



## Equality and Diversity Learning in the European Steel Industry: An Executive Summary

The Equality and Diversity Learning in the European Steel Industry (EDLESI) project is a response to real and anticipated changes in the composition of the European steel industry workforce<sup>1</sup>. The focus of the project is on raising equality and diversity awareness and establishing equal opportunities policy and practice in the steel sector, particularly with regard to teaching and learning. This briefing paper provides an executive summary of the main findings and recommendations of the project.



**The EU Steel Industry:** The European Union (EU) steel industry is experiencing massive upheaval and change. At the centre of numerous industry developments is a workforce of 30,000, and it is important that company decisions and processes of change are inclusive of the workforce and their representatives.

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<sup>1</sup> The project is informed by the following definitions: Equality refers to an emphasis on equal outcomes, not merely equality of opportunities and an even playing field. Diversity refers to the differences of every member of a group in terms of values, attitudes, age, abilities, cultural backgrounds, beliefs, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, competences, knowledge and experiences.

The EU steel industry is the second largest in the world, and arguably the world leader in steel quality, and technology and innovation. However, the EU industry is undergoing continuous structural change, and more recently, this process has gathered pace. In particular, the massive expansion of the steel industry in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries and the occurrence of trans-national steel companies present real challenges for European institutions and the steel industry social partners.

People working in the steel industry will be at the centre of the drive for change, and the industry will need the support of the workforce to facilitate industry change. This points to the key role workers can play in creating a vibrant and successful steel industry, as well as the need to prepare people to address change constructively.

The industry faces pressures on a number of fronts, but particularly with regard to:

- changes in ownership, including merger and acquisition;
- broadening of company activities, in terms of production as well as moving beyond the EU context;
- increases in prices of raw materials and energy;
- cyclical pattern of the steel market;
- ongoing discussions in the international bodies (WTO, OECD) on trade regulation and overcapacity;
- growing impact of environmental aspects;
- issues of research and development policy, and technological change.

Moreover, these issues will have implications for the workforce and the way steel is produced. In particular, it is likely that a safer, cleaner and more

technologically developed steel industry working environment, which requires more highly skilled workers, may lead to a recomposition of the steel industry workforce. The mature and predominantly male and, in certain countries, unqualified sections of the workforce that at present comprise the greater part of the industry are likely to leave in the near future, opening up space for the recruitment of more highly qualified men *and* women of different and diverse backgrounds. Such developments will give rise to numerous questions on: training and learning, gender, ethnicity, disability, generation, as well as occupational and qualification profiles. Underscoring these issues will be other questions that the industry must address, on equal opportunity and diversity. (For further details, see Briefing Paper 2)

**Equal Opportunities in the European Steel Industry:** Approaches to achieving equality in the workplace have evolved significantly in recent times. However, whilst certain enterprises and industries have been at the forefront of these developments, Europe's steel industry has only recently begun to concern itself with issues of equality. Steel industry approaches to equality (where they exist) thus remain rather unsophisticated and in a process of development.

There are a number of approaches that steel companies might adopt:

- *Equal Treatment* is a legislative approach that underpins anti-discrimination legislation and enjoins employers to treat everyone 'the same'.
- *Positive Action* recognises that certain social groups may need support measures that compensate for inequalities in access to different spheres of social life.
- *Positive Discrimination* involves reserving jobs or privileges exclusively for people from certain disadvantaged social groups.
- *Mainstreaming* is concerned with the integration of equal opportunities principles, strategies and practices into all aspects of the everyday work of an organisation.
- *Diversity* is a voluntary approach to human resource management. It is not a legal term and

has no legal force behind it. Promoting diversity is often presented merely as a more positive attitude to non-discrimination.

There are moreover, a number of EU directives that: prohibit discrimination; allow for positive action; and, require employer action in relation equal opportunities and diversity. Recent notable directives include the Racial Equality Directive, the Employment Equality Directive and Gender Equality Directives. These directives address both direct and indirect discrimination. (For further details, see Briefing Paper 3)

**The European Union Steel Industry: Experiences of Diversity and Equal Opportunities in the Workplace:** The socio-demographic profile of the steel industry workforce is developing in parallel with other industry developments. The potential for change in the socio-demographic profile of the industry thus necessitates an evaluation of its equality and diversity situation, particularly with regard to women, black and minority ethnic and migrant workers, disabled workers and different generations of workers<sup>2</sup>. Some of the issues the industry faces from such developments are outlined below, with a focus on specific issues faced by sections of the workforce:

Industry Awareness: There is a poor awareness of equality and diversity issues among management and across the steel industry workforce, including those institutions representing workers.

Corporate Policies and Rules: EU directives on equality and diversity are being transposed in uneven ways, across member states, with implications for equal opportunities policies and practices at country and company level. As a result, discriminatory practices and harassment within the industry is exacerbated by the absence of policy within the industry to protect and ensure equal opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> A further related concern, not explored by the EDLESI project, is the increasing use of temporary, outsourced and contract labour within the industry, particularly with regard to differential terms and conditions of employment.

Occupational Segregation: Some groups (for example, women and migrant workers) experience occupational (horizontal and vertical) segregation within the industry.

Work/Life Balance (WLB): The steel industry faces a set of internal and external pressures for the introduction of WLB arrangements. First, there are demands related to the application of European laws on employment equality. Second, there is a pressure for such arrangements to be introduced as the composition of the workforce develops beyond its traditional profile.

Bullying/Mobbing and Harassment: One very difficult issue involves bullying or mobbing and harassment. From company to company, and more generally, from country to country, there are very different assessments and definitions of bullying/mobbing and harassment. It is, nonetheless the case that such behaviours are evident in the industry.

Training: There are specific equality and diversity dimensions to training needs, particularly with regard to uneven access to learning opportunities across the industry.

**Project Target Group Issues:** The EDLESI project focused on issues experienced by particular groups working in the industry: women, migrant and ethnic minority workers, a range of workers from different age bands and disabled workers:

Women: The European steel industry workforce has always comprised a significant minority of women. However, the employment of women within the industry has traditionally been confined to occupations outside the production process or within particular parts of the production process. Moreover, the progression of women through the occupational hierarchy has been limited. It is also evident that instances of sexual harassment occur in the steel industry workplace and that female production workers experience other types of harassment and bullying/mobbing. Further, the terms and conditions of women's employment is often less favourable than

men's – even within like-for-like employment.

Migrant and Black and Minority Ethnic Workers: In some European countries, there is a clear record of reliance by the steel industry on migrant workers. Equally, some workforce populations are characterised by a mix of ethnicities and racial variation. Taken together, questions arise over fair treatment of both migrant workers and those from different ethnic groups.

Migrant and minority ethnic workers employed to the industry often experience occupational segregation and other types of discrimination and harassment. In some countries, migrant and minority ethnic workers appear to be excluded almost entirely from the industry, which suggests current or past discriminatory recruitment policies and practices. A relatively new issue for the industry arises out of the globalisation of the steel industry and the increasing levels of merger and acquisition activity. As the intensity of internationalising operations grows, so does the possibility of cultural misunderstandings – underlining the importance of training.

Generations of Worker: The steel industry has undergone structural change and workforce re-composition over recent decades. One outcome is a workforce polarised by age. For the steel industry, meeting the needs of different generations of worker can be problematic – particularly with regard to organising training to meet different learning needs, but also with regard to the transfer of knowledge and skills between generations of workers. The problem of an ageing workforce is the most pressing issue in some countries.

Disabled Workers: The European steel industry employs a minority of disabled workers, including workers with learning difficulties and/or a physical disability. Some companies pursue recruitment policies that militate against the employment of disabled people. More particularly, disabled workers are vulnerable to discrimination and bullying.

(For further details on 'Experiences of Diversity and Equal Opportunities in the Workplace' and 'Project

Target Group' Issues, see Briefing Papers 4 and 4a, b, c and d.)

**Recognising and Promoting Equality and Diversity: Good Practice:** A central challenge for the industry is to address questions relating to Equal Opportunity and Diversity. The industry is characterised by a predominantly white male workforce with an ageing demographic profile. Addressing the issues of Diversity and Equal Opportunity against such a background is a present day challenge, but one that needs to be addressed against the more diversely comprised workforce of the future. For Social Partners to adequately meet that challenge lessons need to be learned from practitioners who have sought to implement policies and training/learning programmes within the industry (plus benchmarking with practitioners outside the industry) and whose experiences has shaped their knowledge of what 'good practice' looks like.

Legislation provides a foundation for good practice, but it is only a starting point. It is changing 'behaviours' which lies at the heart of problems and solutions to the recognition and promotion of Equality and Diversity in the workplace. In order to address the underlying values and beliefs of individuals in the workplace, it is essential to tackle attitudes towards problem behaviour as part of a successful Diversity implementation initiative. Images and words must reinforce the message that such behaviours are unacceptable regardless of whether there is any Diversity and Equal Opportunity legal connotation.

The message from practitioners is clear – Diversity and Equal Opportunity needs to be viewed and treated as a mainstream issue and not marginalised as something that only has consequences for minority groups. This is vital when undertaking 'awareness' raising events or initiatives. It is important to make diversity and equality issues relevant to all sections of the workforce.

Training and learning is an effective way of communicating the Diversity and Equal Opportunity message. However, it is important to be aware of the particular learning needs of those undertaking

training and learning. There are various tools and techniques that can be used to illustrate human complexity and help move a discussion into areas where people are positively perceived as 'different'. 'Groups' may respond better to a personality inventory that allows them to reflect on the characteristics of their own personality (e.g. introversion and extra-version) and how it affects their behaviour.

Recognising and promoting Diversity and Equal Opportunity has to be firmly embedded within a 'company culture' for it to thrive. In certain cases, it may mean breaking down an existing culture that is unsupportive. Measuring the success of cultural change can be particularly difficult, and organisations embarking on the implementation of a new Diversity strategy should be prepared for an increase in the number of grievance issues raised by the workforce. (For further details, see Briefing Paper 5.)

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Briefing Paper 1 is part of a series of 5 briefing papers coming out of the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme sponsored EDLESI project:

- BP 2: The Steel Industry in the EU
- BP 3: Equal Opportunities Policy in the European Steel Industry.
- BP 4: The EU Steel Industry: Experiences of Diversity and Equal Opportunities
- BP5: Recognising and Promoting Equality and Diversity: Good Practice.

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