

The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency's research projects at a glance:

Discrimination in job advertisements

Overview of the study

Job advertisements are an important means of recruiting personnel. They exert a decisive influence on whether or not a person applies for a job in the first place. The study investigates the extent to which job advertisements contain discrimination, or the risk of discrimination, and makes recommendations on how to design them so that discrimination is not an issue. The basis for the study was provided by the assessment of a content analysis of 5,667 nationwide job advertisements, from the printed press and on-line job portals, for the period 23 October to 10 November 2017. Additionally, a sample of 309 job advertisements from the "eBay small ads" portal were examined.

Authors, year of publication and title of the study

Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (2018): Discrimination in job advertisements. A study to assess job advertisements with a view to discrimination, exclusion mechanisms and positive measures. Berlin.

Results

Only a small proportion of discriminating job advertisements but, in some cases, with a risk of discrimination

For the main part (97.8%), no offences against the General Act on Equal Treatment (*Allgemeine Gleichbehandlungsgesetz – AGG*) were observed; only a very small proportion (2.2%) exhibited discrimination. However, this means that one out of five job advertisements (21.2%) contain a risk of discrimination. A risk of discrimination exists if an advertisement leads to a situation in which not all candidates feel equally addressed by the advertisement, or if it is not completely clear whether or not the advertisement contains discrimination.

Discriminatory job advertisement

Some 80% of discriminatory job advertisements are not formulated in a gender neutral manner; one out of five contain statements relating to age. An above-average number of discriminatory job advertisements are often found among advertisements placed by private households. On the whole, it was also shown that discrimination in advertisements for female-dominated professional groups occur slightly more often than for others.

Gender and age as key discrimination risks

- The risk of discrimination in job advertisements predominantly takes the form of wording that clearly has male, female or age-specific connotations with regard to the expected role or qualifications of candidates. This includes phrases such as "decision-maker", or "would love to hear from career starters".

- Discrimination risks are to be found more often in advertisements for male-dominated professional groups, such as those of managers, organisers, auditors and accounting or data processing experts. These advertisements attempt to purposefully reach out to men and/or young people preferably.
- Most often, job advertisements are written in the generic masculine form, to which the bracketed initials (m/w) are frequently appended. Gender-neutral forms of address or auxiliary typographical characters, such as the gender gap in (*Pilot_innen*) or the gender asterisk (*Kraftfahrer*in*) in German texts, are still not standard and not very widespread.

The role of photographs in job advertisements

- Photographs, too, can be a source of discrimination risks (20.3% of job advertisements contain a photograph). It is true that the majority of the photographs depict both men and women. It is noticeable, however, that in most cases only the corresponding gender is depicted in job advertisements for male and/or female-dominated professional groups.
- With respect to age, it can also be observed that about one-fifths of job advertisements (19%) exclusively depict young people. One out of five photographs (19%), at least also depict a person who has identification potential, for example, for people with a migration background.

Targeted addressing of groups

- Positive measures to target specific, under-represented groups are only to be found in 8% of the job advertisements studied. In most cases, these were job advertisements from the public service that fulfil their statutory obligation to give preference of employment to persons with a severe disability and persons who are equated with them (see Section 154 Social Code Book IX: Obligation of the Employer to Employ Severely Disabled Persons) as well as women or men, in cases where the candidates are equally qualified.
- Only in a few job advertisements (8.8%), which reach out to specific groups, do employers also use the possibility of indicating that applications are welcome from all of the persons protected under the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), or that diversity in the firm is generally appreciated.

Special evaluative study of 'eBay small ads'

- A total of 35.9% of the selected 309 job advertisements, taken from eBay's 'small classified ads' section, contained discrimination. In these instances, the advertisements were predominantly from private households (58.4%) and were not written in a gender-neutral manner.

Conclusions

- Private households and very small enterprises need additional information on how to write a job advertisement that is in conformity with the AGG.
- In formulating and designing job advertisements, employers still tend to be guided by stereotypes and seem, in part, to have concrete pictures of suitable candidates that are then reflected in said job advertisements.
- Although it is true that, in the meantime, patent discrimination is only seldom to be found in job advertisements, it is also true that the possibilities for drafting job advertisements in such a way as to get as many persons as possible to show interest in the job advertisement, and then apply for the job, are not yet being exploited to the fullest.
- Job advertisements that are in conformity with the AGG are only one part of a discrimination-free application procedure. However, they reduce the risk of discrimination on the threshold of the application process.

The publication related to the study also contains suggestions on how to design a job advertisement so that discrimination is not an issue.

More information:

The entire report on the survey can be downloaded => [here](#), available only in German language.

Contact details: Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency

Glinkastrasse 24

D-10117 Berlin

Telephone: 030 18555-1855

E-Mail for counselling: beratung@ads.bund.de

E-Mail for general questions: poststelle@ads.bund.de