

Bergen, Vestland County, Norway



## Bergen Opportunity

Keyword(s):

**Labour Market and VET**

**Migration and Integration**



### Introduction

Bergen Opportunity is a mentor and leadership program for skilled migrants in the western part of Norway. Around 17% of the population has an immigrant background, yet there is very little cultural diversity in leadership positions in academia, media, politics, and businesses in our region. Immigrants are more likely to be overqualified, outside the labor market and stagnate in their careers, a tendency across all of Norway. The mentorship and leadership program educates and inspires leaders from the ethical majority as well as aspiring leaders from the ethnical minority on diversity and leading in a diverse society.

### Main challenge

We regularly ask our 3000 members representing 100.000 employees in the region what are the main challenges for the businesses in our region to grow in the future. The most important challenge for the past decade is attracting and retaining the right competency. More concrete high-skilled labor nationally and internationally is needed. When 17% of our population have poorer opportunities in the labor market, we are failing to take advantage of vital human capital and decrease our opportunities to attract and retain talent from the international labor market.

### Timing

The initiative was started on the tail of the refugee crisis in Europe, increasing the pressure on the multicultural society.



## **Objective**

We have a threefold objective in terms of the participants. Firstly, we want our participants to achieve career progress (new employer, new position, board positions, etc.). Secondly, we want to achieve more cultural diversity in leadership positions across sectors. Thirdly, we want more role models with immigrant backgrounds in all parts of work-life and society. The general goal of the project is to develop diversity leadership in the majority and minority population and have a positive effect on attitudes towards diversity.

## **Target group**

Ambitious high-skilled immigrants in our region. We want a broad range of immigrants in terms of age, gender, nationality, educational background, work experience, preferred industry, ethnicity, and job situation (unemployed, over-qualified, in a relevant position, leader position and entrepreneur). The second target group is leaders from different industries with a good business network. People who can affect the diversity and inclusion work internationally, and also extend the participants network and opportunities.

## **Geographical range**

Vestland County

## **Stakeholders and partners**

Our partners are the municipality, county, and state. The partners are involved through a project group and a strategic group. The project group consists of advisors working with diversity in the partner organizations and assist in finding mentors and mentees, interviewing mentees and similar practical matters. The strategic group consists of directors from the partners who meet annually to receive updates about the project and provide direction for the future. The strategic group is invited to hold a speech for all participants annually to talk about how their organizations work with diversity.

## **Strategy / materials**

The initiative was taken from our expert group "Diversity and Inclusion" consisting of executives in business life. We did provide a policy initiative to the municipalities 4-year-plan for diversity and inclusion in 2018, but mainly we wrote applications to

the municipality, county and state asking for a financial contribution. This was granted for three years from all the contacted partners. The project has recently been started up in other Norwegian cities such as Trondheim and Stavanger in 2021. They have had difficulties receiving grants but received a lot of help from directors from our partners who have promoted the project.

### **Resources**

We did not conduct a feasibility study and created proposals on our own time. These were later covered by the grants.

### **Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

The project is anchored in SDG 10 reduced inequalities.

### **Innovation(s)**

The main innovation is to develop more robust organizations and institutions through diversity leadership. Through the program participants and mentors start to see diversity as a resource instead of a hindrance. We believe purpose driven companies that comply with SDG and use it to drive their profitability will succeed in the future. This involves recruiting cultural diversity, creating a healthy psychosocial work environment, using differences actively to boost problem solving and innovation.

### **Evaluation**

We evaluate the program based on participants career progress after ended program and after three years.

### **Success parameters**

Showing the value of diversity. Shattering glass ceilings to leadership positions and board rooms. Being active in the public debates about handling diversity. Achieving more role models with immigrant background across industries. Shifting attitudes among immigrant sceptics by showing the upside of diversity and not focusing solely on the issues with integration like negative social control, unemployment, language difficulties and cultural differences. Our partners provide services for the

whole population. Achieving focus on diversity in their organizations is pivotal to creating better services for the whole population.

### **Impact**

We do surveys of mentors and mentees after ended program and after three years. We measure whether they have had career progress, whether their qualifications match their position better now than before, whether they are in a leadership position, whether they have had personal development, whether they see themselves more as a role model after the program and whether they believe diversity to be a resource after the program.

The results so far show that 7 out of 10 have had career progress after a year. A small proportion (2-4 out of 20) have progressed to leadership positions after a year, and we expect to see a larger shift towards leadership after three years. Mentors and mentees report being very content with the entirety of the program and report significant personal development. We also see a clear impact in terms of involvement among the immigration population at our meeting arena both from the stage and in the audience.

### **Impediments**

We run a leadership and mentor program so the responsibility is on the participants to achieve career progress. A good recruitment strategy is necessary to find motivated and deserving candidates that we believe will be inspiring role models for immigrants and change attitudes towards immigrants in mainstream media, business life and in society.

### **Replicability**

The Chambers of commerce have a similar organization in Norway and it is easy to adopt the strategy across our region. Through the Norwegian Chamber of Commerce, we have presented the opportunity framework as late as October 2021. The project can be adopted both by public, private and volunteer initiatives, but it is important that the project is driven by an ambition to create profitability more than “do good”.

## Concluding remarks

The Opportunity project has strengthened our organization, member businesses and partners through new perspectives on leadership in a diverse work-life and society.

## Website/Social Media profile(s) of the initiative

[www.bergenopportunity.no](http://www.bergenopportunity.no), [www.bergen-chamber.no](http://www.bergen-chamber.no)

Linkedin: Bergen Opportunity

## Contact details

Iver@bergen-chamber.no

+47 47 68 20 11

<b>Contributor</b>	Iver Belle-Ramos, Advisor Business and Politics Bergen Chamber of Commerce
<b>Researcher/interviewer</b>	Shahnaz Amin Haaq
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