



Universität
Bremen

The Anti-Discrimination Policy in Action

Embracing a Culture of Diversity and Respect



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Foreword by the University Executive Board

Dear students, dear colleagues,

“The University of Bremen strives to be a place of learning, teaching, and working that is characterized by a culture of respect, trust, and interaction that is fair, supportive, and embraces diversity.” This commitment is part of the new Anti-Discrimination Policy that was adopted by the Academic Senate of the University of Bremen in April 2024.

The university has zero tolerance for any discrimination. With this policy, the University of Bremen assumes its socio-political and legal responsibility to prevent any form of discrimination and underscores its commitment to cultivating a culture of diversity and respect. We want to protect all of the university’s students, employees, apprentices, PhD candidates, scholarship holders, and visitors in the best way possible and establish a course of action to achieve this.

Every one of us is asked to contribute to a culture that is mindful of discrimination, and this requires a common understanding of what discrimination is, what to do when experiencing or observing discrimination, as well as what counseling services and complaints channels are available.

It is important to recognize that discrimination is part of the society we live in and therefore takes place at the university on a day-to-day basis. This brochure intends to facilitate ways to talk about discrimination. It shows ways to deal with it, outlines who is responsible for what, and summarizes the most important aspects of the Anti-Discrimination Policy.

This policy is the result of great effort and dedication by many university entities, among them the ADE – Anti-Discrimination and Conflict Management Office and the Legal Office. My heartfelt thanks go to all of them. I am confident that this brochure will help to communicate the content of our policy even more clearly, anchor this constructively in practice, and promote a climate of tolerance – putting anti-discrimination into action.

Dr. Mandy Boehnke

Vice President for International Affairs, Academic Qualification, and Diversity



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What Is the Purpose of This Brochure?

Putting the anti-discrimination policy into practice!

This brochure complements the University of Bremen's Anti-Discrimination Policy. As the policy is based on legal regulations, questions may arise as to how to put it into practice. This brochure explains the university's policy and thus facilitates its application.



A Culture of Anti-Discrimination Needs Everyone

Every one of us has a responsibility to reduce discrimination in everyday university life and to take a stand against discriminatory behavior. But what does that mean in practice? How can we react appropriately and avoid discrimination wherever possible? What can you do if you yourself are discriminated against, witness discrimination, or are accused of discriminating against someone else? What support does the university executive board provide? The following pages will provide you with answers to all these questions.

The Impact is Important:

What do we mean by discrimination?

The term discrimination describes the pain that many people experience every day: prejudices, slights, social exclusion, insults, and injuries. In addition to the emotional consequences, this affects the social relationships of people suffering from discrimination and can influence both access to and success in their academic or professional life.

For individuals who are not affected by it themselves, discrimination is often a non-issue. As discrimination has little to do with their own everyday experiences, they do not need to deal with it. If then someone raises the issue, it is often met with a lack of understanding and antagonism.

The university's definition of discrimination is based on the same legal understanding as the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG). This definition includes three criteria: Discrimination is the less favorable treatment of a person (1) on the basis of one (or multiple) protected characteristics (2) without objective justification (3).



- Protected characteristics according to the AGG
- Protected characteristics added in the university's Anti-Discrimination Policy

What Are Protected Characteristics?

The term discrimination is limited to less favorable treatment based on actual or attributed diversity characteristics: In accordance with the AGG, the university considers gender (including pregnancy and parenthood)/gender identity, sexual identity, racist attributions or ethnic origin, religion and beliefs, age, and disability/chronic illness to be protected characteristics. In addition, the university has decided to add the following protected characteristics: physical appearance, socio-economic background, language, nationality, and family status (e.g. marital status or care responsibilities). Discrimination and less favorable treatment on the basis of any of these characteristics are therefore prohibited at the University of Bremen.

What Does “Without Objective Justification” Mean?

Something is discriminatory if there is no objective reason for unequal treatment. Conversely, if unequal treatment is objectively justified, this is not considered discrimination.

For example:

- Work load is distributed differently in a team. Some regard this as unfair. If it turned out that comparable skills of individuals were assessed differently due to prejudices and biases based on age or gender, this would constitute discrimination.
- However, if this is due to another reason, e.g. that the distribution of work is demonstrably based on differing skills, work expertise, and experience, the unequal treatment would not be discrimination as defined by the policy.

This example illustrates that it is always essential to justify why there is a difference in treatment – either to draw attention to discrimination or to rule it out.

What Is the Difference between Direct and Indirect Discrimination?

Direct (or immediate) discrimination is when a person is treated differently – and less favorably – than another person in a comparable situation because of one (or more) of the aforementioned characteristics.

For example:

- A staff selection committee decides in favor of a male applicant because they doubt that a better-qualified female applicant with two children, who might potentially want to work part-time, would have the same level of commitment to the job.
- A blind student wants to apply for a doctoral position after successfully completing her master’s degree. The professor in charge advises the student against submitting an application because she does not want to provide the student with a fully accessible workplace.

→ A female student is given questions regarding the origin of her parents instead of related to the topic of the oral exam. The examiners question her answers on the examination topic with reference to her supposed migration background and give her a poor grade.

Indirect discrimination often manifests itself in structural or institutional regulations and practices. Decisions are based on provisions, regulations, norms, routines, and practices that apply equally to everyone and seem to be neutral. As soon as the interpretation or application of supposedly neutral regulations and practices results in adverse effects for certain persons or makes it more difficult for them to study or work, this constitutes indirect discrimination.

For example:

- Gender-segregated bathrooms: Due to the prevailing assumption in society that there are only two genders, the corresponding designation of toilets appears to be a “neutral” regulation. This fails to recognize that inter*, trans*, and non-binary persons are disadvantaged on a regular basis because there are no adequate sanitary facilities for them.
- A professor regularly schedules exams on Saturdays. These dates apply equally to all her students. However, one student is unable to take exams on Saturdays due to his religion and another student is unable to take exams on Saturdays due to a lack of childcare. The professor does not offer alternative exam dates.

When Is Unequal Treatment Justified?

There are forms of unequal treatment that are justified in order to create equal opportunities when it comes to access to and participation in university and working life: This includes academic adjustment for students with disabilities or chronic illnesses. Specific measures that are intended to compensate for the structural and institutional inequality for people from socially disadvantaged groups and thus reduce disadvantages are also warranted. **Under no circumstances is harassment, sexualized discrimination, assaults, or violent forms of discrimination and abusive behavior justified.** These kinds of behavior are clearly prohibited under the policy.

What Is Harassment?

If a person is insulted, humiliated, or intimidated on the grounds of a protected characteristic and is marginalized as a result, this is harassment.

For example:

→ A student is tormented with condescending remarks after she outs herself as a Roma in a seminar. She becomes more and more of an outsider and is excluded from participating in working groups.

Sexualized Discrimination and Sexual Assault

The policy uses the term “sexualized discrimination” instead of “sexual harassment” (AGG) to emphasize that the actions and behaviors described are not about sexuality, but about power abuse and sexism.

Sexualized discrimination can take the form of words and gestures as well as physical assault. This includes making lewd remarks and jokes, showing and sending sexist images, unwanted physical contact and advances, and criminal offenses such as stalking, sexual coercion, or rape. Sexualized discrimination and sexual assault are forms of **gender discrimination**. Consequently, discrimination on the basis of gender identity and on the grounds of perceived “atypical” gender behavior or appearance is also included here.

The Impact Is Important!

In all the above examples, it is not the intention but the impact that is important. That means that even if a statement or an action was not intended to be discriminatory, it can have a damaging effect. Carelessness, ignorance, thoughtlessness, as well as statements and behavior that were considered acceptable in the past can still result in discrimination.

Where and to Whom Does the Policy Apply?

The policy applies to all

- students
- employees
- apprentices
- doctoral candidates
- teaching staff
- private teaching staff and honorary professors
- visiting and exchange students
- participants in affiliated educational programs, and
- third parties, e.g. guests, contractual partners or suppliers, if at least one person involved is a member of or affiliated with the university.

Where Does the Policy Apply?

The policy applies to the entire university context. Specifically, this means that the policy applies to the entire university campus and all the university's off-campus locations. The policy covers business trips and university events (both digital and in-person). It can also be applied to discriminatory behavior outside the university context if these activities take place in the context of an existing university work, training, or teaching contract. This also includes digital communication channels (e.g. chats, social media) and phone calls.

Support:

What can I do if I have been discriminated against?

Have you experienced discrimination in a university setting and feel that it is affecting your studies/work? What do you need most right now? Rest, some space, understanding, talking to someone, practical solutions?

- Take your feelings seriously and trust your perception.
- Experiencing or dealing with discrimination is often characterized by a multitude of painful and sometimes contradictory feelings and reactions: Anger, rage, powerlessness, shame, self-doubt, hurt, insecurity, humiliation, sadness, helplessness, speechlessness, resistance, and/or withdrawal.
- Write down the incidents (memory log) so to help you to later remember the situation(s) and circumstances in detail. This allows you to decide without pressure whether and when you want to take action.
- Talk to people you trust. However, be aware that supervisors, deans, researchers, and teaching staff must in principle take action if they learn of incidents of discrimination and are therefore not confidential contact persons. The university's policy stipulates that these persons are responsible for protecting against discrimination and following up on any indications of discrimination. If you are unsure whether you want to take action, please contact persons of trust in your social and work environment or the designated contact persons and counseling services at the university, who will offer you confidential conversations.
- Consult a professional service or counselor if you want to talk about your experience. Here you can clarify in a safe setting what you can do next and what support you can get. You can also seek advice if you are unsure whether what you have experienced constitutes discrimination.
- It can be empowering to talk to people who have experienced similar things and to develop strategies for dealing with discrimination together. Empowerment workshops at the University of Bremen and beyond, e.g. for people who have experienced racism, queer and trans* persons, also provide a suitable setting and space for this. If you have any questions about services and to report needs, you are welcome to get in touch with the support persons and services listed below.
- In addition, you can contact the ADE to find out about possible early interventions and/or lodging an official complaint.

What You Can Do:

A summary of ways to take action

Support for a First Confidential Talk

The university policy lists various contact persons and support services that offer those who have experienced discrimination accessible first support and orientation (see “Support and Services”). These conversations are confidential. Without the consent of the person seeking advice, these services are not permitted to initiate any further action. They help to clarify the issue at hand and to develop ideas for possible solutions and ways of action. If it turns out that the person seeking advice wants further counseling, an early conflict intervention, or to lodge an official complaint, the support person will refer them on to the ADE Office or directly to the complaints office (pursuant to the AGG).

Confidential Anti-Discrimination Counseling at the ADE – Anti-Discrimination and Conflict Management Office

The aim of anti-discrimination counseling at the ADE is to empower those affected. The service is therefore based on their interests and needs. Counseling is confidential. No further steps will be taken without the consent of the person seeking advice. The ADE also provides counseling to social networks and persons of trust of those affected, witnesses of discrimination, as well as people in charge and interest groups at the university.

Anti-discrimination counseling goes beyond the first confidential support talks with the above mentioned contact persons and services. It includes an in-depth reflection and a professional analysis of the incidents and situations. Anti-discrimination counseling offers comprehensive information on possible paths of action. It provides a framework for assessing the chances and risks of possible next steps and making an informed decision.

Early Conflict Intervention

Those affected can take advantage of an early conflict intervention service. This is a dialogue mediated by the ADE between the affected person and the person perceived to have behaved in a discriminatory manner. The aim is to empower those affected through addressing the discrimination and supporting them in maintaining or regaining their own sense of agency and self-efficacy. This gives people who have been accused of discriminatory behavior a chance to develop a respectful, constructive way of dealing with being called out for discrimination, and sets the foundation to jointly develop ideas for future meetings and further cooperation.

An early conflict intervention can only be initiated by the person discriminated against and requires the willingness and consent of all those involved to engage in this process. Both the affected parties and the ADE advisors can end the process at any time if the conditions for constructive understanding are not met. This also applies if the intervention as a whole is not deemed appropriate and constructive.

Right of Complaint

The policy of the University of Bremen regulates the right of complaint: This means that students, employees, trainees, and doctoral candidates who feel discriminated against have the right to lodge an official complaint. This strengthens the subjective perspective and the right to rectification of those affected. Persons who wish to lodge a complaint should contact the relevant complaints office (pursuant to AGG) (see contact details).

Please note: A discrimination complaint can be lodged based on all grounds specified in the policy, including grounds not previously covered by the AGG.

The complaints procedure is a legal procedure. Necessary and appropriate measures and actions will be decided on the grounds of the General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG) and its definition of protected characteristics, and on grounds of existing rights to issue orders and instructions.

If you are unsure whether you should submit an official complaint and wish to consider the opportunities and risks of such a procedure for yourself, please seek advice beforehand.

Most importantly, a complaint must not lead to further discrimination, retribution, or negative consequences.

Anti-Discriminatory Action Needs Awareness:

What can I do if I have observed discrimination?

The University of Bremen strongly encourages people to take action against discrimination and to address it. After all, discrimination affects us all! Therefore, we encourage you to actively and responsibly contribute to a respectful climate at our places of learning, teaching, and work.

Here is what you can do:

- Call out on discriminatory remarks in meetings, chat groups and working groups, in seminars or any other university context.
 - If a person is directly affected, reach out to them. Offer your support.
 - Write a memory log in order to help you to later remember the situation(s) and circumstances in detail. This may also enable you to assist the person(s) concerned in taking further steps.
 - Take advantage from the University of Bremen's support services if you do not know what to do in a particular case.
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Dealing Constructively with Criticism:

What can I do if I have discriminated against someone else?

For many people, discrimination is an unsettling or even threatening word. When called out for discrimination against someone, the first response is often to see the criticism or feedback as an accusation or reproach and to respond with defensiveness, downplaying, or emotional (counter) accusations.

Importantly:

- Take the feedback and/or criticism seriously. Even if it's not easy at first. Pause. Question what you have said or done without being too hard on yourself or others or causing further injury through a hasty defensive impulse.
 - Reflect on your behavior and language, especially with regard to the (possible) effect it had on the other person.
 - It might be helpful to let the other person explain the situation and its effect on them.
 - Apologize to the person who feels discriminated against by you, even if it was not your intention to discriminate against them.
 - Talk to people who have also set out to become more aware of discrimination. Consciously engaging with the topic offers you the opportunity to confront your own stereotypes, attitudes, and privileges. In its policy, the university commits to provide corresponding services.
 - The various contact persons and advice centers are also open to you. They help you to understand the impact of your actions and words, to understand criticism and to use it constructively.
 - Make use an early conflict intervention if your counterpart suggests this as a way of reaching an understanding.
 - Accept a complaints procedure as an opportunity for clarification and as the right of those affected by discrimination. Just like the accusatory party, you have the right to present your point of view and to consult a person you trust.
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Anti-Discrimination in Action:

The responsibility of teaching staff and supervisors

“Members of the university who carry out educational, qualification, and management tasks in teaching, research, and administration (...) bear a particular responsibility and obligation towards the (...) persons to be protected,” according to the policy. They are called upon to actively support a cooperation that is sensitive to discrimination and a respectful attitude towards diversity in their respective areas of responsibility. This means that all professors, academics, deans, people with personnel and management responsibilities, as well as teaching staff are responsible for putting the University of Bremen’s anti-discrimination policy into action:

- Create a cooperative environment that is sensitive to discrimination in your work area and a climate in which criticism and/or conflicts are dealt with constructively.
- Recommend this brochure and pass on the information from the policy. In accordance with the policy, you are responsible for informing people about their rights and obligations in regards to protection against discrimination.
- Follow up on all reports and incidents of discrimination. You are required to take all incidents seriously and to implement measures to protect the person affected and to prevent further discrimination.
- If you are either involved or unable to be impartial, inform your next-highest superior about the situation. If you are a professor, this could be the dean’s office, for example.
- A person affected confides in you and reports a discriminatory incident? Is the person unsure how to deal with the incident? Recommend a confidential consultation. Explain that you have an obligation to follow up on all indications of discrimination.
- Educate yourself further! The university management has expanded its services in the area of anti-discrimination and skills development in accordance to the policy. This gives you security in your position and also has a preventative effect.
- Educate yourself about the different forms of discrimination and reflect on your own prejudices, stereotypes, and privileges.
- If necessary, seek out the contact persons and advice centers mentioned in order to reflect on your possibilities for action in the specific situation.

Services and Support

Who Can I Contact?

First Points of Contact Pursuant to the Anti-Discrimination Policy

→ For employees:

- **Gender Equality Officer (according to BremHG)**
zentrale.frauenbeauftragte@uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/zentrale-frauenbeauftragte (in German only)
- **Gender Equality Officer (according to LGG)**
frauenbeauftragte@uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/frauenbeauftragte (in German only)
- **Representative for Disabled Employees**
sbv@uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/sbv
- **Staff Council**
personalrat@uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/personalrat (in German only)
- **Youth and Apprentice Representative**
personalrat@uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/personalrat (in German only)
- **In-House Social Counseling Service**
sozialberatung@uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/en/sozialberatung
- **Family Care Office**
familien@vw.uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/en/familie

→ For students:

– **Central Student Advisory Service**

zsb@uni-bremen.de

www.uni-bremen.de/en/zsb

– **Study Centers and Career Orientation Offices of each Faculty**

www.uni-bremen.de/en/studies/starting-your-studies

– **International Office**

internationales@uni-bremen.de

www.uni-bremen.de/en/university/profile/international/international-office

– **Gender Equality Officer (according to BremHG)**

zentrale.frauenbeauftragte@uni-bremen.de

www.uni-bremen.de/zentrale-frauenbeauftragte (in German only)

– **KIS – Office for Students with Disabilities or Chronic Diseases**

kis@uni-bremen.de

www.uni-bremen.de/en/office-for-students-with-disabilities-or-chronic-diseases-kis

– **Family Care Office**

familien@vw.uni-bremen.de

www.uni-bremen.de/en/familie

– **ASTA Students' Union at the University of Bremen**

asta@uni-bremen.de

www.asta.uni-bremen.de

Services and Support

Advice and Counseling on Discrimination

ADE – Anti-Discrimination and Conflict Management Office

Advice and Counseling

ade@uni-bremen.de

Phone: +49 421 218 – 60170

Phone consultation hours: Tuesday 10 to 11:30 a.m., Thursday 4 to 5:30 p.m.

<http://www.uni-bremen.de/en/ade>

Complaints Offices (Pursuant to the AGG)

– **Discrimination Complaints Office for Students**

Legal Office (Unit 06)

VWG building, P.O. Box 330440, 28334 Bremen

<http://www.uni-bremen.de/en/rechtsstelle>

– **Discrimination Complaints Office for Employees**

Human Resources Department (Administrative Department 2)

P.O. Box 330440, 28334 Bremen

<https://www.uni-bremen.de/dezernat2>

