

# Young men are disadvantaged when applying to female dominated jobs

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It's not always women who lose out when looking for a job. Men experience disadvantages in hiring processes for female dominated occupations in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. The reverse is not the case for women who apply for typical 'male' jobs. No gender discrimination was found in Norway or the United States. These are the findings of a study by the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, the University of Oslo, the University Carlos III of Madrid and the University of Amsterdam. Five European countries and the United States were covered in the study.

Women still earn less than men and are less likely to hold management positions. Discrimination against [women](#) in hiring processes is often regarded as an important driver of women's disadvantage in the [labor market](#). However, [discrimination](#) is difficult to measure compared across countries, and previous studies have shown different results for different countries.

The study, published in the academic journal *European Sociological Review*, fills this gap. It is the first cross-national field experiment on [gender discrimination](#) in the labor market. The study analyzed employers' responses to 4,300 applications from fictitious job candidates in six countries (Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States). Young women and men (22 to 26 years) applied to vacancies in six professions: cook, payroll clerk, receptionist, sales representative, software developer and store assistant.

The researchers found no sign of discrimination against [young women](#) in any country and in any of the occupations studied—including male-dominated occupations like software developer. Women were

considered more suitable than men for female-dominated occupations. By contrast, male applicants were discriminated against in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. In these countries, men were between 5 and 9 percent less likely to receive feedback on their applications than women. Bram Lancee from the University of Amsterdam explains: "If men applied for typical 'female' jobs, they were significantly less likely to be invited for an interview or asked to provide further information about themselves." By contrast, the researchers found no discrimination against male applicants in Norway and the U.S.

"We need to revisit our assumptions that women are always the disadvantaged group" says lead author Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund from the University of Oslo. Moreover, Birkelund expects gender stereotyping to gradually change in the future. "If male-dominated occupations related to the industrial society keep vanishing, and gender-neutral occupations are growing in size, then we would expect [gender stereotypes](#) to become less important over time".

As a limitation, the study only examines the initial stage of the hiring process. "Gender discrimination is evidently more complex than is widely understood, and if we want to combat [gender inequality](#) on the labor market we probably need to focus on the later stages of the hiring process" Jonas Radl from the WZB Berlin Social Science Center points out.

Moreover, the applicants were young and had four years of professional experience. The new findings thus do not rule out the possibility that women are discriminated in terms of earnings or promotion later in their careers.

**More information:** Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund et al, Gender Discrimination in Hiring: Evidence from a Cross-National Harmonized Field Experiment, *European Sociological Review* (2021). [DOI:](#)

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