International research on diversity and inclusion skills gap and co-design with relevant stakeholders

What is the purpose of the present research?

This document presents the results gathered in the scope of the initial research phase of the *InPluServ*, a project in development under the Erasmus+ program, funded by the European Commission.
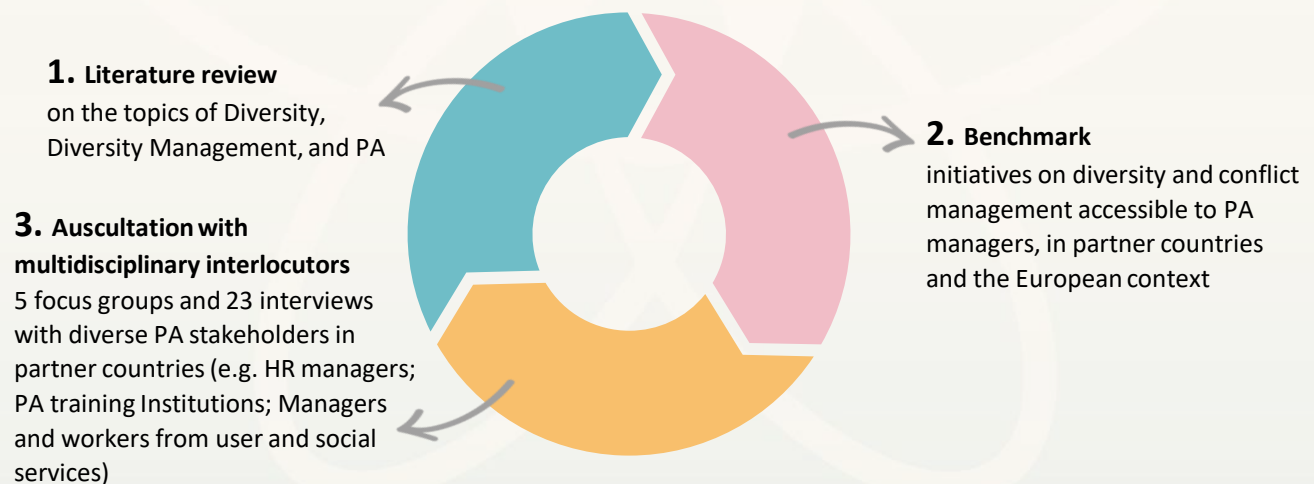
InPluServ stands for "Inclusive Public Services", and the project's main objective is to increase the quality and innovation of vocational training, the resources and tools for the development of diversity management skills (DM), addressed in particular to managers of the Public Administration (PA), through work-based methodologies, thus contributing to making public services and working environments more inclusive.

The following results were collected and analysed with the purpose of setting a support ground and starting point for the development of the next project phases, through research activities that aimed to:

Understand the state of the art of Diversity and Diversity Management (DM), the reality at the PA context and the real needs faced by PA managers in each of the project partner countries (Italy, Portugal, Netherlands, Spain, Cyprus) in terms of diversity, skills and resources needed to manage diversity and inclusion.

What activities were conducted?

Research activities were conducted between February and July 2022 in a defined, interrelated order:

1. Literature review
on the topics of Diversity, Diversity Management, and PA

2. Benchmark
initiatives on diversity and conflict management accessible to PA managers, in partner countries and the European context

3. Auscultation with multidisciplinary interlocutors
5 focus groups and 23 interviews with diverse PA stakeholders in partner countries (e.g. HR managers; PA training Institutions; Managers and workers from user and social services)

Co-construction as key for the research development:
InPluServ brings together a team of seven partners from five European countries, that represent different institutions and disciplinary backgrounds. Contributing to the co-construction of the project, supported on the diversity of knowledge and exchange of unique perspectives within the project partnership.

Research activities were led by the University of Porto (PT, action research and intervention in Work Psychology) and all partners contributed with the conduction of country-level activities (ANCI Umbria and INCA (IT), partnership between a Municipalities network and a labour assistance Institution; University of Barcelona (ES), learning methodologies and digital technologies; Center For Social Innovation and Cyprus Chamber Of Commerce And Industry (CY), intervention with socially vulnerable groups; InDialogue (NL) credit recognition system).

Literature review

Diversity concept

→ It seems there is not a clear and agreed definition of diversity, but literature agrees that diversity is focused on the different attributes among individuals and groups, comprehending several different dimensions, from more or less visible to more or less stable to being relations-oriented or job-oriented.

→ Dimensions are interrelated and a person's diversity attributes should not be considered separately from one another, as it influences the understanding of diversity impacts and consequences experienced by individuals and groups.

→ Diversity is also socially constructed, having different meanings and implications across different cultures.

(Doycheva, 2019; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Kapoor, 2011; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Mor Barak, 2017; OECD, 2009; Qin et al., 2014; Quemener, 2020; Simons et al., 1999; Unzueta & Binning, 2010; Wrench, 2015; Yadav & Lenka, 2020)

Diversity Management (DM)

→ Consists of a set of different practices that are developed by organizations aimed to retain and promote diversity within their workforce, and can comprehend different initiatives, from policies to awareness activities or training programs.

→ The inclusion approach of DM promotes a culture of inclusion, is sensible to the implications faced by diverse groups within the context, and understands that individuals are different and have different needs.

(European Commission, 2017; Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012; Intercultural Cities, 2021; Kellough & Naff, 2004; Kersten, 2000; Nolan-Flecha, 2018; Pitts, 2006, 2007; Sabharwal et al., 2018; Thomas, 1991; WEF, 2020)

Diversity and Inclusion at Public Administration (PA)

→ Is becoming more central in recent years, as it imposes on PA a responsibility to answer both the needs of their diverse user population and the critical diversity characteristics of their workforce.

→ The PA manager's role, through the adoption of inclusive leadership practices, is fundamental to create inclusive and empowering environments for a diverse PA workforce, fostering a stronger change for inclusion among PA workers, than the solely existence of diversity and inclusion policies on themselves.

(Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015; Gerson, 2020; Hoang et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2017; Nolan-Flecha, 2018; OECD & EUPAN, 2015; OECD, 2009, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b; Ozgen, 2018; Pitts et al., 2010; Pitts, 2009)

Benchmark

Initiatives at European and national level

→ Diversity and inclusion in the workplace have been a recent topic of interest European wide (e.g. *Diverse and Active* project (under development) and *Diversity@Work* project (2019-2020)).

→ However, it seems that there are few training offers tailored exclusively for PA managers work activity, which highlights the need for an integrated training offer that aligns diversity and inclusion contents with practical tools for the managers to be able to bring their work reality to the focus of the training and develop actions to intervene in the needs of their contexts.

(Active Citizens Fund; Autonomous University of Barcelona (ES); Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment (PT); Diversity Charter (CY); European Commission; Federation of Municipalities of Catalonia (ES); Foundation Soldalitas (IT); Institute Diversitas (ES); Intercultural Cities Program; National Institute of Administration (PT); Public Administration School (ES))

Auscultation with multidisciplinary interlocutors

Positive outcomes and challenges of diversity

→ Diversity is perceived as bringing different perspectives and ideas, which contribute to both innovation at work and the representativeness of public diversity and diverse needs within PA.

→ When managed with inclusion, diversity promotes teams to develop more adaptative and flexible behaviours and attitudes towards including diversity within teams (e.g. providing reasonable accommodations and understanding the other's different perspective).

→ Diversity in itself brings more challenging situations (with an impact on management) than conflicts.

→ Challenges are related to dealing with the different (views, perspectives, and realities) that diversity brings, and how to promote an inclusive environment on the teams to attend to these differences with equity, including them as the 'normal' and not in relation to what is the 'view of normal' in the work context.

Final considerations and practical implications
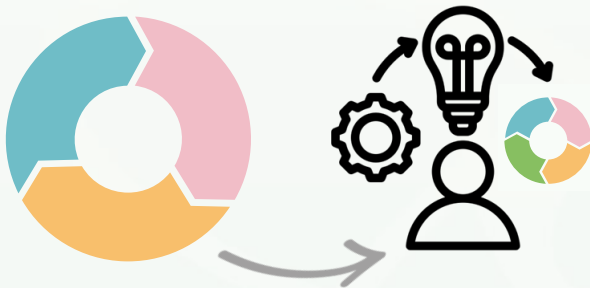
Proposing an original contribution by focusing the analysis on the managers' reality and needs for action on diversity and inclusion on their work activity

→ Comparing the findings gathered, a mismatch can be perceived. Literature on the role of managers seems to tend to come from a more prescribed view, that focuses on what needs to be done and not on how and in what way it should be done by managers to promote diversity and inclusion in the PA work contexts.

→ However, the auscultation highlighted that PA managers expressed a strong need for a training course that can help them solve, in practical terms, the real needs that they find in their work context in terms of diversity challenges to work towards providing a more inclusive workplace.

→ These results will support the development of a training program for PA managers, able to promote the development of a set of information and tools that allow the managers to better understand diversity in their work context and identify their management needs to develop actions to work towards diversity and inclusion, with the purpose of promoting transformation in the context of Public Administration in national contexts across Europe towards the co-construction of an inclusive environment at different levels and departments within these organizations.

For more information about the InPluServ project visit our social media channels or contact us via email

This document was developed in November 2022 for external communication of the InPluServ project