

Bias-Aware Selection Guidelines for the ENHANCE Alliance

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WRITTEN BY ENHANCE DIVERSITY OFFICE

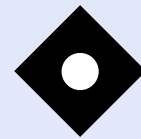




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WHY A GUIDELINE?

In our professional lives, we make many decisions—some of which directly affect other people’s opportunities and careers. Consider a situation in which you are responsible for selecting candidates for a programme, activity, or position. What do you notice first in an application? What questions do you ask in an interview?

Research shows that decision-making can be influenced by unconscious biases. These biases are often based on incomplete or inaccurate assumptions and can negatively affect fair selection processes. Reflecting on our decision-making and applying practical strategies can help reduce their impact. **This document will help you!**

This guideline supports all **individuals involved in selection processes** within the ENHANCE Alliance, including activities such as offers in our Innovative Learning Campus (ILC), staff weeks, workshops, seminars, training programmes, and mobility opportunities.

UNCONSCIOUS BIASES

Unconscious biases are mental shortcuts that help us process information quickly. While they can simplify complex situations, they may also influence our judgments and behaviour without our awareness.

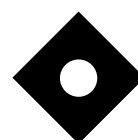
The “first impression”, non-verbal behaviors or unconscious feelings of comfort or discomfort can cause biases. Being aware of different kinds of biases based on dimensions like gender, age, ethnicity, cultural background, nationality, sexual and affective orientation, ableism, beauty and physical appearance, is the first step to overcoming the habit of reaching decisions that are guided by them.

A common mechanism behind bias is similarity bias—the tendency to favour individuals who are similar to ourselves. Other frequent forms include:

- Confirmation bias: seeking information that confirms existing beliefs
- Conformity bias: being influenced by the opinions of others (e.g. groupthink)

While completely eliminating bias may not be realistic, increasing awareness and applying structured approaches can significantly reduce its impact. The goal is to base decisions on clearly defined, transparent criteria rather than subjective impressions.

Bias in selection processes can lead to **discrimination, including sexism, racism, and ableism**. Establishing shared criteria across all stages—application, evaluation, and selection—helps ensure fairer outcomes.



PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SELECTION PROCESSES

Selection processes vary depending on the context, but each stage should be carefully designed and implemented. The following recommendations provide practical guidance.

THE APPLICATION CALL

- ✓ Describe the **qualifications and skills** related to the activity or grant.
- ✓ Use inclusive language. Tools such as the Gender Decoder or built-in writing assistants (e.g. in Microsoft 365) can help identify biased wording.

Also use the ENHANCE Alliance's Inclusive Communication Checklist.

- ✓ Be transparent about the **criteria** of your selection process. Set clear **performance-related** hiring criteria before the selection process begins. Get feedback of diverse 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 all relevant target groups. 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 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.

*WHO ARE (YOUNG) PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES?

'People with fewer opportunities' are defined in the Erasmus+ programme guide as 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.

[Read the Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.](#)

THE SELECTION COMMISSION

- ✓ Ensure diversity within the selection team (including less visible dimensions such as background, family situation, or disability).
- ✓ Encourage open discussion about bias and selection criteria.
- ✓ Take part in anti-bias training offered by ENHANCE, especially for colleagues in charge of selection processes.
- ✓ Regularly reflect on decision-making processes and challenge each other constructively.

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?

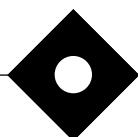
(The answer is on the last page!)

[Video about unconscious bias]



THE SELECTION PHASE

- ✓ Apply objective, performance-based criteria consistently.
- ✓ Use structured evaluation methods (e.g. scoring systems for skills and qualifications).
- ✓ Black out the name and other personal details (age, gender, family-related information) of the applicants as long as possible to avoid biases.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Be mindful of cultural differences, especially in international or multilingual contexts.
- ✓ Slow down the decision process: take your time to decide.



Exercise:

Imagine that you are going to form a jury for an ENHANCE hackathon for all ENHANCE students. Here is your task: Select four colleagues to create the most diverse jury possible. Answer the reflection questions after the exercise. Remember that this is only an exercise!

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 for Diversity](#)
- ✓ [ENHANCE Inclusive Communication Checklist](#)

Did you know that ENHANCE offers training opportunities about unconscious bias? (Anti-Bias Lunchbreaks)

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



This guideline has been developed by the members of the ENHANCE Diversity Office

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