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DIFFERENT MARKET, SAME TREATMENT? A GLOBAL COMPARISON OF HIRING AND HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

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Different market, same treatment? A global comparison of hiring and housing discrimination

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Abstract

While extensive empirical research documents discrimination in labour and housing markets, comparative insights between these markets remain limited. We address this gap by juxtaposing levels of discrimination across five legally protected grounds—race and ethnicity, sex and gender, health and disability, sexual orientation, and social origin—in both markets. We apply hierarchical Bayesian meta-regressions to global data from correspondence audit studies conducted from 2000 to 2024. In doing so, we account for the metadata's multilevel structure, including study, group, location and time components. Our meta-analysis uncovers structural differences in discrimination, with racial and ethnic discrimination being greatest in the labour market and discrimination based on social origin being highest in the housing market. Frequentist robustness checks that address publication bias yield comparable findings.

Keywords: discrimination, correspondence audits, meta-analysis, housing market, labour market.

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1. Background

Discrimination daunts equal access to housing and labour markets. This inequality is especially pressing given that exclusion in these markets has long-term consequences, affecting not only immediate opportunities but also residential stability, wealth accumulation, and intergenerational mobility (Atkinson & Jacobs, 2017; Charles, 2003; Squires, 2007). A substantial body of correspondence experiments has shown that discrimination is widespread and persistent across various legally protected characteristics (Gaddis, 2018; Verhaeghe, 2022).

Despite the breadth of evidence, most studies examine discrimination within a single market or ground, limiting our understanding of how patterns vary across institutional contexts and between social groups (Baert, 2018; Gaddis et al., 2021). Meta-analyses address part of this gap by pooling evidence across time, regions, and subgroups (Auspurg et al., 2019; Flage, 2018, 2020; Quillian et al., 2017; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). For instance, Lippens et al. (2023) provide a global synthesis of labour market discrimination across ten grounds, identifying race and ethnicity, disability, and age as particularly salient, while Verhaeghe et al. (2026) review rental market discrimination, finding social origin and disability as the most pronounced grounds.

However, these meta-analyses generally assess discrimination within a single market rather than across markets. An exception is Gaddis et al. (2021), who compare racial discrimination across institutional settings in the United States and report the highest levels in economic markets—specifically housing and employment—relative to sectors such as healthcare or education. While this work underscores the importance of institutional context, its focus is limited to a single ground in a single national setting. To date, no other meta-study has systematically compared multiple protected characteristics across both labour and rental markets globally.

2. Data and methods

2.1. Scope, study selection, and data collection

We harmonised and integrated two large-scale meta-datasets of primary studies that used the gold standard method for measuring discrimination in the first phase of hiring: correspondence experiments. Our data cover hiring discrimination (Lippens & Baert, 2025) and rental housing discrimination (Verhaeghe et al., 2026), and together comprise 2,928 study treatment effects. Detailed discussions of search strategies, screening decisions, and inclusion logic are available in the original meta-analyses and preregistration files of Lippens and Baert (2025) and Verhaeghe et al. (2026). For transparency, we summarise the key elements below. Table 1 reproduces the full eligibility criteria, formulated using a variant of the PICO framework.

<Table 1 here>

Eligible studies employed correspondence testing or telephone audit designs in which fictitious treated and control applicants were randomly assigned to otherwise equivalent profiles. In this meta-study, we excluded telephone audits for comparability purposes. Studies were required to report positive responses, defined broadly as any favourable follow-up from the tester's perspective, including interview invitations, requests for additional information, or invitations to property viewings. In the analyses, we formally controlled for callback type, accounting for studies that only reported interview or viewing invitations. Studies were included if (a) raw callback counts were reported in the publication, (b) were obtained from the authors upon request, or (c) could be reliably reconstructed from the information provided. Searches covered Google Scholar, Web of Science, SSRN, IZA Discussion Papers, NBER Working Papers, CEPR Discussion Papers, ArXiv, PsyArXiv, SocArXiv, and were supplemented by backward citation tracking from prior reviews as discussed by Lippens and Baert (2025) and Verhaeghe et al. (2026). Screening was conducted independently by at least two reviewers.

Correspondence experiments were disaggregated into unique observational units based on discrimination ground, treatment–control group comparison, geographical context, and time. Data extraction was generally conducted independently by at least

two reviewers and included publication year, data collection period, country and region, treatment and control group categories, other application characteristics (e.g., gender, migrant generation), application counts, positive response counts, matched design indicator (matched or unmatched applications), and communication mode (i.e., email or telephone).

The primary outcome measure is the positive response ratio (PRR), defined as the proportion of positive responses among treated applicants relative to the same proportion among control applicants. Following standard meta-analytic practice, PRR were log-transformed before synthesis to ensure symmetry and approximate normality of the effects (Borenstein et al., 2009). For effect k, the natural logarithm of the PRR is defined as:

$$\ln(PRR_k) = \ln\left(\frac{y_k^T / n_k^T}{y_k^C / n_k^C}\right)$$

where y denotes the number of positive responses, n the number of applications, and superscripts T and C refer to treated and control groups, respectively. The standard error is given as:

$$SE_{\ln(PRR_k)} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{y_k^T} - \frac{1}{n_k^T} + \frac{1}{y_k^C} - \frac{1}{n_k^C}}$$

2.2. Analyses

The core analyses relied on Bayesian hierarchical meta-regression (BHMRA), estimated separately for each discrimination ground. We adopted this modelling strategy to explicitly account for the multilevel structure inherent to correspondence experiment data, in which multiple effect sizes may originate from the same study, treatment group, country, or time period. BHMRA provides a principled framework for modelling such clustering while allowing partial pooling across higher-level units, thereby improving estimation efficiency and robustness in the presence of unbalanced group sizes and sparse cells (Gelman et al., 2021; Röver et al., 2021). Data and accompanying code to reproduce the main figure are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/76FP9).

The outcome of the BHMRA was the log PRR, and sampling uncertainty was incorporated through reported standard errors, implying inverse-variance weighting of observations. The likelihood used a Student-*t* distribution. Fixed effects included a binary market indicator and study-level covariates for candidate gender (excluded from analyses where gender or sex constitutes the discrimination ground), migrant generation (only included in the analyses for race, ethnicity, and national origin), callback type (i.e., broad or narrow), and matched pairs design. Hierarchical elements of the BHMRA included random intercepts for study, treatment group, country, and study year (i.e., the midpoint year of the data collection period) to account for differences in baseline discrimination across markets, and a country-specific market slope to capture differences in market effects across countries. Priors were weakly informative, with normal distributions centred at zero and standard deviation 1 for the intercept and slopes, and Cauchy distributions centred at zero with scale 0.5 for the group standard deviations and residual error. Models were estimated with four chains and 10,000 iterations per chain, with 2,000 warm-up iterations.

In addition to the Bayesian analyses, we assessed small-sample publication bias using unrestricted weighted least squares meta-regressions (UWLSMRA). The alternative frequentist specifications regressed the log PRR on the market indicator and a measure of study precision, and used inverse-variance weights and robust standard errors clustered by study and country. Fixed effects for treated group (except for sex and gender effects), country, and year were included to compare outcomes within the same group, location, and time period, improving market comparability by removing systematic differences that are not of substantive interest.

We employed two complementary UWLSMRA estimation variants (Stanley & Doucouliagos, 2014, 2017). First, the precision effect test (PET) included the standard error of the effect size as a regressor and serves as a diagnostic for overreliance on imprecise effects. If the standard error term is significant, it suggests that less precise (typically smaller-sample) studies report larger effects. Second, the precision effect estimate with standard errors (PEESE) replaced the standard error with the sampling variance of the effect size, yielding a bias-adjusted estimate under the assumption that small-sample publication bias operates through excess statistical imprecision. PEESE is preferred when the bias-corrected estimate from the PET specification, i.e.,

the predicted effect at a standard error of zero averaged over the empirical covariate and fixed effect distribution, is significant at the 10% level. Otherwise, the estimates from the PET specification were retained.

3. Results and discussion

Figure 1 shows between-market similarities in discrimination; detailed results are provided in Table 2. Two systematic differences emerge. First, racial and ethnic discrimination is significantly stronger in the labour market than in the housing market. Conditional on study covariates, the treatment–control gap in positive response rates is approximately 14% ($CI_{95\%}$ = [6%, 22%]; β [$CI_{95\%}$] = 0.15 [0.06, 0.25]) larger in hiring than in renting.[5] One plausible interpretation is that taste-based discrimination plays a larger role in shaping race and ethnic differences in employment than in rental contexts (Becker, 1957; Lippens et al., 2022). Compared with rental transactions, employment arrangements typically entail more intense interaction with employers, co-workers and customers, amplifying the relevance of racial and ethnic salience, ethnocultural distance, and prejudice.

< Figure 1 here>

< Table 2 here>

Second, discrimination based on social origin is substantially stronger in housing than in hiring. Relative to socio-economically advantaged applicants, disadvantaged applicants face approximately 35% ($CI_{95\%}$ = [12%, 52%]; β [$CI_{95\%}$] = 0.43 [0.13, 0.73]) greater discrimination in access to rental housing than in hiring; we find substantial disadvantage in renting but none in hiring. This pattern aligns with the statistical discrimination mechanism (Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972). Property owners directly bear the financial risks associated with rent arrears and thus rely more heavily on observable socio-economic signals as proxies for unobserved payment reliability (Hanson & Hawley, 2011; Verhaeghe et al., 2026). By contrast, once formal

[5] Reported percentages are derived by applying the transformation 1 − exp(β) to the estimated coefficients, which pertain to the log of the positive response ratio. The 95% CI's for the percentages are obtained by applying the same transformation to the bounds of the CI for β.

qualifications are accounted for, socio-economic background may be less informative for expected productivity in hiring decisions.

For sex and gender, sexual orientation, and disability, differences between labour and housing markets are not statistically significant. These apparent between-market similarities are consistent with new institutionalist perspectives, which emphasise that institutionalised norms and routine evaluative practices shape decision-making across contexts, producing stable discriminatory outcomes despite formal market differences (Brinton & Nee, 1998; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012).

Robustness analyses using UWLSMRA, accounting for small-sample publication bias, confirm the stability of these findings (see Table 3). We follow the PEESE specification for race, ethnicity, and national origin, ($\beta = -7\%$; $CI_{95\%} = [-9\%, -4\%]$), for health and disability ($\beta = -3\%$; $CI_{95\%} = [-14\%, +10\%]$), and for social origin ($\beta = +73\%$; $CI_{95\%} = [+50\%, +99\%]$), as for these grounds, the PET-implied bias-corrected effect at a standard error of zero is significantly negative at $p < 0.001$. For sex and gender ($\beta = +5\%$; $CI_{95\%} = [-4\%, -14\%]$) and sexual orientation ($\beta = -10\%$; $CI_{95\%}$ uninformative), the bias-corrected effect is not statistically significant, so PET estimates are retained. The substantive conclusions mirror those of the BHMRA: racial and ethnic discrimination is strongest in the labour market, social origin discrimination is strongest in the housing market, and the remaining three grounds show no statistically significant differences between markets.

< Table 3 here>

Thus, across specifications, the substantive conclusions remain: racial and ethnic discrimination is most pronounced in hiring, while discrimination based on social origin is strongest in housing. Future research should cover how these dissimilarities have originated.

Declarations

Data and code availability

The data and accompanying code necessary to generate the figure and tables are available on OSF: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/76FP9.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Figure and tables

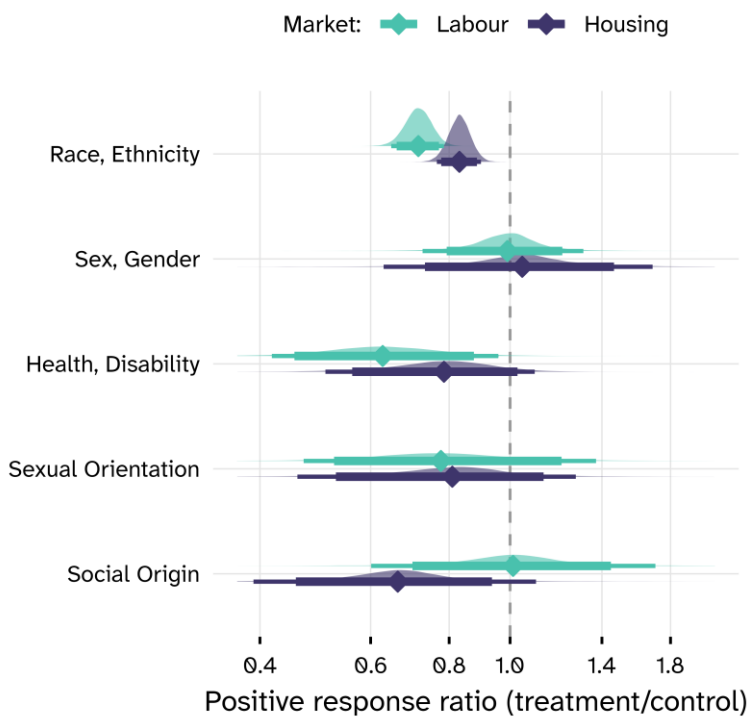

Figure 1. Predicted positive response ratios by protected ground of discrimination and market, worldwide, studies published 2000–2024. Points plot estimated average treatment–control positive response ratios based on 2,928 study effects from correspondence experiments in labour and housing markets; data from Lippens & Baert (2025) and Verhaeghe et al. (2026). A ratio of 1 indicates equal treatment, with lower ratios indicating more discrimination against disadvantaged groups (i.e., people from racialised groups, women and gender minorities, people with health conditions or disabilities, individuals with same-sex attraction, and people of disadvantaged social origin). Model-implied predictions are obtained from Bayesian hierarchical meta-regressions of the log of the positive response ratio on a market indicator, controlling for candidate gender (except when ground is sex/gender), migrant generation (only when ground is race/ethnicity), matched-pair design, and callback type, and including grouping terms for study, treatment group, country, and study year, and a country-specific market slope. For each protected ground and market, we compute population-level predictions by holding the remaining covariates at their observed values, but dropping grouping effects, and averaging over the empirical (observed) covariate distribution. Shaded half-eye shapes show the posterior draws of the average market-specific predicted ratio; thick (thin) horizontal bars report 89 (95) per cent posterior credible intervals; the vertical dashed line marks equal treatment; the horizontal axis shows the predicted ratios on a log scale with back-transformed tick labels.

Table 1. Eligibility criteria for study inclusion

Criterion	Details
Study type	Correspondence experiments in which researchers sent applications in response to vacancies on the labour market, and email audits in the rental housing market
Population	(Fictitious) applicants from five treated groups (race and ethnic origin, sex and gender, disability, social origin (i.e., class and wealth), and sexual orientation) and their non-treated counterparts
Outcome	Hiring and rental discrimination
Comparison	Broad positive callback of the treated individuals compared with their non-treated counterparts
Outcome	Study first published between 2000 and 2024

Notes. The eligibility criteria are defined using the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework, first described by Richardson et al. (1995).

Table 2. Bayesian hierarchical meta-regressions of log positive response ratio on market indicator

	REN	**SEG**	**HED**	**SOC**	**SEO**
Labour market	−0.15 (0.05)	−0.05 (0.27)	−0.21 (0.22)	0.43 (0.15)	−0.01 (0.30)
Intercept	−0.34 (0.07)	0.01 (0.23)	−0.36 (0.37)	−0.36 (0.27)	−0.46 (0.33)
Controls	Gender, Matched design, Callback type, Migrant generation	Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type
Groups	Study, Treated group, Country, Year	Study, Treated group, Country, Year	Study, Treated group, Country, Year	Study, Treated group, Country, Year	Study, Treated group, Country, Year
N	1,670	716	187	101	254
J_{study}	223	153	37	40	33
$J_{treated}$	17	4	9	2	4
$J_{country}$	33	37	14	13	17
J_{year}	23	25	16	17	17
SD_{study}	0.12 (0.01)	0.07 (0.03)	0.06 (0.05)	0.14 (0.06)	0.22 (0.06)
$SD_{treated}$	0.09 (0.02)	0.21 (0.14)	0.11 (0.07)	0.26 (0.28)	0.26 (0.23)
$SD_{country}$	0.08 (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)	0.28 (0.26)	0.07 (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)
$SD_{market\|country}$	0.11 (0.05)	0.10 (0.05)	0.55 (0.29)	0.11 (0.09)	0.49 (0.18)
SD_{year}	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.07 (0.06)	0.13 (0.07)	0.07 (0.05)
σ	0.07 (0.01)	0.14 (0.02)	0.16 (0.03)	0.10 (0.04)	0.05 (0.03)
Bayesian R^2	0.22 (0.01)	0.06 (0.01)	0.75 (0.03)	0.21 (0.04)	0.41 (0.03)

Notes. Abbreviations used: REN (race, ethnicity, and national origin), SEG (sex and gender), HED (health and disability), SOC (social origin), SEO (sexual orientation), *N* (number of effects), *J* (group levels), *SD* (standard deviation). Each column reports results from a separate meta-regression of the log of the positive response ratio on a market indicator (i.e., labour versus housing market) and the listed controls. The regressions use a Student-t distribution for the response variable. Priors are weakly informative: the intercept and slope of the predictors are assigned standard normal priors, i.e., $\alpha \sim \mathcal{N}(0,1)$ and $\beta \sim \mathcal{N}(0,1)$, respectively, whereas standard deviations are assigned a Cauchy prior, i.e., $\sigma \sim \mathcal{C}(0,0.5)$. All regressions are estimated via Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) with 4 chains, 10,000 iterations per chain, of which 2,000 are warm-up iterations, and a thinning parameter of 1. All coefficients' $\hat{R}$ equal 1, indicating full model convergence. Coefficient values are posterior means with posterior standard deviations in parentheses. The 'controls' row lists the covariates included in each specification; the 'groups' row lists the grouping terms. Model parameters include the sample size, number of levels, standard deviations of the intercepts for each grouping term (and of the country-specific market slope), residual error σ, and the R^2, with estimation errors in parentheses.

Table 3. UWLS meta-regressions of log positive response ratio on market indicator

Term	REN	SEG	HED	SOC	SEO
Panel A: Precision-effect test (PET)					
Labour market	−0.04 (0.02)	0.04 (0.05)	0.08 (0.08)	0.55*** (0.07)	−0.11 (7.50)
$SE_{ln(PRR)}$	−0.42** (0.15)	−0.04 (0.07)	−0.73 (0.41)	−0.80 (0.76)	−0.28 (0.34)
Controls	Gender, Matched design, Callback type, Migrant generation	Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type
Fixed effects	Treated group, Country, Year	Country, Year	Treated group, Country, Year	Treated group, Country, Year	Treated group, Country, Year
N	1,670	716	187	101	254
Adj. R^2	0.58	0.15	0.61	0.66	0.78
Adj. within R^2	0.04	<0.01	0.06	0.09	<0.01
Panel B: Precision-effect estimate with standard errors (PEESE)					
Labour market	−0.07*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)	−0.03 (0.06)	0.55*** (0.07)	0.03 (7.15)
$V_{ln(PRR)}$	−0.37** (0.13)	−0.09 (0.05)	−0.60 (0.58)	−0.43 (1.16)	−0.03 (0.13)
Controls	Gender, Matched design, Callback type, Migrant generation	Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type	Gender, Matched design, Callback type
Fixed effects	Treated group, Country, Year	Country, Year	Treated group, Country, Year	Treated group, Country, Year	Treated group, Country, Year
N	1,670	716	187	101	254
Adj. R^2	0.57	0.15	0.60	0.65	0.78
Adj. within R^2	0.02	<0.01	0.02	0.06	<0.01

Notes. Abbreviations used: REN (race, ethnicity, and national origin), SEG (sex and gender), HED (health and disability), SOC (social origin), SEO (sexual orientation), SE (standard error), V (variance), *N* (number of effects), *Adj*. (adjusted). Each column reports results from a separate regression of the log of the positive response ratio on a market indicator (i.e., labour versus housing market) and the listed controls. Panels present precision-effect test (PET) and precision-effect estimate with standard errors (PEESE) variants of the unrestricted weighted least squares (UWLS) meta-regressions. The PET (PEESE) specifications include the standard error (variance) of the log positive response ratio as an additional regressor to account for small-sample publication bias. The canonical Stanley & Doucouliagos (2014) rule selects PEESE when the bias-corrected estimate from the PET specification (i.e., the predicted effect at a standard error of zero, averaged over the empirical covariate and fixed effect distribution) is significant at the 10% level; PET is retained otherwise. Under this rule, PEESE is the primary specification for race and ethnicity, health and disability, and social origin; PET is retained for sex and gender, and for sexual orientation. All models are estimated using inverse-variance weights and robust standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by study and country. The 'controls' rows list the covariates included in each specification; the 'fixed effects' rows list the included fixed effects. Significance is indicated by ** if p <.01 and *** if p <.001.