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DISCRIMINATION IN HIRING IN FRANCE : FINDINGS AND COURSES OF ACTION

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Summary

Among migrant populations, discrimination in hiring is a significant obstacle to entering the labour market, an important conduit to integration. This study compares the rate of success of CVs that are identical except for the names that were changed. The results show that with the same CV, an applicant with a migrant background receives 40 per cent fewer invitations to an interview than an applicant identified as a « native ». This discrimination does not appear for female applicants when a good command of the French language is obvious. These results open the way to new tools with which to counter discrimination, which consist of improving the available information about an applicant's skills, such as, for example, a certificate of proficiency in French. ■

- The same job application identified as submitted by someone with a migrant background (from the Maghreb or somewhere else not clearly identifiable by the employers) receives 40 per cent fewer invitations to an interview than an application identified as coming from a French « native ».
- Discrimination on the basis of origin is more marked among men than women.
- Discrimination on the basis of origin disappears among female applicants when a good command of the French language is evident.

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Participation in the labour market is a significant means for ensuring the integration and socialisation of people of migrant background. From this point of view, the French labour market is characterised by stark contrasts in access to employment depending on an individual's origins. For example, between 2005 and 2009, the rate of employment for people aged between 16 and 65 years whose two parents were born in France was an average of 86 per cent for men and 74 per cent for women. Among those French with at least one parent born in the Maghreb, the rate of employment falls to 65 per cent for men and 56 per cent for women ; that is, 21 and 18 points difference for men and women respectively, depending on the origins of their parents. These differences raise questions about the extent of discrimination against immigrants and ways of ending it.

What is discrimination ?

Different degrees of participation in the labour market among individuals can be explained by a number of factors linked to objective differences (regarding criteria relevant to the labour market) and which are not necessarily the result of discrimination. If, for example, on average, migrants have lower qualifications and less-qualified people have more difficulty finding work, then people of migrant background will on average have a lower employment rate.

« Different degrees of participation in the labour market among individuals can be explained by a number of factors linked to objective differences [...] and which are not necessarily the result of discrimination »

According to French law, to constitute discrimination, a difference in access to employment must be due to a « distinction between physical persons on the basis of their origin, sex, physical appearance, age, etc. » (Article 225-1 of the Penal Code).

A study by Aeberhardt, Coudin and Rathelot (2010), CREST researchers, which is affiliated with the IPP, sought to separate differences in rates of unemployment among minority ethnic groups that are explicable from those that are non-explicable, of which discrimination is a one. The objective factors taken into account include both the elements directly valued by employers (such as diplomas and professional experience) and the factors linked to the person's decision to enter the workforce (family situation or salary of domestic partner, for example). As is shown in Figure 1, these kinds of differences explain up to one-third of the differential rate of activity (dark areas), while the rest (light areas) represent the unexplained differential rate.

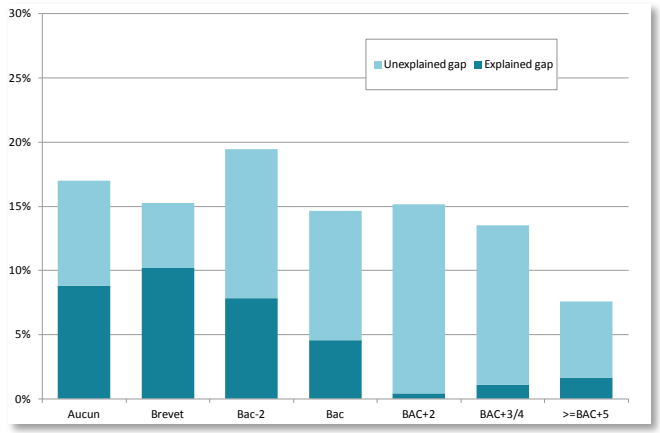
In order to isolate the part strictly explained by a differential treatment of individuals on the basis of their membership of a group, we must be able to draw up and measure a complete list of the individual characteristics that might affect a person's rate of employment. **Measuring the extent of actual discrimination is therefore not as simple as it might seem**.

Measuring discrimination: methodology

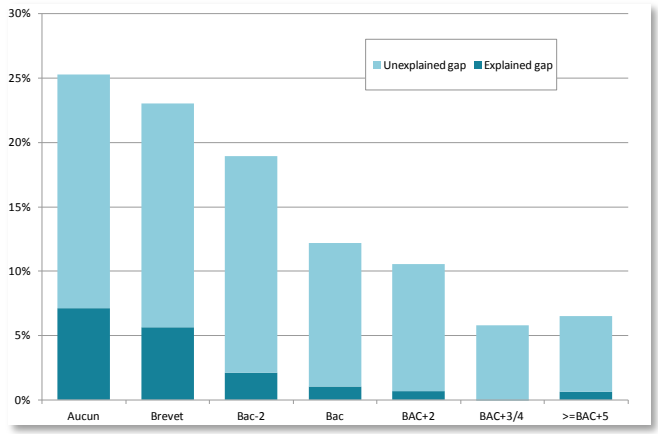
To overcome these difficulties, the researchers developed a novel method, using controlled fictitious applications for advertised positions. This approach, « correspondence testing » consists in responding to job offers with CVs and letters of application from fictitious candidates whose qualifications match the job requirements. Associated with this set of candidates is a set of identities, also fictitious. An identity corresponds to a fictitious candidate whose first and last names were chosen beforehand. These identities constitute the principal variable of interest: they are conceived so as to suggest as clearly as possible membership of the « applicants » in groups the discrimination against we want to measure. In France, the studies typically use an identity (first/last names) that sounds Maghrebine, whose success is compared with the success of candidatures with identities that suggest a « native » candidate.

Figure 1: Gap in the rate of employment between individuals whose parents were born in France and those who had at least one parent born in North Africa. This gap is details in explained/unexplained by observable characteristics

1a. Women (16-65 years old)



1b. Men (16-65 years old)



Source: Labor force survey 2005-2009 ; from Aeberhardt, Coudin et Rathelot (2010, p. 159).

Note: The group was limited to people aged between 16 and 65 years, French either through birth or nationalisation acquired through having arrived in France before the age of five, not including students or retired persons, and living in metropolitan France. By gender and by educational qualifications, the graphs present the gap in the rate of employment between individuals whose parents were born in France and those who had at least one parent born in North Africa. For example, for women who have a "Bac", the gap in employment is around 15% between the first ones and the last ones. Around one third of this gap is due to observable individual characteristics relevant on the job market; two-thirds have to do with "unexplained" gap in that sense.

For each job advertisement, we sent in as many applications as there were identities in the study. The CVs and letters of application were all different in order to minimize the risk of detection of the research scheme. Of course, different CVs could generate different views of the quality of an application regardless of the identity associated with it, which is why the combination of CV and application letter was changed in a strictly controlled rotation.

Thus, the systematic differences in the responses received for the different applicant identities can in no case be attributed to the quality of the CV. Indeed, if the quality of the CV were the only thing differentiating inducing different callback rates between the applicants, then all the identities would basically be processed equally because they were sometimes sent out with a « good quality » CV and sometimes with a CV of « lesser quality ».

« Thus, the systematic differences in the responses received for the different applicant identities can in no case be attributed to the quality of the CV »

Our study (Edo A., Jacquemet. N. and Yannelis C. : *Language Skills and Homophilous Hiring Discrimination [...]*) used this method **to measure the degree of discrimination in hiring on the basis of ethnic/national origins and gender**. It involved measuring the success of six fictitious job applicants (three male and three female, each of a particular ethnic background). In each gender category, the three candidates were distinguished by the ethnic origin to be inferred from their identity.

One applicant has a French-sounding name, a second, a North African one. The comparison of their success rates lets us measure the degree of discrimination against those with a Maghgreb background. A third candidate has a name that, while clearly suggesting an applicant with a migrant background, is not associated by the employers with any particular country or region of origin. The relative success of these candidates allows us test whether there is non-differentiated discrimination against all applicants who appear not to belong to the majority population group.

The quality of the interpretations depends on **how employers deduce the ethnicity of an applicant from the fictitious identities**. These perceptions were tested beforehand in a preliminary survey in which respondents were asked to state what they believed were the gender and origins of the identities presented to them. The results of this survey, presented in Table 1, clearly confirm that respondents inferred from our fictitious identities what we intended to be inferred, in terms of both origin and gender.

« The results of this survey [...] clearly confirm that respondents inferred from our fictitious identities what we intended to be inferred, in terms of both origin and gender »

The third aspect of the study concerns **the influence of the (perceived) command of French on the extent of the discrimination**. Applicants' insufficient language skill is increasingly used by employers to explain discriminatory behaviour : on the basis of their perceptions, employers favour applicants whose parents were born in France, in order to ensure stronger language ability (fluency in spoken language and writing ability). In order to test this dimension, we added a qualification to indicate a candidate's French language skills in half of the applications sent out to employers. These skills appeared as either supplementary work experience (as a tutor in French to students having difficulties, for example) or in the « leisure/hobbies » section of the CV (participation in a French language course).

Table 1 : Perceived origin and gender rate as inferred by fictitious applications.
This table presents the 12 identities that collect the highest rates (among the 32 identities tested in the preliminary phase)

FAMILY NAMES-Names French				**FAMILY NAMES-Names North African**				**FAMILY NAMES-Names Foreigner inferrance**			
Perceived Origin		*Perceived Genre*		*Perceived Origin*		*Perceived Genre*		*Perceived Origin*		*Perceived Genre*	
LECLERC Pascal	99%	Male	97%	BENBALIT Rachid	94%	Male	96%	ALDEGI Jatrix	83%	Male	73%
RIVIERE Benoît	97%	Male	98%	MOKRAOUI Yassine	92%	Male	80%	KOCH Maynir	65%	Male	53%
ROUSSET Sandrine	97%	Female	98%	BENOUNIS Samira	92%	Female	99%	HADAV Alissa	70%	Female	83%
DUFOUR Jeanne	96%	Female	93%	DERBAL Rachida	88%	Female	98%	RAZEL Yuna	55%	Female	76%

Source: Edo A., Jacquemet. N., Yannelis C. Language Skills and Homophilous Hiring Discrimination: Evidence from Gender- and Racially-Differentiated Applications. CES Working Paper n°13-58.

Note: Results of the preliminary phase during which 32 identities were tested; the 12 identities presented here collected the highest perception/relevant rate. Among those 12 names, 6 were effectively used in phase 2. 300 individuals were called. For example: the identity « MOKRAOUI Yassine » is perceived as being probably the one of a North African candidate by 92% of the individuals (potentiel recruiters), and as Male by 80% of them.

Results

The study focused on the accounting sector, particularly the positions of assistant accountant, accounting clerk and accountant. The results are based on responses to 504 advertised job vacancies in the Île-de-France region, collected between September 2011 and February 2012. The success of the different types of application is shown in Table 2.

Three conclusions emerge from the data. First, this study confirms the findings of all earlier studies, that the French labour market is characterised by strong discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, which leads to a a handicap of around 40 per cent for candidates with a migrant background : taking two people whose applications are (statistically) identical except for their origin, the probability of being contacted for an interview after having sent in an application and CV in response to a job advertisement is 40 per cent weaker for the migrant-background applicant[1].

« The probability of being contacted [...] is 40 per cent weaker for the migrant-background applicant »

Second, this unequal treatment appears both for applicants identifiable as of North African origin and those whose origins are unknown. There seems to be no greater mistrust of applicants of North African origin than of those apparently from elsewhere.

1. This gap is the relative difference between the « interview rate » of migrant-background-applicant and french applicant : 17 % (average rate for the reference applicant) - 10 % (average rate for migrant-background applicant) / 17% (reference rate) = 40% - i.e the probability of being contacte is 40% weaker as regards the name.

The third conclusion of our study, which also matches the findings of other studies, is that **we observed no discrimination against the female applicants of a given origin**. In a quite eminised sector of the labour market, this result qualifies the generally accepted idea that women are systematically penalised in areas where they compete with male applicants for jobs. The finding suggests that the causes of the gender gap in this labour market are to be found later in hiring processes (career interruptions, work-family balance and the like).

Aside from the gender differences, our study also found that **discrimination on the basis of ethnic background is greater against men than against women**. This suggests that employers have very different expectations of the qualities of non-majority ethnic group applicants depending on their gender. The hypothesis seems to be supported by the observed effect of a candidate's language skills: an explicit statement of a good command of French negates the discrimination against women of migrant background, while it only marginally reduces discrimination against the male applicants

« An explicit statement of a good command of French negates the discrimination against women of migrant background »

Table 2: Rate of success of applicants by origin, by gender and in relation to specific signal of a good command of French.

FAMILY NAMES-Names French			**FAMILY NAMES-Names North African**			**FAMILY NAMES-Names Foreigner inferrance**		
Applicant	*Command of fr.*		*Applicant*	*Command of fr.*		*Applicant*	*S Command of fr.*	
	Non	***Oui***		***Non***	***Oui***		***Non***	***Oui***
LECLERC Pascal	14,3%	15,5%	BENBALIT Rachid	6%	8,3%	ALDEGI Jatrix	8,3%	7,9%
ROUSSET Sandrine	20,6%	18,7%	BENOUNIS Samira	10,7%	14,7%	HADAV Alissa	9,1%	15,1%
Ensemble	**17,5%**	**17,1%**	*Ensemble*	**8,3%**	**11,5%**	*Ensemble*	**8,7%**	**11,5%**

Sources : Edo A., Jacquemet. N., Yannelis C. Language Skills and Homophilous Hiring Discrimination: Evidence from Gender- and Racially-Differentiated Applications. CES Working Paper n°13-58.

Note: For each identity, differentiated by gender (in rows) and by origin (in columns), the rates of invitation to interview are distinguished according to whether the candidate explicitly mentioned something that signalled a good command of French (« signal » column) or not (« neutral » column). Thus "BENOUIS Samira" has been interviewed by 10.7% of the employers when her CV didn't mention any command of French; 14.7% of the employers interviewed her when the good command of French was specified.

What steps can be taken to fight discrimination?

The discrimination observed in this study shows that the perceived origin of a candidate on the basis of their name constitutes a significant handicap for an identical job application if it comes from a candidate with a migrant background. Several courses of action against such discrimination are possible.

One measure that generated much discussion was the proposal **to make anonymous CVs compulsory**. In 2006, the Equal Opportunity Law opened this possibility, but following the evaluation of a rigorous experiment (see Box 1), this idea was abandoned

The limit of the anonymous CV is that it only counters discrimination based on the origins of the name of the individual, but cannot compensate for the difficulties encountered along the career path (reflected in the contents of a CV). A general policy to promote equality of opportunity, on the other hand, aims specifically to address those differences – by restoring equal treatment inside schools, entry to education institutions, etc.

Box 1: Evaluation of the impact of anonymous CVs

A team of researchers from J-PAL Europe, Crest and the Paris School of Economics (Behaghel et al.), in collaboration with Pôle Emploi (the French employment centre), carried out an assessment of the use of anonymous CVs. The methodology for the evaluation was based on an innovative protocol : companies that volunteered to participate received either anonymous CVs or CVs with names, according to drawn lots.

The main conclusion of the study was that, contrary to expectations, **applicants with a migrant background tend to be penalised by anonymous CVs** : the gap between the rate of interview invitations between the group potentially discriminated against – of migrant background – and the reference group – of ethnic majority background – rises steeply when the CV is anonymous. With named CVs, the migrant-background applicants had a one-in-ten chance of gaining an interview, against a one-in-eight chance for the applicants perceived to be « natives ». When the CVs are anonymous, the gap increases to a one-in-22 chance and a one-in-six chance respectively. What explains this ?

This result is probably due to the combination of two factors : the particularity of the companies that volunteered to take part in the study and the reinterpretation of the contents of a CV whose bio-data section is blacked out. When the CV is anonymous, issues such as awkward presentation, spelling mistakes or a professional history marked by significant difficulties in finding work are judged harshly by the recruiter, while they are considered with more generosity when the bio-data reveal that the applicant is of migrant background. In this sense, the bio-data allow recruiters to interpret with more finesse the possible negative signals in the CVs.

Another course of action, suggested by our study, is to identify the degree to which language skills influence the behaviour of employers. Specifically, we show that the explicit mention of extra-curricular experience related to language use reduces considerably discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin against female job applicants. These findings open the way to policy interventions **promoting a labelling system to indicate the degree of a candidate's mastery of the French language**, in order to fight against discrimination. The aim of such labels would be to correct employer assumptions about applicants' language skills with their actual level of competence, independent of their origins. It would be appropriate, therefore, that the label be mentioned in the job application and that it be verifiable, not open to manipulation or falsification.

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