

Facebook under fire for job ads that let companies exclude women

Jessica Guynn, USA TODAY

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SAN FRANCISCO -- Employers are using Facebook to target job ads to men only, excluding women and non-binary people from employment

opportunities, according to a complaint filed Tuesday with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The complaint, the first step before filing a discrimination lawsuit, is being brought against Facebook and 10 employers on behalf of three women who say the ad filtering kept them from seeing job postings in male-dominated fields including construction, trucking and software. All but one of the job ads cited in the complaint were also targeted to younger workers.

"I shouldn't be shut out of the chance to hear about a job opportunity just because I am a woman," Linda Bradley, a job seeker and complainant, said in a statement about Tuesday's complaint.

Facebook is also named in the complaint "because it is creating the mechanisms by which employers can elect to unlawfully target their advertisements based on gender and age" and it's profiting from the ads, Galen Sherwin, senior staff attorney at the ACLU Women's Rights Project, told USA TODAY.

Spokesman Joe Osborne said Facebook had not yet had the opportunity to review the EEOC complaint.

"There is no place for discrimination on Facebook; it's strictly prohibited in our policies," he said in an emailed statement. "We look forward to defending our practices."

Users are required to select their gender when opening a Facebook account, opening the door to employers targeting job ads based on gender. Facebook users can click on ads to see why they are seeing them. For example, one ad in 2017 from home security company Defenders stated: "DEFENDERS Careers wants to reach men ages 20 to 40."

Facebook's ability to target messages to specific groups of people has made it an increasingly popular way for employers to reach job prospects, particularly through the use of targeted ads. A 2016 study by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 66% of employers who recruit on social media use Facebook. In 2017, Facebook created tools for businesses to post job openings and for job seekers to hunt for new gigs.