EVENT REPORT

DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS: BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

seap
society of european affairs professionals

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viEUw Project The Brussels Binder

***event held on 19 May 2022**

About the event

The EU Public Affairs sector, and more generally the EU Bubble is facing a lack of diversity. We believe that more can be done through raising awareness.

The **Society of European Affairs Professionals** brought together a diverse group of people active in the field of Public Affairs for a panel discussion moderated by **Emma Brown, Vice President of SEAP** to discuss the lack of diversity and inclusion in the sector.

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Key takeaways

Diversity means different things to different people

The discussion touched down on what diversity is. Whilst there was an agreement that diversity can mean different things to different people, it was also pointed out that some people are still trying to figure out what actually diversity stands for, with **Cianán Russell** mentioning that:

"When I think about what diversity means, it's about ensuring that as broad as possible, variety of voices are part of every level of the conversation from decision making, to scoping, to funding, to messaging and communications, and that to me doesn't feel like a thing that we have in the Brussels sphere."

Diversity in Member States

Way too often the conversation is centred around the topic of gender balance, but there are so many other aspects that have to be taken into account when assessing how diverse and inclusive a member state is. Giving the example of Spain, **Maria Rosa Rotondo** pointed out that:

"Spanish society is very diverse and tolerant in many ways, but the country is not exempt from trouble, of course. It has a very extraordinarily open society."

And although Spain might be on a good track when it comes to diversity, the case is not the same in other member states, as there are different levels of progress from one country to another.

Key takeaways

Diversity at the Institutional level

There has been clear progress at the EU Institutional level when it comes to the representation of certain minority groups. However, having a diverse group of people is the bare minimum that can be done, ensuring they feel welcome and included is as important as having a diverse workforce.

"To ensure that we have diversity but also the inclusion part, we have thought how do we ensure that when people do come into these spaces where they historically have not been a part of, that they then feel comfortable enough and valued as anybody else, just as anybody should feel" - **Michaela Moua**

The recruitment perspective

When it comes to recruitment, there has been a lot of good will in the last couple of years to at least discuss and approach the issue. What became apparent is that what missing to a certain degree is actually organisations walking the talk, in other words making sure that their actions complement their words and promises.

"I think in terms of what diversity means is really about action, about proactively challenging our own perception and assumptions by seeking diversity of thought, diversity of ways of working, and I think this should be a sort of a process that we embed in our everyday life, but also in our working processes." **- Anna Koj**

Key takeaways

Diversity and inclusion at decision making level

An issue raised is that the marginalised communities are represented on the Civil Society side, frequently if not exclusively by NGOs that stand up for the rights of certain underrepresented groups. At the same time, decision makers are usually on the other side of the table.

"The majority of people making the decisions about money, making the decisions about policy, making the decisions about communications about that policy, are not from that marginalised group." **- Cianán Russell**

For the society to be truly diverse and inclusive, there needs to be a fair share of power with the marginalised communities, for a real impact and change to happen.

People that are assumed to represent marginalised communities that are chosen into decision making position or to panels, sometimes are chosen on the basis of not "rocking the boat", or making conversations uncomfortable, and they are simply there to ensure representation of minority groups, a minority that is just happy to be there but not really having their say.

"It is not only about ticking the box, who's there, but also exactly what kind of power do they have in decision making processes, but also to ensure that they can even say the difficult things." **- Michaela Moua**

Key takeaways

The role of Data and the need for more of it

Some member states are doing great in equality data collection and analysis while others are way behind, which makes it difficult to understand the current situation and benchmark in the future.

***"We need data, and the European Commission is in the best position to collect it Europe wise."* - Maria Rosa Rotondo**

There are also certain myths about data collection, such as that it is too difficult or there are barriers due to GDPR. Some of these myths were addressed during the roundtable on Equality data which took place in September 2021 at the Commission.

***"Equality Data - the Commission is encouraging member states to move to harmonising across the EU the collection of equality data, so that over time it could be comparable, and to build more efficient policy legislation on top of that."* – Michaela Moua**

Conclusions

Diversity is not only about ensuring there are diverse voices around the table, diversity is making sure those voices are being heard and acted upon, ensuring that power is shared with minority groups so it can be reflected in decision making in order to have a real impact on the life of those coming from underrepresented groups.

Way too often the minority groups are represented by NGOs, which usually sit on the opposite side with the decision-makers that take decisions affecting the life of a specific minority group represented by NGOs or Civil Society.

When it comes to recruitment, the discussion on diversity and inclusion needs to go beyond the gender balance aspect and should focus on ensuring that a certain process is embedded in the way of working, so it becomes a lifestyle and not an exception to ensure Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI).

Member states must do more work to ensure a uniform level of DEI and especially more work must be done in ensuring equality data collection is available so it can be analysed and acted upon to ultimately be reflected in better informed policy making.

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About SEAP

SEAP is the Society of European Affairs Professionals established in 1997. It is the recognised organisation of all EU public affairs professionals including those operating in trade associations, corporations, consultancies and other representative bodies.

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Society of European Affairs Professionals

EU Transparency Register: 360457536314-69

Useful Links

Equality data collection | European Commission

The **Visibility Watch EU Project (viEUw)** follows up on some historical work looking into a representation of different people on panels in the Brussels Bubble to find out what voices are present, what voices are missing, and to what degree.

Find out more about the **Public Affairs Community of Europe (PACE)** or **Mavence**

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