

Does more knowledge on anti-discrimination law relate to more support for anti-discrimination policy on the rental housing market?

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Does more knowledge on anti-discrimination law relate to more support for anti-discrimination policy on the rental housing market?

Discrimination is still a pervasive problem on the rental housing market. At the same time, the efficiency of anti-discrimination policies relies on the support for and knowledge of these policies. We examined to which extent landlords have knowledge of the anti-discrimination legislation in Belgium and whether their level of knowledge is related to their support for anti-discrimination policy measures. For these purposes, we performed a survey including vignettes among 223 private landlords. We find that landlords successfully recognize discriminatory behavior based on income and ethnic origin. Besides, private landlords' support for anti-discrimination measures is relatively high, and more so for compliance as opposed to deterrence measures. Importantly, both knowledge and support are found to be strongly related, with more knowledge relating to more support for general, targeted and compliance measures. The exception, however, is the link with support for deterrence measures (e.g. correspondence testing with sanctions or compulsory training sessions).

Keywords: Anti-discrimination policy, housing market, discrimination, survey, private landlords

Introduction

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that rental discrimination remains a major issue when pursuing a rental dwelling. Discrimination in access to housing is present on the grounds of ethnic origin, gender (Auspurg *et al.* 2019; Flage 2018), socio-economic class (e.g. Andersson *et al.* 2012) and disability (Fumarco *et al.* 2017; Verhaeghe *et al.* 2016). Many studies have shown the persistence of rental discrimination in Europe (e.g. Lacroix *et al.* 2023; Mazziotta *et al.* 2015; Molla *et al.* 2022; Váradi *et al.* 2023). Given the repeated proof of unequal access to housing for multiple groups, it should be high on the agenda of policymakers. Certain Belgian local governments address discrimination by establishing a set of soft measures, aimed at raising awareness among the general public and realtors that discrimination is unlawful. This is generally done by establishing informational brochures or campaigns, providing training sessions for realtors, and/or conducting correspondence tests. Since the end of 2022, the Flemish regional government proposes “plan living together”¹ (plan Samenleven), providing subsidies for local governments to engage with 24 different actions directed at living together in diversity. The latter

includes four actions directed at discrimination in a broad sense (Local action plan against street intimidation, bystander training, local action plan for accessibility, and correspondence tests).

Tackling rental discrimination is very challenging and can best be instrumentalized through multiple ways. Research suggests that the combination of both so-called ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ measures is the most effective to combat discrimination (Baldwin & Cave 1999; Verstraete *et al.* 2017). We expect that especially the soft measures, such as awareness campaigns and anti-discrimination trainings, will have more impact if they are supported by the stakeholders on the housing market. The participation into many of these activities is not only voluntary, but people are more likely to comply to these actions if they are positive about the goal of anti-discrimination (Kahneman 2011). This expectation is in line with research showing that public support for affordable housing in the US facilitates the efficacy of housing planning programs and initiatives (Tighe 2010). In addition, we argue that a prerequisite for supporting anti-discrimination laws and policies is to have at least a minimum level of knowledge about them. There is, however, very little research yet that examines this association.

The goal of this study is, therefore, to analyze the level of support for and knowledge of anti-discrimination legislation on the housing market among private landlords in Belgium. Moreover, we will examine to which extent both are related. In other words, to which extent is knowledge of anti-discrimination laws, and thus the ability to differentiate legal selection from discrimination, related to support for anti-discrimination policies? This study makes several contributions to the literature. Firstly, while support for anti-discrimination policies in the housing market has been examined among the general public in both the United States (Abravanel 2002; Mangum & Block 2022; Strolovitch 1998) and Europe (Verhaeghe *et al.* 2023), the perspectives of private landlords remain largely unknown. Secondly, there is limited research on the extent to which real estate agents and landlords are aware of fair housing legislation. It appears that realtors are at least vaguely familiar with anti-discrimination laws, as they tend to use subtle and indirect methods of discrimination (e.g. selecting candidates based on non-ethnic but subjective factors such as language or asking certain candidates for more information as a dissuasion tool) or they refuse to comply with discriminatory requests from clients by citing the law (Ghekiere *et al.* 2023b; Verstraete & Verhaeghe 2019). However, the position of private landlords, which is a significantly understudied group in rental market discrimination research, remains largely unknown. This study aims to address these gaps in the literature by examining both the support for and knowledge of anti-discrimination policies in Belgium, and their mutual relationship.

The case-study of Belgium is interesting for two reasons. First of all, Belgium is a country with enduring levels of discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin, gender, financial means and/or disability (Heylen & Van den Broeck 2016; Martiniello & Verhaeghe 2022; Martiniello & Verhaeghe 2023; Van Den Broeck & Heylen 2015; Van der Bracht *et al.* 2015; Verhaeghe & Ghekiere 2021). Especially, ethnic and financial discrimination appear to be high, with

discrimination rates ranging from circa 25% to 40%, depending on the region, ground and group under scrutiny. It is precisely these two discrimination grounds which will be the focus of our research design. Moreover, Belgium has a dualistic housing market, in which homeowners are dominating (a share of 74%) and have been long fiscally advantaged by the government (De Decker & Dewilde 2010; Winter & Heylen 2014). In addition, social housing is very scarce (7% of the market). As a result, private renters constitute a relatively minor portion (a share of 19%) of the housing market and originate disproportionately from lower-income and/or ethnic minority groups. On this private housing market, the private landlords are overrepresented and responsible for most of the discrimination. (Ghekiere & Verhaeghe 2022). In what follows, we first look at different types of anti-discrimination policy, distinguishing policies aimed at compliance or deterrence, as well as general versus targeted policies. After having made this distinction, we consider the state of the art regarding both support and knowledge for the different types of anti-discrimination policy. We follow up with the data and methodology, whereafter we present the results of how support relates to knowledge. We finalize the paper with a discussion and conclusion.

Anti-discrimination policies

Regarding policy directed at anti-discrimination and the provision of equal opportunities, a distinction can be made between policies aiming at compliance on the one hand or deterrence on the other (Verstraete *et al.* 2017). The former refers to ‘soft’ measures aiming at sensibilizing people by raising awareness. The latter comprises more ‘forceful’ measures, focused on enforcement and if necessary, sanctioning (Baldwin & Cave 1999). More specifically for the housing market, examples of soft measures are correspondence testing with the goal of engaging in follow-up discussions with discriminatory landlords, providing voluntary diversity trainings for realtors or landlords, establishing a general campaign in the media to raise public awareness about discrimination, building contact points where victims of discrimination can file complaints and make them better known to the general public and establishing a contact point for questions regarding the anti-discrimination law for realtors and landlords (Verhaeghe *et al.*, 2023; Verstraete *et al.* 2017). As opposed to this, examples of forceful measures are legal correspondence testing where the goal is to file a complaint against discriminatory realtors or landlords and providing mandatory diversity trainings for realtors and landlords (Freiberg & Squires 2015; Verhaeghe 2022).

Besides, a distinction can be made between general or targeted policies (Alexander 2004). The move from multicultural to diversity policies in many European contexts has led to less focus on racial or ethnic characteristics specifically, by instead focusing on multiple grounds of discrimination (Bereni *et al.* 2020; Cretton 2018; Lewis 2004; Westerveen & Adam 2019)). Where multicultural policies targeted specific ethnic groups, diversity policies address all

individuals within society, as multiple grounds of discrimination besides ethnic origin (like disability, sexual orientation, gender identity) are considered, and hence addressing them all with the same policies (Schiller 2015; Saeys *et al.* 2019; Cianetti 2020). An example of targeted policies is correspondence tests, both in their sensibilizing and legal forms. However, because of the move to diversity policies, more weight is given to general policies, like providing voluntary or mandatory diversity trainings, establishing general media campaigns aimed at sensibilizing people or creating contact-points for victims of discrimination or for realtors and landlords with questions regarding the anti-discrimination law. Also, policies focusing on expanding the number of affordable housing units or social housing projects are examples of general policies. Nevertheless, general policies can indirectly target specific groups, if for example a significant number of the people in need of more affordable or social housings are belonging to an ethnic minority group (De Zwart 2005).

Support for anti-discrimination policies

Having made this distinction between sorts of anti-discrimination policies, the question arises to what extent these policies are supported. When considering support for anti-discrimination policies in a specific domain, one must distinguish between the general public on the one hand and realtors and landlords on the other. It appears that a majority of the general public is in favor of the existence of the Fair Housing Act in the American context. This is especially the case for people with lower incomes, aged between 35 and 44, women, African Americans or Hispanic, and people living in larger families (Abravanel 2002). These differences in support based on personal characteristics might be related to two elements. Respondents aged between 35 and 44 years old appeared to have more knowledge of the Fair Housing Act. This explanation, however, does not hold for people with lower incomes, as a modest positive association was found between income and knowledge about the Fair Housing Act, and a negative association is found between income and support for the Fair Housing Act. In this case, as well as for women, ethnic minorities and people living in larger families, the stronger the support for the Fair Housing Act might be explained by their greater exposure to discriminatory behavior. However, perceived discrimination has been found to have at most a modest impact on support for affirmative action as anti-discrimination measure or pro-Black policies (Haaland & Roth 2023; Mangum & Block 2022). More influential is group self-interest, whereby believing that society treats individuals from ones' own background unequally or unfavorable leads to more support for affirmative action or race-targeted anti-discrimination policies (Strolovitch 1998; Mangum and Block 2022).

In addition, support for anti-discrimination policies among the general public is also found to be related to prejudices (Verhaeghe *et al.* 2022), discriminatory beliefs (Strolovitch 1998) and racial resentment (Mangum and Block 2022) and this both in a European and American context. People with significant negative – both overt and covert – prejudices are not supportive

of policies aimed at tackling discrimination. The opposite holds for people with (as good as) no negative prejudices. People with only covert negative prejudices support soft measures aimed at sensibilizing and raising awareness, but reject forceful measures that apply enforcement (Verhaeghe *et al.* 2022). People with discriminatory beliefs and racial resentment, regardless of their ethnic group, are less supportive of anti-discrimination policy. Also individualism and the belief that the government should play no role here relates to lower support (Strolovitch 1998). Overall, one could argue that the general public is more likely to go along with policies that are beneficial to them, consequently disagreeing with policies that might impact them in an adverse way (Baert *et al.* 2021).

Also, support for anti-discrimination policies is mixed among the supply side of the housing market. The above-mentioned analyses among the general public might be extended to realtors and landlords, especially considering the absence or presence of prejudices. More prejudiced realtors or landlords will probably be less in favor of anti-discrimination policy. Besides, group self-interest could also be applied to the supply side: private landlords might be against anti-discrimination policy measures, because they might want to safeguard the ability to choose the tenants they want. The only study focusing on the supply side so far found that realtors and landlords in a European context claim that the focus should be on raising awareness through training and information rather than applying forceful measures (Verstraete *et al.* 2017). Although the literature gives a certain direction as to which actors are in favor of what sort of policies, a more in-depth understanding is lacking.

Knowledge about anti-discrimination law

Besides questioning support, one might wonder whether individuals know the difference between legal selection and discrimination. Knowledge on anti-discrimination legislation has been tested among the general public, often in an American context. This is relevant, as knowledge about the existing law among the general public is needed to a) realize if a person is being treated in an adverse way and b) know that this adverse treatment is illegal (Abravanel 2002). Only then, plausible victims of discrimination can consider filing a complaint, although further information regarding what options are available as well as a belief that the system is effective is needed to actually do so (Abravanel 2002, 2007; Silver & Danielowski 2019).

Although – modest – attention has been granted to the general public, the supply side remains as good as untouched. Nevertheless, knowledge of the law is primordial to comply with antidiscrimination rules. It is only when realtors and landlords know what behavior is unlawful or not, that they can consciously make the decision whether to comply. In this line, mystery shopping – which measures the intention to discriminate by analyzing the way realtors reply to a discriminatory request – is proven to be a useful tool. Realtors are often careful in replying positively or agree indirectly to the discriminatory request, by proposing to select candidates on

non-ethnic yet subjective criteria (e.g. language and appearance of the rental candidate) that comply to the customer's wishes or to complicate the process for specific profiles of rental candidates by asking them to provide more information (Ghekiere *et al.* 2023b; Verstraete & Verhaeghe 2019). This tactic implies a degree of knowledge of the anti-discrimination law among realtors, yet without compliance to the law. An important share of realtors reject the discriminatory request by referring to the anti-discrimination law, also indicating their knowledge and its relation to compliance (Ghekiere *et al.* 2023b; Verstraete & Verhaeghe 2019).

Linking support to knowledge

Besides the decision whether to play by the rules, knowledge of the law might be related to support for anti-discrimination policies among landlords. Prior to forming an opinion on a policy, people must possess a certain degree of knowledge or information about the subject (Zaller 1992; Tighe 2010). The association between knowledge and support has already been examined among the general public in the US. Abravanel (2002) has shown that the more people know about Fair Housing laws, the more likely they are in favor of public non-discrimination policies. The picture is, however, unknown with respect to the suppliers of housing. Real estate agents are found to generally believe more in policies aiming at raising awareness and sensibilization as opposed to stronger policies directed at enforcement and sanctioning (Verstraete *et al.* 2017). This might vary accordingly to the knowledge among realtors and landlords of what discrimination precisely means: realtors and landlords with a good knowledge of what the anti-discrimination law covers, might be more sensible to recognize discriminatory situations. This might lead to an increased awareness of an existing problem, consequently understanding - or supporting - the need for anti-discrimination policies and even more forceful measures. On the contrary, if extensive knowledge is lacking, the problem of discrimination might be overlooked or perceived as overemphasized. This might lead to low support for anti-discrimination policies in general or to a preference for soft measures over forceful ones.

Legal context

Unlike the American context, Europe does not have a fair housing act. Nonetheless, in 2000, the European Union adopted the Racial Equality Directive as well as the Employment Equality Directive (Silver and Danielowski 2019). The aim of these directives is to create a legislative framework that prohibits unequal treatment based on racial or ethnic grounds in goods and services. With the concept of discrimination, the Racial Equality Directive refers to both direct and indirect discrimination, but also to harassment and the instruction to discriminate. Reliant on this European-level framework, member states are expected to translate the directives in concrete actions and laws striving for equal opportunities. A major difference with the American fair

housing act is the wider scope. Whereas the latter applies specifically to housing, the Racial Equality Directive targets different areas, whereunder housing, employment, education and social protection, under the header of “goods and services” (Brown 2001; Eur-Lex²).

Article 11 of the Belgian constitution states that “Het genot van de rechten en vrijheden aan de Belgen toegekend moet zonder discriminatie verzekerd worden” (*The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms granted to Belgians must be ensured without discrimination*). Based on the Racial Equality Directive at the European-level, Belgium established three federal laws that depart from the non-discrimination principle: the anti-discrimination law (directed at the criteria of, among others, sex, gender identity and motherhood), anti-racism law (directed at the criteria of, among others, nationality, ethnic or national origin and skin-color), and the law on the equality between men and women (directed at the criteria of, among others, disability, sexual orientation, religion or philosophical belief (Belgium.be³). In addition, on the Regional level the Flemish region follows an equal-opportunity and equal treatment decree (“*decreet gelijkekansen- en gelijkebehandelingsbeleid*”) (Verstraete *et al.* 2017; Vlaanderen.be⁴) and the Walloon region developed The Walloon decree against certain forms of discrimination (“*Le décret wallon de lutte contre certaines forms de discrimination*”) (Wallonie.be)⁵. In the Brussels region, four legislative texts were established based on the EU-level framework, whereunder three are directed towards specific areas: housing, employment, and employment in a regional public office. The fourth considers an Ordinance to combat certain forms of discrimination and to promote equal treatment. Additionally, a policy text aimed at creating diversity and combating discrimination in the Brussels Regional civil service is being established (Equal.brussels⁶).

Data and method

In November 2022 we collected data from 223 private landlords resulting from a targeted survey in Belgium. The population was sampled through the online, specialized survey platform, Bilendi. The recruitment for the panel was done through multi-sourcing, in which Bilendi on the one hand contacted respondents in their database that indicated being a landlord now, or in the past and on the other hand actively approached potential panellists through different channels (Bilendi website, third party databases, banner media websites, etc.) which ensures that different types of profiles were reached. The survey was introduced as “a survey on selection with landlords”. Quota’s on gender, language and education were included to represent the diversity of landlords in Belgium. The selection of respondents was limited to people who currently rent out or have ever rented out their property in the past. Importantly, we use private landlords (individuals who are not related to a company or a profit-oriented organization) and not real estate agencies. The survey could be completed in Dutch and French, the two main languages in Belgium, and consisted of two major sections: simulations of rental processes by means of vignettes and measured support for different anti-discrimination policies.

First, a simulation of a rental process was presented, which tested the knowledge regarding the anti-discrimination policy in Belgium. More concretely, we randomly presented three distinct vignettes that included situations in which rental decisions were made. These situations related to selection based on the candidate's source of income, the candidate's ethnic origin¹ and the intersection between both, as shown in the examples below:

The Kowalczyk family, consisting of mom, dad and four children, are applying to rent a two-bedroom apartment at 1.200 euros/month in Asse. Their combined net income amounts to 3.900 euros per month. In response to their request to view the property, they receive a negative answer because the landlords do not want to rent to people with a migration background.

Ms Peeters wants to rent a one-bedroom flat in Antwerp. The rent is 550 euro/month. She receives 1500 euro net in the month from unemployment benefit. The landlord does not want to rent the flat to Ms Peeters because she receives unemployment benefit.

Ms Celiköz, on unemployment benefit of 1300euro net monthly, wants to rent a one-bedroom flat in Ghent. The rent is 450euro/month. The landlord does not want to rent the flat to Ms Celiköz because she receives unemployment benefit.

The respondents subsequently were asked to indicate whether the choice of not inviting the candidate to the viewing is considered as an illegitimate selection and thus discrimination or is considered a legal form of selection. In a text box below the question, the respondents were asked to motivate their answer. Three situations were presented, the first situation related to discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin, more concretely: *in response to their request to view the property, the candidates receive a negative answer because the landlords do not want to rent to people with a migration background.* This statement concerns selection based on the ethnic origin of a candidate, which should be labeled as discrimination. The second situation relates to the source of income as a reason to not invite the candidate: *the landlord does not want to rent the property to (Flemish name) because he/she is receiving unemployment benefits.* Both grounds are illegal selection

¹ We used an East-European and Turkish name to signal that a person has a non-Belgian origin in the vignettes. We expect these results to remain the same even if other origin groups were to be used, and this for two reasons. Firstly, research shows that respondents do pick up signals of a person belonging to a minority group based on a name but are way less successful to attribute a specific country of origin to a name (Martiniello & Verhaeghe 2022). Following this observation, the importance in this vignette study is that the names are perceived as of another than Belgian origin. Secondly, the vignettes do not ask about the respondents' own preferences, intentions or behavior, but about their knowledge about the law. Hence, if they are familiar with anti-discrimination policy and law, they should know that this holds for all origin groups.

criteria and would thus be labeled as discrimination. A third and last situation related to the intersect between the ethnic origin and source of income: *the landlord does not want to rent the property to (name signaling an ethnic minority candidate) because he/she receives unemployment benefits.*

The second section of the survey related to the support for anti-discrimination policy on the housing market. With a 7-point Likert scale, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they totally do not agree, do not agree, partly do not agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly agree, agree, or totally agree, with 7 policy measures on the rental housing market, shown in table 1. The items relate to general, targeted, compliance and deterrence policy as conceptualized in the theoretical framework and are policies often used or debated in Belgium (Verstraete *et al.* 2017; Verhaeghe *et al.* 2023).²

(Insert Table 1 here)

The final section of the survey included the measurement of personal characteristics of the respondents, their involvement in the topic of (anti-)discrimination and their willingness to adapt to the anti-discrimination law. These variables are presented in table 2. The personal characteristics include the language in which the questionnaire was executed, the gender of the respondents, their educational level and their place of residency (metropolitan or non-metropolitan area). Additionally, two dummy variables questioned the respondents' involvement in the subject: whether they ever attended a diversity training/workshop and whether they are interested in the debate around discrimination on the housing market. These variables are important factors to control for in the analysis, as they could affect the relation between knowledge and support. With a similar reasoning, we asked about the respondent's willingness to change behavior according to the anti-discrimination-law, using a 7-point Likert scale. We expect that a lot of knowledge but low willingness to adapt could result in low support. On the other hand, little knowledge but a lot of willingness to adapt could result in high levels of support. Therefore, we will test whether the effect of knowledge on support is mediated by the willingness to change or adapt to anti-discrimination law.

(Insert Table 2 here)

We analyze the data with multiple linear regression analyses. The results are divided in four separate analyses, with the four categorized groups of policy measures (general, targeted,

² The policy items were described in short sentences, such as: "Do you agree with getting landlords to voluntarily follow diversity training?". Besides, private landlords are expected to be familiar with the term "correspondence tests", as it is widely used as such in local and regional political debate.

compliance and deterrence) as the dependent variables. These are continuous variables (going from 1 to 7) that express the support for each policy measure. The independent variables consist of (I) the knowledge on anti-discrimination policy and (II) the personal characteristics, as shown in table 1.

Results

Descriptive results

Table 3 shows the results of the first section of the survey relating to the recognition of rental discrimination based on different grounds. These results show that 88 percent of the respondents correctly labeled selection on the basis of ethnic origin as discrimination. Interestingly, only 51 percent was able to label discrimination on the basis of the source of income correctly as discrimination. The intersection of ethnic origin and source of income was least recognized as discrimination, with only 46 percent correctly labeling the statement as discrimination. The latter might point towards the use of source-of-income discrimination to achieve ethnic discrimination, although the difference to the scenario solely based on source of income is only 5%. This clearly shows that the respondents' focus went primarily to the information regarding the source of income.

(Insert Table 3 here)

In table 4, we present the general results on policy support. We found that, in line with the literature, the support for general compliance policy measures, like awareness campaigns or a contact point for victims, acquire the most support. On the contrary, the deterrence measures receive the least support. The deterrence feature would most likely reduce support as the private owner is not eager to obligatory, no matter their behavior, join the training in this case. Following, the targeted measures are second in line of support. Interestingly, the support for correspondence tests is rather high. However, the correspondence tests including sanctions carry a significant lower level of support.

(Insert Table 4 here)

Regression analysis

Table 5 shows the results from the regression analysis on support for anti-discrimination policy. In the first model we measure the effect of the level of knowledge of discrimination legislation on support for targeted measures of anti-discrimination policy. The results indicate that both the

knowledge on ethnic and source of income discrimination result in higher levels of support for targeted anti-discrimination policy (measures resulting from targeted correspondence tests). The intersect of these grounds of discrimination shows no significant effect on the targeted policy support. When adding respondent characteristics to the analysis in model 2, we found that the will to comply to the anti-discrimination law has a large, significant effect on the policy support. Moreover, this willingness appears to mediate the original effect of knowledge of ethnic discrimination on policy support. The same is found regarding interest in the debate around discrimination.

In addition, we found similar results related to support for general anti-discrimination policy measures (training, awareness, etc.). Both knowledge on ethnic and income discrimination is associated with higher support for general policy measures. Similarly, the positive mediation effect results from the will to comply to the anti-discrimination law and from interest in the general discrimination debate.

(Insert Table 5 here)

In table 6, we examine the association of knowledge with support for deterrence and compliance policies. In contrast to the two previous analyses, we found no effect of the level of knowledge on ethnic discrimination on support for deterrence policy. Interestingly, when we add control variables in model 2, it shows that education has a negative effect on support for deterrence policy. In other words, higher education respondents were less likely to support deterrence policy measures. The same goes for the current place of residence: we found lower support for deterrence policies in metropolitan areas as compared to rural areas. Subsequently, a significant positive effect of language shows higher support among French speaking respondents. Overall, the French speaking part of Belgium is more politically left as compared to the Dutch speaking part, which might contribute to explaining this finding. Finally, as with the previous policies, we find a significant positive mediation effect of the willingness to adapt according to the anti-discrimination law. Finally, the results on compliance policy show similar results as the targeted and general policies. Again, both the knowledge on ethnic and source of income discrimination show positive effects on the support for compliance policy, as does the willingness to adapt to anti-discrimination law.

(Insert Table 6 here)

Discussion and conclusion

Discrimination is still a pervasive problem on the rental housing market. At the same time, the efficiency of anti-discrimination policies relies on the support for and knowledge of these policies. In this paper, we examined to which extent landlords have knowledge of the anti-discrimination legislation in Belgium and whether their level of knowledge is related to their support for anti-discrimination policy measures. For these purposes, we performed a vignette study among 223 private landlords in Belgium. We could draw several conclusions.

Firstly, landlords are well able to recognize ethnic discrimination on the housing market, which suggests a good and practical knowledge of this discrimination ground. However, they are much less able to recognize discrimination on the basis of the source of the income. This is disturbing, given the fact that a recent meta-regression showed that candidates with an unemployment status or a housing voucher experience the most discrimination on the housing market (Ghekiere *et al.* 2023c). This suggests that these high levels of income discrimination could be (partly) explained by the low level of knowledge among landlords about this discrimination ground. The findings also reflect the nature of the public debate in Belgium, where ethnic discrimination is widely debated while income discrimination is rather absent. Important to note is that these results could be moderated by landlord characteristics, such as the size and price of the rental dwelling or their previous experience with renting to ethnic minority group members in the past, which we were unable to include in the current analyses. In addition, we find relatively high levels of support among landlords for anti-discrimination policies on the housing market, which corroborates with the findings from previous studies among the general public (e.g. Abravanel 2002; Verhaeghe *et al.* 2023). The support varies, however, according to the nature of the measures, with most support for general compliance measures and – not surprisingly – the least support for deterrence measures.

Moreover, as the first study, we found a strong relationship between knowledge of and support for anti-discrimination policies. Landlords who can recognize ethnic and income discrimination in a vignette study tend to agree more with both general, targeted and compliance policy measures to tackle rental discrimination. The exception is, however, policies with a focus on deterrence (e.g. correspondence tests with sanctions or compulsory training sessions), where only knowledge of income discrimination plays a role. Interestingly, these positive effects of knowledge on policy support are (partly) mediated by landlords' willingness to adapt their behavior and their interest in the public debate around discrimination. Landlords who know the anti-discrimination legislation are more willing to change their selection behavior (if necessary) and are more interested in the public debate on the topic, also show higher levels of support for anti-discrimination policies. Unfortunately, given the cross-sectional design of our study, we could not establish the causality of these relationships. Neither could we assess the effect of

potential socially desirable answers in the experiment, which could have affected, especially, the measure of “willingness to adapt”.

A surprising finding is, furthermore, that landlords who followed a training session do not support anti-discrimination policies more. This is remarkable, because educating landlords about the anti-discrimination legislation is usually an important part of these workshops. A possible explanation is that the attendees of these voluntary training sessions are often those landlords that are also willing to adapt their behavior. In other words, the potential positive effect of these training sessions is fully captured by their very selective influx. Future research should look specifically at more obligatory training sessions with a less selective participation of landlords to examine the ‘true’ effect of training.

Of course, this research contains certain limitations. Firstly, by focusing solely on private landlords, we miss another important group on the rental housing market, namely real estate agents. Secondly, although we were able to analyse knowledge of anti-discrimination law and policy on the one hand and support for concrete measures on the other, this does not tell us anything about their personal behavior when renting out a dwelling. Thirdly, albeit small, some social desirability in the respondents’ answers cannot be fully excluded.

Since support for anti-discrimination policies among landlords is instrumental for the efficacy of these policies (Tighe 2010), the policy implication of these findings is that policy makers should invest more in improving the knowledge of the anti-discrimination legislation. Previous research among students in real estate already showed that training interventions could be successful not only in improving knowledge of anti-discrimination legislation, but also in effectively reducing ethnic discrimination (Ghekiere *et al.* 2023a). This study further shows that more knowledge is associated with more support for anti-discrimination policies. This study is, however, ambivalent with respect to how we should inform landlords about the laws. Voluntary training sessions about discrimination do not appear to be effective at the moment in Belgium, probably because of attention biases and selection effects respectively. Therefore, the policy recommendation is – besides the engagement of local governments to conduct correspondence tests to measure discrimination - to inform landlords about the anti-discrimination laws in other ways, such as through obligatory training session on anti-discrimination or through voluntary workshops about other housing topics than discrimination (e.g. housing subsidies or evictions) in which discrimination is also discussed as a side-topic. This last type of workshop will probably attract a less selective audience of landlords. Local governments such as municipality actors could have an important role in this, creating an institutional setting in which information and training is provided to private landlords as they enter the local rental housing market.

Funding details

This work was supported by FWO Flanders under grant number G021922N.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University (S004119N).

Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data availability statement

In line with the conditions outlined in the data management plan of the EdisTools project, of which the data in this study is a part, the anonymised data will be made available after five years following the end of the research project. The data and replication package will be publicly available on Zenodo from the 16th of September 2028 through following link <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13816542>.

Table 1. Types of policy measures tested

Targeted	Correspondence tests + follow ups	●	Deterrence
	Correspondence tests + sanctions		
General	Compulsory training	Compliance	
	Voluntary training		
	General awareness		
	Information point for anti-discrimination		
	Contact point for victims		

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of respondent characteristics

Respondent's characteristics	Values	%
Language: Dutch (ref. French)	0 - 1	74.4
Gender: women (ref. men)	0 - 1	33.2
Education: higher education (ref. secondary education)	0 - 1	72.2
Area of residence: metropolitan (ref. non metropolitan area)	0 - 1	52.9
Respondent's involvement	Values	\bar{x}
I ever attended an anti-discrimination workshop (no-yes)	0 - 1	0.09
I am interested in the debate on discrimination (no-yes)	0 - 1	0.33
Respondent's willingness to adapt	Values	\bar{x}
I want to change my own behavior in relation to the anti-discrimination law	1 - 7	4.59

Table 3. The recognition of rental discrimination on the basis of different grounds

Ground of discrimination	Recognition of discrimination
Ethnic origin	88%
Source of income	51%
Ethnic origin in combination with the source of income	46%

Table 4. Descriptive results on the support for the policy measures

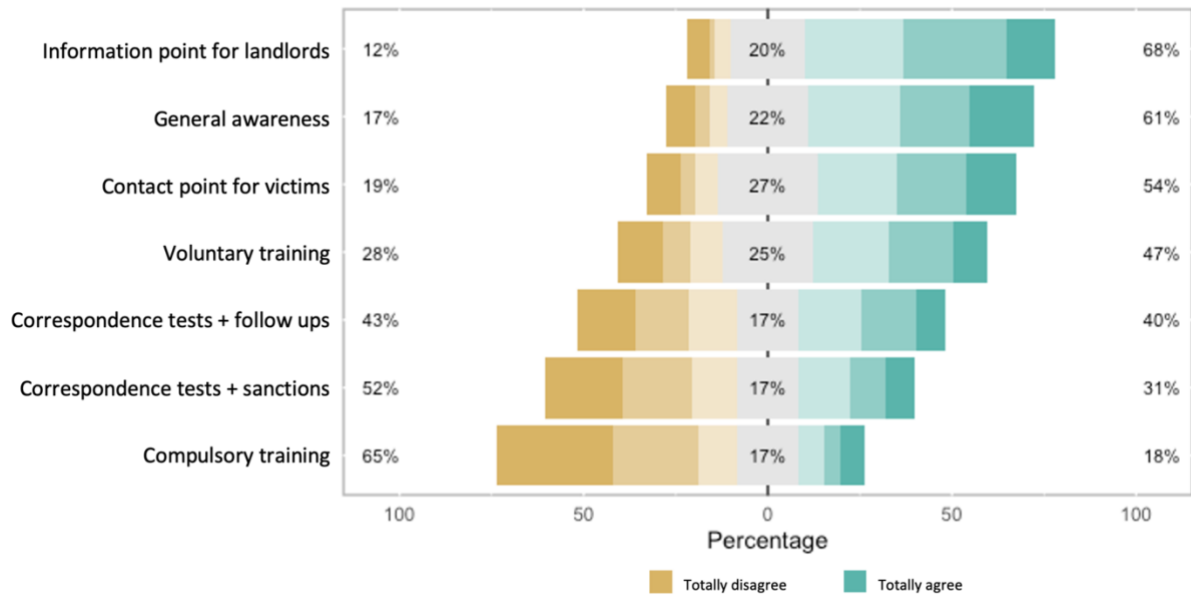


Table 5. Regression analysis on the support for targeted and general policy measures

	TARGETED		GENERAL	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	1.694 (0.290)***	0.646 (0.972)	2.512 (0.213)***	1.328 (0.627)*
Recognition of discrimination				
Ethnic origin	0.777 (0.318)***	0.401 (0.300)	0.759 (0.233)***	0.334 (0.193)
Source of income	0.957 (0.265)***	0.700 (0.245)**	0.781 (0.195)***	0.574 (0.158)***
Ethnic origin with source of income	0.323 (0.260)	0.273 (0.237)	-0.013 (0.191)	-0.074 (0.630)
Control variables				
Gender		0.127 (0.195)		0.143 (0.126)
Education		0.025 (0.206)		-0.126 (0.133)
Language		0.132 (0.247)		-0.053 (0.159)
Metropolitan		-0.074 (0.065)		-0.030 (0.042)
Interest in public debate		0.398 (0.211)*		0.298 (0.136)*
Willingness to adapt		0.371 (0.059)***		0.403 (0.038)***
Participated in a training		-0.048 (0.366)		-0.031 (0.236)
AIC	51513.666	13148.971	23578.156	37669.451

***p<0.001;** p<0.01;*p<0.05

Table 6. Regression analysis on the support for deterrence and compliance policy measures

	DETERRENCE		COMPLIANCE	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	1.495 (0.316)***	2.205 (1.000)**	2.038 (0.245)***	0.495 (0.727)
Recognition of discrimination				
Ethnic origin	0.043 (0.346)	-0.139 (0.308)	1.025 (0.269)***	0.547 (0.224)*
Source of income	1.029 (0.288)***	0.694 (0.252)**	0.887 (0.224)***	0.632 (0.183)***
Ethnic origin with source of income	0.17 (0.283)	0.082 (0.243)	0.172 (0.220)	0.115 (0.177)
Control variables				
Gender		0.199 (0.200)		0.113 (0.146)
Education		-0.433 (0.212)*		-0.091 (0.154)
Language		0.721 (0.254)**		-0.035 (0.185)
Metropolitan		-0.127 (0.067)*		-0.067 (0.049)
Interest in public debate		0.271 (0.217)		0.367 (0.157)*
Willingness to adapt		0.381 (0.061)***		0.451 (0.044)***
Participated in a training		0.712 (0.377)		-0.219 (0.274)
AIC	51513.666	13148.971	23578.156	37669.451

***p<0.001;** p<0.01;*p<0.05

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/plan-samenleven>; accessed on the 11th of July 2024
- ² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0043>; accessed on 6.12.22
- ³ [https://www.belgium.be/nl/justitie/slachtoffer/klachten_en_aangiften/discriminatie#:~:text=Discriminatie%20is%20bij%20wet%20verboden,op%20grond%20van%20verschillende%20criteria%20.](https://www.belgium.be/nl/justitie/slachtoffer/klachten_en_aangiften/discriminatie#:~:text=Discriminatie%20is%20bij%20wet%20verboden,op%20grond%20van%20verschillende%20criteria%20.;); accessed on 6.12.22
- ⁴ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/samenleven/sociale-cohesie/discriminatie-en-racisme>; accessed on 6.12.22
- ⁵ <https://www.wallonie.be/fr/demarches/signaler-une-discrimination>; accessed on 6.12.22
- ⁶ https://equal.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Actieplan-tegen-Racisme-en-discriminatie_def.pdf; accessed on 6.12.22

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