Pilot project 'Depersonalised application procedures'
- Summary of outcomes –

Outcomes of the evaluation implemented by the Unit for Co-operation between Science and the Working World at the European University Viadrina (German abbreviation: *KOWA*) as well as the Institute for the Study of Labour (German abbreviation: *IZA*)

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Initial situation

In spite of improved outline conditions at institutions, discrimination on the labour market is still widespread (cf. *inter alia*, Akman et al., 2005; McGinnity et al., 2009). Particularly people from a migrant background, elderly job-seekers and women with children are discriminated against in the course of application procedures. For example, a study for the German labour market has shown that merely the indication of a Turkish-sounding name will reduce the chances of being invited to a job interview by approximately 14 percent on an average, even if the qualification is the same as in the case of other applicants. At medium and small enterprises, this reduction is even 24 percent (cf. Kaas and Manger, 2012).

There are clues indicating that the discrimination rate declines in the course of the application procedure. This means, that during the first stage of the application procedure, when the decision is reached on whether an applicant is invited to a job interview, this rate is highest (cf. Cedley and Foroni, 2008). Depersonalised application procedures are a potentially attractive option for reducing discrimination during the application procedure. The basic idea of depersonalised applications is to restrict the application documents to data which merely refer to the qualification. Personal data, such as gender, a potential migrant background, marital status or age of the applicant are supposed to be not visible when first examining the application documents in order to prevent even unconscious discriminations on ground of these characteristics.

To refrain from providing personal data only applies to the first stage of the application procedure, that is when the decision on whether inviting a person to a job interview or to an aptitude test is reached. As soon as the personnel managers have decided to invite an applicant, they are granted access to his/her personal data.

What counts during a job interview is not only the qualification, but also the applicant's personal appearance. The concept of depersonalised application procedures starts out from the assumption that reservations and prejudice during and after a personal talk will have less effect than when a decision is reached on the basis of written application documents.

An international comparison reveals: Particularly in the English-speaking regions (**USA, United Kingdom, Canada**) it has been customary practice for many decades to refrain from providing personal data. Over the past few years, depersonalised application procedures have also been tested in various European countries, as for example in **Sweden**, in the **Netherlands**, in **Switzerland**, **France** and **Belgium**. It was reported from **Switzerland**, that foreign adolescents will have a considerably higher chance of getting an apprenticeship place, if they can apply for it anonymously. The personnel managers also estimated the Swiss pilot scheme in Zurich to be a success, since the application documents could be evaluated more objectively and efficiently due to the depersonalised procedure.

In **Belgium**, depersonalised application procedures have been introduced in all public authorities and have been maintained until now. There, the suspicion was voiced that these procedures

encourage those candidates to file their applications, who otherwise would not have done so due to a possible discrimination. In **Sweden**, the project aimed at increasing the chances of getting an employment at the public authorities of the city of Göteborg for persons with a migrant background and women and at counteracting potential discriminations against these groups of persons. In this context, the outcome was rated as encouraging. Thus, for both, women and applicants with a migrant background, the probability of being invited to a selection interview was raised. Moreover, the degree of probability to be offered a job was also increased for female applicants (cf. Åslund and Nordström Skans, 2012).

In co-operation with the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA), the Institute for the Study of Labour (German abbreviation: *IZA*) elaborated an expert opinion on depersonalised application procedures, providing a survey on experience at international level (cf. Krause et al., 2010). The outcome of this expert opinion was, *inter alia*, that depersonalised application procedures are basically adequate for reducing different forms of discrimination. On the basis of international findings, the *IZA* had elaborated guidelines for depersonalised application procedures. In August 2010, the FADA then gave official notice to carry out a pilot scheme in Germany, which was launched in November 2010.

Altogether eight organisations (enterprises, public bodies and local authorities) took part in this German pilot scheme on a voluntary basis and each of them for a period of 12 months. In various employment sectors, they examined incoming application documents where different methods of depersonalisation had been used.

The pilot project was scientifically supported and evaluated by the Co-operation Agency of Science and Employment of the European University Viadrina (German abbreviation: *KOWA*) and *IZA*.

The most important objective of the German project was to learn a lesson on the **practicability** of depersonalised application procedures, as comparable initiatives have not existed before in Germany. In addition, findings on the **effect** of this procedure should be gained as compared to conventional application situations which, however, cannot be rated as final, due to the fact that the pilot scheme serves as an example.

After this pilot scheme was announced, various **opinion polls** were launched to gather information on the German citizens' attitude to depersonalised application procedures. According to a survey implemented by the polling institute *'forsa'* on behalf of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency in 2010, 56 percent of the respondents actually like depersonalised application procedures or even like them very much. In a representative survey which was conducted online, the 'mingle Trend' (respondi AG), *inter alia,* ascertained the public opinion on depersonalised application procedures. Thus, 61 percent of approximately 1000 German respondents actually like the initiative on depersonalised applications, launched by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency.[1] The public opinion research institute in Allensbach, however, arrived at a different result. According to their findings, about 30 percent of the respondents

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[1] Compare: http://mingle-trend.respondi.com

prefer depersonalised applications, 24 percent of them are indecisive, and 46 percent hold the view that anonymous applications are not appropriate.[2]

When the eight organisations taking part had finished their pilot stage, the final evaluation was implemented. [3] Within the scope of the pilot scheme, altogether 8,550 depersonalised applications were examined.[4] On the whole, 1,293 persons were invited to an aptitude test or a job interview in the course of this pilot project. 246 persons were offered a job and/or a place in the course of a study or apprenticeship.

The report below presents the results of the German pilot scheme. Subsequent to an outline of the pilot project and the methods applied, the results of the so-called formative evaluation are presented, Subsequently, the results of the quantitative evaluation of the *IZA* are described to highlight the scientific findings about the chances of being invited within the scope of depersonalised application procedures. Due to data protection rules, all results are presented without allowing conclusions to be drawn to individual organisations taking part.

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[2] According to a representative survey by the market and trends research institute 'Ears and 'Eyes', 66 percent of the respondents endorsed the idea of depersonalised application procedures (cf. Ears and Eyes, 2010). Moreover, the non-representative study 'Application Practice 2011' was received by the media. According to this study, only 13.2 percent of the 'job seekers and those who are looking for a career' hold the view that in future, "enterprises should only accept depersonalised applications."

[3] An interim report outlining the currently ongoing projects had been submitted in May 2011.

[4] This refers to all applications which have been scrutinized within the scope of this pilot project by all participating organizations. Within the scope of quantitative impact analysis, however, not all data could be evaluated because of incomplete information, and therefore the number within the quantitative survey is lower.

The German pilot project

On the whole, eight organisations took part in the pilot project of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency. The majority of the organisations involved had already taken measures to promote diversity (e.g. diversity management or a women's quota) before they participated in this project. These organisations included four groups acting at a global level (*Deutsche Post DHL*, *Deutsche Telekom*, L'Oréal Germany, Procter & Gamble), three public authorities (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Federal Employment Agency, regional office for North Rhine-Westphalia and the municipal administration of Celle) as well as a medium-sized enterprise (MYDAYS). In this way, three different forms of organisation could be examined.

Sectors of employment

Various sectors of employment in those organisations were affected by this project. In this context, we differ between the following sectors:

- Young and upcoming experts (apprentices and students) – at five organisations[5]
- expert staff – at five organisations
- Executive staff (also management trainees) – at five organisations

At some of those organisations, all or several of the sectors of employment listed above were affected by depersonalisation, at others the focus was on one individual sector of employment.

Start and duration of the project

Due to the various job recruitment procedures and prerequisites customary at the individual organisations, the project was launched at different dates. The first of these organisations started with the depersonalised procedure already in September 2010. For a period of twelve months, all organisations taking part examined the entire depersonalised application documents referring to the chosen sector(s).

Extent of depersonalisation

Before launching the projects, all stakeholders agreed to the extent of depersonalisation, that is determining the characteristics which were supposed to be affected by depersonalisation. In the expert opinion elaborated prior to the start of this project, it was recommended to depersonalise the following data (cf. Krause *et al.*, 2010):

- Name
- Gender
- Nationality and place of birth
- Disability
- Date of birth (or age)

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[5] The 'students' are applicants for a dual study programme which is offered by some organisations.

- Marital status
- Picture[6]

In the course of the pilot project, this recommendation for action was largely attended. There were exceptions concerning the data on gender and disability, since support mechanisms could become applicable on account of legally stipulated goals and objectives (Social Code Book IX, Federal Act on Gender Equality).

Some of the particulars, such as e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, addresses or periods of employment allow indirect conclusions to be drawn about discrimination characteristics. The parties involved agreed to depersonalise these particulars to a great extent, too.

Methods of depersonalisation

The organisations decided to implement different methods of depersonalisation. Altogether four depersonalisation methods were applied in the course of the pilot scheme:

- Standardized application forms, refraining from sensitive data which allow conclusions to be drawn to the above said characteristics (either available for being downloaded or in the form of a particularly adapted online mask)[7] at three organisations (cf. scheme 2.4.1).

- Blanking out sensitive data by an online system (without adapting the online mask) – at an organisation (cf. scheme 2.4.2).

- Depersonalisation by entering the applicants' data in a standardised table (in line with criteria stipulated before) - at an organisation (cf. scheme 2.4.3).

- Blacking out sensitive data (manually or in the PDF file) which, directly or indirectly, allow conclusions to be drawn to the above said characteristics – at four organisations (cf. scheme 2.4.4).

Depending on the method applied, the depersonalisation was either done by the applicants themselves (standardised application form) or the applications received before were depersonalised by the organisation. The blanking out of sensitive data is a mixed procedure specific to this project. The applicants were requested not to provide any information on the above said characteristics. The data collected on characteristics (e.g. gender) during the previous process were blanked out subsequently by the online system – until the time when the invitation to the job interview was extended. In this context, the online mask was not comprehensively adjusted.

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[6] Characteristics such as religion, belief and sexual orientation have not been listed, since these possible grounds for discrimination are usually not mentioned in application documents. In cases where these data had been provided, they were depersonalised as well.

[7] Either a fillable, standardised application form was provided on the homepage of the organisation, which could be downloaded by the applicant and completed before being sent back (usually via e-mail). As an alternative, the respective online mask for the pilot scheme was adjusted adequately in case an online application system had been used already before.

When the applicants depersonalised their information and sensitive data were blanked out, their certificates (e.g. references of employers, leaving-certificates and the like) and letters of reference were not examined before the personal data had been entered again. In case the incoming applications were blacked out subsequently, the respective documents have been made available in a depersonalised form (e.g. certificates) to most of the organisations. When the data were entered into a table, the marks of the certificate were listed, however, complete certificates were not submitted to the personnel managers for examination.

The data of all participants were depersonalised for the so-called 'first step', i.e. until the decision was reached whether an applicant was invited to a job interview or an aptitude test (which both include a personal encounter). After the invitations had been sent off to the respective applicants, the personnel managers received the complete application documents. So this was the time when the personal data were entered again.

Conclusions and future prospects

The pilot project 'Depersonalised Application Procedures' was completed at the beginning of 2012 and was evaluated by the Unit for Cooperation between Science and the Working World (German abbreviation: *KOWA*) of the European University Viadrina as well as by the Institute for the Study of Labour (German abbreviation: *IZA*). In this context, two questions occupied centre stage: Are depersonalised application procedures feasible and what effect do they have?

After a duration of twelve months at all enterprises and public authorities, a total number of 8,550 depersonalised applications were examined. 1,293 persons were invited to an aptitude test or a job interview. 246 persons were offered a job and/or a place in the course of a study or apprenticeship.

Conclusions of the personnel managers

Prior to the pilot project the question was raised as to whether job placements are possible without the hitherto customary personal data on age, gender, marital status etc., and how much time it takes to achieve them. Within the scope of the evaluation, the personnel managers at the participating organisations were asked about their experiences gained in the pilot scheme.

The assessment by the personnel managers shows that depersonalised application procedures can **be implemented** in nearly all sectors of employment and that **vacancies** can be **filled successfully**.

⇨ The **lack of personal data** in the application documents, such as name, gender, age and marital status, is **not a problem** for the majority of personnel managers. According to the statements of some of the personnel managers, it is particularly the fact that photos are left out which contributes to focusing on qualifications and was evaluated as positive. Some even reported about applicants whom they possibly would not have invited in the course of the conventional procedure, but who had been convincing during their job interviews.

⇨ With regard to the method of depersonalisation, the use of **standardised application forms** proved to be an **advisable solution** which, as a rule, is suited for all forms of organisation that have been examined. In this context, the final summary of the personnel managers was positive across the board. However, blacking out data on conventional application documents is rather time-consuming and not feasible for larger groups of applicants.

⇨ **Many participants in this project** responded positive **to the fact that the introduction of depersonalised application procedures had triggered a** discussion about the recruitment methods applicable so far **at the relevant organisation. Some of the personnel managers involved stated that their former recruitment procedures had already comprehensively taken account of the aspect of diversity, and therefore, no additional potential could result from depersonalised applications.**

⇨ Some organisations noted that depersonalised application procedures had brought about **positive, intangible effects** (image gain, employer branding), since they give a clear signal

to applicants that data relating to gender, age, origin, marital status etc. are irrelevant in the recruitment process.

Conclusions of the applicants

The applicants who had filled in a standardised application form within the scope of this pilot scheme, were also requested to share their experiences. One of the targets was to work out how much time the new method takes for the applicants and which procedure they prefer.

⇨ **The depersonalisation with a standardised application form seems to be a feasible method for applicants.** According to their own assessment, 31 percent took less time for depersonalised applications than for conventional procedures, 44 percent could not state any difference between the two methods, and only 25 percent of the respondents said that the depersonalised procedure was more time-consuming.

⇨ **On the whole, 41 percent of the respondents estimated that their chances of being invited to a job interview were higher in the course of depersonalised procedures than in conventional ones.** 33 percent of them stated that there was no difference, no matter which method had been applied. According to the estimates of 26 percent of them, their chance was rated to be higher in the case of conventional procedures.

⇨ The survey among the applicants also referred to the description potential in standardised applications. **Accordingly, 54 percent of the respondents stated that they could describe their potential better in depersonalised application procedures and/or that it made no difference to them which one they had chosen for their applications.** 46 percent of the applicants said that they could better describe their potential in conventional application procedures.

Results concerning the effect of depersonalised applications

Avowedly, the target of depersonalisation is the equalisation of opportunities. Therefore, when analysing the effects of depersonalised application procedures, two aspects come to the fore:

First, it was examined whether all applicants *involved in the depersonalised application procedure* definitely had the same chance of being invited (so-called "probability of being invited") – both groups, those affected by discrimination and those exempted.

Second, it was examined whether due to the introduction of depersonalised application procedures for groups that are affected by discrimination the probability of being invited *as compared to conventional application procedures* has been changed.

The observed effects of depersonalised application procedures, however, must not be considered as representative, since the majority of participating organisations had already taken active measures for the promotion of diversity before. *To this extent, the participating enterprises and public authorities are a positive selection. Thus we have to start out from the assumption that the differences between the application procedures would be more significant in the case of less committed organisations.* The quantitative evaluation of different procedures which was

implemented by the Institute for the Study of Labour (*IZA*), provided important information on general trends. To gain concluding results, however, further research will be required – which last but not least is due to the exemplary nature of the pilot project.

⇨ **When the documents are depersonalised there is a tendency of equal opportunities for all groups of applicants.**

Depersonalised application procedures are supposed to offer equal chances of being invited to a job interview to all applicants – irrespective of the fact whether they might be affected by discrimination or not.

As a rule, this goal was attained in the course of the pilot project, since after the introduction of depersonalised application procedures the probability of being invited has been mostly the same for groups of persons who might be affected by discrimination and those who are exempted. During the various depersonalised application procedures, women and persons with a migrant background had the same chance of being invited to a job interview and/or aptitude test as other groups.

The comparison with conventional application procedures shows that there are concrete effects for the individual groups.

⇨ **As compared to conventional procedures, <u>women</u> tend to have a better chance of being invited to a job interview.**

There are clues indicating that this was the case in particular when the advertised post was described as suitable for persons having gained a certain vocational experience and not for first-time employees. Depersonalised application procedures obviously bring about a positive effect for women with regard to possible disruptions and gaps in their employment biography. Obviously, this applies in particular to younger women who had been discriminated against in the conventional application procedure on grounds of their potential wish to start a family.

In the case of applicants from a migrant background, the starting positions were different.

⇨ **Whereas before, the chances of being invited were lower for <u>applicants from a migrant background</u>, they improved after the introduction of depersonalised application procedures, since then their chances of being invited to a job interview have been the same as those for other applicants.**

In other cases, depersonalised application procedures do not have any effect on this group, that is in those circumstances where systematic differences did not exist for individual groups from the very starting position. What matters in this context is the fact that the organisations involved represent a positive selection as far as diversity is concerned. **In a representative sample of enterprises and public employers this aspect ought to play a considerably minor role, as high-quality empirical studies reveal a substantial extent of discrimination on the German labour market (cf., *inter alia*, Kaas and Manger, 2012).**

In a few exceptional cases there are clues indicating that depersonalised application procedures lead to an adjustment of chances of invitation in such a form that favoured groups of persons will

henceforth no longer experience systematically better chances to be invited to a personal interview.

Future prospects: After the pilot project: 'Application procedures focused on qualifications'

Within the scope of this pilot scheme, the shifting of the focus to qualifications was continuously considered as positive. In the long run it therefore seems to be reasonable to implement depersonalised application procedures, but at least those which are focused on qualifications.

In this context, it is refrained from providing personal data on the front page (picture, name, address, date of birth, place of birth, nationality and marital status). Further particulars possibly allowing indirect conclusions might be tolerated in those cases.

This type of application procedure would offer the advantage that personal data can no longer be discerned and thus are no longer the focus of attention. In this procedure the main focus is on qualifications, but certificates and conventional documents are also taken into account.

> ⇨ **Depersonalised applications and/or those which are focused on qualifications do not rule out the promotion of underrepresented groups.**

Following the first selection process on the basis of equal aptitude, performance and professional competence (qualifications), this shall continue to be possible during the second phase of the application procedure, too. Diversity-oriented strategies which are not rigid but consider qualifications, thus may be continuously applied to counteract structural inequalities.

In this context, depersonalised application procedures only represent one of the aspects of diversity management at organisations. It is true that this kind of procedures may reduce discrimination against individual groups at a decisive stage and help to bring about more equal opportunities in the application process, but they will not be suited to offset structural discrimination as for example in the education sector. To attain this goal, further strategies will be needed.

As a rule, it seems to be desirable that selection procedures shall be organised (even) more than before from the points of view of transparency and objectivity. Inter alia, this includes the definition of exact and tightened job specifications as well as the application of clear and comprehensible criteria for evaluation.