

IAB-Colloquium zur Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung

Sorting Through Affirmative Action: Two Field Experiments in Colombia

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Affirmative action is a subject of intense debate. Supporters point to the opportunities to address historical and statistical discrimination. Critics contend that affirmative action can lead to lower their hiring standards creating inefficiencies. In this paper we present results from two field experiments in Colombia that were designed to test how applicants sort in response to affirmative action in favor of women and whether the quality of applications is compromised by such a policy. The quality of the resulting applicant pools was measured through grades, experience, degree completed, aptitude and personality tests. Our results suggest that the criticism of affirmative action may be misplaced. Affirmative action does induce men and women to sort in expected ways: men are discouraged from jobs that advertise preferential treatment for women, and women are induced to apply to such jobs. But affirmative action does not lead to lower standards in the pool of applicants.

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