consider the language used in a document as well as potential biases and prejudice.[14] Artificial Intelligence (AI) provides even more sophisticated solutions to uncover hidden biases in different texts. For example, the Text IQ Unconscious Bias Detector is a machine learning model that detects potential bias across categories such as race, gender, ethnic origin, and age. It provides detailed language usage reports by reviewers, allowing organisations to address hidden biases through education, coaching, and process redesign.

And one extra ...

Disseminate short quizzes, such as the Unconscious Bias Quiz, among your employees to spark the staff's interest and engagement in the DE&I topics.

Awareness-Raising and Training Activities

▶ Multidisciplinary initiatives

Understandably, not all companies possess the internal resources and capacity to educate their staff on inclusive communication. These limitations can be addressed with assistance from the civic sector, academia, and other businesses. An illustrative instance is the 'Academy for Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion' in Bulgaria, a programme executed by a multidisciplinary team. This initiative is part of broader endeavours by national NGOs and business entities to promote DE&I within the country. The participants were professionals working in different companies who wanted to enhance their knowledge and proficiency in DE&I management.[15] The Academy was launched by the Council of Women in Business in Bulgaria, and its first training programme ran from January to April 2023. Developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Economics at Sofia University, the curriculum covered a wide range of DE&I topics, including a session on inclusive communication in the workplace. Significantly, this session was led by professionals from a communication agency as well as university lecturers. The combination of diverse backgrounds and expertise, such as academia and business, not only serves as a model for diversity but also enriches the training through varied perspectives. Another variation of this practice is arranging internal training sessions conducted by external

[14] Interview I-LT-02.
[15] Interview I-BG-01.

experts, tailored specifically for a company's employees. The multidisciplinary approach should not be underestimated. The involvement of professionals from different sectors, each contributing with unique expertise and perspective, can be a game-changer.

▶ Inclusive celebrations

Since the workforce is comprised of individuals from various cultures and religious backgrounds, it is important to make celebrations more inclusive. A good practice in this regard comes from a company in Lithuania. They use broader terms to describe festive periods where different cultures might celebrate different events. For example, using 'winter holidays' or 'holiday week' instead of Christmas.[16] This can also be achieved by introducing a diversity calendar that marks the various religious, cultural, and historical dates and events, as well as holidays, celebrations and awareness days happening across the globe.[17]

Guides, Toolkits and Glossaries

Numerous guides and toolkits have been developed to promote and facilitate the use of inclusive and neutral language in various professional contexts. The research found multiple examples of instruments dedicated to providing guidance on inclusive communication, including those mentioned in this section. Considering the research findings presented above, which suggest a widespread lack of specific guidelines on inclusive communication in the workplaces in the examined countries, and the willingness to learn more, the creation of a dedicated instrument that reflects the unique realities of the workplace would undoubtedly be well-received by the employees. The examples below provide suggestions for elements that can be integrated into these instruments.

▶ Gender-sensitive language

In 2018, the European Parliament was one of the first supranational public bodies to adopt guidelines on gender-neutral language in multiple languages. The objective of this guide is to ensure that non-sexist and inclusive language is used, to the extent possible, in the documents and

[16] Interview I-LT-03.
[17] Also see TestGorilla (2023), Promote inclusion with a 2023 diversity calendar for your workplace.

communications of the European Parliament in all official languages. The aim of this guide is not to impose mandatory rules, but rather to encourage administrative services to pay due attention to gender-related aspects in the language they use whenever they draft, translate, or interpret. Similarly, but at national level, the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality in Greece has introduced a Guide on non-sexist language in administrative documents, aiming to eliminate linguistic sexism from administrative materials. This guide promotes deeper understanding of the existing linguistic sexism in administrative documents and raises awareness that language can contribute to the formation of collective social consciousness. It offers recommendations for public bodies how to avoid discriminative language. The European Institute for Gender Equality has also created a comprehensive Toolkit on gender-sensitive communication. This resource targets policymakers, legislators, media, and individuals interested in adopting inclusive communication. It focuses on gender equality and offers practical insights into gender-sensitive language usage, accompanied by real-world examples.

▶ Communication with people with disabilities

Person-first language is usually the preferred approach to referring to individuals with disabilities, marginalised identities, or specific characteristics. These linguistic choices aim to promote respect, dignity, and inclusivity in communication. Person-first language places the individual before their identity or condition. It emphasises the person rather than their characteristics. For instance, 'a person with a disability' instead of 'a disabled person' or 'an individual with autism' rather than 'an autistic individual'. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARNDI) offers guidance on the proper use of person-first language.

Alternative approach is the **identity-first language**. It acknowledges and respects the condition as an integral part of the person's identity and experience. So, it places the identity or condition before the person. For example, 'a deaf individual' instead of 'an individual with hearing impairment'. According to EARNDI, many people with disabilities, particularly younger people, tend to choose the identity-first language.

Both approaches are valid and the choice depends on the individual preference of the person with disability. To achieve inclusive communication, employees should be educated on both approaches and be attentive to always ask. Companies and organisations may facilitate this through guides and resources on the topic. An example of such resource is the Disability

Language Style Guide developed by the National Center on Disability and Journalism at Arizona State University. It can be translated into national languages or serve as an example for companies wishing to develop their own guides.

▶ Communication with LGBTIQA+

A crucial aspect of inclusive language is that it ensures the use of words in ways that acknowledge and demonstrate respect for how people describe their own bodies, genders and relationships. Modern corporate world needs to build safe, supportive and inclusive workplaces for LGBTIQA+ employees. It is notable that the terminology for LGBTIQA+ communities is complex and constantly evolving. Yet, many people do not possess the knowledge and skills needed. It is vital to put special attention on raising awareness and providing communication guidance in order to achieve LGBTIQA+ inclusion in the workplace.

The Equality Project developed a comprehensive LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Language Guide for the Workplace. It gives a variety of recommendations. For instance, avoid making assumptions about one's sex, gender or sexuality. Practically, this means that we should free ourselves of assumptions that everyone is heterosexual. Also, to avoid language such as 'wife' or 'husband' if we are not certain of one's family situation, and replace these with the neutral term 'partner'.

A relevant example is the Work It Out platform in Bulgaria. It developed a Toolbox for employers to equip them with basic knowledge on the promotion of diversity and inclusion of LGBTIQA+ people in the workplace. The PREVENT Toolbox gives specific guidance on inclusive communication with regard to LGBTIQA+ employees. It is complemented by an e-learning programme to educate employees on how to improve their communication skills though exercises, videos and examples of best practices in the context of LGBTIQA+.

▶ Glossary of inclusive terms

The NICE study found that practical instructions are preferred by employees as they could provide clarity of what terms could be exclusionary, hence should be avoided. That is why glossaries of potentially biased terms can be very helpful. For example, the previously mentioned European Parliament Guide includes an optional glossary of gender-neutral terms for professions, occupations, functions, serving as alternatives for exclusionary terms.

Visually Inclusive Communication

Visually inclusive communication refers to the practice of creating and presenting visual content in a way that ensures accessibility and understanding for a diverse audience. The consulted DE&I experts from Bulgaria shared two forms of this practice that have been implemented to address particular visual abilities and needs of their employees.

▶ Alt text

The incorporation of Alt text (alternative text) is a promising practice for inclusive communication regarding employees with visual impairment. Alt text provides text descriptions for images, graphics, and other visual elements, ensuring that the content is accessible and understandable to everyone regardless of their visual abilities. In today's increasingly digital workplace, creating an inclusive online environment is essential for ensuring that all employees can equally comprehend and engage with work-related visual content.[18]

▶ Content adapted for colour blindness

Some companies apply techniques of visually inclusive communication toward colleagues having colour blindness. Given that red-green colour blindness is prevalent, they advise their employees to avoid these colours in the design of visual materials that are prepared to be presented to internal or external audience. Moreover, it is recommended to utilise symbols or text, instead of colours, to differentiate the sets of information.

▶ Subtitles for videos

After hiring a person with a hearing disability, one of the interviewed organisations realised that video content that they create for the organisation's intranet is not inclusive. Therefore, the company started posting videos only with subtitles. Subtitles are useful not only for people with a hearing disability but also for people who are not fluent in a language used in the company.

[18] Interview I-BG-04.

Reporting Mechanisms

The importance of reporting mechanisms has already been highlighted. This section provides some promising practices that can improve such mechanisms.

▶ Internal whistle-blower mechanism

Many companies have established a reporting mechanism within the organisation where instances of misconduct, including the use of discriminatory or exclusionary language, can be reported. Notably, the person reporting misconduct does not need to be the direct target, but can be a witness. It is imperative to ensure the option for keeping the anonymity of the reporting individual. The ultimate goal is to foster a proactive engagement whenever an employee encounters behaviour that is not aligned with the company's values and internal conduct rules. As one of the interviewed experts put it 'Immediate reaction is the best approach'.[19]

[19] Interview I-BG-04.

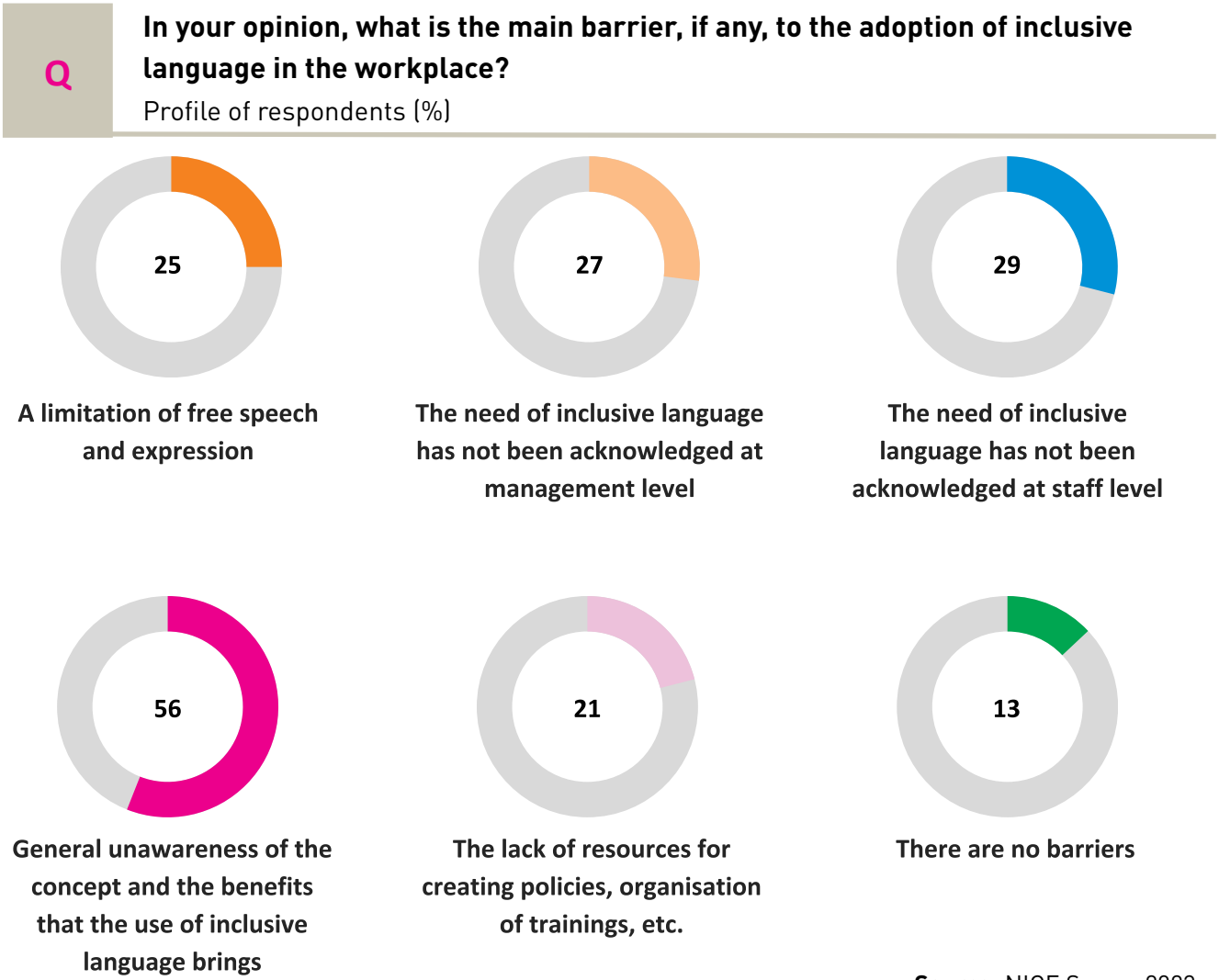


Roadblocks and Dilemmas in Promoting Inclusive Communication

Everyone has heard the phrase that 'language is alive.' Whether it is in written, verbal, or non-verbal form of communication — indeed, language is constantly evolving, and any attempt at regulation can be a complex endeavour. This is why the introduction and implementation of inclusive language can encounter obstacles and even resistence. The workplace is just one societal context where human interactions unfold, and it reflects broader societal dynamics while also holding the potential to influence them. This means that fostering inclusive communication in the work environment can catalyse positive transformations within a larger societal scale.

Drawing upon the linguistic relativity hypothesis mentioned in the introduction, it becomes evident that words and language we employ are capable to shape our perception of reality, at least to a certain extent. This underscores our responsibility to be careful with our choice of language. The present study not only acknowledges these potential barriers but also explores the challenges for the implementation of inclusive communication as perceived by survey participants. These perceptions are depicted below (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Main Barrier to the Adoption of Inclusive Language in the Workplace according to the Respondents



Source: NICE Survey 2023.

The analysis of the survey results pertaining to the main barriers to the adoption of inclusive language in the workplace unveils several noteworthy insights. Approximately one-quarter (24%) of the participants identify the perception of inclusive language as a constraint to the freedom of speech and expression. This apprehension is rooted in the fundamental human right to freedom of speech, a right that is unequivocally cherished by individuals. However, it is imperative to recognise that even the most fundamental rights bear reasonable limitations. In the realm of human rights law, the delicate art of weighting and balancing of rights is subject to extensive scholarly debate. It encompasses considerations of reasonable restrictions, the role of morality, values, collective and individual interests, among other factors. While this study does not delve into the intricacies of this ongoing discourse, it is noteworthy to emphasise the widely accepted principle that a restriction on freedom of expression can be justified when the competing interests and societal benefits outweigh the individual's right to unrestricted expression.

Furthermore, approximately a quarter of respondents (27%) indicate that the absence of recognition of the necessity for inclusive language at the management level represents a significant obstacle. Similarly, another quarter (29%) points out a parallel lack of recognition, albeit at the staff level. These findings correspond to the prevailing notion that a considerable portion of the workforce is simply not aware of the concept of inclusive communication and its associated benefits. In fact, more than half of the respondents (56%) cite this general unawareness as the primary barrier to the adoption of inclusive language within their respective workplaces. This demonstrates the substantial gap in comprehending the significance of inclusive communication across the participating countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania and Romania). This, in turn, naturally explains the limited allocation of resources toward fostering and standardising inclusive communication. Consequently, 21% of participants point out the scarcity of resources for policymaking and organisation of training as a substantial challenge. Finally, according to the survey data, only 13% of the respondents believe there are no barriers to introducing inclusive language in their workplace.

In addition to these challenges, it is essential to acknowledge the role of political discourse within the surveyed countries as a factor contributing to the reproduction of societal inequalities, including within the workplace. The manners in which political actors publicly discuss issues such as immigration, race, gender, and the LGBTIQA+ community, as disseminated through media coverage, have a profound impact on shaping public opinion. This influence, in turn, stimulates unequal opportunities and outcomes within the labour market for different groups. For instance, the

ILO has drawn attention to the negative narratives surrounding migration and migrant workers, which emerged in 2015 and were subsequently reinforced by populist rhetoric. The ILO concludes that the focus should be on building more positive, realistic, and evidence-based narratives surrounding migrants and refugees (and other marginalised groups) instead of stigmatising and 'othering' them. Prejudice, stigmatisation, and bias towards underrepresented groups are phenomena observed in the examined countries. Therefore, they constitute a significant factor that should be carefully considered when addressing diversity management and implementing inclusive language in the workplace.

Lastly, the role of grammatical gender should be recognised as a perceived barrier as it is often subject of disagreement in conversations about the extent of inclusive communication. For many individuals, it remains an enigma how to transform grammatically gendered languages into a gender-neutral ones while navigating established linguistic traditions that emphasise the masculine gender. In some languages, masculine gender is often used as the main form of words and position titles. Solutions and approaches exist, such as *feminisation and neutralisation of language*, but the lack of consensus often persists on the most suitable approach to each national language. Recent findings from the World Bank concerning the impact of gendered language on gender equality in developing countries raise significant questions about the interplay between linguistics, gender norms, and economic outcomes for women. The pursuit of a consensus on these delicate matters requires a comprehensive dialogue, one that actively involves politicians, scholars, business representatives, and the civil society. This study aspires to make a meaningful contribution to such a constructive, informed, and sustainable discourse, with the ultimate aim of fostering more inclusive and equitable workplaces though the implementation of ambitious yet pragmatic solutions.




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Neutral and Inclusive Communication
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