

Narrative Report
“Creating a Diverse Workforce”
a project for the Republic of Macedonia
October 3-11 , 2011

Arranged by: Graduate School, International institute

Partners from Macedonia: Secretariat for Implementation of Ohrid framework Agreement, Ministry of labor and social policy, Center for management of Conflicts, Forum ZFD, private companies Global HR™, Ecolog and NEXTSENSE.

Participants from Macedonia:

1. **Ms. Kate Trajkova**, Director, Human resources Management, Ministry of Labor and social policy
2. **Mr. Xhelal Cajani**, International affairs Sector, Secretariat for implementation of the Ohrid framework Agreement (SIOFA)
3. **Mr. Albert Hani** – Deputy country director – ForumZFD
4. **Mr. Evzal Rakipi** – Director of Recruitment, ECOLOG Ltd
5. **Mr. Iskra Trajkoska** – Human resources Manager – IT company, Nextsense

6. Context

The study visit was part of the project “**Affirmative action, reflection of multiculturalism and benefit to the business sector**” developed by the Secretariat for Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (SIOFA) in cooperation with the Center for Management of Conflicts, *forumZFD* and Global HR™.

The aim of the project was to introduce the three American concepts: Affirmative Action (AA), Equal employment opportunities (EEO), and Diversified Workforce (DW), into the state and non-state systems in Macedonia. By replicating American systems and procedures the implementing partners want to improve the access to the labor market for marginalized groups, thus creating more job opportunities for them in state administration and private companies. Among other measures partner organizations want to set up a legal anti-discriminatory platform at state level, and support measures for introducing affirmative action strategies in private companies.

In general this project: (1) reflects the multiculturalism of our society and directly contributes towards economic development of the Republic of Macedonia by ensuring diversity and Peace in all levels of the state; (2) widens the understanding of the term “marginalized groups” by including other actors that are necessarily “ethnic minorities”, i.e. women, poor, other religious groups, handicapped people; (3) widens the scope of inclusion of the marginalized groups not just in administration but also in private companies; (4) decreases hostility in society by realizing that AA measures are not specific for Macedonia but have been applied in other countries long ago; (5) Makes it easier for SIOFA to meet its obligation to ensure equitable representation of Albanians and other ethnic minorities in Macedonia in the state administration of Macedonia;

Up to now SIOFA together with its project partners has organized a national conference where the American concepts of Affirmative action, Equal employment opportunities and diversified Workforce, have been presented to 30 of the biggest companies in Macedonia. To increase our knowledge, and get more profound information and support project partners thought that it would be a good idea to learn from the experience in the United States of America, where these concepts have been developed and have been applied for a long time. Therefore has addressed the American embassy to support a study visit at USA for six representatives from different state and non – state sectors, titled “Creating a diverse workforce”.

Following this request the embassy has positively responded to the needs of the partners, and jointly with the Bureau of educational and cultural affairs/International Visitor leadership Program has organized a study trip for five representatives in Macedonia. (Due to private reasons one person canceled the trip at the start of the event).

The representatives had a very unique opportunity to visit state and non state actors in USA that have experience in implementing Affirmative Action measures. After a thorough analyses and frequent communication with the implementing partners the American embassy and the Graduate school, International institute, have prepared a detailed program that reflected completely the needs of the project. In the program the Graduate school considered that Washington DC, San Antonio and Los angels are the cities that are reflecting diversity in surrounding but also at the working environment of private companies and state actors. The Macedonian group had a chance to visit and draw maximum of the experience from the presentations that representatives of companies and state and local agencies were doing.

7. Visa and travel arrangements

The group faced no difficulties in obtaining the visa and necessary information for the travel to USA. The embassy staff was very hospitable. They were advising the group thought-out all the time. The group had informative meeting at the embassy in order to get the necessary travel information and readers for the event.

Although the initiator of the project was SIOFA, and they have positively responded to the need of the program and to take care for the flight tickets, the Macedonian group has financed the trip on their private basis.

8. Logistic

The group had no difficulties at all when traveling to USA and inside USA, as the program was very precise and the hosting organization, the Graduate School – international visitors had arranged everything in details in the program and have appointed two persons that took care of the logistic, arranging the travel to the cities, attending meetings, accommodation, food and havening a good presentations and discussion was not a problem for the guide and translator in the group. They were very friendly and responsive to all our needs.

9. Meetings

The program started with visit of the US agencies in Washington DC that deal with Affirmative actions measures. In this city we have visited the following institutions:

Washington DC:

- ***Graduate school, international institute*** – here we had first introduction of the theme but also logistical information and administrative briefing necessary for the further visits;

- George Town University – the meeting was held at the graduate school with two wonderful presentations from two ladies from the University of Georgetown. One was founder and CEO of the Professional Pipeline Development group and professor at George Town University, and the other one was master of HR.
- **Meridian International center** – institution that provided the group a briefing on U.S. Federalism form of the government. At this meeting we had a chance to meet also another group from the municipality of Prishtina, represented by the Mayor.
- **Equal Employment Advisory Council** – institution that provided perhaps the best incentives on what affirmative action means in practice, by elaborating Equal opportunity regulations and monitoring compliances.
- **Merit systems Protection Board** - at this meeting we had a chance to meet the director of this institution and discuss the ways for protecting Federal merit systems;
- **American Center for International labor Solidarity** – was a meeting where we discussed the workers rights and non-profit organizations efforts in ensuring a diverse workplace. Here we met the regional Program Director.
- **Office of Civil rights, Broadcasting Board of Governors** – institution of the Department of state that works on strategies for advocacy of Affirmative actions. At this organization we met the Director of the office that had impressive personal background on working in promotion of affirmative actions measures and diversity at workplace.

San Antonio - Texas

In San Antonio we met with two wonderful persons that were hosting the group. Except their hospitality they have also been very helpful resource persons for the group. In this city we have visited the following organizations:

- **University of Incarnate World** – At this meeting we had a chance to hear a presentation and talk to Dean of the University on the obstacles, opportunities in ensuring diversity in universities.
- **South Research Institute** - Presentation and discussion with the manager of Work –Life & Diversity at the South Research Institute. At this meeting we had very nice discussion on the cultural diversity in their work place.
- **Alpha Diagnostics** – Biotechnology Company located in San Antonio. This presentation was very interesting from the aspect of investments and personal experience of the Director of the company in trying to provide a diverse workforce.
- **University of Texas San Antonio (UTSA)** - we discussed on ideas on managing diversity, promoting EEO and AA for students and faculty staff.
- **Alamo Heights United Methodist Church** – reception hosted by the SACIV and members honoring the Peace Corps Volunteers. At this reception we had a chance to meet and talk about diversity with the key stakeholders in the municipality of San Antonio and Peace Corps volunteers.
- **City of San Antonio** – At the city of SA we had a chance to see a presentation by the Human resources administrator and discuss on the policies concerning Diversity, AA and EEO. At this meeting we got a proper understanding on how the AA strategies are done and which kinds of formulas are used to reach out the proper information on the needs for recruitment of marginalized groups.

- *Express News Daily* – bilingual magazine in SA. On this working lunch we had a chance to discuss on AA with Editor and journalists of this newspaper.

In this city the host had organized a “*Home hospitality program for the group*” The Macedonian group was split in 3 small groups and had a chance to visit three different families in SA. This was a very unique opportunity for all participants and one of the best highlights in the whole event.

Los Angeles, California

In this city the hosting persons that were responsible for logistics, upon the arrival awarded the group with the honor to see for the first time an American Football match at the stadium of UCLA. This was a very impressive and unforgettable experience for the whole group. Although some meetings were canceled in this city the organizers did adapt quickly and replaced the canceled meetings with other interesting institutions. The next days we continued with the program visiting the following organizations:

- ***University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)***, Center for research and Education – was the first institution that the group visited in this city. The University campus as such was very impressive and diverse. The presentation was focused on research, education and policy development procedures that help create jobs.
- ***Unite here Local 11*** – was a very interesting meeting with one of the Labor unions in LA that does advocate and executes union actions in different items. Their aim was to fight for improvement of living standards and working conditions of the workers employed at hotels, restaurants airports sports arenas and convention centers
- ***Hire LA’s Youth*** – was an NGO that worked on employment programs for youth.
- ***NGO ROC*** – The Macedonian group attended a workshop on health care corporate, organized by this organization. Although we were just observers of this workshop at the end we had a chance to discuss to the organizers on the concepts of Diversity and AA.
- ***Metro Skills Center*** - Vocational School of LA – this hosting institution made a very nice presentation of the facilities of their school and the ways how they try to match the needs for different profiles of workers from different backgrounds, the available workforce and necessary activities that need to be undertaken in order to provide to the companies the needed workforce.

10. Lessons learned:

- Diversifying workforce is a profitable concept for companies;
- Introducing the concept of diversification of workforce needs interventions in legal system;
- Diversity is wider concept than the Affirmative action and equal employment opportunities, and usage of terminology of Diversity in study of AA and EEO is better as it produces less aversion in accepting it;
- The American companies understand the usage of the have the concept of diversity in the working environment therefore they are interested in creating a culture where diversity is nurtured on basis of “good faith effort”

- With Directives from the Department of state and the President, the American companies are obliged to be diversified;
- Special formula that was merging the data from employed and unemployed persons as well as the results from analyses of the needs in labor market was existing when designing strategies for AA. This issue needs to be seen closely and the group considers necessity for further information and knowledge on understanding these formula;
- Analyses of the workforce were necessary for proper approach to advocate for Affirmative actions;
- Promotion is necessary as well as Inclusion of universities in process of promotion of AA measures are necessary;
- Companies as well as universities dedicate money to support affirmative action measures for their staff members, clients and students; and
- Organizations/ companies need to set up a proper organizational structure within Human resources units. Certification process of Diversity Human resources officers will be asset in such projects.

11. Social part of the study trip:

The social part of the study trip was very impressive because: firstly the organizers of the study trip were very flexible and melted easy within the group dynamic that was created among local Macedonian participants; secondly we were a small and very dynamic group that had no difficulties in becoming closer; and finally because we had very good opportunity to visit a Diverse cities.

Sight seeing and shopping's were part of the trip that helped building up the group dynamics and relationships amongst the participants.

12. Benefits from the study trip:

- Got better understanding of state and non state systems and procedures concerning AA, EEO and DW, in order to replicate them in Macedonia;
- Got better understanding on the ways to provide dialogue platform where state, business and civil society actors will discuss continuously about threats, opportunities and challenges of diversity and multiculturalism.

13. Expression of Gratitude

After the arrival in Macedonia the group has immediately started with redefining the project according to the gained experience in Macedonia.

The group was also invited to attend a special interject on affirmative actions measures and the study trip at a 45 minutes show on the National Macedonian radio.

At the end the group thanked in written the US Embassy as well as the Graduate school – International visitors program for giving them the opportunity to be part of such program.

The letter we are attaching below:

Dear Ms. Robin Neilson
Dear Ms. Angela Oatis-Ashby
Dear Ms. Thea Richard
Dear Mr. Vince Drader

We, the international visitors group from Macedonia, within this e-mail would like to express our gratitude for your hospitality during our stay in your country. This was an unforgettable learning experience that exceeded our expectations. The diversified workforce, as selected topic for this particular study trip, as well as the socio-cultural component of the study visit jumpstarted the creative thinking in us. On our way back we already started thinking on new cutting edge approaches to dealing with the diversification of workforce in our society.

The working program as such, selection of the partner organizations as well as timing of the events was responding directly to our needs, therefore we consider that we learned lot and that we have a new chance to be more creative when designing further the upcoming project activities related to the concepts of affirmative action, equal employment opportunities and diversified workforce. We also do not have any remark considering the logistic aspects such as: accommodation, transport, transparency, food, daily allowances etc. In fact we are amazed from the way how you all have thought on all small details for this trip.

Using this opportunity we would like to express special gratitude to the people that were accompanying us, Mr. Marcus Hawkins and Mr. Sal Gashi. Both of them, without hesitation merged in to an existing group dynamic, as if we had known them from long before. We appreciate their understanding of our cultural difference and their readiness to react on these differences with lots of tolerance. They both made this study visit an extraordinary experience, by donating lot of their time and energy for the group. The Contact people, as well as the drivers in Washington, San Antonio and Los Angeles had great understanding for our needs. Their presence as such, their different backgrounds, as well as their readiness to share their life experiences during the informal time showed us a great deal of what diversity is about.

We intend to produce a small report and letter of gratitude to all people that we met in this study visit. They will be distributed later to all of you as soon as they are ready.

Being aware that we might never have chance to return your kindness at the same level we remain open to show you Macedonian hospitality whenever you are going to be here. Once again thank you for giving us this unforgettable opportunity to see and learn from the extensive experience of the United States of America on the issue of diversified workforce.

Best regards,

Albert Hani, Deputy Country Director of *forumZFD*

Kate Trajkova, Head of Human Resources Department of Ministry of Labor and Social Policy

Xhelal Cajani, Head of sector for international cooperation, Government of Macedonia, Secretariat for Implementation of Ohrid Framework Agreement

Iskra Trajkoska, Human Resources Manager at NEXTSENSE

Evzal Rakipi, Head of Recruitment sector at ECOLOG