

## **Project 9: How organizations shape ethnic discrimination in the labour market: studying organizations**

### **Aim**

To examine how the organizational context shapes ethnic discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions

### **Theoretical background**

Contemporary theories of ethnic discrimination tend to see discrimination in the labour market as the aggregate consequences of individual behaviour and as the result of employers' choices based on self-interest ('statistical discrimination') or preferences ('taste discrimination'). As a result, most research has focused on individual characteristics of job seekers in explaining discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions. Recent theoretical thought in sociology, however, blends elements of these theories into an older concern with institutions. The 'new institutionalist' (NI) theory emphasizes that the behaviour of social actors is shaped by their national and organizational context. Thus, to understand discriminatory behaviour of employers, it is crucial to account for the context in which employers make their decisions (Derous and Ryan 2018).

However, such a link is currently lacking. Scholarly work on discrimination has been primarily concerned with individual-level explanations, thereby largely ignoring the role of the organization and the employer (Midtbøen, 2015). That is, scholarly work on discrimination has been largely ignoring the role of the workplace (Reskin, 2000). While discrimination varies across organizations and countries, existing explanations of discriminatory behaviour cannot account for differential treatment across institutional settings.

Hence, a pressing question that has not been yet been sufficiently addressed is: how does the institutional context affect discriminatory decisions of employers? This project seeks to study how the organizational context affects discrimination in hiring behaviour of employers. The aim of the project is to hypothesize and empirically assess the 'institutional circumstances' under which ethnicity becomes decisive in hiring decisions.

### **Research design**

The project collects unique organizational data and conducts a vignette study and implicit association tests among employers in four countries (UK, NL, DE, ES). Furthermore, there is the possibility to carry out laboratory experiments. It is also possible to work with existing cross-national field experimental data on hiring discrimination. The position is part of the VIDI project: 'Bringing the context back in: How national institutions and organizations shape ethnic discrimination in the labour market. A multi-method comparative study'. Within the framework of the VIDI, the candidate is encouraged to develop her/his own dissertation project. Possible projects cover, but are not limited to formalization of recruitment, standardization of hiring procedures, anonymization of applications. Candidates have a background in sociology, economics, or a related field. Good proficiency in one or more of the languages of the countries of study is desired. For questions or information about the project, please contact Bram Lancee (B.Lancee@uva.nl).

### **Literature**

Derous, E., & Ryan, A. M. (2018). When your resume is (not) turning you down: Modelling ethnic bias in resume screening. *Human Resource Management Journal*. DOI: 10.1111/1748-8583.12217

Midtbøen, A. H. (2015). The context of employment discrimination: interpreting the findings of a field experiment. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 66(1), 193-214. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12098

Reskin, B. F. (2000). The proximate causes of employment discrimination. *Contemporary Sociology*, 29(2), 319-328.

### **Project initiators**

Bram Lancee (UvA) and Matthijs Kalmijn (UvA)

### **Location**

Amsterdam