

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION – A CASE OF SELECT INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Internationally, companies have made DEI metrics a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and have linked executive compensation to their direct contributions. With the recent changes, due to the anti-DEI executive orders and increasing legal and political challenges, facing such initiatives of the United States of America (USA), the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs all across the globe are disrupted. Though there are studies in DEI programs, policies, and initiatives in various sectors and policy levels, very little study is done on investments. Hence, this study proposes a unique approach regarding the DEI perspectives and relevant investment policy decisions. Nifty 50, an Indian stock market Index representing the performance of the 50 largest Indian companies listed as of 17th March 2025, in the National Stock Exchange (NSE), is the sample framework from which the sample of organizations was chosen for data collection. Deductive Summative Analysis approach is used in the study. Areas such as workforce composition, inclusive compensation and benefits, millennials' induction to employment, and awareness creation still need more attention. The study was done based on available key terms from the sourced documents.

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## 1 Introduction

India is the largest democratic country, and its constitutional provisions (Legislative Department, 2025) and regulatory mechanisms are also strong and highly influential at the political and social levels of Indians. Though India has varied cultures, (Social Samosa. 2025), language, and belief systems, the common man's life is protected with the strong support of its constitutional provisions. Some of them are, the right to equality (Article 14), prohibition of discrimination (Article 15), equality of opportunity (Article 16), the right to life and personal liberty (Article 21), the right of minorities and promotion of educational and economic interests (Article 46), ensure that the treatment of its citizens in various walks of life are safe and sound. Thus, the constitutional provisions create a legal foundation in sectors, such as education, employment, and social welfare, promoting an inclusive society that respects diversity.

Though there is no specific legal mandate, various legal provisions and regulations indirectly promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles in the workplace. They are, labor laws, corporate governance norms, and industry-specific regulations that create an inclusive and equitable work environment through anti-discrimination practices, gender parity, accommodations for disabilities, and prevention of sexual harassment. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has a Corporate Governance Code that encourages diversity on boards of publicly listed companies, focusing on gender diversity. But it is not a mandatory DEI policy. While there is no specific law mandating DEI frameworks, several national and international organizations have voluntarily embraced DEI guidelines. Codes by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), National Foundation for Corporate Governance (NFCG), and initiatives such as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus mainly on promoting social justice, equality, and the rights of disadvantaged groups in trade and business.

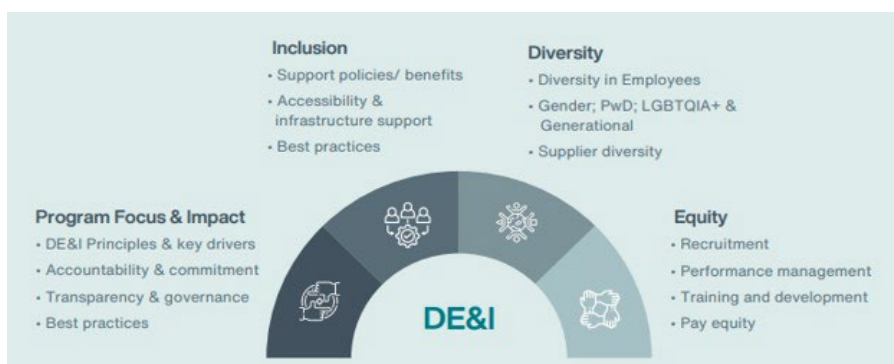
## 2 Background

Internationally, companies have made DEI metrics a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and have linked executive compensation to their direct contributions (HR Brew, 2025; Conference Board, The. 2025; HR Executive. (2025). With the advent

of the recent changes due to the anti-DEI executive orders (Whitehouse, 2025) and increasing legal and political challenges facing such initiatives of the United States of America (USA), the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs all across the globe are disrupted. A number of major corporations (Forbes, 2025; Ng, E., Fitzsimmons, et al., 2025) has rolled back their DEI programs. They are MLB, Warner Bros. Discovery, Goldman Sachs, Paramount, Bank of America, BlackRock, Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Wells Fargo, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Disney, Deloitte, Google, NPR, Accenture, Amazon, Amtrak, the Smithsonian Institution, and the FBI. This move impacts the existing diversity targets, renaming programs, omitting DEI language from public reports, and discontinuing DEI partnerships across the globe (finance.yahoo.com, 2025).

To understand the reasons and effects of such moves, it is necessary to understand the lay theory of diversity that encompasses the zero-sum and win-win approaches. The zero-sum beliefs (ZSBs) presume that the efforts to advance diversity come at the expense of the majority; the win-win beliefs (WWBs) assume that diversity initiatives can benefit all racial groups. Proving the theory, the present administration of the United States of America (USA) is also of the opinion that the investments made in DEI initiatives are not giving any value to the money spent; at the same time, merit cannot be compromised for any radical ideologies.

Due to an executive order released in one corner of the world impacting the entire globe (HR Brew. In 2025, it is a must to understand the scenario concerning voluntary investments made by Indian organizations in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. According to Aon India's 2022 National Wellbeing Survey India by Brand Equity Foundation (2023), 81% of Indian enterprises have indicated that their investment in employee wellbeing initiatives (including DEI initiatives) has increased since 2021.



**Figure 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coverage**

Source: India Brand Equity Foundation (2023)

Figure 1 above depicts the coverage of most DEI investments made by Indian organizations.

### 3 Review of literature

The term DEI includes the mere idea of tolerance and respect for others regardless of their age, gender, race, political and religious beliefs, assumed purposes and values, physical and mental abilities, and sexual orientation, (Burleson, et al., 2022; Park, C.H., Park, S. and Kwon, B., 2025). Investment in DEI initiatives has been looked at with various emotions and perspectives. From the point of view of an investor, it carries both positive and negative ideologies. Carla, F. et al's (2023) positive note on the partnership between Apple and CNote has been seen as a competitive advantage to both in terms of their investment in economic equality, racial justice, gender equity, and climate change initiatives. Through the lens of lay theories, the benefit or outcome of DEI investments would always be with win-win expectations, as noted by MIT Strategy Forum (2022). Corporate attention to DEI leads to long-term shareholder value, rather than short-term. It is a strong case for startup investors to integrate DEI into investment decisions (Kacperczyk, A. 2008; Standley, K., & Javorka, M., 2025). According to Mercer (2025), a investment consulting organization, those organizations exhibiting a strong DEI history, perform better, and their work environment boosts innovation (Amazing Workplaces, 2024; Armstrong, A., 2024). Though there are studies in DEI programs, policies, and initiatives in various sectors and policy levels, there is very little done on investments made in DEI. Hence, this study tries to provide wider knowledge

regarding the DEI perspectives and relevant investment policy decisions (Tucker, E., 2023). Management, communication, and business disciplines have incorporated some DEI vocabulary (Sethi and Cambrelen, 2022). Diversity has been studied about corporate leadership and gender equality (Nishii et al., 2018; Nishii and Leroy, 2020), particularly in the public relations profession (Meng and Neill, 2021; Shah, 2015; Topic, 2022); its effectiveness concerning corporate outcomes (Gonzalez and DeNisi, 2009) and globalization, workforce and inclusion (Shore et al., 2018), among several other related topics.

#### 4 Research methods

Nifty 50, an Indian stock market Index representing the performance of the top 50 Indian companies listed as of 17th March 2025, in the National Stock Exchange (NSE), is the sample framework from which the sample of organizations was chosen for data collection. Documents such as (Integrated) Annual Reports (AR), Sustainability Reports (SR), Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reports (BRSR), ESG Reports, and Environmental Reports (some organizations have given DEI initiatives in their environmental reports) were retrieved from the respective home pages of the chosen organizations for identifying DEI words and texts used as shown in Figure 1. The period of the study is restricted to 2019 – 2024 (5) financial years. The final selection of documents went through a rigorous process in multiple stages, and ultimately, 40 organizations were chosen for the study, applying exclusion and inclusion strategies using the PRISMA (2024) protocol as follows:

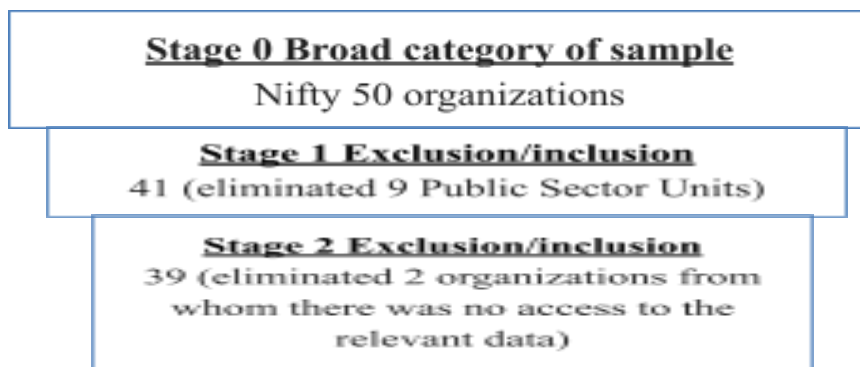


Figure 2: PRISMA Protocol (Sample Selection)

Out of the Nifty 50 organizations, nine public sector units (PSUs) were eliminated, as they have certain mandatory clauses to fulfill in terms of quota and other regulations (Tanya Settles, 2025), they do not fall under the volunteer investor, the purpose of the study, and two organizations from whom there was no access to the required data, also were eliminated.

**Table 1: PRISMA Protocol (Year-wise Document Selection)**

Year	(Integrated) Annual Reports	Sustainability Reports	Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reports	Environmental, Social, and Governance Reports	Total
2019-20	19	12	1	6	39
2020-21	17	13	3	7	40
2021-22	16	12	4	4	36
2022-23	16	13	1	6	36
2023-2024	11	9	4	10	34

Table 1 shows the year-wise selection of documents. As not all organizations have published or made their reports publicly available, or some reports do not have enough information or only one-line explanations are available, the selection of documents was extended to all available reports. Thus, Annual Reports (including integrated (AR), Sustainability Reports (SR), Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reports (BRSR), Environmental, Social and Governance Reports (ESGR) were included in the list.

## Codes and categories

The codes and categories identified are the texts and words in the source documents. The entire collection of words and texts were classified into major codes and categories of various dimensions (the India Brand Equity Foundation, 2023) as follows:

The data were categorised into three major codes such as diversity, equity, and inclusion. Each major code was categorised as generic and specific.

Diversity-generic, diversity-company specific,diversity-policy specific, diversity-by-women-composition, diversity-by-LGBTQIIA+,

disability-specific, youth/millennials-specific were brought under the code ‘diversity’. Equal benefits and open commitment to gender parity are considered under the code ‘equity’. Explicitly stated as an equal opportunity employer, racial and ethnic inclusion, flexible work arrangements, and employee-as-a-parent support programs are brought under the code ‘inclusion’.

The reported vocabulary that may not come under any of the above is brought under the ‘not specific or combined, or not fitting’ type.

### **Exclusion criteria**

The words and/or texts or meaning to, “stakeholder inclusion, social, community, society, social welfare, community welfare, family, mandatory, corporate social responsibility terms, public sector, quota for minorities, mandate, regular technical learning and training as a part of continuous improvement, aspirant training, common management development programs, regular or common human rights training, regular health checkups, common grievance redressal mechanisms, common mentoring, mandatory board diversity, regular employee engagement and employee induction events, common or regular vacation and leave on medical grounds, legally mandated transfer and transport policies” were excluded. As the study is restricted to inbound investments of the employers, the social or outbound investments are excluded.

### **Inclusion criteria**

The words and/or texts were grouped and taken as major, minor, and sub-dimension for discussion. Major dimensions were diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Minor dimensions were grouped as specific to the company, culture, function, gender, ability, age, race, benefits, employment conditions, policy-related, global, or otherwise membership in DEI matters, support services, and special training offered and recognized with honors and awards for their success in the DEI space. Specific dimensions were the specific initiatives stated as a unique feature of the organizations offered in the DEI space.

## Analysis/Results

Deductive Summative Analysis approach is used in the study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Based on the contents collated from the available reports, the frequency of each specific dimension has been connected to the respective specific dimension under the respective major dimension. The terms were carefully noted only once in the organization chosen, not as many as they appear. Thus, the observations were presented as follows:

**Table 2: Dimension-based observations on DEI Initiatives**

Major dimension	Specific Dimensions	Minor Dimensions	Frequency of occurrence by companies (names are not revealed) N=39	Percentage
Diversity-generic	Company-specific diversity initiatives are given explicitly		3	8
	Board Diversity Policy (only if women and/or DEI-specific terms are stated explicitly)		5	13
	Cultural diversity details are clearly stated		2	5
	The diversity hiring agenda is explicitly stated		19	49
	Gender Diversity-generic	Gender diversity targets	1	3
		Career support initiatives other than regular career plan events	7	18
		Diversity metrics, surveys, audits, reviews, and reporting information are explicitly stated	4	10
	Diversity by women	Diversity women network	1	3
		All women's branches/units established data explicitly stated	7	18



Major dimension	Specific Dimensions	Minor Dimensions	Frequency of occurrence by companies (names are not revealed) N=39	Percentage
		One or more gender specific initiatives exclusively for women	1	3
		Return-to-work policy for women in case of career breaks	9	23
		Women leadership-friendly initiatives	8	8
		Women-specific support, reward, and recognition programs organized (For e.g. Women-of-the-organization recognition)	9	23
		Women-in-every-team initiative stated	1	3
		The workforce composition by women is explicitly stated >=50% 31 to 49% 11 to 30% 1 to 10%	12 1 4 2 5	31
		The rate of women in leadership 1 to 10% 11 to 20% 21 to 30%	6 2 2 2	15
		Women in heavy-duty operations of the business	2	5
	<b>LGBTQIIA+</b>	LGBTQIIA+ friendly policies explicitly stated	10	26
		Gender-neutral utilities available	1	3
		LGBTQUI+ friendly environment ensured	2	5
		Gender reassignment benefits are given (Reimbursement of surgery expenses and	2	5

Major dimension	Specific Dimensions	Minor Dimensions	Frequency of occurrence by companies (names are not revealed) N=39	Percentage
		further medical support)		
		Transgender in heavy-duty operations	1	3
		LGBTQAI+ Specific recruitment program organized	1	3
	<b>Disability</b>	Disability-friendly policy	5	13
		Disability friendly accessibility in the workspace	10	26
		Support group exclusively for disabled	1	3
	<b>Youth/Millennials</b>	Workforce Composition by Millennials	2	5
<b>Equity</b>	<b>Equal benefits provided (beyond mandates only)</b>	Equal medical benefits to all	1	3
		Future commitments on gender parity are explicitly stated	10	26
<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Explicitly stated as an equal opportunity employer</b>		11	28
	<b>Racial and ethnic inclusion is explicitly stated</b>		2	5
	<b>Flexible work arrangements are provided as the need arises</b>		16	41
	<b>Employee as a parent (support programs offered)</b>		12	31
<b>Not specific or combined of all or not fitting into any of the above</b>	<b>The DEI Policy is explicitly stated</b>		39	100

Major dimension	Specific Dimensions	Minor Dimensions	Frequency of occurrence by companies (names are not revealed) N=39	Percentage
	The Inclusion and Diversity Council is present		3	8
	DEI support group/resource group available		10	26
	DEI-specific training, empowerment, sensitization, and awareness programs offered		11	28
	Membership/partnership/deals with global DEI regulators/collectives		5	13
	Gained significant honors/awards for leadership in the DEI space		9	23

With the inclusion and exclusion criteria in mind, the documents have been carefully read, and the approaches adopted by the chosen organizations regarding their investment in DEI initiatives have been summarized and shown in Table 2.

## 5 Discussion

Experts believe that the organizations prone to DEI investments, make better decisions on scarce resources (ESG Dive, 2024; Tanya Settles, 2025; Standley, K., & Javorka, M., 2025). Though most of the employers across the globe feel and prove that the DEI initiatives help (Social Samosa. 2025) them achieve the innovation targets, culture-bound business goals and bring in varied perspectives to the business, many of them are rolling back on their planned programs and initiatives in response to the recent executive orders that were released by the present government of the USA (Morningstar, 2025). Both of these statements are proven to be contradictory to each other in practice, in this study. From the given observations, it is clear that certain specific areas boost the retention level (Armstrong, A., 2024; Avery et al. 2008) such as diversity hiring (Tanya Settles,

2025), return-to-work program, women recognition in leadership, (Tucker, E., 2023), LGBTQIIA+ policies, disability friendly policies (Avery, D.R., et al. 2013), efforts are seriously taken into account, but in certain areas such as workforce composition, inclusive compensation and benefits, millennials induction to employment and awareness creation (Tucker, E., 2023) still need more attention.

## 6 Conclusion

Based on the Deductive Summative Analysis of publicly available reports from 39 select Indian organizations listed on the Nifty 50 index, this study provides the prevalence and focus areas of corporate DEI initiatives in India between 2019 and 2024. The study indicates that there is a significant adoption of DEI policies across the studied organisations. The study focused on various aspects in which the corporations invest in DEI initiatives in India. All of them explicitly state a DEI policy. There is a notable emphasis on certain dimensions, particularly diversity hiring. Nearly half of them explicitly stated a diversity hiring agenda. Women-friendly initiatives such as return-to-work policies, women-specific support and recognition programs, and workforce composition by women also show considerable prevalence.

The adoption of flexible work arrangements and employee-as-a-parent support programs suggest a broader approach towards inclusive workplace practices. Specific gender diversity targets, detailed information on diversity metrics and reporting, initiatives for LGBTQIIA+ and disabled individuals beyond general policies and accessibility, and explicit focus on workforce composition by millennials are areas of less focus, with less explicit and frequent reporting.

In conclusion, while the studied Indian organizations demonstrate a strong foundational commitment to DEI through policy adoption and significant focus on diversity hiring and certain gender-related initiative. There is variability in the depth and breadth of reported initiatives across different dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This suggests that while progress is being made, a more comprehensive and explicitly communicated approach across all key DEI dimensions could further enhance inclusivity within these leading Indian corporations. The reliance on publicly available data necessitates caution in generalizing these findings, as the actual implementation and impact of these

initiatives may extend beyond what is publicly reported. Whether the DEI initiatives are adopted with a win-win approach or a zero-sum approach, there is a dire need to focus on aspects such as workforce composition, inclusivity in benefits, and, above all, greater awareness to be created among the stakeholders, especially among the employees.

## **Limitations**

The study delved into understanding the corporate approach towards DEI investments on a conceptual level only. Hence, there is a scope for more depth of research into the impact of the investments on businesses. It was done based on the available key terms from the sourced documents. Hence, the terms that were not used by the chosen organizations are not covered in the study.

## **Originality/Value**

The article is a work on various approaches adopted by Indian corporations in investing in DEI initiatives. It is an original work written based on secondary data sourced from the homepages of the respective organizations. This account will be a crucial resource for future researchers studying this period and its impact. International policy and its impact are the core idea of this work. Hence, this work provides valuable insights for both scholars and human resource experts working to advance DEI initiatives in their respective organizations.

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