

## Abstract

**Thematic Session to the ESPI IREC – International Real Estate Conference**

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### **Professional practices of real estate agents and discrimination in housing markets**

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In many developed countries, there is evidence of persistent discriminatory practices in housing markets. Numerous recent studies, mobilizing a vast array of methodologies (case studies, spatial econometrics, testings, hypothetical survey experiments, law studies) have revealed its existence and demonstrated its persistence over time and across countries (see Flage (2018) and Auspurg et al. (2019) for recent meta-analyses).

In US cities, see Ondrich et al. (1999), Choi et al. (2005), Zhao et al. (2006), Hanson & Hawley (2011), Korver-Glenn (2018), Fang et al. (2019), Hellyer (2021) and Chan & Fan (2023). In European cities, see Bosch et al., (2010) for Spain, Gouveia et al. (2020) for Portugal, Baldini & Federici (2011) for Italy, Beatty & Sommervoll (2012) for Norway, Carlsson & Eriksson (2014) for Sweden, Auspurg et al. (2017) for Germany, Acolin et al. (2016), Bunel et al. (2021), Le Gallo et al. (2020) for France and Ghekiere & Verhaeghe (2022) for Belgium. In Asia, see Galster et al. (2018) for Australia, Liu & Rommel (2023) for China and Suzuki et al., (2022) for Tokyo. For recent papers on discrimination on AirBnB platforms, see Edelman et al. (2017) and Marchenko (2019).

Real estate agents occupy a unique position as intermediaries between owners with specific (discriminatory) preferences on the one hand and potential tenants

or buyers on the other. Real estate agents are at the heart of the fight against discrimination in access to housing.

However, studies show that real estate agents are just as discriminatory as non-professional landlords, and they develop strategies to put discriminatory requests into practice.

For instance, Flage (2018) shows that statistical discrimination is higher among landlords than among real estate agents. Le Gallo et al. (2020) find that for the 50 largest urban areas in metropolitan France, the levels of discrimination did not differ much between ads from individual landlords or real estate agencies. Further, Ghekiere, Lippens, et al., (2022) and Verstraete & Verhaeghe (2020) show that, in the Brussels region, real estate agents are willing to implement strategies to exclude ethnic minority tenants at the request of clients. Moreover, using a hypothetical survey experiment on a sample of 576 student respondents asked to put themselves in the shoes of rental agents, Ghekiere, Verhaeghe, et al. (2022) find strong evidence towards ethnic taste-based discrimination as the main driver of the respondents' willingness to invite applicants for a house visit. Bunel and Tovar (2023) show that the acceptability of discrimination by real estate agents is enhanced by profit considerations.

On the other hand, more and more real estate professionals are being trained in non-discrimination in access to housing and many of them are aware of these issues.

The thematic session aims to shed light on recent works on this topic and set a debate around evidence across different countries.

The conference invites empirical research and case studies, qualitative or quantitative research findings that highlight the prevalence, patterns, and consequences of discrimination in access to housing in diverse contexts.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

1. Legal and regulatory frameworks: Examining existing laws and regulations aimed at combating housing discrimination, evaluating their effectiveness, and proposing legal reforms or policy measures to strengthen protections against discrimination.
2. Discriminatory practices, mechanisms and multiple forms of discrimination: Investigating the various forms of discrimination in housing (redlining or differential treatment) for example, exploring how intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, disability, and sexual orientation intersect to create complex experiences of discrimination in housing access.
3. Housing affordability and segregation: Analysing the relationship between housing affordability, segregation, and discrimination, and assessing the

role of socioeconomic factors in perpetuating disparities in housing access and quality.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Housing markets, Real estate agents, Spatial econometrics, Experimental method, Testing method

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