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# Update DIVERSITY & LEADERSHIP

## Deep Dive: Contested Diversity

How to deal with headwinds to equality and diversity?

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# 1 LET'S TALK ABOUT ... Contested Diversity

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Dear EAF corporate partners, dear readers,

The US government under Donald Trump is currently attempting to roll back decades of human rights achievements. International companies, including European partners, have been asked to stop implementing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) measures — otherwise they risk being excluded from US public contracts. Companies such as Meta, Ford and McDonald's have already scaled back their DEI programmes. In Germany, there is also a great deal of uncertainty among companies, and the media are reporting a 'diversity backlash'.

However, diversity and equality are non-negotiable. They are fundamental social values and, at the same time, a key factor for sustainable business. When companies scale back their diversity programmes, it is not just a strategic decision — it has concrete consequences for people. Employees affected by discrimination may experience less protection, visibility and opportunities as a result. Especially in times of growing polarisation, we need to take a stand. Companies that stand up for their values send a strong signal, both internally and externally. A survey by the Diversity Charter also shows that many companies are continuing along this path: 90% of the companies surveyed are sticking to their DEI programmes, with some even expanding them.

In our day-to-day work, we also witness the level of commitment within companies, particularly once diversity is recognised as a strategic issue. At that point, stopping is no longer an option because ignoring diversity means missing out on potential instead of seizing opportunities.

Let's stick together - for values that are non-negotiable. For a working world that is accessible to all, not just some.

Now, more than ever.

With kind regards,



Tina Weber  
Member of the EAF Berlin Leadership Team



## Developments in a Nutshell

### **In the USA:**

- US President Donald Trump issues Executive Order 14173 calling on US federal agencies and their contractors to stop DEI measures - international companies with US government contracts are also affected.
- US companies, including Meta and Google, publicly distance themselves from DEI guidelines.
- A public conflict between the US government and Harvard University over political interference in diversity programs is becoming a symbol of a deeper culture war.
- Meanwhile, agricultural and hotel associations have protested against the president's tightened deportation policy, achieving success when the US government announced industry-specific exemptions to deportation practices.

### **In Europe / in Germany:**

- Companies in several European countries, including Germany, are also receiving requests from the US government to distance themselves from DEI programs.
- German associations are opposing this: The BDI clearly positions itself against the US demands, the BDA emphasizes the importance of a non-discriminatory environment and the DIHK reaffirms the importance of diversity for the further development of companies.
- SAP scraps its quota for the proportion of women in the Group and programs that promote gender diversity.
- At the same time, according to a survey by the Diversity Charter, around 90% of the companies surveyed remain committed to diversity.
- Legally, DEI initiatives continue to be protected by the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG). There is a legitimate interest in equal opportunities and diversity - both from a social and economic perspective. Companies in Germany are therefore required to continue their programs and comply with their obligations under the AGG.



## **EAF Berlin: Recommendations for Action**

1

Stay calm: US executive orders are political moves - many will be open to legal challenge.

2

Stay the course: Focus on sustainable strategies to attract and develop talent - regardless of the label for it.

3

Document carefully: Keep wording as neutral as possible, better clarify sensitive issues in person.

4

Legal context: The AGG continues to provide valuable guidance for companies and must be complied with.

## 2 **KNOW THE FACTS:** **Contested Diversity**

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### **Deutsche Welle: Donald Trump backtracks on deportation policy after pressure from the US agricultural sector**

Since his election as US President, Donald Trump has tightened the US deportation policy. This has sparked protests among the population nationwide. There was also protest from the business community. The agricultural, hotel and catering industries warned of an acute labor shortage. In response to the protests from business sectors, the US government rowed back and reduced raids by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the affected industries. Trump praised the role of “longtime, great” workers with a history of migration and announced a change of course.

[🔗 See Link](#)

### **Diversity Charter: Despite international pressure: German companies stick to diversity**

In April 2025, the Diversity Charter [Charta der Vielfalt] surveyed the current mood among its members and larger signatory organizations in Germany in response to the US political pressure on companies. According to the survey, 90% of the companies surveyed are maintaining their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) measures; only 2% report specific cuts. According to the survey, the main challenge does not lie in the strategic orientation of DEI, but in communication: companies are increasingly unsure how to deal with diversity issues linguistically. Cawa Younosi, Managing Director of Charta der Vielfalt e.V., emphasizes that there is no wave of retreat, but rather a desire for accessible language and orientation.

[🔗 See Link](#)

### **UN Global Compact Network: Background paper: Navigating the Diversity Backlash**

The background paper “Social Change and Diversity Backlash - Strategies for Businesses” from the UN Global Compact Network Germany shows how companies can respond to the growing backlash against Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI). Especially in times of social tensions, holding your ground is needed - because diversity is a reality and the basis of responsible business. The paper identifies three key areas of action for companies: create internal clarity and analyse learning processes, use existing scope of action and develop DEI consistently.

[🔗 See Link](#)

### **Capital: Taking a clear stance against the anti-diversity course**

The guest article “Taking a clear stance against the anti-diversity course” [„Mit klarer Haltung gegen Anti-Diversity-Kurs“] in the business magazine Capital, written by Ferda Ataman and Cawa Younosi, looks at how the Trump administration is deliberately undermining diversity policies with Decree 14173 issued in January 2025 - and explains why Europe must now stand firm. While DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) is increasingly being delegitimized in the USA, other regulations apply in Germany and the EU: protection against discrimination is firmly anchored in law - via the German Constitution, European regulations, equality laws and the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG). The article makes it clear that it is now more important than ever for business and politics to take a clear stance. Diversity is not only a question of justice, but also an economic success factor: those who forgo diversity lose skilled workers, innovative strength and adaptability. The authors are therefore also calling for a clear commitment from the [future] German government: the AGG must be reformed and the transatlantic devaluation of diversity must be decisively countered. The EU and the German government should turn the tables: Anyone who wants to do business here must commit to diversity, equal treatment and inclusion.

[🔗 See Link](#)

# manager magazin: Is Equality an Outdated Model?

The article “Is equality a discontinued model?” [„Ist Gleichstellung ein Auslaufmodell?“] in manager magazin sheds light on the current uncertainty of many companies in dealing with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) - and at the same time gives a sign of confidence. While companies such as SAP are scaling back parts of their diversity strategies, particularly in the US business under political pressure from Donald Trump, there are still strong efforts in Germany to maintain and expand DEI initiatives. But this commitment is under pressure. On the occasion of the 13th German Diversity Day, the DFK association warns of a step backwards: jobs are being cut, language is being relativized and measures are being gutted. It is particularly critical that many companies are less likely to publicly commit to their diversity goals for fear of legal or political conflicts.

Nevertheless, optimism prevails among DEI stakeholders. Eva Voß, Chairwoman of the Diversity Charter and Diversity Officer at BNP Paribas, emphasizes that the withdrawal of individual companies cannot be generalized. While SAP is also expanding its new strategy to Germany, VW is limiting this to the US market - diversity remains a declared goal in Europe. At the same time, the commitment of other companies such as Bayer, EY and Otto is growing. Many medium-sized companies are also following suit and continue to commit to fairness, equal opportunities and diversity.

 [See Link](#)

# Deutschlandfunk Nova: US-Corporations and Diversity. “We are in the Midst of a Backlash”

The audio feature “Meta's farewell to diversity - we're in the midst of a backlash” [„Metas Abschied von Diversität – wir sind mitten im Backlash“] by Deutschlandfunk Nova discusses the current events that have seen US corporations increasingly abandon Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs. Following the re-election of Donald Trump and under pressure from the political right, Mark Zuckerberg is now also discontinuing in-house DEI programs. Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp are thus joining a growing list of companies such as Amazon, Walmart and Ford that are taking similar steps. Journalist and author Annika Brockschmidt puts this development into historical perspective: she sees the current retreat as part of a recurring backlash that has been flaring up again and again since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The political right in the USA is thus waging an organized culture war - with the aim of systematically preventing the extension of civil rights to minorities.

The consequences of this development could be serious: Brockschmidt fears that marginalized people will feel increasingly excluded in their work environments - and that white, heterosexual men will once again be given preference in hiring in the future. The abolition of DEI programs is not a business coincidence, but a political signal. It shows how much pressure is currently being exerted on issues of justice and belonging - and how important a clear stance remains, even beyond the USA.

 [See Link](#)



### Tagesschau: Diversity Programs under Scrutiny

Following a decree by US President Donald Trump, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs in companies and government agencies are coming under increasing pressure. Trump had announced that he would end the “divisive mandate” of diversity and equity and had the legality of corresponding initiatives reviewed. Many companies are unsettled by this - they fear a step backwards in the fight against discrimination. Lawyer Robin Nunn emphasizes that the decree is difficult to apply in practice, as many DEI initiatives take place within the framework of applicable law and there is no clear definition of which elements are to be considered unlawful.

[🔗 See Link](#)

### Tagesschau: US Government Demands Reversal of Diversity Regulations

German companies are also coming under increasing political pressure from the US government. This is due to an initiative by the Trump administration that calls on business partners of the US government worldwide to discontinue programs on diversity, equity and inclusion. According to the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DIHK), around two dozen German companies have already received letters to this effect. While the practical consequences have so far been minimal, business associations such as the BDI and DIHK have warned against restricting DEI measures, emphasizing their importance for innovation, competitiveness and the recruitment of skilled workers.

[🔗 See Link](#)

### Tagesschau: SAP Cancels Diversity Programs

The software company SAP is discontinuing parts of its programs for the advancement of women and gender diversity in the USA - apparently in response to political and legal developments under President Trump. According to an internal announcement, the targeted 40 percent quota for women is being dropped in order to avoid legal risks. In the future, the USA will no longer be included in global targets for women in management positions. In addition, the Diversity & Inclusion Office will lose its independence and be integrated into the Corporate Social Responsibility department.

[🔗 See Link](#)

# 3

## WHAT ELSE?

### News on Diversity & Leadership

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## World Economic Forum: Global Gender Gap Report 2025

Every year, the Global Gender Gap Index measures how equal women and men are in different countries - in four areas: economic participation, education, health and political participation. The index was introduced in 2006, making it the oldest tool for measuring progress in gender equality worldwide. In the current 2025 edition, 148 countries were examined. On average, global equality is 68.8%, which means that a good third of the differences between women and men still exist. Looking at the 145 countries that were represented in the index in both 2024 and 2025, there was a small improvement of 0.3 percentage points - from 68.4% to 68.8%. If things continue at this rate, it will take another 123 years to achieve full equality worldwide. No country has yet reached 100%, but the top ten countries have closed at least 80% of the gender gap. Eight of these are in Europe, including Iceland (1st place with 92.6%), Finland (2nd place), Norway (3rd place) and Sweden (6th place), which have been in the top 10 consistently since 2006. The United Kingdom (4th place) and the Republic of Moldova (7th place) are new additions. Germany (9th place with 80.3%) and Ireland (10th place) are also among the frontrunners again in 2025. New Zealand (5th place) and Namibia (8th place) complete the list - both have been stable in the top 10 since 2021.

[🔗 See Link](#)

## Independent Federal Commissioner for Anti-Discrimination: Annual Report 2024

The new annual report of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency shows a significant increase in reports of discrimination. Working life continues to be the area with the most reports. The reported cases refer particularly frequently to racial discrimination (43%), discrimination based on disability or chronic illness (27%) and gender discrimination (24%). Changes can only be achieved through active protection against discrimination - for example through the revision of internal guidelines, targeted training and the promotion of an inclusive corporate culture.

[🔗 See Link](#)

## Federal Agency for Civic Education: Antifeminism: How Organizations Can Protect and Defend Themselves

How can companies, associations or educational institutions deal with anti-feminist attacks? The new article from the Federal Agency for Civic Education [Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung] shows: Anti-feminism is not a marginal phenomenon, but a deliberate strategy used to discredit equality and weaken democratic structures. Equality officers, advice centres and committed employees are particularly affected - often in the form of digital agitation, intimidation or organized campaigns.

The article offers practical recommendations on how organizations can protect themselves in the first place, take a clear stance and effectively support affected employees.

 [See Link](#)

## DeZIM: National Discrimination & Racism Monitor

Racist attitudes are still widespread in German society. Discrimination - whether through racist attributions or on the basis of other characteristics - is part of everyday life for many people. The 2025 monitoring report of the National Discrimination and Racism Monitor [Nationaler Diskriminierungs- und Rassismusmonitor (NaDiRa)] "Hidden patterns, visible consequences. Racism and discrimination in Germany" [„Verborgene Muster, sichtbare Folgen. Rassismus und Diskriminierung in Deutschland“] shows the uneven distribution of experiences of discrimination in German society: more than one in two racialized people (54%) stated that they had experienced discrimination at least once a month in 2024. For people with no racial markers, the proportion is 32%. The monitoring report of the National Discrimination and Racism Monitor examines three key questions: How have racist attitudes developed in German society? And what experiences do racialized people have in their everyday lives? What effects do experiences of discrimination have? The results show that racist attitudes are widespread. This has serious consequences. People who are regularly discriminated against are more likely to suffer from psychological stress and report symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders. In addition, trust in state institutions dwindles - especially among people with repeated experiences of discrimination.

 [See Link](#)

## Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency: Age Discrimination. Identify, understand, address.

Almost half of people in Germany over the age of 16 have experienced age discrimination. This is the result of a representative survey conducted by the opinion research institute GMS on behalf of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency [Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes]. According to the survey, 45% of the more than 2,000 respondents, interviewed in March 2025, stated that they had been discriminated against because of their age. Age discrimination is based on the assumption that people either do not yet or no longer have certain abilities.

This means that both younger and older people are affected. 16 to 44-year-olds were the most likely to report exclusion due to their age: 52% of respondents stated that they had experienced this at least once. Among the over 65s, however, the figure was significantly lower at 35%.

According to the study, the area in which age discrimination occurs most frequently is working life. 39% of those affected stated that they had been excluded at work because of their age. This was followed by the health sector (27%), stores and services (24%) and the housing market (22%).

 [See Link](#)

## Trier University: How more women get into management positions

Three regional factors strongly influence how often women hold management positions in medium-sized companies: The general employment rate of women, the availability of childcare places and the proportion of men who take parental leave. This is the conclusion of a Trier study published in March 2025. The correlation has been proven with data from around 25,000 companies with 50 to 500 employees. Interesting regional patterns also emerged. "We see a clear East-West divide," explains project manager Jörn Block - "probably because women were already better integrated into the labor market in GDR times. You can still see the effect today." In West Germany, the above-mentioned factors often hinder the career advancement of women into the management of medium-sized companies. There is no general difference in the proportion of women in management between family and non-family businesses. However, it is interesting to note that regional factors have less of an influence on family businesses.

 [See Link](#)

## Ipsos: LGBTQ Study for Pride Month

With Pride Month, the social, political and market research company Ipsos has examined people's attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in 26 countries. The study sheds light on how public opinion has developed on a range of topics - including marriage for all, diversity programs in companies and trans people in sport. Worldwide, the situation for LGBTQ+ people has deteriorated significantly in recent years. The USA is one of the countries in which rejection has increased particularly sharply. In contrast to most of the other countries surveyed, support for LGBTQIA+ rights in Germany has not deteriorated significantly in recent years. In principle, three quarters of Germans believe that lesbian, gay and bisexual people (78%) and trans people (75%) should be protected from discrimination, for example when working or looking for accommodation. Compared to the previous year, agreement with this statement has risen by 5 percentage points in each case. Around the same number (74%) support the statement that same-sex couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples when adopting children. Less than a fifth (19%) oppose this. 71% are also in favour of homosexual people being allowed to marry legally, while 10% are against any form of legal recognition.

 [See Link](#)

# 4

## DIVERSITY IN NUMBERS

### Figures & current Data

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#### Visualizations & Data on the Topic on our Website

- Proportion of women on DAX 40 supervisory boards
  - As of 09/ 2024
- Proportion of women on DAX 40 management boards
  - As of 07/2025
- List of female DAX 40 board members
  - As of 07/ 2025
- Proportion of women in management positions in Germany
  - As of 03 / 2025
- Proportion of women in management positions EU 27
  - As of 09/ 2023

[🔗 Click here for the graphics](#)

# 5

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