



ENHANCE GUIDELINE FOR BIAS-AWARE SELECTION

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INDEX

Part I: Introduction

Why guideline?

Unconscious biases

Part II: Recommendations for selection processes

The application call

The selection commission

The selection process

Resources

PART I: INTRODUCTION

WHY GUIDELINE?

In our working life, we take lots of decisions. Sometimes, our decisions may affect other people's professional situations directly as well. Think of an application by someone, and imagine that you are the person who will select the "right" candidate. **What do you look at first in this application? What would you ask during the interview?** [Scientific studies](#) have proven that decision-makers might be affected negatively by their unconscious biases when involved in selection processes. These are often based on mistaken, inaccurate, or incomplete information. Reflection and some exercises can assist you in becoming aware of these biases and breaking these habits. This document will help you!

This guide has been created for all those who are involved in selection processes for activities in the ENHANCE Alliance, such as summer schools, staff weeks, workshops, seminars, training offers, mobility activities, or any other cross-border educational activity.

UNCONSCIOUS BIASES

Unconscious biases help us standardize and simplify reality, and may affect our decisions and behavior without us even realizing it. The "first impression", non-verbal behaviors or unconscious feelings of comfort or discomfort can cause biases. Being aware of different kinds of biases based on dimensions like **gender, age, ethnicity, cultural background, nationality, sexual and affective orientation, body ableism, beauty and physical appearance**, is the first step to overcoming the habit of reaching decisions that are guided by them.

Biases are often based on the principle of similarity or [homosocial reproduction](#), i.e., that people hire individuals who are similar to themselves in terms of social dimensions. Confirmation and conformity biases are also common, as they refer respectively to the tendency to either seek information that confirms our pre-existing beliefs or is influenced by the views of others (similar to "groupthink").

While taking actions or making decisions entirely bias-free could be a desirable goal, it appears a more realistic aim would be to raise awareness about common biases, thus trying to avoid coming to a conclusion based on them rather than on clearly defined criteria.

Consequences of bias-driven actions in **selection processes** can be discrimination against people belonging to less appreciated groups, commonly known as sexism, racism, ableism, cultural distinction, and so on.

A set of shared and defined criteria to be implemented throughout the selection process (during all phases: call, commission, assessment, selection) will provide the basis for

contrasting the presence of biases. In the following part, a shortlist of recommendations is provided.

THE SURGEON'S DILEMMA – A TEST FOR UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Here is a challenge for you:

A father and his son are involved in a horrific car crash and the man dies at the scene. However, when the child arrives at the hospital and is rushed into the operating theater, the surgeon pulls away and says: "I can't operate on this boy, he's my son".

How can this be true?

(The answer is on the last page!)

[Video about unconscious bias](#)



PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SELECTION PROCESSES

Selection processes may differ significantly for different activities or opportunities offered, as described below. Each phase should be addressed and structured properly. A list of suggestions within this regard is thus provided.

THE APPLICATION CALL

- ✓ Describe the qualifications and skills related to the activity or grant.
- ✓ Check the language you use in your ad. Is your text inclusive? Try out the open-source free tool [Gender Decoder](#) for job ads. If you are a Microsoft 365 user, AI can help you write more [inclusive texts](#).
- ✓ Be transparent about the criteria of your selection process. Set clear performance-

related hiring criteria before the selection process begins. Also, check that none of the pre-established criteria is prejudicial to a particular group of people.

- ✓ Encourage people with fewer opportunities* to apply. Especially in ENHANCE, we want to include everyone in our activities. Do not only use conventional communication channels to publish and share your call. This may exclude some groups with fewer opportunities from the very beginning. They will never apply to your activity if they do not see your call. For example, inform the department that takes care of the staff or students with disabilities about your call or encourage the student associations of first-generation students to promote your call in their network.
- ✓ Ensure an open call and spread the information among the entire individual who should be addressed. The ENHANCE Alliance consists of a diverse community (administrative, academic staff and students at your campus). Have this diversity reflected when selecting a mixed group too. Diversity does not only apply to gender, ethnicity, or religion. You can also think of age, disability, language, and cultural background.
- ✓ Decide whether to forbid photos of applicants. Some people are photogenic

*WHO ARE (YOUNG) PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES?

'Young people with fewer opportunities' are defined in the Erasmus+ program guide as young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more of the seven exclusion factors: disability, health problems, educational difficulties, cultural differences, economic obstacles, social obstacles, or geographic obstacles.

and can present themselves well, while others cannot.

- ✓ Publish your call in English too. Universities are international communities. Using only your national language may exclude potential international candidates from the activity.

THE SELECTION COMMISSION

- ✓ Select diverse individuals for the commission. Diversity may include non-evident dimensions, such as an invisible disability, family situation or background, or sexual orientation.
- ✓ Promote dialogue on (unconscious) bias and selection criteria and ask for feedback.
- ✓ Take part in anti-bias training opportunities offered by ENHANCE, especially for colleagues in charge of selection processes.
- ✓ Regularly reflect on unconscious bias and monitor each other.

WHAT ARE YOUR UNCONSCIOUS BIASES?

DO THE TEST!

Harvard University's Project Implicit® uses online tests to reveal subconscious biases that we may not be aware of. These Implicit Association Tests (IATs) cover a wide range of possible social preferences. The project seeks to learn more about these biases by providing free, confidential access to short tests. We recommend you try out some of the tests here. For example, why not try out the [gender career test](#):



THE SELECTION PHASE

Design well-structured and fair selection processes. These pieces of advice may be helpful:

- ✓ Use objective performance-based and job- or program-specific criteria for the assessment of candidates.
- ✓ Consider using structured assessment procedures by assigning points for required knowledge or skills.
- ✓ Black out the name and other personal details (age, gender, family-related information) of the applicants as long as possible to avoid biases. Check out [this resource](#) for more tips.
- ✓ A different approach could be using personal characteristics within the assessment as additional criteria in favor of candidates with fewer opportunities or using quotas to ensure a better representation of subgroups like persons with disabilities or those with an “international background”.
- ✓ During interviews, apply the above-mentioned criteria (conduct the job interview with another colleague together and prepare yourself for the interview) and make sure you ask the same questions about each application.
- ✓ Consider cultural differences, especially if the selection process is in another language, such as English.
- ✓ Slow down the decision process: take your time to decide.

Exercise:

Imagine that you are going to form a jury for a big ENHANCE competition for all ENHANCE students on the topic of sustainability. Here is your task: Please choose four colleagues for this jury. Try to form the most diverse jury that you can. Answer the reflection questions after the exercise. Remember that this is only an exercise! You do not have to tell your colleagues whom you have chosen.

Your jury:

Person 1 _____

Person 2 _____

Person 3 _____

Person 4 _____

Reflection questions about this exercise:

- ✓ Why did you choose these colleagues?
- ✓ How did you proceed when selecting them?
- ✓ How can you be sure that your choice was based on facts and standard selection criteria?
- ✓ Have you uncovered any unconscious biases? Check your blind spots!

ANSWER TO "SURGEON'S DILEMMA":

This story – called the surgeon's dilemma – is often used to demonstrate the way that unconscious bias works. Of course, the surgeon is the boy's mother.

The point of the riddle:

If you didn't come up with the answer, then don't worry, you aren't alone. It seems less than half of those who try to solve the surgeon's dilemma struggle with it, but that's the point of the riddle: to unearth our own biases and show that we all have them, but they do not have to be reflected in our behavior. This is the sneaky nature of unconscious biases: we are not aware that we have them and this in itself makes it harder to identify such biases and then do something about them. But all is not lost. We can do something about our biases if we are motivated to.

RESOURCES

- ✓ [10 ways to reduce the damaging impact of unconscious bias in your business.](#)
- ✓ [Turner Consulting Group. Bias-free Hiring. Quick Reference Guide](#)
- ✓ [University of Virginia: Project Implicit](#)
- ✓ [The Royal Society: Understanding unconscious bias](#)
- ✓ [ENHANCE Diversity and Gender Equality Hub](#)

Did you know that ENHANCE even offers training opportunities about unconscious bias?

[Visit this page to explore the next offers](#)



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