



European Centre for Economic,
Policy Analysis and Affairs

Research paper

Results of the survey on the “Discrimination in the workplace”

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1. POLICY CONTEXT

Changes in the European arena

The political, social and economic changes that have occurred in Europe throughout the last 50 years have significantly influenced the European political agenda. Indeed, the consequences of such changes are visible both at a general level, within the European society and, at a more specific level, in the work environment.

Defining Discrimination

Discrimination can be defined as treating, or proposing to treat, someone unfavorably because of a personal characteristic protected by law. Discrimination can be direct and indirect: the former often happens because people make unfair assumptions about what people with certain personal characteristics can and cannot do. Indirect discrimination occurs when an unreasonable condition is imposed that disadvantages a person with a personal characteristic protected by law.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Questionnaire

The European Centre for Economic and Policy Analysis and Affairs (ECEPAA) has decided to launch the following survey in order to get a broader picture of the current situation with regard to diversity in the workplace. The data collected will also provide an evidence-based support for the advocacy activities that ECEPAA carries out with European policy makers, who specifically deal with these topics.

The questionnaire consisted in 11 questions, of which some were structured as multiple-choice questions whereas others were open ones.

With this survey, ECEPAA intends to better analyze and examine three aspects:

1. People's knowledge about the European legal framework on discrimination;
2. People's perception of discrimination in their workplace;
3. People's opinion on strategies to tackle discriminations in the workplace.

Data Collection

The questionnaire has been accessible through an online system from March the 28th until May the 23rd. In order to collect the largest number of answers, the survey has been sent out and promoted through:

- 1) ECEPAA's newsletter;
- 2) social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

We have tracked 99 online accesses to the survey, of which 57 has been the number of the complete questionnaires collected, in three different languages: English, French and Italian.

3. KEY OBSERVATIONS

European Legal Framework on discrimination

The principle of equality has been an element of the European Union's foundations from its early days and it first developed in the context of gender equality. The Treaty of Rome of 1957 required equal pay between men and women. Yet it was only with the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997 that the European Union introduced a specific power to combat discrimination on a wide range of grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Equality and respect for human rights are now at the base of the European Union's goals, legislation and institutions.

Employment discrimination law in the European Union comprises two directives, which were agreed by all EU member states in 2000 and the European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs is responsible for oversight. The Employment Equality Framework Directive (Directive 2000/78/EC) establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. It aims to protect everyone in the EU from discrimination based on age, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief in the workplace. The Racial Equality Directive (Directive 2000/43/EC) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in the workplace as well as in other areas of life such as education, social security, healthcare and access to goods and services.

As for the citizens' knowledge on European legislation, we have found there is a general awareness on the Directive 2000/43/EC: indeed, 72% replied to be aware of it. Nonetheless, only 49,1% of the people replied that they believe equality and non-discrimination are respected in their home countries, against 42,1% who believes that such principles are not respected.

At this point, it might be important to highlight that 61,4% of the respondents possess a Master's degree, and the remaining 38,6% possesses either a Bachelor's degree or a PhD.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Discrimination in the workplace

In May, in the UK, a female employee was sent home from work at a corporate finance company after refusing to wear high heels. The event sparked, once more, the wide debate about the sexism that lies behind dress codes for female employees. Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, has recently stated that the government will introduce legislation to protect transgender Canadians from discrimination and violence. News, articles and debates on the various strands of discrimination can be found on a daily basis. The topic is an extremely complex one and very much present.

The laws on equal rights between women and man were joined by new EU legislation in 2000 that prohibit discrimination on other grounds. Under these new laws it is illegal to discriminate against someone because of their racial and ethnic origin, religion and belief, disability, sexual orientation, age. These five areas of discrimination, together with gender discrimination, are included in the Amsterdam Treaty of the European Union as areas where the EU can act to prevent discrimination.

Employment Discrimination laws seek to prevent discrimination based on race, sex, religion, national origin, physical disability, and age by employers. A growing body of law also seeks to prevent employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Discriminatory practices include bias in hiring, promotion, job assignment, termination, compensation, retaliation, and various types of harassment.

With regard to the perceived level of diversity in the workplace: 24,6% of the respondents think that there is a low level; 57,9% medium, and 15,8% high. Moreover, 89,5% agreed in saying that diversity represents an added value for the workplace.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Strategies to tackle discrimination in the workplace

When asked their opinion about **the most effective means to counter discrimination in the workplace**, **42,6% of the respondents chose awareness campaigns and 31,9% legal actions.**

Providing employees with the necessary information is the first step in stopping discrimination. Managers must take the lead and ensure that discrimination is stopped in all departments and during every business initiative, such as hiring and firing. Many of the people agreed in saying that **hiring a diverse group of employees helps stop discrimination.** Employees learn to understand other cultures and ages, for example, and have a mutual respect for all team members. In addition, employees of different abilities, ages, races, ethnicities and genders bring a diverse mix of ideas and experiences that can capture a broader range of clients. Such framework clearly emerged from the answers: indeed, **43.3% of the respondents consider the monitoring of the recruiting procedures as the best measure to foster diversity in the workplace**, which is followed by trainings with 29,9% and monitoring the composition of the workforce with 22,7%.

The European Union (EU) is supporting a range of measures to combat discrimination, from funding projects, to carrying out research to supporting awareness-raising and information campaigns. In particular, since 2005, **the EU has promoted the establishment of several Diversity Charters** aimed at encouraging companies to implement and develop diversity policies. **Nevertheless, 86% of the people declared to not have heard** about it and the remaining 14% who have, said to have come across such initiative.

From our survey it is clear that, despite the good intentions, very often important initiatives, such as the **Diversity Charter, do not reach out to the people they are designed for and their impact remains very much limited.**

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

Discrimination in the workplace

- Providing employees with the necessary information about the means to counter discrimination.
 - Hiring a diverse group of employees helps stop discrimination.
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Diversity Management

- Diversity Management in the workplace could represent an important added value for the organization because:
 - a. The work culture and work procedures need to be adapted to the diverse components of the workplace
 - b. It would bring different perspectives, ideas, solutions
 - Important initiatives aiming at promoting diversity, such as the Diversity Charter, do not reach out to the people they are designed for and their impact remains very much limited
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The **European Centre for Economic and Policy Analysis and Affairs (ECEPAA)** is a non-profit organization specialized in the development of European Union projects in the field of research, education, youth, culture and social inclusion.

Founded in Brussels in 2011, ECEPAA implements projects in the aforementioned fields as well as carries out policy-oriented research while developing also assistance projects at local, national and international level.

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