

# GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: A CASE STUDY IN GERMANY

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## Abstract.

**Purpose and aim of the study:** *The paper aim is to analyse qualitatively youth gender-based discrimination in employment.*

**Design / Methodology / Approach:** *The methodology of exploratory case study research was employed in this research. The method of data collection was observation. Observation was chosen, as it is an effective method of collecting qualitative data for building an adequate picture related to the phenomenon investigated. The obtained data were processed via pedagogical interpretation. The data were summarised.*

**Main Findings:** *Young engineering specialists have not been affected by gender based discrimination in employment. This finding based on the qualitative study is in accordance with the quantitative data received from a questionnaire survey recently implemented in selected countries of the European Union.*

**Originality:** *The originality of the paper is shown by a qualitative analysis of youth gender-based discrimination in employment, as there is a gap in such studies.*

**Implications:** *The scientific community could put more their efforts into the investigation of this significant topic.*

**Keywords:** *disadvantaged youth, employment, engineering, exposure, gender discrimination, observation, youth.*

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## Introduction

Youth gender-based discrimination in employment in the European Union has recently attracted researchers' attention, as the European Union Youth Strategy for 2019-2027 aims at quality employment for all (European Commission, 2018). The research field of youth gender-based discrimination in employment in the European Union is only emerging, and there is a gap in studies on the evaluation of youth gender-based

discrimination in employment in the European Union (Ahrens, Zascierinska, & Macovei, 2022b). This gap appeared due to the consideration of gender based discrimination and youth employment separately in the European Union Youth Strategy for 2019-2027 (European Commission, 2018), as pointed by Ahrens et.al. (2022): gender-based discrimination refers to Goal 2, and youth employment – to Goal 7. Due to this approach, the research on youth gender-based discrimination in employment remains under-explored.

The current research is built on the interrelation between youth employment and gender-based discrimination (Ahrens et.al., 2022).

Few studies (Ahrens, Zascierinska, & Macovei, 2022a; Ahrens, Zascierinska, & Macovei, 2022b; Ahrens et. al., 2022) were devoted to the analysis of youth gender-based discrimination in employment in the European Union. A comparative quantitative study of youth gender-based discrimination in employment in the selected countries of the European Union revealed that young people beliefs about gender-based discrimination were twice higher than a level of exposure in relation to gender-based discrimination (Ahrens, Zascierinska, & Macovei, 2022b). Against this background, the research on youth gender-based discrimination in employment requires a qualitative analysis of the phenomenon.

The aim of the paper is to analyse qualitatively youth gender-based discrimination in employment.

The tasks to reach the research aim are:

1. To analyse the links between economic development, youth employment and gender based discrimination.
2. To carry out an empirical study to evaluate the existence of the exposure of youth gender based discrimination in employment.
3. To put forward a new research question.

The analysis of the case study will be of qualitative nature. The originality of the paper is shown by a qualitative analysis of youth gender-based discrimination in employment, as there is a gap in such studies. The method of data collection is observation. Observation was chosen due to its effectiveness in collecting qualitative data (Zascierinska, 2013). The data were collected in September 2023. The findings of this research based on the qualitative data will be compared with the quantitative data from the recently implemented study. The novel nature of this research will be shown in a newly formulated research question.

## **Research results and discussion**

### **Literature Review**

Economic development is created by people (GIZ, 2021) including young people. The role of youth in economic development is seen as crucial (Mandalu, 2023). Young people have the potential to bring about positive change and drive the economy forward (Mandalu, 2023).

Economic development, as distinct from mere economic growth, combines (Adelman, 2000): (1) self-sustaining growth; (2) structural change in patterns of production; (3) technological upgrading; (4) social, political and institutional modernization; and (5) widespread improvement in the human condition. Consequently, economic development and social well-being are inter-connected. The better the economic situation is, the better the societal well-being becomes, and vice versa. The key benefits to economic development and, therefore, social well-being include (Mandalu, 2023)

1. A higher standard of living: economic development can lead to a higher standard of living for all citizens, especially those in poverty.
2. Increased employment opportunities: economic development can create new jobs and industries, providing more opportunities for youth to enter the workforce.
3. Greater social mobility: economic development can increase social mobility, allowing youth to move up the socio-economic ladder.
4. Improved infrastructure: economic development can lead to improvements in infrastructure, such as better roads, schools, and hospitals.
5. Increased foreign investment: foreign investors are often attracted to countries with strong economic growth potential. This can bring new capital and technology into the country, benefiting all citizens.

Therefore, economic development in any region in the world is aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, as well as providing a boost to a country's overall productivity (Mandalu, 2023).

At the same time, economic development might face some challenges, e.g., reducing poverty, creating jobs, and promoting sustainable growth (Mandalu, 2023).

Employment serves as an indicator of economic development and social well-being. The stronger the economic development is, the more employees are needed, and vice versa. Employment of young people is significant not only for their own personal economic prospects and well-being but also for overall economic growth and social cohesion (OECD,

2022). For example, in July 2023, 2.683 million young persons (under 25) were unemployed in the EU, of whom 2.206 million were in the euro area (Eurostat, 2023). In July 2023, the youth unemployment rate was 13.9% in the EU, and 13.8% in the euro area (Eurostat, 2023). In Germany, the youth unemployment rate, for example, in August 2023 was 5.7%.

Young people are suffering from high youth unemployment (European Commission, 2018). Even if young people are employed, they might experience precarious and exploitative working conditions as well as discrimination in the labour market and the workplace (European Commission, 2018).

Gender based discrimination in employment still affects many young people, especially young women (European Commission, 2018). Therein, youth employment and gender-based discrimination are inter-connected (Ahrens et.al., 2022). In order to engage young people into the labour market successfully, the European Union Youth Strategy for 2019-2027 aims at quality employment for all (European Commission, 2018). Quality employment means an inclusive working environment without gender based discrimination.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The study was enabled by the following research question: What is the exposure of youth gender based discrimination in employment? The aim of the empirical study was to evaluate the existence of the exposure of youth gender based discrimination in employment.

The empirical study was implemented in September 2023. The empirical study was built within the methodology of the exploratory type of case study research (Zainal, 2007). The selection of this methodology is based on an assumption that a function of case studies is to generate new research questions and hypotheses, as well as to build theory (Kohlbacher, 2005). Exploratory case studies are leveraged to analyse any phenomenon that is of interest to the researcher (Zainal, 2007). The exploratory methodology is organised in three phases. Phase 1 is aimed at exploration through data collection, Phase 2 is devoted to data processing, analysis and interpretation, and Phase 3 focuses on hypothesis/question development in Phase 3 (Ahrens, Bassus, & Zaščerinska, 2013; Hariharan, Zaščerinska, & Swamydhas, 2013).

A data analysis was carried out on the basis of the interpretive research paradigm. The use of the interpretive paradigm is disclosed by the researcher's interest in a phenomenon (Ahrens, Zascerinska, & Aleksejeva, 2021). The interpretive paradigm is used for the analysis of meaningful reality socially constructed (Ahrens, Zascerinska, & Aleksejeva, 2021).

Interpretation allows meanings to emerge (Ahrens, Zascerinska, & Aleksejeva, 2021). The present study employed pedagogical interpretation. Pedagogical interpretation means that only the data that are of pedagogical interest were processed and analysed (Zascerinska et.al., 2023). Interpretation is carried out by the researcher involved in the present research and study (Ahrens et.al, 2018). The data were structured and summarised.

Observation was the method of data collection. Observation allows for building of an adequate picture that emerges of the research setting as a social system described from a number of participants' perspectives (Geertz, 1973). Participant observation in an institution in which the researcher work is beneficial, as the researcher participates as a member of the group while observing it (Hargreaves, 1967). This direct participation in the group life permits an easy entrance into the social situation by reducing the resistance of the group members; decreases the extent to which the investigator disturbs the 'natural' situation, and permits the investigator to experience and observe the group's norms, values, conflicts and pressures, which (over a long period) cannot be hidden from someone playing an in-group role (Hargreaves, 1967).

The sample was composed of 15 respondents. The respondents were young people between 21 and 26 years old. All of them were engineers. This sample was composed of the respondents with the immigrant background. All the respondents belonged to a disadvantaged group. Eight respondents were female, and seven respondents were male. Eight respondents obtained some working experience (1-2 years) in engineering via employment. Among eight respondents with working experience in India, six respondents were males, and two respondents were female. Seven respondents have not received any working experience. Table 1 summarizes the description of the sample respondents.

**Table 1 Description of the sample respondents** (compiled by the authors)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Total</b>
Respondents	8	7	15
Number of respondents with working experiences	2	6	8
Number of respondents without working experiences	6	1	7

## **Research results, findings and discussion**

The data were collected on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2023. The data were collected during an online class at a university in Germany. The task was to give a presentation on one of the three topics. One of the topics was defined as gender based discrimination in employment. From the group of 15 respondents, five respondents selected the topic of gender based discrimination in employment for presenting. Among these five respondents, four respondents were male, and one respondent was female.

The female respondent devoted her presentation to the definition of gender based discrimination, its target and manifestation, scope and historical context. The impact of gender based discrimination in employment on individuals and society was also presented. Measures to mitigate gender based discrimination in employment were proposed.

One of the male respondents also constructed his presentation in a similar manner. He shed light on the definition of gender discrimination in employment, gender discrimination practices in employment observed, and mitigation steps to reduce gender discrimination in employment.

Another male respondent revealed the definition of gender discrimination in employment. Other sub-topics related to gender discrimination in employment covered misandry & misogyny, transphobia, and measures to diminish the effect of gender discrimination in employment. Additionally, this respondent mentioned the other aspects of gender discrimination such as objectification, child marriage, women dress attire, and domestic violence.

The next male presenter highlighted the definition of gender discrimination, its historical context, types of gender discrimination in employment, the gender pay gap, workplace discrimination, stereotyping and bias. He also called to action in order to break the barriers of gender discrimination.

The final presentation given by a male respondent aimed at the definition of gender based discrimination, causes and consequences of gender discrimination. The speaker emphasized the importance of movements such as #MeToo and few other initiatives in fighting with gender discrimination in employment. Educational, legislative, and other campaigns to engage individuals and society in building an inclusive environment were proposed.

Table 2 gives an overview of the presented sub-topics on the issue of gender based discrimination in employment.

**Table 2 Presented sub-topics on gender based discrimination in employment (compiled by the authors)**

Sub-topic	Respon dent 1	Respon dent 2	Respon dent 3	Respon dent 4	Respon dent 5
Definition of gender based discrimination	X	X	X	X	X
Target of gender based discrimination	X		X		
Manifestation of gender based discrimination	X	X	X	X	
Scope of gender based discrimination	X				
Historical context	X			X	X
Impact of gender based discrimination	X				
Measures to mitigate of gender based discrimination	X	X	X	X	X

Table 3 presents Top 3 sub-topics discussed by the respondents.

**Table 3 Top 3 sub-topics on gender based discrimination in employment (compiled by the authors)**

Sub-topic	Top 1	Top 2	Top 3
Definition of gender based discrimination	5 respondents		
Measures to mitigate of gender based discrimination	5 respondents		
Manifestation of gender based discrimination		4 respondents	
Historical context			3 respondents

The choice of the sub-topics for presenting allow us to find that the respondents were aware of gender based discrimination in employment. They had the knowledge about what gender based discrimination was, the historical context of gender based discrimination, the manifestation of gender based discrimination, and the measures to be taken to mitigate gender based discrimination.

The respondents' observation revealed that while their presentation about gender based discrimination in employment, their facial expressions, voice, and body language did not change. During their presentations, the

respondents spoke about theoretical developments in the field of gender based discrimination. There were no examples or cases discussed by the respondents. All these observations gave the impression that the respondents did not personally experience gender based discrimination. This allows us to find that the exposure of gender based discrimination in employment was not identified. If compared with the previously obtained findings by Ahrens, Zascerinska, & Macovei (2022b), the present study's finding is in accordance with the results of the quantitative study of youth gender-based discrimination in employment in the selected countries of the European Union (Ahrens, Zascerinska, & Macovei, 2022b).

The present study's results can be explained that four presentations were made by the male respondents who had working experience, and only one female respondent who received some working experience. Gender based discrimination in employment mostly affects young women (European Commission, 2018) in comparison with young men. Consequently, active engagement of male respondents in the discussion about gender based discrimination in employment could influence the study's results.

Another aspect to be considered when discussing the present study results is that the respondents did not experience any gender based discrimination in employment, as our respondents belonged to the engineering field. Currently, persistent labour shortages are found to be particularly prevalent in construction, healthcare, science, technology (notably ICT), engineering and mathematics (STEM) (EU Commission, 2023). Looking ahead, shortages in both high-skilled and low-skilled occupations are expected to continue, as the population ages and the green and digital transitions advance (EU Commission, 2023). Therefore, any employed engineering specialist is too valuable for the company to proceed.

Also, all the respondents were working in the engineering field. Engineering work does not imply any interpretation of working activities if compared with theatre, cinema, and other similar working environments. It means that an engineer gets a task and instructions, and later, s/he works mostly alone on the task implementation. In other professional environments such as supermarkets, hospitals, universities and similar, people work in direct interaction with others. This mutual interaction between the people promotes an interpretation of each other feelings and activities. These (mis)interpretations can lead to gender based discrimination in employment.



## **Conclusions and suggestions**

The literature review demonstrated that the research on youth gender based discrimination in employment was scarce. The scientific community could put more their efforts into the investigation of this significant topic.

The empirical study's results allow us to conclude that youth has not been affected by gender based discrimination in employment. This conclusion is in accordance with the previously published research.

The conclusion about gender discrimination in employment of the respondents belonging to the disadvantaged group does not appear possible to be drawn within this study, as the respondents did not have any work experience in Germany or the European Union. The conclusion is that young engineering specialists enter the labour market and employment in the European Union without gender based discrimination experience.

The present study was limited by the engagement of only few respondents. Another limitation was that the sample was represented by the respondents of only one nationality. The limitation also was that the respondents belonged to one professional group of engineers. The study was also impacted by the fact that the majority of respondents who had work experience were male, while young females were more often affected by gender based discrimination in employment.

A new research question has been put forward: What is the experience of disadvantaged groups in gender based discrimination in employment in the European Union?

The results of the study facilitate the conclusion that the exposure of gender based discrimination in employment varies depending on a professional field. Young people who are employed in cinema, theatre, hospitals, etc. are more often affected by gender based discrimination. Young people who mostly work alone and in the field with less room for interpretation are rarely impacted by gender based discrimination.

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