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Ethnocultural Identity and Hiring Decisions: The Role of Social Desirability and Employer Bias

Louise Devos
Ghent University

Kristen du Bois
EDHEC Business School

Stijn Baert
Ghent University, University of Antwerp,
Université Catholique de Louvain and IZA@LISER

Louis Lippens
Ghent University

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Abstract

Hiring discrimination against candidates from ethnocultural minority groups is a persistent concern in contemporary labour markets. This study examines how professional recruiters evaluate fictitious job applicants with profiles that systematically vary in signals that form ethnocultural identity rather than isolated minority markers. Using a preregistered factorial survey experiment true to recruiters' organisational context, we assess how greater perceived distance from the ethnocultural majority is associated with hiring intentions. Structural equation modelling shows that lower perceived ethnocultural alignment is strongly and negatively associated with the likelihood of a candidate being considered for a job interview. This bias is also reflected in the extent to which recruiters identify with a candidate, as well as in taste-based expectations and competence assessments related to communication, efficiency, and leadership. Methodologically, we reinforce the credibility of the experimental findings by explicitly addressing socially desirable responses using three complementary approaches. First, we used a validated scale that captures socially desirable response tendencies, excluding respondents with a strong tendency to such responding. Second, we implemented the nominative technique, reducing the normative pressure to report personal views. Third, we employed the Bayesian truth serum, weighting responses based on their informativeness and honesty. Across all specifications, perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority emerges as a robust and consistent correlate of hiring intentions.

JEL classification

C83, J61, J71

Keywords

factorial survey experiment, social desirability, identity, hiring, discrimination

Corresponding author

Louise Devos
Louise.Devos@UGent.be

1. Introduction

Persistent disparities in hiring continue to disadvantage candidates associated with ethnocultural minority identities. Meta-analyses of correspondence studies consistently show that such candidates receive fewer interview invitations than majority-identified applicants with equivalent qualifications (Quillian et al., 2017, 2019; Gaddis et al., 2021; Lippens et al., 2023b). While correspondence tests provide robust causal evidence of discrimination, these typically rely on stylised signals such as homogeneous minority-sounding names. As such, they reveal little about how employers interpret more ambiguous, mixed, or multidimensional ethnocultural cues. Recent vignette studies have begun to incorporate such signals—through mixed-ethnicity names or culturally specific extracurricular activities. However, the findings are uneven, and inconsistencies make generalisation difficult (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Van Borm et al., 2022; Di Stasio et al., 2021).

This study addresses these gaps by examining how multiple cues of ethnocultural identity jointly shape recruiters' perceptions and hiring intentions. We randomise three dimensions that typically co-occur in real CVs—first and last name combinations, migration background, and extracurricular activities—in a preregistered factorial survey (vignette) experiment among professional recruiters. Using structural equation modelling (SEM), we conceptualise the perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority identity formed by these vignette dimensions. We then analyse how this perception influences hiring intentions, drawing on identity economics (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000) and taste-based and statistical theories of discrimination (Becker, 1957, 1971; Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972).

A central methodological concern in vignette-based hiring research is whether hypothetical evaluations can accurately approximate real-world decisions, particularly given socially desirable responses (Forster & Neugebauer, 2024; Wulff & Villadsen, 2019). We thus mitigate social desirability bias using three complementary approaches: excluding respondents with strong tendencies toward socially desirable responses (Steenkamp et al., 2010), applying nominative technique to elicit predicted judgments by colleagues (Fisher, 1993; Krumpal, 2013), and by weighting responses using the Bayesian truth serum (BTS), which rewards informative and honest answers

(Prelec, 2004). Additionally, we enhance the ecological validity of the experiment by embedding the assessments in recruiters' organisational context and by presenting profiles through an interface modelled after professional HR software.

Our findings indicate that perceived identity alignment with the ethnocultural majority is strongly associated with hiring intentions, and lower perceived alignment is associated with substantially lower interview-propensity ratings. Further, the structural equation model shows that lower perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority is consistently associated with weaker recruiter–candidate identification, lower ratings of taste-based cooperation expectations and with more negative statistical evaluations of communication, efficiency, and leadership skills. Importantly, these substantive results remain robust across all approaches addressing social desirability bias.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the study's background, outlining the theoretical framework and summarising the relevant empirical evidence. Section 3 describes the experimental design and empirical strategy, including the procedures implemented to mitigate social desirability bias, and details the data collection. Section 4 reports and discusses the findings, and Section 5 concludes.

2. Background

In the framework of identity economics, individuals derive utility from behaviour that aligns with their social identity (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). In hiring, this implies that employers may prefer candidates with whom they identify, assuming they will integrate more smoothly into the organisational culture (Kanter, 1977; Rivera, 2011). Conversely, not identifying with candidates may elicit doubt about interpersonal compatibility, reducing employers' hiring intentions (Amis et al., 2020; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016; Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Williams et al., 2012).

Ethnocultural identity is considered a salient basis for identity alignment. This concept is typically defined as a self-ascribed sense of belonging to a cultural or ethnic group (Buonomo et al., 2025; Phinney, 1992). However, hiring decisions are more strongly influenced by the perceived ethnocultural identity (PCI) of a candidate. PCI refers to recruiters' subjective classification of applicants' ethnocultural background based on observable cues (Derous & Ryan, 2019). Such perceptions are shaped by various markers, including ethnicised names (Ghekiere et al., 2023; Van Borm et al., 2022), explicit references to a migration background (Veit & Thijsen, 2021), or extracurricular activities linked to specific minority cultures (Kang et al., 2016; Fossati et al., 2020).

Such ethnocultural cues can also trigger taste-based or statistical discrimination. Taste-based discrimination theory (Becker, 1957, 1971) posits that unequal treatment arises from a subjective distaste for interacting with out-group minority candidates and is unrelated to labour productivity. This animosity may originate from employers, but it can also reflect the prejudices of coworkers or clients whose preferences employers anticipate in their hiring decisions (Borjas, 2020; Combes et al., 2016). Statistical discrimination offers a complementary explanation for biased hiring decisions. According to Phelps (1972) and Arrow (1973), employers may lack sufficient information to judge a candidate's productivity accurately and may thus rely on group-based stereotypes. Ethnocultural identity markers may be used as proxies for unobservable characteristics such as language proficiency, motivation, flexibility, or trustworthiness (Altonji & Pierret, 2001; Midtbøen, 2014). These assumptions are particularly salient when candidates are associated with unfamiliar or stigmatised groups (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2017; Derous et al., 2021).

We empirically capture taste-based discrimination by assessing whether the ethnocultural identity that recruiters attribute to a candidate shapes their perceptions of the willingness of employers, colleagues, and clients to collaborate with that candidate. Evidence from vignettes and field experiments suggests that individual cues of an ethnocultural minority can activate distaste, leading to reduced ratings on these perceptions (Baert & De Pauw, 2014; Lippens et al., 2023a; Fossati et al., 2020). Conversely, candidates who signal their partial alignment with the majority may face less discrimination, as these isolated cues reduce the perceived social or

ethnocultural distance (Biavaschi et al., 2017; Ghekiere et al., 2023; Tuppat & Gerhards, 2021).

Regarding statistical discrimination, group-based assumptions can shape perceptions across a broad range of competencies. Research highlights the impact of recurring stereotypes about the communicative and social skills of ethnocultural minorities, including their language proficiency, sociability, and assertiveness (Derous et al., 2021; Agerström et al., 2012; Van Borm et al., 2022). These stereotypes extend to perceptions of efficiency and reliability, with minorities often perceived as less punctual, less detail-oriented, or less committed (Burris et al., 2013; Van Borm et al., 2022). Finally, there are stereotypes related to leadership and development potential, with minority candidates assumed to display weaker ambition, leadership, or learning ability (Agerström et al., 2012; Van Borm et al., 2022). Studies show that minority candidates are often rated lower on these factors, especially when ethnocultural identity cues are highly salient or when the group is perceived as culturally distant from the majority (Agerström et al., 2012; Van Borm et al., 2022; Burris et al., 2013). At the same time, signals of assimilation can reduce the uncertainty associated with group-based stereotypes, thereby lowering the risk of statistical discrimination (Arai & Thoursie, 2009; Biavaschi et al., 2017).

Our study extends the literature on discrimination by examining how recruiters' integrated perceptions of candidates' ethnocultural identity—rather than isolated cues—shape hiring intentions as well as taste-based perceptions and statistical evaluations across competency domains. Building on the above theoretical approaches, our primary hypothesis (**H1**) is that the intention to discriminate in hiring increases as candidates are perceived as having a stronger minority-associated ethnocultural identity. Conversely, candidates perceived as having an identity closer to the majority are expected to face fewer disadvantages. Our secondary hypothesis (**H2**) is that a stronger minority-associated ethnocultural identity increases negative perceptions and evaluations of candidates.

3. Methods

We test our hypotheses by conducting a preregistered vignette experiment.[1] This method is well-suited to studying causal relationships because it combines the advantages of survey data with experimental variation. This combination allows us to isolate the effects of ethnocultural identity cues on hiring outcomes, while also gaining insight into the mechanisms driving differences in outcomes (Auspurg & Hinz, 2014). Vignette experiments have been successfully applied to the study of hiring discrimination and its underlying mechanisms in various contexts (e.g., Baert et al., 2024; Dalle et al., 2024a, 2024b; Devos et al., 2025a; D'hert et al., 2024; El Haj et al., 2025; Moens et al., 2024; Sterkens et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2024, 2025; Van Belle et al., 2018; Van Borm et al., 2021).

We administered our vignette experiment in Belgium. As discussed in the literature review by Devos et al. (2025b), the integration of individuals from ethnocultural minorities into the Belgian labour market has been conspicuously sluggish. In particular, first-generation migrants from non-EU countries face substantial barriers to entry. Discrimination is frequently cited as a plausible explanation for these unfavourable labour market outcomes (Devos et al., 2025b). In 2025, as much as 36% of the Belgian population had a foreign background (Statbel, 2025), underscoring the societal relevance of studying hiring discrimination in this national context.

3.1. Experimental design

A significant concern in vignette experiments is their ecological validity, that is, the extent to which respondents' evaluations resemble actual decision-making processes (Forster & Neugebauer, 2024; Wulff & Villadsen, 2020). We addressed this concern by designing our experiment to maximise realism: fictitious candidate profiles were presented within the template of a professional HR-software system, closely

[1] See https://osf.io/ma5xt; deviations from the preregistration are detailed in the Appendix, **Text A1**.

mirroring real-world recruitment settings. Each candidate profile contained general information held constant across vignettes (see Appendix, **Figure A1**), as well as experimentally varied candidate characteristics. The latter either signalled a particular ethnocultural identity (through the ethnicity of the name, extracurricular activities, or migration background) or represented candidate attributes (namely gender and work experience) intended to enhance the realism and, therefore, the ecological validity of the hiring scenarios. The experimental factors are summarised in **Table 1**.

< Table 1 about here >

The first key dimension concerned candidate names. Each vignette included a combination of first and last names signalling a majority or minority ethnocultural identity. We distinguished between homogeneous majority names (Belgian), homogeneous minority names (Moroccan, Turkish, Congolese, or Polish), and names that combined a majority first name with a minority surname from the same four ethnicities. Homogeneous majority names occurred eight times, whereas each minority or mixed-name combination occurred once. This overrepresentation of majority names increased the study's external validity (Van Borm et al., 2022). Based on prior studies, candidates with a homogeneous minority name should experience greater hiring discrimination than those with either a mixed or a homogeneous majority name (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Van Borm et al., 2022; Ghekiere et al., 2023).

The specific names employed were drawn from the name set of Martiniello and Verhaeghe (2022), which was validated in the Belgian context to ensure the names reliably signalled ethnocultural identity while controlling for other attributes, such as religiosity and social class. We selected the four minority groups because of their salience in the national migration landscape: Moroccans and Turks represent groups for which there have been historically sizeable migration flows, and these remain among the largest foreign-origin populations in Belgium (Statistics Flanders, 2024). Congolese names reflect Belgium's colonial past and represent sub-Saharan African origin; the latter population is often studied in research on labour-market discrimination (Lippens et al., 2023a). Finally, Polish migrants represent the largest Eastern European group in Belgium and have been shown to face comparatively high levels of hiring discrimination (Lippens et al., 2023a).

The second manipulated vignette dimension was migration background, which we signalled through the candidate's motivation statement. This design choice increased the realism of the vignette: in a first screening conversation, a migration background would not typically be mentioned unless explicitly framed as part of motivation. Candidates either did not mention migration, expressly stated they were first-generation migrants, or stated explicitly that they were second-generation migrants. Signalling a migration background should decrease a candidate's hiring chances relative to not signalling, because it serves as a salient marker of perceived ethnocultural distance and may reinforce discriminatory hiring preferences (Veit & Thijssen, 2021; Ahmad, 2020; Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Friedberg, 2000). This penalty should be higher for first-generation than for second-generation migrants.

Third, we varied extracurricular activities. Candidates listed one of four types of activities, either volunteering or a hobby, and each was presented in a general or culturally specific form associated with a minority group. While a candidate's extracurriculars can signal valuable skills and social capital (Baert & Vujić, 2016; Kang et al., 2016; Rivera, 2011), they can also reinforce minority identity cues, thereby reducing hiring chances (Di Stasio et al., 2021; Fossati et al., 2020). Thus, compared to general activities, culture-specific activities are expected to negatively impact hiring outcomes.

Fourth, the remaining factors increased the vignettes' realism. We included candidate gender to reflect hiring decisions typically being made based on profiles in which gender is observable and salient, and to align the experimental setup with real-world recruitment contexts (Derous & Pepermans, 2019; Dahl & Krog, 2018). In addition, we varied levels of relevant work experience, a core attribute in virtually all hiring decisions and a key determinant of labour-market outcomes for candidates, regardless of their migration background (Baert et al., 2017; Lippens et al., 2023b). This dimension was operationalised as a continuous factor, with randomly drawn values from four predefined experience brackets: none, 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, and more than 10 years. We capped experience at 25 years to indicate substantial yet realistic experience; we believed additional years would not meaningfully alter the signal in this context but could instead trigger age discrimination, as is common in Belgium (Dalle et al., 2025).

Crossing all levels of the five experimental factors produced a vignette universe of 1,536 possible candidate profiles. Given resource constraints, it was not feasible to present all combinations. We thus applied a D-efficient design (Auspurg & Hinz, 2014; Kuhfeld, 2010) to select 280 vignettes that optimise parameter precision while allowing for two-way interactions. These vignettes were grouped into 70 decks, each containing four profiles. We randomly assigned participants to one deck, with the order of profiles within decks also randomised. This procedure yielded a D-efficiency score of 90.99. Following the procedure recommended in Auspurg and Hinz (2014), we targeted 350 recruiters and ensured that participants would evaluate each profile at least 5 times. However, due to recruitment limitations at the collaborating survey agency in searching for eligible recruiters, the final sample comprised 275 recruiters.

Finally, the fictitious candidates applied to a set of jobs that varied in required education, levels of customer and internal contact (low versus high), and labour-shortage status (yes versus no), as prior evidence shows that labour-market tightness can substantially reduce ethnic discrimination in hiring (Baert et al., 2015). Including job heterogeneity further strengthened the study's external validity. **Table A1** in the Appendix summarises the selected occupations.

3.2. Mitigating social desirability bias

We mitigated the challenge of socially desirable responses in vignette experiments by applying the BTS developed by Prelec (2004). BTS incentivises truthful reporting by rewarding answers that are both closely aligned with the actual answers given by other respondents and are more frequent than respondents expect. Importantly, respondents are not asked to predict individual answers, but rather to indicate how they believe the average recruiter would evaluate the same candidate.

The method consists of two components. First, the information score captures how unexpectedly common a respondent's answer is, given their stated beliefs about how others would respond (Equation 1). Second, the prediction penalty is a Kullback–Leibler divergence (Equation 2) that captures how closely a respondent's stated expectations about which response options other recruiters would choose align with

the aggregate pattern of responses observed in the sample. Combining these, we obtain a raw BTS score for each respondent (Equation 3) and average it across vignettes.

$$INFO_{ij} = \log\left(\hat{p}_j^{self}(y_{ij})\right) - \log\left(\hat{p}_{ij}^{other}(y_{ij})\right) \quad (1)$$

$$PRED_{ij} = \sum_{k \in K} \hat{p}_{ij}^{other}(k) * \left[\log\left(\hat{p}_{ij}^{other}(k) - \log\left(\widehat{p_j}^{self}(k)\right)\right)\right] \quad (2)$$

$$BTS_i^{raw} = \frac{1}{n_i}\sum_{j=1}^{n_i}(INFO_{ij} - PRED_{ij}) \quad (3)$$

where

- $\hat{p}_j^{self}(y_{ij})$ is the empirical relative frequency with which answer y_{ij} is chosen for vignette j across every respondent i completing the vignette.
- $\hat{p}_{ij}^{other}(y_{ij})$ is the probability that respondent i predicts peers will give answer y_{ij} in vignette j.
- $\widehat{p_j}^{self}(k)$ is the empirical relative frequency with which response category k is chosen for vignette j across all respondents.
- $\hat{p}_{ij}^{other}(k)$ is the predicted probability by respondent i that peers will choose response category k.
- K is the set of all possible response categories.
- n_i is the number of vignettes evaluated by respondent i.

In our implementation, recruiters evaluated each job applicant twice, once directly, by stating their own judgment, and once indirectly, by estimating how most other recruiters would respond (i.e., the nominative technique). These direct and indirect ratings are aggregated into probability distributions over the same set of response categories and serve as inputs for Equations 1 and 2. The raw BTS score from Equation 3 is then normalised to 0–1 and used as regression weights in our analyses. Previous studies have shown that BTS substantially reduces misreporting in sensitive domains (Prelec, 2004; Bartoš et al., 2016; Frank et al., 2017).

These indirect ratings also allowed us to employ the nominative technique as a complementary strategy, using the indirect measures as alternative dependent variables. The method leverages the tendency of individuals to project their own biases onto others. As these ratings shift the focus from the respondent's own views,

they lower the incentive to provide socially acceptable answers (Fisher, 1993; Krumpal, 2013).

Additionally, we included the Steenkamp et al. (2010) scale to measure individual differences in socially desirable responding. The scale consists of two subdimensions: the egoistic response tendency (ERT), which captures respondents' inclination to present themselves in an overly favourable light, and the moralistic response tendency (MRT), which measures their tendency to underreport undesirable behaviours. Respondents scoring more than one standard deviation above the mean on either subscale were flagged as highly susceptible to social-desirability bias, in line with, for example, Devos et al. (2025a), Van Belle et al. (2020), and Sterkens et al. (2023b).

3.3. Experimental procedure

The survey had four parts: (i) an introduction, (ii) a set of instructions, (iii) the experimental task, and (iv) a post-experimental questionnaire. In the introduction, participants were informed about the General Data Protection Regulation and data confidentiality provisions, received practical guidance on survey timing and question types, and were reminded of the available incentives. Before proceeding, recruiters were asked to report their hiring experience. Respondents without such experience were excluded from the survey. Recruiters also selected the job role with which they were most familiar from the set of occupations included in our experimental context.

The instructions to participants included the job vacancy description, which explicitly listed the relevant job characteristics (see **Figure A2** in the Appendix). For occupations experiencing a shortage, the instructions explicitly stated that receiving multiple applications for such vacancies was good news, as these jobs are often difficult to fill. The participants were also informed that all candidates were based in Belgium, held the necessary permits to start work immediately, and had sufficient language proficiency. Additionally, they were told that a colleague recruiter had already spoken to the candidates and had summarised the meeting notes in the HR

software. Participants were then asked to offer their professional judgement of the candidates.

The experimental survey presented each participant with four candidate profiles. For every profile, we elicited direct and indirect outcome measures, allowing us to calculate BTS scores and apply the nominative technique, as described in Subsection 3.2. The outcome measures included interview propensity and hiring propensity scores, formulated in line with previous vignette studies on hiring discrimination (e.g., Devos et al., 2025a; Van Belle et al., 2018). Perception outcomes were measured according to taste-based and statistical clusters (see **Table 2**). Recruiters were also asked to evaluate the extent to which they perceived each candidate as belonging to the cultural majority and the extent to which they personally identified with the candidate. All items were measured on an 11-point Likert scale. Additionally, we incorporated two attention checks into the vignette survey. Only the responses of participants who passed both checks were retained for analysis, ensuring that all included observations reflected careful and valid responses.

< Table 2 about here >

For taste-based discrimination, we relied on statements that measured the willingness of employers, colleagues, and clients to collaborate with the candidate. These items were adapted from earlier work on taste-based ethnic hiring discrimination (Baert & De Pauw, 2014). The scale assessed whether recruiters, their colleagues, and potential clients would welcome or avoid interaction with the candidate. We calculated the internal consistency of this scale using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.93.

For statistical discrimination, we distinguished three perception clusters: (i) communicative and social competencies (three items), (ii) efficiency (three items), and (iii) leadership and professional development (six items). The individual items were selected based on Van Borm et al. (2022), who provided a comprehensive overview of productivity-related perceptions. These items were refined after a thorough review of the broader literature to ensure relevance to the specific ethnic minority groups included in our experimental design. The items were then substantively grouped into the three clusters above, and this grouping was validated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess whether the items load onto the

theoretically expected clusters. The CFA broadly supported our four theorised perception clusters.[2] However, high latent-factor correlations indicated a strong general evaluation component and only partial discriminant validity between taste-based and statistical constructs. On this basis, we proceed with the theoretical clusters while noting that the different perceptions are highly interrelated.

The post-experimental survey collected information on company and recruiter characteristics. In line with earlier studies on contextual variation in hiring discrimination, company characteristics included firm size, multinational status, and profit orientation (Lippens et al., 2023b). Recruiter characteristics covered professional experience, demographics, and contact with ethnic minorities. Finally, social desirability bias was assessed using Steenkamp et al.'s (2010) scale (Cronbach's alpha ERT = 0.70, MRT = 0.66).

3.4. Data

Data were collected in the summer of 2025 via a professional survey agency. The target sample consisted of 350 professional recruiters active in Belgium, ensuring that each of the 70 vignette decks would be evaluated at least five times. However, the final sample comprised 275 recruiters, as the agency had exhausted its pool of eligible panel members with hiring responsibilities. Each recruiter evaluated four candidate profiles, resulting in 1,100 candidate assessments. The survey was offered in Dutch and French to ensure coverage of recruiters across Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia, the three Belgian regions.

Participants were part of a paid sample and received a baseline incentive of €2. Consistent with Frank et al. (2017), participants were informed that their direct and indirect evaluations as part of the BTS approach would receive an honesty-based score, without revealing the exact formula. The seven highest-scoring respondents received gift vouchers ranging from €30 to €140.

[2] A four-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the 15 perception items (N = 1,100) indicated an acceptable overall fit ($\chi^2(84) = 877.05$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.093, 90% CI [0.087, 0.098]; CFI = 0.943; TLI = 0.929; SRMR = 0.038).

The descriptive statistics for the 275 participating recruiters and their companies are summarised in **Table 3**. The sample has a balanced gender distribution (45% women and 55% men); two respondents identifying as "other" were merged into the male category. Educational attainment is high, with over half of the respondents holding a master's or doctoral degree, one-third a bachelor's degree, and only a small share with a secondary education or lower (one primary respondent with primary education was merged into the secondary education group). Recruiters are generally experienced, with nearly two-thirds reporting more than 10 years of recruitment experience, and one-quarter engaging in hiring at least monthly. Most recruiters report frequent contact with ethnic minorities.

Regarding organisational characteristics, almost half of the respondents work in large firms, and around one-fifth are employed in companies that are internationally active. Profit orientation is split: 47% work in profit-oriented organisations, and the remainder in non-profit entities (including three "unknown" cases that were merged into this group). Compared with D'hert et al.'s (2024) descriptive profile of Belgian recruiters in the European Social Survey, our sample is similar in educational composition and age structure, though it somewhat overrepresents men. Overall, this supports the study's population validity.

< Table 3 about here >

4. Results and discussion

Section 4.1 presents the main results using an SEM framework that simultaneously estimates (i) the causal effects of experimentally manipulated vignette dimensions signalling ethnocultural identity on hiring-related outcomes, and (ii) the indirect associations between these vignette dimensions and hiring-related outcomes operating through recruiters' perception of candidates' alignment with the ethnocultural majority. The SEM framework also allows us to examine interview propensity alongside perceptions of recruiter–candidate identity alignment as well as taste-based and statistical discrimination. The conceptual structure of this integrated

modelling approach is presented in **Figure 1**. In Subsection 4.2, we evaluate the robustness of these findings to multiple corrections for socially desirable responding. Section 4.3 presents additional robustness checks.

< Figure 1 about here >

4.1. Ethnocultural identity and hiring outcomes

Table 4 reports the SEM results by outcome. We first examine how vignette dimensions signalling ethnocultural identity affect recruiter perceptions of candidates' alignment with the ethnocultural majority. Estimates are obtained using a maximum likelihood estimator with standard errors clustered at the recruiter level and based on 1,000 non-parametric bootstrap replications. The overall model fit for this first step is good, as indicated by a low robust root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, 0.020) and standardised root mean squared residual (SRMR, 0.008).

< Table 4 about here >

The results show that several ethnocultural signals strongly impact perceived alignment with the majority. Candidates with a homogeneous Moroccan name are rated, on average, 10.59 percentage points lower in their perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority ($p = 0.002$) than candidates with a homogeneous majority name. Similarly, candidates with homogeneous Turkish or Polish names, as well as candidates with mixed ethnic names, are perceived as significantly less aligned with the ethnocultural majority, with coefficients ranging from −0.743 ($p = 0.028$) for mixed Congolese names to −1.154 ($p = 0.001$) for homogeneous Turkish names. Homogeneous Congolese names is the only name category for which no statistically significant difference is observed, although the estimated coefficient is also negative (−0.186). Notably, among all minority name categories, homogeneous and mixed Congolese names exhibit the smallest negative effects, which is consistent with the historical ties between Belgium and Congo. In contrast, the largest negative coefficient is observed for homogeneous Turkish names, closely followed by homogeneous Moroccan names. This is consistent with established evidence on ethnic hierarchies in Belgium, where Turkish and Moroccan groups tend to be relegated to the lowest positions (Lippens et al., 2023a).

Beyond name signals, compared to not signalling a migration background, explicitly signalling being a first-generation migrant has a strong negative impact on perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority, corresponding to a reduction of 13.86 percentage points ($p < 0.001$); signalling second-generation migration status is not statistically associated with perceived alignment. Finally, compared to signalling engagement in a general cultural activity, signalling an ethnic cultural activity or general or culture-specific volunteering as an extracurricular does not significantly impact the perceived alignment of the candidate with the ethnocultural majority.

In the model's second step, all vignette dimensions and the perceived distance from the ethnocultural majority are jointly regressed on the different outcome measures. All specifications include controls for job, recruiter, and firm characteristics. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are obtained via 1,000 non-parametric bootstrap replications. The model fit is satisfactory across all outcomes, with robust values for the comparative fit index (CFI). These range from 0.957 for the statistical discrimination efficiency outcome to 0.972 for interview propensity. The Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) values are also robust, ranging from 0.870 for the statistical-discrimination efficiency cluster to 0.915 for interview propensity.

Focusing on our primary outcome, interview propensity, our results are in line with **H1**. The perceived distance of the candidate from the ethnocultural majority is a strong negative correlate of interview intention: a one-point increase in their perceived alignment is associated with a 2.80 percentage point increase in interview propensity ($p < 0.001$). Once perceived alignment is included, nearly all identity-signalling vignette dimensions no longer exhibit a direct association with interview propensity; the sole exception is a positive effect for candidates with a mixed Turkish name ($\beta = 0.675$, $p = 0.005$). A formal comparison between a restricted SEM excluding perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and the unrestricted model confirms its central role; allowing this path yields a substantial improvement in model fit ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 112.42$, $p < 0.001$).

The regression results for the remaining perceptual outcomes, which capture potential bias related to the candidate's perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority through alternative mechanisms, yield highly similar patterns, consistent with **H2**. Across all outcome measures linked to identity economics, taste-based

discrimination, and the three clusters of perceptions associated with statistical discrimination, the perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority is strongly and positively associated with the respective outcome. Estimated coefficients range from 0.192 for the statistical discrimination efficiency and leadership clusters to 0.347 for recruiter–candidate identity alignment, with all associations statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The particularly strong association for recruiter–candidate identity alignment is expected, given that the descriptive statistics indicate that recruiters with a majority ethnocultural background dominate the sample.

Beyond these indirect associations, several identity-signalling vignette dimensions have residual direct effects on perceptual outcomes. Except for the recruiter–candidate identity-alignment regression, a mixed Turkish name has a positive effect across the remaining outcomes, with coefficients ranging from 0.506 ($p = 0.006$) in the taste-based-discrimination regression to 0.704 ($p < 0.001$) in the leadership-perception regression. Within the leadership-perception model, a homogeneous Turkish name is also weakly associated with a positive residual effect ($\beta = 0.316$, $p = 0.070$). In addition, signalling a second-generation migration background has a statistically significant positive effect on leadership perceptions, relative to not signalling any migration status ($\beta = 0.253$, $p = 0.008$). By contrast, in the recruiter–candidate identity-alignment regression, signalling a first-generation migration background has a marginally significant negative impact on recruiter–candidate identification compared to not signalling any migration status ($\beta = -0.338$, $p = 0.082$).

We identify the individual perceptions driving the results for the clustered perception outcomes by re-estimating the SEM and regressing each individual perceptual item from the taste-based and statistical-discrimination clusters on perceived alignment with the ethnocultural-majority identity and the vignette dimensions. The results are reported in Appendix **Table A2**. Across all individual outcome measures, the candidate's perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority is again strongly and positively associated with the respective perception. The strongest associations are observed for the expected willingness of clients to interact ($\beta = 0.277$, $p < 0.001$), language proficiency ($\beta = 0.267$, $p < 0.001$), and social skills ($\beta =$

0.240, $p < 0.001$). The weakest, though still highly significant, association is found for assertiveness ($\beta = 0.168$, $p < 0.001$).

Across all outcome measures, the impact of ethnocultural identity signals on hiring-related outcomes operates primarily through the perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority. Rather than individual identity signals exerting independent influence, it is the perceived distance of the candidate from the ethnocultural majority that appears to shape hiring intentions and related evaluations. A notable exception across several outcomes concerns Turkish names, which exhibit (marginally) significant positive residual effects (beyond the indirect association) operating through the perceived alignment of the candidate with the ethnocultural majority identity.

4.2. Corrections for social desirability

We assess the robustness of our findings to socially desirable responding by re-estimating the SEM with interview propensity as the outcome variable under three alternative specifications. For each specification, we focus on the second stage of the model, regressing interview propensity on the vignette dimensions and perceived ethnocultural majority alignment; the results are reported in Appendix **Table A3**. Across all specifications, the association between perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and interview propensity remains stable in magnitude and statistically significant, indicating that the main result is robust to corrections for socially desirable responding. For each correction, we also observe that a mixed Turkish name has a (marginally) significant positive residual direct effect on interview propensity, over and above the indirect association operating through perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority.

First, in line with the nominative technique, we re-estimate the model, replacing the direct interview-propensity item with the colleague-oriented counterpart. Under this specification, the association between perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and the indirect interview-propensity measure remains strong

and statistically significant, albeit slightly smaller than in the baseline model ($\beta = 0.225$, $p < 0.001$).

Second, we implement a correction based on the validated social desirability scale of Steenkamp et al. (2010) by excluding respondents with a high tendency toward socially desirable responding, defined as scoring above the mean plus one standard deviation on either the ERT or MRT subscale. In this reduced sample of 804 candidate evaluations, the association between perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and interview propensity remains highly similar to the baseline estimate ($\beta = 0.272$, $p < 0.001$). Under this correction, in addition to the residual positive effect of a mixed Turkish name, there is a significant positive residual impact of a mixed Congolese name on interview propensity. Model fit under this specification is excellent, with robust CFI and TLI values close to 1.000.

Third, we apply the BTS by weighting observations using normalised BTS scores that reward informative, unexpectedly common answers. The resulting weighted SEM again yields a coefficient that closely aligns with the unweighted estimates for the association between perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and interview propensity ($\beta = 0.264$, $p < 0.001$). Under this correction, a positive residual effect of a mixed Congolese name on interview propensity also emerges.

4.3. Additional robustness checks

Finally, we conduct a broader set of robustness checks to assess the stability of our findings. First, we correct for multiple hypothesis testing that arises from estimating the same structural model across six distinct outcome measures. Applying Westfall–Young, Šidák–Holm, and Bonferroni–Holm adjustments, we find that the association between the perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and each of the six outcomes remains highly significant ($p < 0.001$ for each outcome under each correction), confirming that multiple-testing concerns do not drive our results.

Second, we test the robustness of our findings to an alternative definition of the outcome. We re-estimate the main SEM by replacing interview propensity with the more stringent hiring-propensity outcome (Appendix **Table A4**). The estimated

association between perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and hiring intentions remains highly stable and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.229$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the core mechanism extends beyond initial screening decisions to later-stage hiring evaluation. Under this specification, we again observe significant positive residual effects for both mixed-Turkish and mixed-Congolese names, over and above the association operating through the perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority.

Third, we re-estimate the main model with interview propensity as the outcome using alternative samples (Appendix **Table A4**). Excluding respondents in the bottom 5% of the vignette response-time distribution, retaining only recruiters who devoted sufficient time to evaluating the profiles, yields a restricted sample of 261 recruiters (N = 1,044). In this sample, the association between the perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority and interview propensity remains highly significant and is slightly larger than in the baseline specification ($\beta = 0.282$, $p < 0.001$). Consistent with earlier robustness checks, additional positive residual effects are observed for mixed Turkish names. This check directly addresses concerns about insufficient effort in responding, which are common in factorial survey experiments (Forster & Neugebauer, 2024; Wulff & Villadsen, 2020).

Fourth and last, prior to the data collection through the research agency, we implemented an almost identical survey among a smaller field-recruited sample of professional recruiters (126 recruiters, each evaluating four profiles, resulting in 504 observations). These were identified via publicly available contact information from the Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels Public Employment Services (see preregistration for details). Replicating the main model for this alternative sample yields substantively similar results (Appendix **Table A4**): perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority remains positively and statistically significantly associated with interview propensity ($\beta = 0.124$, $p = 0.006$). Model fit is weaker in this sample (robust CFI = 0.853; robust TLI = 0.560; scaled $\chi^2 = 37.287$; p-value = 0.090), which we attribute to the substantially smaller sample size. Consistent with this interpretation, the residual effects for Turkish names that emerge in our main specification are not statistically significant in the field-recruited sample.

5. Conclusion

This study provides robust evidence that during the recruitment process, the candidate's perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority is centrally associated with hiring intentions. Drawing on an ecologically valid, preregistered factorial vignette experiment conducted among 275 professional recruiters, we systematically combined multiple signals of ethnocultural identity (names, migration-related status, and extracurricular activities) within a realistic HR-software interface. We strengthened the credibility of the findings by implementing several complementary strategies to address socially desirable responding. These included the nominative technique, exclusion based on the validated social desirability scale of Steenkamp et al. (2010), and BTS weighting.

Across all model specifications, perceived alignment with the ethnocultural majority is consistently positively associated with recruiters' stated intentions to invite candidates for an interview. Importantly, these associations are not primarily driven by the direct influence of individual vignette dimensions. Instead, the results indicate that hiring evaluations are chiefly associated with recruiters' holistic perception of a candidate's ethnocultural alignment, which integrates multiple identity signals into an overall assessment of their proximity to the majority group. Beyond interview intention, perceived ethnocultural alignment is also strongly associated with recruiters' sense of identification with candidates, taste-based expectations regarding collaboration with employers, colleagues, and clients, and assessments of competencies in communication, efficiency, and leadership.

The stability of our results across multiple corrections for socially desirable responding is also instructive for future applied research. Indirect elicitation strategies such as the nominative technique help reduce impression management concerns but introduce interpretational ambiguity, as responses may reflect either projected personal biases or expectations about others' behaviour (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Approaches based on validated scales, such as Steenkamp et al. (2010), remain widely used in hiring-discrimination studies (e.g., Devos et al., 2025a; Sterkens et al., 2021, 2025; Van Borm et al., 2021), yet they inevitably sacrifice information by excluding respondents and may only partially capture socially desirable responding in

sensitive domains. The BTS provides a promising alternative. The technique allows the full sample to be retained and incentivises informative responses with item-specific weights derived directly from the focal outcome variables. In our sample, BTS yields results comparable to those obtained with the other correction approaches. One plausible explanation for this similarity is that the upfront truth-telling incentive associated with BTS improved response honesty across the entire survey, affecting the baseline specification, the Steenkamp et al. (2010) correction, and the nominative technique. We therefore recommend that future research experimentally vary the provision of such incentives and systematically compare indirect, scale-based, and BTS-based corrections to identify context-specific best practices for mitigating social desirability bias.

Declarations

Preregistration

The experiment was preregistered at OSF before data collection (osf.io/v68zs).

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ex ante ethical approval of survey research with informed consent is not required by the faculty of the research institution where the authors work.

Data and code availability

The anonymised dataset and accompanying code are available through OSF (osf.io/v68zs).

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Louise Devos: Conceptualisation, methods, formal analysis, data Curation, writing (original draft, review & editing), visualisation. **Kristen du Bois:** Methods, writing (original draft, review and editing). **Stijn Baert:** Conceptualisation, methods, formal analysis, writing (review and editing), supervision, and funding acquisition. **Louis Lippens:** Conceptualisation, methods, formal analysis, writing (original draft, review and editing), and supervision.

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Figures and tables

Table 1

Candidate characteristics as vignette factors, and their levels

Candidate characteristics	Levels
Ethnicity name	{Homogeneous Belgian name (x8), homogeneous Moroccan name, homogeneous Turkish name, homogeneous Congolese name, homogeneous Polish name, Belgian first name with Moroccan last name, Belgian first name with Turkish last name, Belgian first name with Congolese last name, Belgian first name with Polish last name}
Migration status	{First generation, second generation, not mentioned}
Extracurricular activities	{General volunteering, volunteering for an ethnic minority association, general cultural activity, cultural activity in an ethnic minority association}
Work experience	{No relevant experience, between 1 and 5 years of experience, between 6 and 10 years of experience, more than 10 years of experience}
Gender	{Male, Female}

Note. Homogeneous majority names occurred eight times, whereas each minority or mixed name combination occurred once.

Table 2

Clusters, signals, and statements

Cluster	Signal	Direct and indirect statements
A. Statistical discrimination		
Communicative and social competencies	Language proficiency	"This candidate seems more suited to a job that requires the following level of [language proficiency]"; "Most professional recruiters will consider this candidate more suitable for a job with the following level of [language proficiency]"
	Social skills	…social skills
	Assertiveness	…assertiveness
Efficiency and reliability	Efficiency	…efficiency
	Punctuality	…punctuality
	Detail orientation	…detail orientation
Leadership and professional development	Leadership skills	…leadership skills
	Ambition	…ambition
	Motivation	…motivation
	Respect for authority	…respect for authority
	Learning ability	…learning ability
	Flexibility	…flexibility
B. Taste-based discrimination		
Employer taste	Employer collaboration	…contact with management
Coworker taste	Coworker collaboration	…teamwork
Customer taste	Client interaction	…client contact

Notes. Perceptions are measured using parallel direct (own evaluation) and indirect (predicted evaluation by most recruiters) statements. Statistical discrimination items assess perceived suitability for jobs requiring specific competencies, while taste-based discrimination items capture willingness to collaborate by employers, coworkers, or clients. All statements use 11-point Likert scales. Statements are translated from Dutch and French to English.

Table 3

Descriptives of recruiter and company characteristics

	Number of observations (per cent)
Recruiter characteristics	
Gender	
Women	500 (45.45)
Men or others	600 (54.55)
Age	
24 to 40 years	288 (26.18)
41 to 49 years	264 (24.00)
50 to 56 years	288 (26.18)
57 to 76 years	260 (23.64)
Educational level	
Primary or secondary	148 (13.45)
Bachelor's	356 (32.36)
Master's or PhD	596 (54.18)
Recruitment involvement	
Less than once a year	224 (20.36)
Once a year	248 (22.55)
Once per semester	304 (27.64)
Monthly	196 (17.82)
Biweekly	60 (5.45)
Weekly	44 (4.00)
Daily	24 (2.18)
Recruitment experience	
1 to 5 years	272 (24.73)
5 to 10 years	140 (12.73)
More than 10 years	688 (62.55)
Contact with ethnic minorities	
Only anonymous contacts	28 (2.55)
Acquaintances	128 (11.64)
Close colleagues	420 (38.18)
Friends	240 (21.82)
Close family or friends	284 (25.82)
Social desirability	
High score on ERT	200 (18.18)
High score on MRT	160 (14.55)

Table 3 - continued

Descriptives of recruiter and company characteristics

	Number of observations (per cent)
Company characteristics	
Size	
Micro firm ([0, 10) FTE)	248 (22.55)
Small firm ([10, 50) FTE)	164 (14.91)
Medium firm ([50, 250) FTE)	160 (14.55)
Large firm ([250, ∞) FTE)	528 (48.00)
Multinational status	
Only active in Belgium	764 (69.45)
Only active in Benelux	60 (5.45)
Active in Europe	44 (4.00)
Active outside Europe	232 (21.09)
Profit status	
For profit	516 (46.91)
Not for profit or unknown	584 (53.09)

Note. ERT (egoistic response tendencies), FTE (full-time equivalent employees), and MRT (moralistic response tendencies). N=1,100, with 275 respondents each evaluating 4 vignettes. High score on both the ERT- and MRT-subscales is defined as scoring higher than one standard deviation above the mean.

Table 4

Perceived ethnocultural majority alignment, interview, and perception outcomes

	First stage	Second stage	
	Ethnic majority alignment	**Interview propensity**	**Identity alignment recruiter–candidate**
Ethnicity name (ref. = Homogeneous Belgian name)			
Homogeneous Moroccan name	−1.059** (0.354)	0.196 (0.264)	−0.430 (0.292)
Homogeneous Turkish name	−1.154** (0.392)	0.236 (0.268)	−0.521 (0.326)
Homogeneous Congolese name	−0.186 (0.279)	0.075 (0.196)	−0.447 (0.309)
Homogeneous Polish name	−0.846** (0.304)	−0.101 (0.239)	−0.301 (0.296)
Mixed Moroccan name	−0.866* (0.344)	0.088 (0.229)	−0.206 (0.285)
Mixed Turkish name	−0.915** (0.321)	0.675** (0.254)	0.305 (0.310)
Mixed Congolese name	−0.743* (0.354)	0.352 (0.256)	0.003 (0.292)
Mixed Polish name	−0.886* (0.363)	0.167 (0.251)	−0.035 (0.322)
Migration status (ref. = not signalled)			
First-generation migrant	−1.386*** (0.197)	−0.053 (0.156)	−0.338† (0.179)
Second-generation migrant	−0.108 (0.168)	0.072 (0.133)	−0.271 (0.179)
Extracurricular activities (ref. = general cultural activity)			
Ethnic cultural activity	−0.173 (0.213)	−0.103 (0.170)	0.038 (0.207)
General volunteering	−0.117 (0.219)	0.054 (0.163)	−0.114 (0.200)
Ethnic volunteering	−0.221 (0.227)	0.041 (0.162)	−0.025 (0.198)
Male (ref. = female)		0.035 (0.115)	0.014 (0.144)
Work experience (ref. = No experience)			
1–5 years of experience		1.428*** (0.174)	0.359† (0.202)
6–10 years of experience		1.932*** (0.174)	0.518* (0.214)
10–25 years of experience		2.096*** (0.171)	0.672** (0.209)
Ethnic majority alignment		0.280*** (0.031)	0.347*** (0.028)
Recruiter, job, and firm controls		Yes	Yes
Constant	8.408*** (0.178)	3.067*** (0.455)	1.416** (0.475)
Scaled χ^2(p-value)		32.706 (0.207)	32.593 (0.211)
Robust CFI		0.972	0.958
Robust TLI		0.915	0.874

Notes. CFI (comparative fit index), ref. (reference category), and TLI (Tucker–Lewis index). N=1,100. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. Results are based on a two-stage structural equation modelling approach. In the first stage, vignette dimensions signalling ethnocultural identity predict perceived alignment with the ethnic majority. In the second stage, perceived majority alignment and all vignette dimensions predict interview propensity and discrimination-related perceptions. Model fit is good (robust RMSEA = 0.020, 90% CI [0.000, 0.042]; SRMR = 0.008). Robust CFI and TLI are reported per outcome. Significance is indicated as *** when p <.001, ** when p <.01, * when p <.05, and † when p <.10.

Table 4 - continued

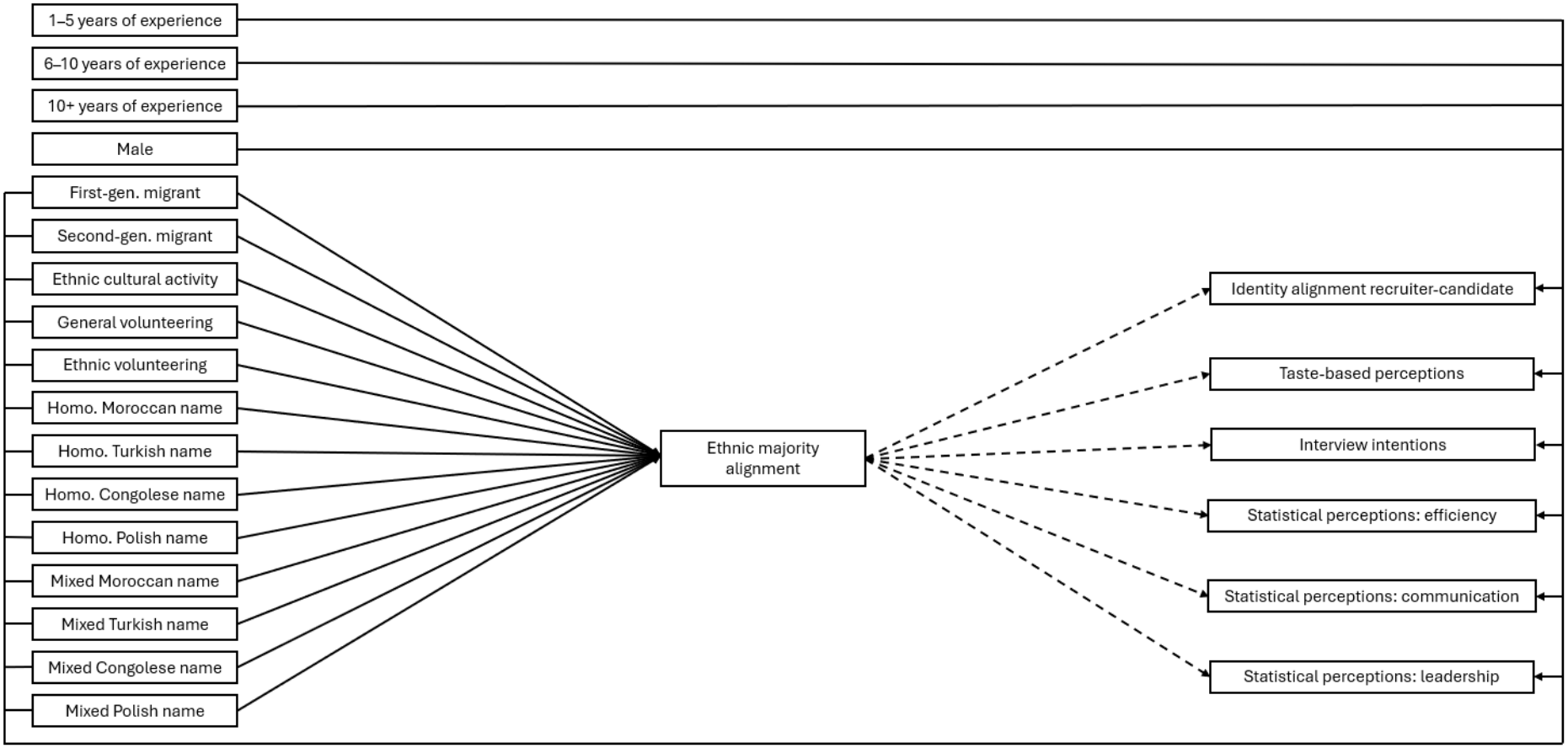
Perceived ethnocultural majority alignment and interview and perception outcomes

	Second stage			
	Taste-based discrimination	**Statistical discrimination: communication**	**Statistical discrimination: efficiency**	**Statistical discrimination: leadership**
Ethnicity name (ref. = Homogeneous Belgian name)				
Homogeneous Moroccan name	−0.111 (0.190)	−0.061 (0.164)	0.159 (0.188)	0.027 (0.180)
Homogeneous Turkish name	0.152 (0.183)	0.046 (0.173)	0.267 (0.183)	0.316† (0.170)
Homogeneous Congolese name	−0.049 (0.224)	0.078 (0.200)	0.169 (0.197)	0.103 (0.188)
Homogeneous Polish name	−0.053 (0.176)	−0.163 (0.181)	−0.056 (0.201)	0.133 (0.196)
Mixed Moroccan name	0.240 (0.160)	−0.096 (0.180)	0.133 (0.178)	0.104 (0.156)
Mixed Turkish name	0.506** (0.190)	0.627*** (0.166)	0.686*** (0.159)	0.704*** (0.159)
Mixed Congolese name	0.063 (0.185)	0.204 (0.206)	0.106 (0.215)	0.081 (0.207)
Mixed Polish name	0.084 (0.198)	−0.204 (0.173)	0.236 (0.200)	0.104 (0.175)
Migration status (ref. = Not signalled)				
First-generation migrant	0.041 (0.113)	−0.013 (0.115)	−0.016 (0.114)	0.129 (0.108)
Second-generation migrant	0.158 (0.107)	0.120 (0.103)	0.051 (0.109)	0.253** (0.100)
Extracurricular activities (ref. = General cultural activity)				
Ethnic cultural activity	0.022 (0.130)	0.098 (0.129)	0.021 (0.131)	0.067 (0.121)
General volunteering	0.121 (0.126)	−0.011 (0.121)	0.079 (0.129)	0.120 (0.122)
Ethnic volunteering	0.104 (0.125)	0.031 (0.128)	−0.004 (0.132)	0.066 (0.122)
Male (ref. = Female)	−0.013 (0.089)	−0.112 (0.088)	−0.108 (0.091)	0.035 (0.085)
Work experience (ref. = No experience)				
1–5 years of experience	0.591*** (0.132)	0.399** (0.128)	0.451** (0.131)	0.224† (0.124)
6–10 years of experience	0.959*** (0.133)	0.562*** (0.130)	0.755*** (0.132)	0.553*** (0.128)
10–25 years of experience	1.004*** (0.125)	0.572*** (0.124)	0.824*** (0.129)	0.504*** (0.119)
Ethnic majority alignment	0.243*** (0.023)	0.225*** (0.022)	0.192*** (0.022)	0.192*** (0.021)
Recruiter, job, and firm controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	3.921*** (0.351)	4.893*** (0.341)	4.990*** (0.349)	4.289*** (0.311)
Scaled χ^2(p-value)	32.610 (0.210)	32.668 (0.208)	32.685 (0.208)	32.674 (0.208)
Robust CFI	0.966	0.960	0.957	0.959
Robust TLI	0.899	0.879	0.870	0.876

Notes. CFI (comparative fit index), ref. (reference category), and TLI (Tucker–Lewis index). N=1,100. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. Results are based on a two-stage structural equation modelling approach. In the first stage, vignette dimensions signalling ethnocultural identity predict perceived alignment with the ethnic majority. In the second stage, perceived majority alignment and all vignette dimensions predict interview propensity and discrimination-related perceptions. Model fit is good (robust RMSEA = 0.020, 90% CI [0.000, 0.042]; SRMR = 0.008). Robust CFI and TLI are reported per outcome. Significance is indicated as *** when p <0.001, ** when p <0.01, * when p <0.05, and † when p <0.10.

Figure 1

Structural equation model



Notes. gen. (generation), homo. (homogeneous). Reference categories are 'no work experience' for '1–5 years of experience, '6–10 years of experience' and '10+ years of experience', 'Female' for 'Male', 'General cultural activity' for 'Ethnic cultural activity', 'General volunteering', and 'Ethnic volunteering', 'No migration status mentioned' for 'First-gen. migrant' and 'Second-gen. migrant', and 'Homogeneous Belgian name' for 'Homo. Moroccan name', 'Homo. Turkish name', 'Homo. Congolese name', 'Homo. Polish name', 'Mixed Moroccan name', 'Mixed Turkish name', 'Mixed Congolese name', and 'Mixed Polish name'. Outcome variables are estimated in separate models; recruiter, job, and firm controls (see Methods) are included in all outcome regressions. Solid arrows denote structural paths, dashed arrows denote associative paths.

Appendix

Text A1: Deviations from the preregistered analysis plan

The study was implemented in close accordance with the preregistered design. However, a limited number of preregistered measured variables were not included in the analyses. Specifically, we excluded company-level contextual characteristics requiring additional administrative data linkage, namely indicators of local ethnic diversity (measured at the municipal, provincial, or regional level) and the dominant political orientation of the company's municipality. In addition, several recruiter-level characteristics capturing background contextual and attitudinal factors were omitted from the analyses, including attitudes toward migration (based on adapted European Social Survey items), ethnic minority contact avoidance, and indicators of the local ethnic composition and political orientation of the recruiter's municipality. These recruiter-level attitudinal measures were no longer theoretically appropriate given the integrated modelling strategy adopted in the analyses (see below). Overall, these variables were not central to the study's primary research objectives and would have substantially increased the model complexity, given the already extensive set of control variables.

With respect to the analysis strategy, we deviated from the preregistered plan to estimate separate models for vignette effects and for associations between perceived ethnocultural identity and hiring outcomes. Instead, we adopted an integrated modelling approach that incorporates multiple signals of ethnocultural identity, perceived distance to the ethnocultural majority, and hiring-related outcomes using a maximum likelihood estimator. This specification remains closely aligned with the preregistered hypotheses, while more directly addressing the central research question of whether hiring disparities are driven by individual identity cues or by their combined effect through perceived ethnocultural distance. Contrary to the preregistered plan, moderation analyses with two-way interaction terms are not reported, as post hoc power analyses indicated that the sample size achieved was insufficient to detect these effects reliably.

Finally, two minor deviations concern robustness procedures. Insufficient effort in responding was operationalised by excluding the 5% of observations with the lowest evaluation times, rather than applying a mean minus one-standard-deviation threshold, due to substantial heterogeneity in response times. In addition, preregistered robustness checks based on subsamples of highly experienced recruiters or on self-assessed recruitment capability were not conducted, as recruitment experience was included as a control variable in all models, and all respondents in the final sample had demonstrable experience with hiring decisions.

Table A1

Job characteristics

Job	Educational level	Level of customer contact	Level of coworker contact	Bottleneck
Quality controller	Secondary education	Low	Low	No bottleneck
Assembler of mechanical parts	Secondary education	Low	Low	Bottleneck
Courier	Secondary education	Low	High	No bottleneck
Kitchen staff	Secondary education	Low	High	Bottleneck
Massage therapist	Secondary education	High	Low	No bottleneck
Bus driver	Secondary education	High	Low	Bottleneck
Dispatcher	Secondary education	High	High	No bottleneck
Security guard	Secondary education	High	High	Bottleneck
Chemist	Bachelors	Low	Low	No bottleneck
IT developer analyst	Bachelors	Low	Low	Bottleneck
HR officer	Bachelors	Low	High	No bottleneck
Business analyst	Bachelors	Low	High	Bottleneck
Camera and photo equipment repair technician	Bachelors	High	Low	No bottleneck
Insurance broker	Bachelors	High	Low	Bottleneck
Marketing associate	Bachelors	High	High	No bottleneck
Social worker	Bachelors	High	High	Bottleneck

Table A2

Perceived ethnocultural majority alignment and individual perception outcomes

	A. Statistical discrimination					
	Communicative and social competencies			**Efficiency and reliability**		
	Language proficiency	**Social skills**	**Assertiveness**	**Efficiency**	**Punctuality**	**Detail orientation**
Ethnic majority alignment	0.267*** (0.025)	0.240*** (0.027)	0.168*** (0.024)	0.197*** (0.023)	0.197*** (0.024)	0.181*** (0.023)
Scaled χ^2(p-value)	32.619 (0.210)	32.694 (0.207)	32.671 (0.208)	32.668 (0.208)	32.690 (0.207)	32.703 (0.207)
Robust CFI	0.961	0.954	0.937	0.956	0.951	0.950
Robust TLI	0.884	0.863	0.812	0.869	0.852	0.850

Notes. CFI (comparative fit index) and TLI (Tucker–Lewis index). N=1,100. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. Model fit is good (robust RMSEA = 0.020, 90% CI [0.000, 0.042]; SRMR = 0.008). Robust CFI and TLI are reported per outcome. Significance is indicated as *** when p <0.001.

Table A2 - continued

Perceived ethnocultural majority alignment and individual perception outcomes

	A. Statistical discrimination					
	Leadership and professional development					
	Leadership skills	**Ambition**	**Motivation**	**Respect for authority**	**Learning ability**	**Flexibility**
Ethnic majority alignment	0.222*** (0.024)	0.182*** (0.026)	0.207*** (0.031)	0.183*** (0.023)	0.175*** (0.024)	0.181*** (0.025)
Scaled χ^2(p-value)	32.659 (0.209)	32.703 (0.207)	32.681 (0.208)	32.674 (0.208)	32.661 (0.208)	32.684 (0.208)
Robust CFI	0.958	0.939	0.976	0.941	0.942	0.937
Robust TLI	0.875	0.817	0.928	0.822	0.826	0.811

Notes. CFI (comparative fit index), and TLI (Tucker–Lewis index). N=1,100. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. Model fit is good (robust RMSEA = 0.020, 90% CI [0.000, 0.042]; SRMR = 0.008). Robust CFI and TLI are reported per outcome. Significance is indicated as *** when p <0.001.

Table A2 - continued

Perceived ethnocultural majority alignment and individual perception outcomes

	B. Taste-based discrimination		
	Employer taste	**Coworker taste**	**Customer taste**
	Employer collaboration	**Coworker collaboration**	**Client interaction**
Ethnic majority alignment	0.214*** (0.025)	0.214*** (0.025)	0.277*** (0.025)
Scaled χ^2(p-value)	32.658 (0.209)	32.658 (0.209)	32.627 (0.210)
Robust CFI	0.962	0.962	0.965
Robust TLI	0.886	0.886	0.896

Notes. CFI (comparative fit index), and TLI (Tucker–Lewis index). N=1,100. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. Model fit is good (robust RMSEA = 0.020, 90% CI [0.000, 0.042]; SRMR = 0.008). Robust CFI and TLI are reported per outcome. Significance is indicated as *** when p <0.001.

Table A3

Social desirability corrections

	Interview propensity			
	No correction	Nominative technique	Steenkamp et al. (2010) correction	BTS weights
Ethnicity name (ref. = Homogeneous Belgian name)				
Homogeneous Moroccan name	0.196 (0.264)	−0.128 (0.264)	0.134 (0.322)	0.292 (0.250)
Homogeneous Turkish name	0.236 (0.268)	0.085 (0.262)	0.207 (0.315)	0.290 (0.261)
Homogeneous Congolese name	0.075 (0.196)	−0.062 (0.231)	0.044 (0.249)	−0.019 (0.166)
Homogeneous Polish name	−0.101 (0.239)	−0.240 (0.249)	0.094 (0.283)	−0.131 (0.228)
Mixed Moroccan name	0.088 (0.229)	0.055 (0.235)	0.038 (0.266)	0.107 (0.236)
Mixed Turkish name	0.675** (0.254)	0.471† (0.268)	0.628† (0.349)	0.623** (0.229)
Mixed Congolese name	0.352 (0.256)	0.149 (0.250)	0.692* (0.267)	0.378† (0.228)
Mixed Polish name	0.167 (0.251)	−0.180 (0.241)	0.128 (0.285)	0.233 (0.252)
Migration status (ref. = Not signalled)				
First-generation migrant	−0.053 (0.156)	−0.214 (0.159)	−0.005 (0.192)	−0.077 (0.132)
Second-generation migrant	0.072 (0.133)	−0.026 (0.142)	0.169 (0.164)	0.047 (0.114)
Extracurricular activities (ref. = General cultural activity)				
Ethnic cultural activity	−0.103 (0.170)	−0.068 (0.173)	−0.023 (0.196)	−0.090 (0.132)
General volunteering	0.054 (0.163)	0.142 (0.160)	0.071 (0.191)	0.024 (0.126)
Ethnic volunteering	0.041 (0.162)	0.067 (0.167)	−0.034 (0.189)	0.076 (0.132)
Male (ref. = Female)	0.035 (0.115)	−0.081 (0.116)	0.050 (0.133)	0.013 (0.089)
Work experience (ref. = no experience)				
1–5 years of experience	1.428*** (0.174)	1.603*** (0.172)	1.396*** (0.208)	1.387*** (0.138)
6–10 years of experience	1.932*** (0.174)	2.098*** (0.182)	1.993*** (0.213)	1.888*** (0.153)
10–25 years of experience	2.096*** (0.171)	2.214*** (0.173)	2.134*** (0.207)	2.052*** (0.151)
Ethnic majority alignment	0.280*** (0.031)	0.225*** (0.029)	0.272*** (0.035)	0.264*** (0.042)
Recruiter, job, and firm controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	3.067*** (0.455)	3.170*** (0.439)	3.270*** (0.543)	3.125*** (0.591)
Scaled χ^2(p-value)	32.706 (0.207)	32.684 (0.208)	25.622 (0.540)	38.458 (0.071)
Robust CFI	0.972	0.970	1.000	0.944
Robust TLI	0.915	0.909	1.032	0.831
Robust RMSEA	0.020	0.020	0.000	0.029
90% CI robust RMSEA	[0.000, 0.042]	[0.000, 0.042]	[0.000, 0.038]	[0.000, 0.049]
SRMR	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.009

Notes. BTS (Bayesian truth serum), CFI (comparative fit index), CI (confidence interval), ref. (reference category), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), SRMR (standardised root mean square residual), and TLI (Tucker–Lewis index). N = 1,100 for the full-sample specifications (no correction, nominative technique, and BTS weights) and N = 804 for the Steenkamp et al. (2010) low–social-desirability subsample. The no-correction model uses direct outcomes without weights; the nominative technique replaces direct outcomes with indirect (colleague-predicted) outcomes; and the Steenkamp et al. (2010) specification restricts the sample to respondents who score ≤ the mean +1 SD on both subscales. The BTS-weighted model applies normalised respondent weights derived from the Bayesian truth serum. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. For the no-correction, nominative technique, and Steenkamp et al. (2010) specifications, bootstrap standard errors are obtained using lavaan's built-in bootstrap; for the BTS-weighted specification, standard errors are obtained via a recruiter-level cluster bootstrap (1,000 replications), as probability weights and clustering are not jointly supported by lavaan's built-in procedure. The BTS-weighted model applies normalised respondent weights based on the BTS. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when p <0.001, ** when p <0.01, * when p <0.05, and † when p <0.10.

Table A4

Robustness checks

	Hiring propensity	Interview propensity: IER correction	Interview propensity: field sample
Ethnicity name (ref. = Homogeneous Belgian name)			
Homogeneous Moroccan name	0.225 (0.263)	0.161 (0.279)	0.140 (0.375)
Homogeneous Turkish name	0.188 (0.260)	0.282 (0.265)	−0.353 (0.426)
Homogeneous Congolese name	0.072 (0.214)	0.082 (0.201)	0.537† (0.324)
Homogeneous Polish name	−0.023 (0.256)	−0.140 (0.249)	−0.005 (0.321)
Mixed Moroccan name	0.172 (0.233)	0.068 (0.226)	−0.284 (0.372)
Mixed Turkish name	0.628* (0.249)	0.655* (0.265)	−0.268 (0.430)
Mixed Congolese name	0.503* (0.231)	0.447 (0.276)	−0.151 (0.492)
Mixed Polish name	−0.051 (0.234)	0.220 (0.272)	0.229 (0.457)
Migration status (ref. = Not signalled)			
First-generation migrant	−0.151 (0.164)	−0.057 (0.163)	0.227 (0.253)
Second-generation migrant	0.070 (0.138)	0.076 (0.140)	0.319 (0.236)
Extracurricular activities (ref. = General cultural activity)			
Ethnic cultural activity	0.041 (0.173)	−0.159 (0.171)	−0.060 (0.271)
General volunteering	0.044 (0.166)	0.004 (0.166)	0.050 (0.272)
Ethnic volunteering	0.117 (0.168)	0.005 (0.170)	−0.034 (0.275)
Male (ref. = Female)	0.038 (0.120)	0.012 (0.114)	0.222 (0.191)
Work experience (ref. = No experience)			
1–5 years of experience	1.299*** (0.170)	1.445*** (0.183)	2.029*** (0.303)
6–10 years of experience	1.770*** (0.181)	1.952*** (0.179)	2.433*** (0.302)
10–25 years of experience	2.003*** (0.173)	2.133*** (0.177)	2.678*** (0.294)
Ethnic majority alignment	0.229*** (0.029)	0.282*** (0.032)	0.124** (0.045)
Recruiter, job, and firm controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	3.501*** (0.433)	3.076*** (0.479)	4.286*** (0.860)
Scaled χ^2(p-value)	32.712 (0.207)	30.382 (0.297)	37.287 (0.090)
Robust CFI	0.965	0.982	0.853
Robust TLI	0.895	0.947	0.560
Robust RMSEA	0.020	0.016	0.043
90% CI robust RMSEA	[0.000, 0.042]	[0.000, 0.040]	[0.000, 0.074]
SRMR	0.008	0.008	0.011

Notes. CFI (comparative fit index), CI (confidence interval), IER (insufficient effort responding), ref. (reference category), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), SRMR (standardised root mean square residual), and TLI (Tucker–Lewis index). N = 1,100 for the full-sample specification (hiring propensity), N = 1044 for the IER correction, and N = 504 for the alternative sample with recruiters from the field. The hiring propensity model replaces interview propensity with hiring propensity. The IER specification restricts the sample to respondents scoring high (top 95%) on time spent on the experiment. The field sample replicates the main analysis, with interview propensity as the outcome variable, using an alternative group of respondents recruited directly from the field rather than through the research agency. Coefficients are reported with non-parametric bootstrap standard errors (1,000 replications) in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when p <0.001, ** when p <0.01, * when p <0.05, and † when p <0.10.

Figure A1

Example of vignette presentation in the HR software template

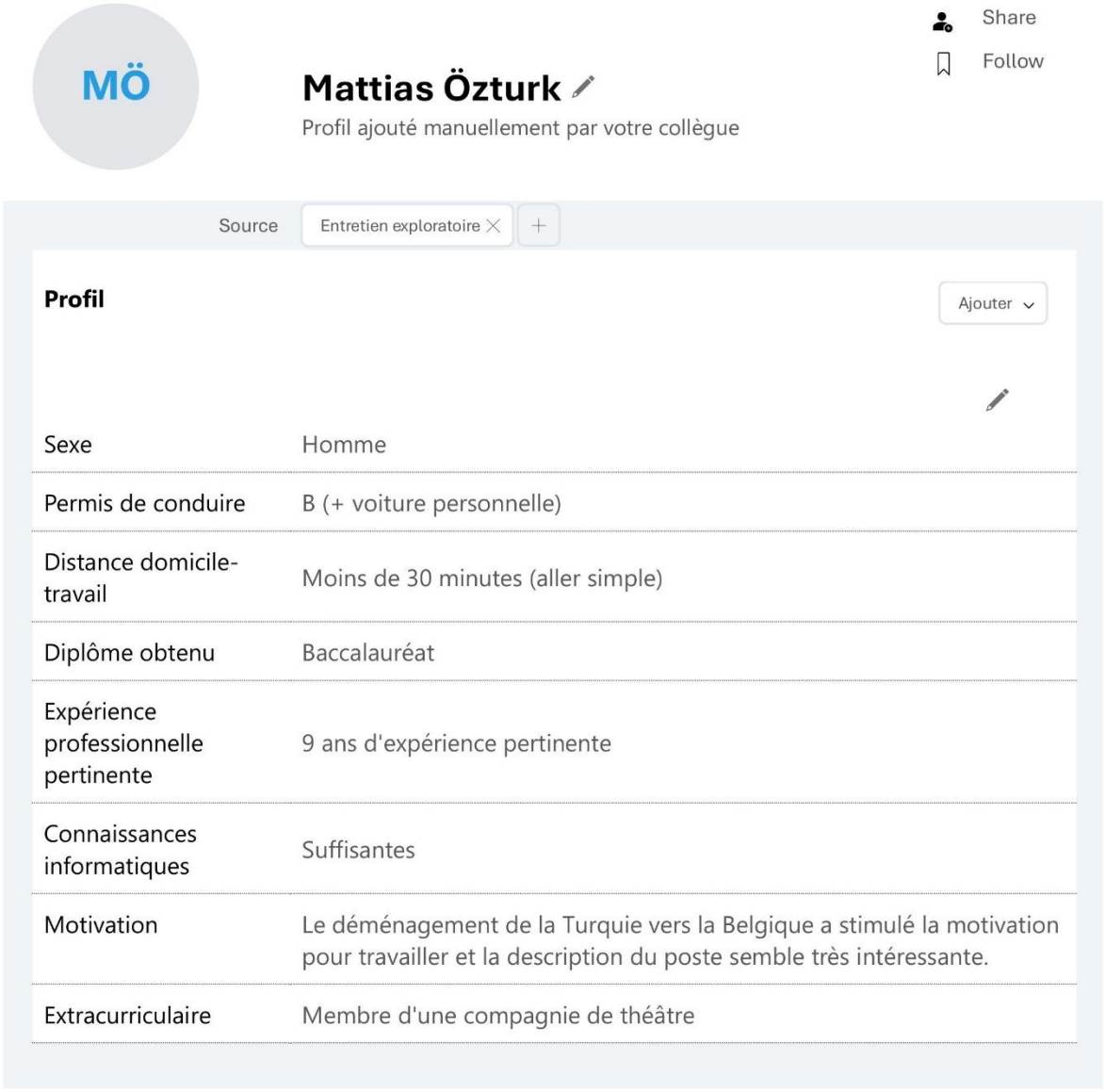


Figure A2

Example of a job description

Details du poste

Description du poste

Contrôleur de qualité

Nous recherchons un(e) contrôleur (contrôleuse) de qualité motivé(e), titulaire d'un diplôme d'études secondaires, pour rejoindre notre équipe. Ce poste est idéal pour les personnes qui aiment travailler de manière indépendante sur des défis pratiques.

Description du poste:

- Contrôler les produits et les processus conformément aux normes de qualité établies;
- Enregistrer les déviations et en faire rapport à la personne responsable;
- Travailler dans un environnement de travail calme avec un contact limité avec les clients;
- Travailler de manière indépendante sur les contrôles avec un minimum de moments de consultation interne;
- Respecter les procédures et assurer une documentation correcte.

Nous offrons un poste à temps plein au sein d'une équipe stable avec des possibilités d'évolution professionnelle et de coaching sur le terrain. Les candidats sans expérience professionnelle sont également vivement encouragés à postuler.