



## NEWS

## Study finds hiring bias by recruiters, especially tired ones

Research published in *Nature* finds strong evidence of hiring bias by recruiters and uncovers notable patterns of when biased decision making is more likely to occur.

By [Patrick Thibodeau](#), Senior News Writer

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Researchers in Switzerland have found clear evidence of hiring bias by recruiters in a study recently published by the peer-reviewed science journal *Nature*.

At ETH Zurich, a Swiss research university, scientists analyzed data from the government website Job-Room for unemployed workers. In Switzerland, those who are unemployed post their availability and credentials on the site.

The site hosts 150,000 profiles and includes the gender, nationality and language skills of job seekers. Researchers used the site to determine when recruiters contacted a potential candidate [for an interview](#), which could then be followed up to discover if it led to a job.

Among the findings was that men and women were hired at about equal rates. But [the research](#) found evidence of occupational [bias](#), where women, for instance, were less likely to be hired for jobs traditionally held by men.



Dominik Hangartner

"We see a lot of evidence for hiring discrimination against women who apply in typically male-dominated jobs -- for example, the construction sector," said Dominik Hangartner, an associate professor of public policy at ETH Zurich and lead author of the study. The same thing happens to men "if they apply for typically female[-dominated] jobs, such as in the healthcare sector," he said.

The research also uncovered discrimination based on the race and ethnicity of applicants and saw an increase in hiring bias by recruiters based on the time of day.

In working with the government, researchers had access to anonymized data about how recruiters use the job site, including what time of day and how long they spent on each profile. Job seekers get help from government employment officers in creating their profiles, which helps ensure that the information on Job-Room is accurate.

### Evidence of discrimination

Among immigrant groups, "there's a lot of evidence for ethnic discrimination" against people who aren't in the majority population group, the Swiss, Hangartner said. The hiring bias follows a pattern described as "ethnic hierarchies," meaning the further candidates are from the majority group -- culturally, linguistically or in skin color -- the more discriminated against they will be, he said.

A person from Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, was 17% less likely to be contacted compared with a Swiss worker for a job for which they were each equally qualified.

Another finding is that time of day matters. Either just before lunch or near the end of the workday, recruiters spent less time on the profiles and hiring bias increased up to 20%, he said.

An increase in discrimination by recruiters around certain times of day is not [conscious prejudice](#), Hangartner said.

**There's a lot of evidence for ethnic discrimination.**

Recruiters are exhausted and "maybe in those hours they rely more on stereotypes, heuristic decision making, which leads to more discrimination," he said.

**Dominik Hangartner**  
Professor of public policy, ETH Zurich

The research could be used to improve recruiting sites such as Job-Room, he said. It opens up some avenues for [reducing discrimination](#), including designing job sites that highlight upfront occupational skills and education and de-emphasize details such as nationality, he suggested.

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