

GEMM: field experiments of discrimination

In most countries, immigrants and their offspring have higher unemployment rates and a lower occupational status and income than natives. Such disadvantage can only partly be explained by demographic and human capital variables available in survey and census data (e.g., Heath et al. 2008). However, because ethnic disadvantage may be due to other unobserved variables than discrimination, survey-based studies cannot provide direct evidence of discrimination (see Kalter 2006).

There is therefore a major interest in the sociological and economics literature to use field experiments for examining ethnic discrimination (Pager and Shepherd 2008; Riach and Rich 2002a/b). Field experiments are appealing, as they provide clear and convincing evidence of differential treatment in real-life social settings. In the experiment, job applications of fictitious applicants are sent to real vacancies. The applications vary on treatment conditions only, the most important treatment being the ethnic origin of the applicant, signalled by his/her name and language skills. When an applicant from an ethnic minority group is not invited for an interview whereas an equally-qualified applicant from the majority group does receive an invitation, this is evidence of ethnic discrimination, i.e. of unequal treatment based on ethnicity. Previous field-experimental studies have provided rigorous evidence that ethnic discrimination is prevalent in the European labour market (see, for example, Zegers de Beijl 2000, Kaas and Manger 2012).

Our study employs an innovative research design that allows us to analyse discrimination across a large number of ethnic groups and various dimensions of ethnicity (cultural distance, religion, language) in five strategically selected countries: Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Norway and the Netherlands. In particular, the project seeks to advance our understanding of three key issues:

- The extent and causes of variation in discrimination across ethnic groups, including prospective migrants and including different skill levels
- The relative importance of ethnic preferences and dislikes (“taste discrimination”) and information deficiencies (“statistical discrimination”) in explaining variations in discrimination;
- The extent and causes of contextual variation in levels of discrimination across regions and countries.

Our first task is to provide a descriptive account of the extent of ethnic discrimination in the labour markets of the five countries included (DE, ES, NL, UK, NO). A detailed overview of the extent of discrimination is a necessary and important first step in the fight against discrimination, as it results in country reports that can be used by policy makers. In each country we will carry out a fully comparative field experiment in the form of a correspondence test, in which randomly generated job applications are sent to existing vacancies. The comparative design is imperative, as it not only provides a reference point for the extent of assessing discrimination across countries, but also allows for testing hypotheses about the consequences of institutional arrangements.

Survey-based studies show that ethnic penalties differ strongly across groups (e.g., Heath and

Cheung 2007), and are particularly large for Muslim immigrants (e.g., Van Tubergen et al. 2004; Höhne and Koopmans 2010). However, up to now, only one or a few ethnic groups have been compared within any single field experimental study on discrimination. The limited knowledge of differences in discrimination rates across ethnic groups is a major knowledge gap because discrimination is unlikely to be homogenous.

The proposed study includes 30 ethnic groups covering the largest groups in each of the five countries; and we over-sample Muslim minorities. Instead of a single (and different) ethnic group per country, the design compares multiple ethnic minority groups. Thus, this project examines the amount of discrimination experienced by 30 ethnic minority groups, and all these groups are examined in each of the five countries. The result is a double-comparative research design, which allows for testing of origin, destination, and community effects (Van Tubergen 2006; Van Tubergen et al. 2004).

Besides the more descriptive aim of measuring the extent of discrimination, a major objective of the GEMM project is to theorize and measure the individual and contextual conditions that could affect ethnic discrimination in accord with GEMM's unified research agenda. We aim to advance our understanding with regard to explanations on the individual level and also how contextual and institutional variation can explain differences in discrimination rates.

References:

- HEATH, A. & CHEUNG, S. Y. (eds.) 2007. *Unequal Chances: Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- HEATH, A., ROTHON, C. & KILPI, E. 2008. The second generation in western Europe: education, unemployment, and occupational attainment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 211-235.
- KALTER, F. 2006. Auf der Suche nach einer Erklärung für die spezifischen Arbeitsmarktnachteile von Jugendlichen türkischer Herkunft. Zugleich eine Replik auf den Beitrag von Holger Seibert und Heike Solga: "Gleiche Chancen dank einer abgeschlossenen Ausbildung?". *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 35, 144-160
- KAAS, L. & MANGER, C. 2012. Ethnic Discrimination in Germany's Labour Market: A Field Experiment. *German Economic Review*, 13, 1-20.
- PAGER, D. & SHEPHERD, H. 2008. The sociology of discrimination: Racial discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and consumer markets. *Annual review of sociology*, 34, 181.
- RIACH, P. A. & RICH, J. 2002a. Deceptive field experiments of discrimination. Are they ethical? *Kyklos* 3, 457-470.
- RIACH, P. A. & RICH, J. 2002b. Field experiments of discrimination in the market place. *The Economic Journal* 112, F480-F518.
- VAN TUBERGEN, F. 2006. *Immigrant integration. A cross-national study*, New York, LFB Scholarly Publishing.
- VAN TUBERGEN, F., MAAS, I. & FLAP, H. D. 2004. The economic incorporation of immigrants in 18 western societies: origin, destination and community effects. *American Sociological Review*, 69, 704-727.
- ZEGERS DE BEIJL, R. (ed.) 2000. *Documenting Discrimination against Migrant Workers in the Labour Market. A Comparative Study of Four European Countries*, Geneva: ILO.