

## Cases of discrimination in Austria - the most important results and demands



### WORK

21%

Other skin colour or accent	34%
Muslims	33%
Physical disability	30%
Migrants	28%
Individuals belonging to lower class	27%



### HEALTH

8%

Physical disability	32%
Individuals belonging to lower class	15%
Elderly (over 60 years of age)	22%
Other skin colour or accent	14%



### HOUSING

13%

Muslims	35%
Homosexuals	30%
Other skin colour or accent	30%
Migrants	22%
Of different faith	21%
Individuals belonging to lower class	19%
Physical disability	17%



### EDUCATION

10%

Young people (up to 15 years of age)	81%
Homosexuals	22%
Muslims	20%
Other skin colour or accent	19%
Migrants	17%
Women	12%

n=432 (Work), n=222 (Housing), n=156 (Health), n=188 (Education)

### Introduction

The European Community is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. In the recitals to EU directives it says: ***“The right to equality before the law and protection against discrimination for all persons constitutes a universal right”***. Effective protection against discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities is, therefore, a mainstay of European policies.

Unfortunately, this aim is often not achieved, as numerous cases show. A recent study in Austria confirms that many people experience discrimination in their daily lives. This begs the question of which steps can be taken at a European level to help those affected and, where possible, prevent discrimination from occurring.

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## Background

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On behalf of the Chamber of Labour (AK), SORA carried out a telephone survey of people's experience of discrimination and unequal treatment in Austria in the areas of work, housing, health and education. Around 2,300 people aged between 14 and 65 participated. They were asked about their experience of discrimination regarding the aspects of gender, marital status, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability and social status.

**Almost half** (43%) stated they felt they had been **treated adversely** or discriminated against **at least once** in one of the four areas in the period 2016 to 2018. If this figure is extrapolated, this means more than 2.5 million people in Austria.

Who experiences discrimination, how often and in which area **depends largely on their individual characteristics**.

Migrants or people from a Muslim background experience adverse treatment twice as frequently (62% and 78%) as non-migrants (37%), or those from a Christian background (39%).

Gays, lesbians or bisexuals are more than three times more likely than heterosexuals to experience adverse treatment. People who see themselves at the lower end of the social scale state twice as frequently that they have been discriminated against because of their social status compared to people who see themselves mid-way on the social scale.

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## Discrimination - primarily a problem of an imbalance of power?

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It is noticeable that the **imbalance of power is relevant to discrimination** across all areas. This means line managers at work, landlords and property managers, doctors and healthcare workers as well as teachers discriminate more often, than colleagues, classmates or neighbours.

In the workplace most cases of discrimination originated with the line manager (73%), much less frequently with colleagues (25%). In terms of housing primarily landlords or property managers discriminate against (51%), followed by neighbours (37%). In healthcare discrimination is experienced mainly from doctors and healthcare personnel (75%). In the field of education discrimination is experienced primarily from teachers, lecturers, professors (51%); however, in 36% of cases discrimination originates with classmates/other trainees.

## How discrimination is handled

**Discrimination is mostly ignored**; not even half of those affected go on the offensive and defend themselves against discrimination. 39% do not know what they should do about it.

Of those who turn to an organisation, 58% turn to the Chamber of Labour (AK), making it the most important contact point.

## Discrimination has a high price

If someone experiences discrimination, they become more alert, more distrustful, and experience it as pressure or even become ill. Around 13% in the working world claim that they became ill because of the discrimination they experienced.

There are also negative effects in form of high turnover of personnel, bad communication and an unpleasant working atmosphere. Furthermore, **potential is being wasted**, in education as well as in the workplace. Not least discrimination results in a **society suffering from a lack of cohesion**, where exclusion, brutalisation and the law of the jungle prevail. It manifests itself as a "everybody-for-him/herself"-climate. The results of the study show clearly that action is needed.

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## What is to be done?

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### Improvements in non-discrimination legislation

Legislation sets standards for society as to what is tolerable and what is not. Currently non-discrimination legislation protects people, in particular in the areas work, housing, education and healthcare.

**Protection against discrimination in the workplace** and in a professional capacity due to gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion or ideology is **enshrined in law**.

But there are gaps outside the workplace - here only the aspects of gender and ethnicity are protected. Protection must be extended to include the aspects of sexual orientation, age, religion or ideology (i.e. Anti-Discrimination Directive/Horizontal Directive).

### Removing structural disadvantages

The Austrian study shows that social status is an important factor in discrimination; people at the lower end of the social scale are faced with a significantly higher risk of discrimination than those of a high

social status. Therefore **structural conditions must be changed in order to make equal opportunities possible** - for example, being fairly treated when choosing a track in education, getting support when looking for a job, getting access to affordable housing, etc.

Numerous findings, also at a European level, confirm that women are disadvantaged in the workplace: their chances of promotion are slimmer, their earnings are lower because of part-time work, they have fewer chances to get continuing education and training and there are less often in management positions. Mothers with children, especially single mothers, find it difficult to re-enter the labour market.

The **authorities need to take decisive action**. A broad awareness of the conditions which promote equal opportunities must be created. This includes:

- Family-friendly working hours, with opportunities for qualified part-time work and switching from part-time to full-time work
- Transparent structures for remuneration and promotion
- Sufficient supply of high-quality, all-day childcare institutions
- Flexible educational systems and full responsibility of the schools for teaching instead of relying on private tutoring, which parents cannot always afford
- Support to overcome barriers to the labour market (ensuring people's livelihood, qualifications, support structures for problems such as debts, etc.)
- Creation of sufficient jobs instead of imputations that job-seekers do not want to work
- Recognition of foreign qualifications of migrants
- Dissipating prejudices when looking for a job, accommodation.
- Preventing two-tier medical care through a stable, public health system accessible to all.

### Promote awareness of discrimination

The study shows that people experience discrimination primarily in hierarchical contexts. Often the cause is not bad intentions, but carelessness. Approaches are needed to promote equal treatment and raise people's awareness.

However, respect and equal treatment must be enshrined in society values - that includes **a respectful tone in advertising, media, politics**. Trainings on equal treatment issues for judges are important for supporting those discriminated against in asserting their rights. Furthermore, politicians must take **a clear stance** against discrimination in any form and for social cohesion.

At the level of the individual, information on legal options is needed as well as more **contact points for equal treatment and anti-discrimination**. Ensuring finances and personnel for NGOs which act against discrimination is also crucial.

### Equal treatment at company level

A lot can be done at company level. Clear instructions on positive treatment and a respectful atmosphere at work, e.g. that **sexual harassment is not tolerated** in a company, can be helpful in creating a respectful attitude to others within a company.

Approaches such as in-house promotion schemes for women, company agreements on equal treatment and diversity, income transparency and the publication of vacant management positions within the company, etc., are important steps to encourage equal opportunity.

### To summarise what equal opportunity needs:

- Effective legislation on non-discrimination
- A strong welfare state which ensures a balance within society
- Transparent structures within companies as well as regarding the access to goods and services
- Raising awareness of treating others with respect

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## Equal treatment and anti-discrimination at European level

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Equality is one of the most important fundamental rights of the European Union. This must be defended vigorously. Therefore the European Union must strengthen solidarity between nations and take a stance against any form of social divide, exclusion, unequal treatment or discrimination. Many forms of discrimination are still being not addressed and remain unrecognised.

As the Austrian study shows, discrimination is experienced most frequently in the workplace. Action must also be taken to ensure that people can work according to their potential and have the opportunity to evolve. A working environment must not put people under pressure or make them ill.

That is why instruments are needed at various levels in the working world to combat discrimination and racism:

- Updating EU legislation and expanding the protection against discrimination: Anti-Discrimination Directive, abolition of the

principle of unanimity in questions of social policy, mandatory gender quotas for boards and decision making)

- Monitoring to promote equal treatment in the workplace using the indicators: gender, ethnicity and social status
- promoting of equal opportunities through positive measures (Gender budgeting, quotas)
- Promoting tolerance and inclusion through campaigns and other means of raising awareness
- Provision of resources and funds to combat discrimination

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## Literature

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**SORA on behalf of the Chamber of Labour, (2019):** Diskriminierungserfahrungen in Österreich, [https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/interessenvertretung/arbeitundsoziales/gleichbehandlung/Diskriminierungsstudie\\_2019\\_Langfassung.pdf](https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/interessenvertretung/arbeitundsoziales/gleichbehandlung/Diskriminierungsstudie_2019_Langfassung.pdf)

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