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DIVERSITY NEEDS TO BE SEEN

Diversity can strengthen business - but only when employees see it in everyday work. Our survey across eight countries shows that the main challenge is not resistance to inclusion, but a gap between formal commitments and what people actually experience, understand, and trust.

A large-scale survey conducted by Alma Career Slovakia through its salary portal, Paylab.com, in cooperation with PwC Slovakia, gathered the perspectives of 35,944 respondents across eight countries in Central Europe, the Balkans, and the Baltics between September and December 2025. The conclusion is a useful correction for any executive assuming that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) programs are either working or not working.

PRESENT, BUT NOT VOICED

Slovak employees are broadly open to working alongside colleagues whose background, identity, or views differ from their own: 29% describe it as very comfortable, and a further 27% as somewhat comfortable. But something else stands out: a full 33% of Slovak respondents chose not to answer this attitude question at all - the highest non-response rate of any country surveyed, ahead of Czechia, the Balkans, and the Baltics.

That silence is not neutral. It signals a sensitivity around the topic of diversity and a lack of the psychological safety employees need to voice a view either way. Compared with Croatia (47% very comfortable) or Lithuania (45%), Slovakia looks less like a country resistant to diversity and more like one where the conversation

itself still feels unfamiliar or risky.

VISIBLE IN MARKETING, ABSENT IN PRACTICE

Discomfort with speaking up echoes throughout the rest of the survey. Asked whether they had noticed their employer taking concrete steps to support DEIB over the past year, respondents across the region revealed a clear hierarchy of visibility. The most common signal, by far, was diversity messaging in recruitment: featuring diverse candidates in job ads or on the company website, cited by 21% of respondents in both Czechia and Slovakia - the highest in the region. Formal diversity policies came next, again matched at 14% in both countries. But concrete, lived interventions - targeted recruitment, workplace accommodations, inclusion training - registered with only 4% to 12% of employees anywhere in the region. DEIB, in other words, is far more visible on a careers page than in a Monday morning team meeting.

BELIEVING IN BUSINESS VALUE

That gap between messaging and lived experience shapes how employees judge DEIB's business value - and here, Slovakia doesn't just believe more; it explains more too. In Slovakia, 11% of employees believe DEIB efforts have a positive

impact on business performance, compared with just 4% in Czechia, the lowest figure of any country surveyed. Czechia also posts the highest non-response rate in the region on this question, at 88%, again echoing the pattern of disengagement seen in its comfort-with-diversity responses.



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The gap holds when the question turns concrete. Asked to name specific benefits - attracting and retaining talent, sparking innovation, strengthening customer relationships, or improving daily collaboration - Slovak employees again score higher than Czech employees across every single category, roughly doubling Czechia's response rate on each item. Compared with the

strongest performers in the region, Lithuania and Latvia, both countries still lag - but between Slovakia and Czechia specifically, the gap in DEIB engagement is consistent and one-directional: Slovak employees are more willing, on every measure, to say diversity delivers a business benefit.

UNPREPARED TO RESPOND

Nowhere is this gap more consequential than in employees' ability to act. Respondents were asked whether, in the past 12 months, they would know what to do if they or a colleague experienced inappropriate or discriminatory behavior - or a lack of acceptance - at work.

Across the region, 34.5% of respondents selected at least one action-oriented answer in a multiple-response question: 20% said they knew how to report concerns confidentially through an official company procedure, 16% knew the designated contact person, and 6% were aware of available external support, such as company-contracted psychological, coaching, or counseling services. However, 24.6% of respondents selected at least one indication that they were unable or unwilling to act: 9% said they would not feel safe reporting such behavior, while 17% were unsure what steps to take or whom to

approach. A further 44% preferred not to answer the question.

The results therefore point to a substantial readiness gap. Knowing that a policy or reporting channel exists is not the same as feeling safe and confident enough to use it. For many employees, the practical route to seeking help remains unclear, invisible, or psychologically difficult to access.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

Together, these findings point to a single, practical conclusion for business leaders. DEIB in this region is still largely an external phenomenon - visible in recruitment marketing and formal policy, but barely present in how managers behave day to day. Only a small share of employees report their manager openly discussing fairness at work, even though this is likely the cheapest and most effective intervention available. Culture doesn't shift through another policy document; it shifts through what a manager says, or fails to say, in an ordinary team meeting. For companies serious about converting diversity into a genuine business advantage, the task ahead isn't launching new initiatives - it's making the ones that already exist visible, understandable, and lived by the people meant to benefit from them.