



European Business Test Panel (EBTP)

European survey on Anti-discrimination

Introduction

The aim of this survey was to collect the opinion of the EBTP members on present levels of protection of consumers against discrimination and to have their view on the necessity/desirability of a single European legislative approach to protect customers against discrimination.

The Anti-discrimination consultation ran from mid-July to end of August 2007. In total, 512 EBTP members responded to the consultation; 478 of them (93%) filled out the questionnaire.

Key findings

The results show that the knowledge of existing rules is high. 75% of the respondents are aware of the existence of European Union rules prohibiting discrimination on grounds of racial and ethnic origin in access to goods and services, as well as housing. 74% of them think that consumers should also be protected against discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, religion and sexual orientation. About half of the companies are of the opinion that the current rules in their country about non-discrimination in access to goods, services and housing on grounds of age, disability, religion and sexual orientation are about right.

63 % of the respondents think it is important if there are different levels of protection between the EU Member States against discrimination in access to goods, services and housing on grounds of age, disability, religion and sexual orientation. 293 companies responded to the question whether the EU should legislate to guarantee the same level of protection of consumers against discrimination and 89% of them fully agreed with that notion. Of the same group, 26% think that a difference in the level of protection would affect their ability to do business in another Member State.

69% of the respondents think that new European rules protecting customers against discrimination would have no financial impact for them. 18% think that there would be a financial impact. Of the companies represented in the last group, (90 in total), more than 64% judge the impact as negative and 22% as positive.

In terms of company policies to ensure that customers are not discriminated against on grounds of disability, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation, only 35% of the respondents (providing goods or services or dealing in property) have such policies in place, or are developing them, primarily because they do not think there is any discrimination to address. Of those that have a non-discrimination policy, the vast majority deal with discrimination on grounds of disability (91%) followed by age (85%). These policies concentrate primarily on customer services, followed by accessibility of goods and services. In total, 73% of companies having such a non-discrimination policy think that the financial impact is positive and 20% negative. The costs of such policies are related to altering premises and training staff, and positive financial impacts are related to improved corporate image (45%) followed by improved customer base (27%).

In terms of the most important challenges in addressing discrimination, the majority of companies identify lack of information and awareness, followed by discriminatory behaviour. National governments are perceived to be the best source of information, closely followed by employers' organisations.