

Inclusive Employment for People with Disabilities as Part of Inclusion and Diversity Management Policies


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Introduction

Inclusive employment has never been high on the agenda of the Russian business community, unlike foreign companies: for them the representation of, for example, people with disabilities, women, ethnic minorities serves as an important indicator of the social orientation of business, and also is an imperative of non-discrimination in the labor market and in society as a whole. However, it has already been proven that inclusive organizations demonstrate better business performance compared to those that do not pay due attention to the issue of inclusion [Inegbedion et.al. 2020]. At the same time, Russia's engagement in the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [2020-2030: Decade of Action for the SDGs...2020] necessitates the adoption and maintenance of inclusion and diversity policies in Russian companies. Most often responsibility for the development of such a policy and its implementation lies with HR managers (top and middle level). Foreign experience suggests that they play a significant, if not the leading role in managing diversity in companies [Mehng et al. 2019; Kessler Foundation 2017]. Meanwhile, there has been no research on such a topic in Russia until recently. That is why we conducted a nationwide survey of HR managers from large, medium and small businesses; this helped to find out for the first time their opinion on the state and prospects of inclusive employment in Russian companies, as well as the factors that, in their view, influence diversity management in the context of global challenges.

The digest presents some interesting findings of the survey that demonstrate positions of Russian HR managers community regarding inclusion and diversity policies¹ in general, and inclusive employment of people with disabilities in particular. Where appropriate, we also provide some excerpts from interviews with HR managers that were conducted prior to the survey and helped design the questionnaire for it.

¹ In the survey, the Diversity and Inclusion Policy was defined as maximizing the inclusion of all employee groups in work activities regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic and other characteristics, taking into account the needs of each group.

Attitude to inclusion policy and the role of HR manager

Our findings suggest that 75% of the surveyed company representatives (remember that we surveyed HR managers) support the policy of inclusion and diversity to a greater or lesser extent. At the same time, companies, regardless of their size, most often follow this policy without clearly defined inclusive rules and norms, which may suggest not only the lack of a regulatory framework for inclusion at the organizational level, but also the fact that the Russian business community has not yet fully understood and appreciated the importance of inclusion. The share of answers stating that there are clearly defined inclusive rules and norms which are always or occasionally supported in organizations, generally shrinks as the size of the company decreases: this share is the smallest in small businesses, and is greater in big ones. At the same time, primarily medium-sized companies (29%) agreed with the statement that «inclusion policies are most often not manifested in any way in the company». Small companies (28%) ranked second in terms of the frequency of choosing this option, while representatives of big companies were the least frequent to agree with this view (19%).

Interestingly, 66% of the organizations that took part in the survey do not have employees with disabilities.

Since our survey focused on HR managers' opinions on inclusion and diversity management, we also asked what the role of HR managers is in promoting the values of inclusion and diversity in companies. The distribution of respondents' opinions on this issue is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
HR managers' assessment of their own role in promoting the values of inclusion and diversity in the company

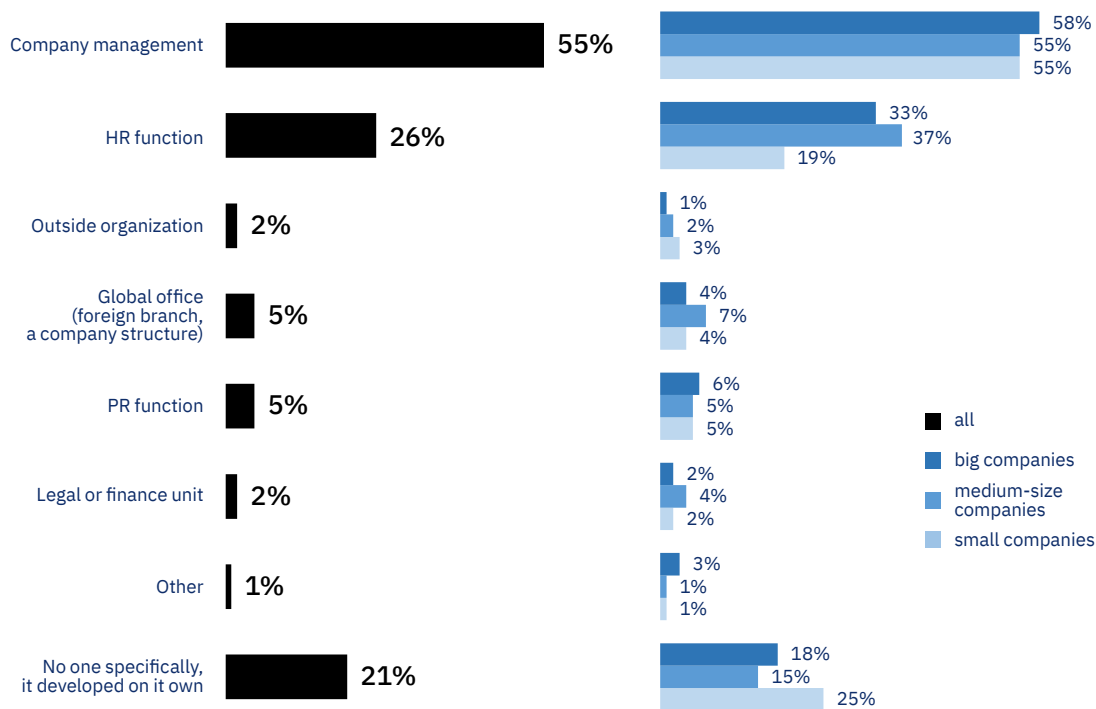


According to the survey, in total 74% of organizations that support the policy do not assign responsibility for implementing inclusive principles to a specific staff member. Only 14% of respondents noted autonomy in decision-making regarding the implementation of inclusion and diversity policies. The most common answer was that the responsibility for implementing inclusion and diversity is shared to some extent with other colleagues. In 8% of cases, HR managers make no decisions on inclusion and diversity policies.

Who do HR managers believe initiates measures to ensure diversity and inclusion policies in their companies (see Figure 2)?

Figure 2.
HR managers' assessment of who initiates measures to ensure implementation of diversity and inclusion policies in the company

Who in your company initiated the implementation of inclusion and diversity in the workplace?



* % of those supporting to a greater of lesser extent

More than half of respondents (55%) note that the initiator of diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace is the company's management. 26% of respondents agree with the leading role of HR in promoting this policy. About one in five respondents (21%) notes that no one specifically initiated the implementation of inclusion and diversity policy in their company; it developed on its own. Thus, the implementation of inclusive policies in companies is mainly driven by their managers. This position was also expressed by interviewees, for example, the HR manager of a company specializing in corporate governance:

“The CEO, the top manager or a vice president is on some public board or something. He needs to demonstrate some degree of the organization’s involvement in this process. There is a lot of this nomenclature nonsense. Accordingly, the thing is just pushed from the top to levels below”.
(Interview 7).

What are the benefits of inclusion and diversity policies in Russia?

Since, as we noted above, this was the first such survey in Russia, we deemed it important to find out what effect HR managers believe the policy in question has. The answers to the respective question are summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3.
HR managers' assessment of inclusion and diversity policy effects in the company

According to respondents, I&D policy has a positive impacts on:

		Big company	Medium-size company	Small company
Trust in the company management	71%	68%	76%	73%
Company reputation in Russian professional / business community	65%	60%	71%	71%
Employees engagement	64%	62%	66%	70%
Your personal growth as HR specialist	64%	62%	66%	69%
Company reputation in Russian society	64%	60%	69%	68%
Company reputation with the government	63%	59%	71%	66%
Employees motivation	62%	59%	65%	67%
Commitment of employees	62%	58%	66%	70%
Employees tolerance	62%	60%	66%	65%
Company reputation in international market / abroad	62%	58%	68%	69%
Creativity in work	61%	58%	64%	68%
Staff performance	60%	57%	63%	62%

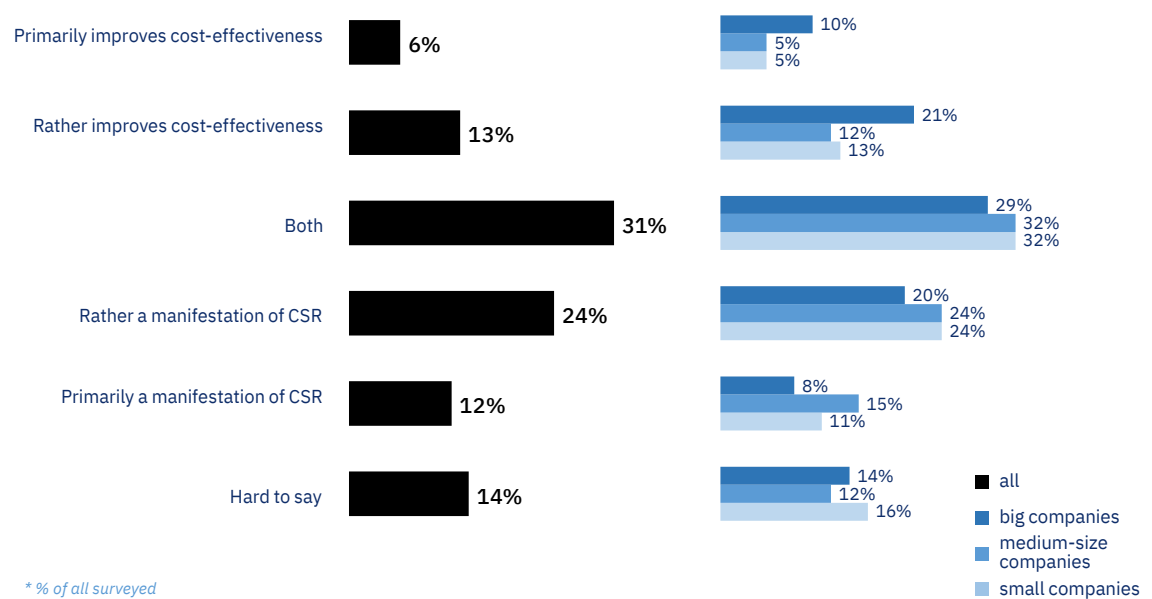
* % of all surveyed

According to the data obtained, more than half of the respondents noted the positive effects of diversity and inclusion policies. Between 60% and 71% report more trust in the company's management, company reputation, employee engagement, commitment, motivation and tolerance, as well as personal growth of HR staff as a result of implementing inclusion and diversity policies. However, the views of respondents representing businesses of different sizes vary. In particular, respondents from small and medium-sized companies (71%) are more likely to mention improved company reputation in the Russian business community than respondents from big companies (60%). The situation is similar with regard to improving reputation with the government – representatives of small (66%) and medium-sized (71%) companies are more likely than representatives of big companies (59%) to state that diversity and inclusion policies contribute to this. It can be assumed that such assessments are due to the fact that big companies consider themselves to already have a stable reputation both inside and outside the business community and do not think about how the inclusive character of their organization may in principle affect the established image.

As inclusion and diversity policies are gradually becoming a part of business operating in Russia, the survey asked how HR managers of companies assess these policies, i.e. whether, according to their experience, they consider them to be more a part of the overall corporate social responsibility agenda, or whether they regard them as charity, or whether they find financial benefits in pursuing them. When asking this question, we assumed that big companies have already had the opportunity to evaluate the outcomes of incorporating inclusion and diversity into their activities, and therefore their position may serve as a point of reference. What did the survey results show?

Figure 4.
Evaluation of inclusion and diversity policies: cost-effectiveness vs. CSR

Implementing D&I policy: cost-effectiveness vs. SCR?



As Figure 4 illustrates, 36% of respondents see diversity and inclusion policy as a manifestation of corporate social responsibility (CSR), while a much smaller proportion of respondents (19%) believe that it to some extent affects the performance of the business. 31% of respondents agreed that diversity and inclusion policy is both a business case and a CSR element. In other words, it can be assumed that the business community has begun to form an idea of inclusion and diversity in companies as a factor that influences economic success.

In line with our assumptions, representatives of big companies (31%) see the business case in the implementation of diversity and inclusion policies significantly more often than representatives of medium-sized (17%) and small (18%) companies. Conversely, representatives of medium and small companies more often regard this policy as part of CSR (39% and 35% respectively) than those from big companies (28%). The interviews also highlighted the variation in the positions of HR managers who saw employing people with disabilities as an act of charity or a business project:

“There was a case when we analyzed productivity. It was expressed in the number of articles, goods sold per person per hour (that was the way we calculated it). And in a store in Voronezh, despite the fact that a large number of deaf-mute workers there, the productivity has always been very good. That is, even productivity metrics suggested that the efficiency of deaf-mute employees is quite high”. (Interview 13).

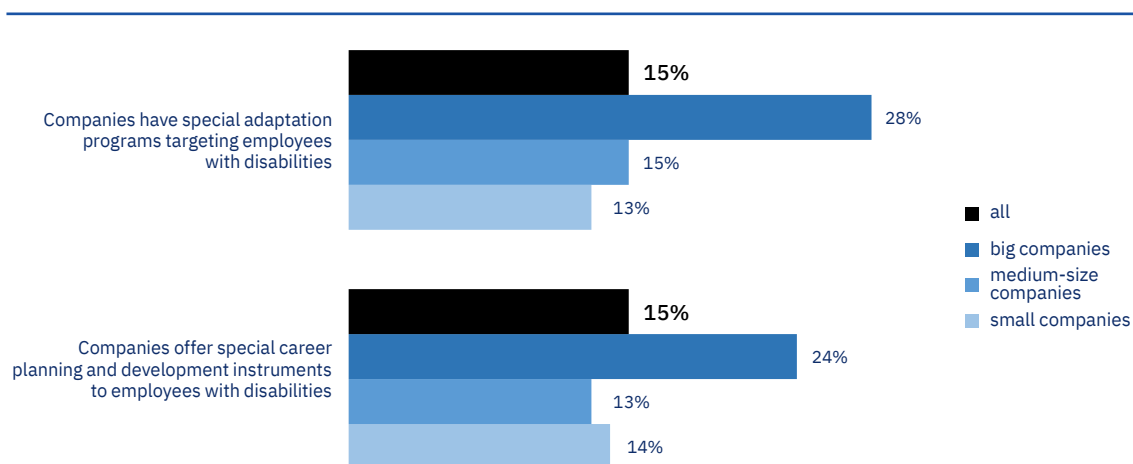
“Indeed, many employers perceive the employment of our students (with disabilities – authors’ note) as a «big heart» philanthropic gesture. It is not that somebody is ready to [hire such people] to meet their serious needs. This is rare, quite rare”. (Interview 15).

Thus, at present we cannot state that HR managers in Russia consider the inclusion and diversity policies in companies to be only a part of CSR or only a factor to increase business efficiency: opinions vary, which indicates that Russian companies are in the process of «embracing» the inclusion policy, and that businesses are able to develop their own position on this issue.

Companies' inclusive practices

Clearly, endorsing diversity and inclusion policies formally and taking concrete steps towards the implementation of such policies are not the same thing. Therefore, we analyzed whether, in the opinion of HR managers, companies have adaptation practices targeting employees with disabilities, and if so, which of them are the most common. The results are summarized in Figure 5.

Figure 5.
Adaptation practices for employees with disabilities



*% of all surveyed

As we have seen, not all companies have adaptation practices for employees with disabilities. Obviously, big companies are in the lead, – 28% of them have special adaptation programs for employees with disabilities; in small business there are only 13% of such companies, and only 15% among medium-sized companies. Overall, such adaptation programs exist in 15% of companies in our sample. Moreover, there are companies that go one step further and do more than just offering adaptation programs for employees with disabilities, thereby allowing them and the team around them to adjust to each other, to develop the values of inclusion, to support the creation and functioning of inclusive programs and tools. In this sense, companies already offer special career planning and development tools for their employees with disabilities. According to our data, such tools are available also in 15% of companies in the overall sample. In terms of company size, 24% of big, 13% of medium-sized and 14% of small companies have designed and operate employee development planning tools. In other words, «embracing» the inclusive policy in the Russian business context potentially may result not only in formal compliance with, say, the job quotas requirements for persons with disabilities, but also in a more conscious acceptance of differences and a focus on building an inclusive culture in organizations; among other things, this is related to creating conditions for equal access of employees with disabilities to advanced training, talent and ability development, and career progression.

It would seem that inclusive employment should increasingly involve not only public employment centers, but also private employment agencies (PEAs) and various NPOs

in partnerships with businesses at the recruitment stage. This should help to maintain an active inclusion and diversity policy in companies.

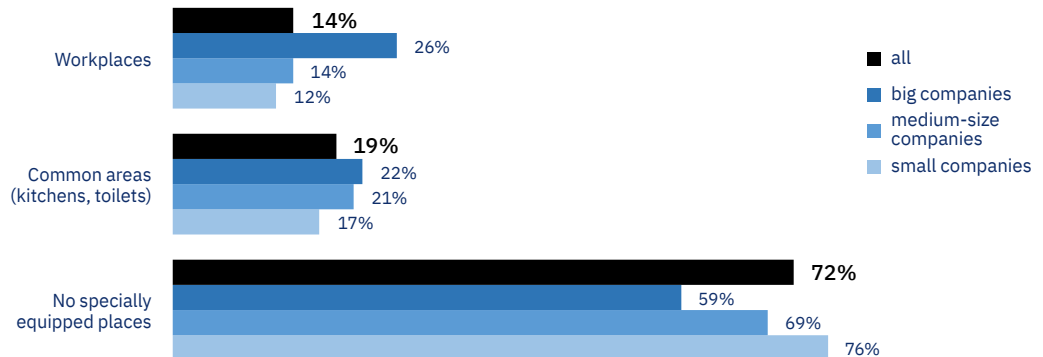
Meanwhile, according to the survey results, the overwhelming majority of companies (71%) do not have such relationships with NCOs. In terms of company size, among those who do employ people with disabilities in cooperation with NPOs (in general, there are only 12% of such companies), 22% are big, 12% are medium-sized, and 11% are small companies.

If values of inclusion are to spread in the business community, it is important for companies that can be considered as inclusive practices champions to make their suppliers or contractors aware of inclusive requirements for their employees as mandatory and to motivate them to comply with such requirements, i.e. in a sense to educate their partners. Therefore, in the survey we also asked whether companies have similar requirements for suppliers and contractors to comply with the principles of inclusion and diversity in relation to their employees. Only 6% of companies in the entire sample confirmed that such formal requirements existed for their contractors and suppliers, with 18% reporting that such requirements were present informally. Expectedly, in answering this question, big companies are again the ones that bring the ideas and practices of cultural diversity and inclusion to the business community: 11% of such companies have these requirements enshrined in formal codes, while another 19% of companies have such requirements set forth informally. Yet the vast majority, 75% of companies, do not yet set such requirements for their business partners. Thus, the business culture of the business community today cannot be described as accommodating the rapid adoption of inclusive principles and norms.

One of the fundamental points in managing diversity in companies as well as an indicator of inclusion is the availability of specially equipped places for employees with disabilities. The distribution of responses provided by HR managers of big, small and medium-sized companies regarding the availability of specially equipped workplaces is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6.
Availability of specially equipped workplaces for employees with disabilities

Does your company have specially equipped places for employees with disabilities?



* % of all surveyed

Thus, according to our survey, only 14% of companies have specially equipped workplaces for employees with disabilities, and only 19% of companies have specially equipped common areas. 72% of companies do not have specially equipped places for employees with disabilities. In terms of company size, the trend already noted above continues: big companies more often than others have specially equipped workplaces for employees with disabilities – 26% vs. 14% of medium-sized and 12% of small companies. As to common facilities, they are available in 22% of big companies, 21% of medium-sized and 17% of small companies. It can be concluded that at the moment the majority of businesses in Russia in terms of accessibility of specially equipped common facilities and workplaces are not ready to accept employees with disabilities, and therefore do not follow the norms of inclusion and diversity management.

The survey also asked which categories of employees with disabilities have specially equipped workplaces. As expected, first of all such places are available to people with mobility impairments (74%); next come hearing impaired and deaf employees – 43% of the surveyed companies have specially equipped workplaces for them. The third position is taken by visually impaired employees – 25% of the companies provide them with special workplaces. Finally, 17% of companies have specially equipped workplaces for people with mental disorders (ASD, Down syndrome, etc.).

What prevents employment of persons with disabilities

Why do companies deny employment to candidates with disabilities? As can be seen from Figure 7, the following reason comes first: «There are areas where it is impossible to hire such employees due to the specifics of the company's activities». 75% of all companies surveyed mentioned this very reason for refusing to hire candidates with disabilities. The next most frequent reason for refusal is: «Additional costs are required to organize the workplace»; it was mentioned by 66% of companies.

It is interesting that in the interviews we managed, among other things, to dispel some stereotypes regarding the reasons for refusing to hire people with disabilities, which were so clearly expressed in the responses to the formalized survey questionnaire. Thus, in interviews, HR managers noted, for example, that:

“Employers are not willing to bother with employing an officially disabled person. Why? Because it is a certain new burden of creating labor protection provisions and schemes. It can often be a lot of trouble, especially when it comes to large corporations that pay a lot of attention to it”. (Interviews 10-11).

Some informants explained that staff may not be prepared to accept employees with disabilities as part of the team:

“I don't want to, I spend 12 hours here, am I going to look at them?». So this is a personal prejudice against such people: I don't want to see people suffering, people don't know how to deal with it”. (Interview 9).

Figure 7.
Reasons for refusing to hire candidates with disabilities

		Big company	Medium-size company	Small company
There are areas where it is impossible to hire such employees due to the specifics of the company's activities	75%	81%	76%	73%
Additional costs are required to organize the workplace	66%	70%	69%	64%
Often there are informal norms\ requirements to give preference to other employees	46%	54%	47%	44%
Such employees find it harder and take longer to adapt	46%	47%	50%	43%
Compared with other job seekers, such employees normally are less experienced	42%	42%	45%	42%
Such employees normally lack skills to perform job assignments	34%	29%	36%	34%
Such employees are less efficient	34%	27%	39%	33%
Often the team is not ready to accept such employees	30%	31%	33%	29%

That said, there is a different opinion from those who have had a different experience:

“When I worked in another organization, I would have one opinion. Here I have such a positive experience, I think <...> there was no experience, because it was more fear and the related attitudes transmitted by others that these are major issues and so on” (Interview 13)

Also in the interviews, opinions were expressed that organizational culture is important for advancing the work with employees with disabilities in the company:

“And additionally, the promotion of culture. With culture (of inclusion – author’s note) absent, we will not progress in any way – neither in inclusion, nor in work with youth, nor in work with certain categories of employees. Culture – it determines the general orientation, goals, objectives and mission” (Interview 13).

Conclusion

Thus, based on the results of the first all-Russian survey of HR managers, we can conclude that $\frac{3}{4}$ of companies operating in Russia support inclusion and diversity policy to a greater or lesser extent; however, this agenda and system of values are still insufficiently expressed and formalized in specific strategies and inclusive practices of business organizations. At the same time, formalized practices supporting adaptation of workplaces and employees with disabilities are most noticeable in big companies. Inclusive practices of small businesses are more informal and ad hoc. Representatives of big business more often regard the employment of people with disabilities as a business case, strive to convince their partners, suppliers and/or contractors to comply with inclusive norms. They understand the importance of an inclusive organizational culture in promoting the principles of inclusion and diversity management in the company and in society as a whole, and the presence of employees with disabilities is more visible in big companies.

These and more extended findings of this study, which are not included in this digest, can help both academics and HR managers and personnel management in developing a methodology for studying, for example, the state of inclusive organizational culture not only in private businesses, but also in state-owned companies. Its focus can be on both employees with disabilities, and migrants, youth, women, etc.

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3. Interviews 10–11, females, foundation for support of people with disabilities
4. Interview 13, female, regional holding company, retail, medium-sized business
5. Interview 15, male, regional office, oil and gas sector, big company