

Including socioemotional skill signals in CVs increases interview invitations only if the skill is solicited in the vacancy text, and reduces interview invitations for women when the skill is unsolicited.

A deeper look into the hiring process: does gender or the skills on your CV play a role for getting an interview?

In the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region, only one in two working-age adults has a job, and the region is experiencing more and more limited job creation to absorb the working-age population. In some countries, only three out of ten women are working or looking for jobs, and across all countries, they have a harder time finding a job and spend more time looking for one. At the same time, employers complain that, despite high unemployment, difficulty finding workers with the “right” skills – including socioemotional skills, such as resilience, motivation, and the ability to work in teams and to take initiative – is one of the main constraints to their business. But it is not easy for job applicants to signal that they have these sought-after skills when submitting a job application. Attention in CVs and job ads is placed on detailing education and work experience, which employers use as imperfect skills proxies in their decision of whom to consider for a job.

In collaboration with the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), the World Bank set out to test (1) whether socioemotional skill signals in CVs are valued by employers at the initial hiring stage (evaluation of CVs and selection for interviews), and (2) whether the same socioemotional skill signals are perceived differently in male versus female candidates’ CVs. We chose to study this issue in two large cities in Turkey – Istanbul and Ankara – due to the size and dynamism of the labor market, as well as the salience of gender issues and skills constraints (Turkey has the lowest female labor force participation rate among the OECD countries, and one that is well below the country’s level of development and education of the population). Turkey also has had an active policy dialogue between the World Bank and government counterparts on labor, gender, and skills; and strong partnerships with donors to advance on closing gender gaps in economic participation. The case in point is that the study was funded by the World Bank’s Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality.

The Project

Could better signaling of socioemotional skills in job applications help women get an upper hand when applying for jobs? Or, can gender bias arising from socially ascribed norms and perceptions on roles of the sexes unduly influence employers’ assessments of job seekers’ socioemotional skills and thus affect subsequent hiring decisions?

To answer these questions, we conducted a correspondence audit study focused on young job seekers. We created fictitious CVs of both female and male young job seekers to apply for real jobs. These candidates were similar in every aspect, except whether they signaled socioemotional skills in their CVs.

Fictitious candidates signaled their socioemotional skills through descriptions of work experience as well as extracurricular activities. With that in mind, we then created and sent out 10,748 fictitious CVs to 2,687 real vacancy ads published on a large online job portal in Turkey. To each job, we sent two female and two male candidates, who varied only in whether or not they signaled socioemotional skills in their CVs (one woman and one man did, the other two candidates did not). Then we waited to see whether they receive a callback for an interview, all the while using the online job portal to track the candidate’s progress through the hiring stages, such as the filtered longlist and employer’s viewing of the full CV.



The Results



Signaling socioemotional skills is valued only if these skills are requested in the vacancy ad.

The results suggest that, once a candidate's full CV is viewed, employers are about two percent more likely to invite for interview a candidate who signaled socioemotional skills that were explicitly solicited in the vacancy ad, compared to one who did not signal the requested skills.



Women experience a penalty for unsolicited socioemotional skill signaling.

When socioemotional skills are not requested by the employer, male candidates who include such skill signals are treated the same way as those who do not. However, a woman who signals socioemotional skills when these are not solicited in the vacancy text is around five percent less likely to be invited for an interview than a woman who does not include any socioemotional skills in her CV.



Employers who do not ask for socioemotional skills in the vacancy text do not place additional value on these skills being signaled in the candidates' CVs.

The potential payoff for signaling socioemotional skills on the CV disappears when employers are not requesting these skills in the vacancy ad.



In Turkey, there is no clear indication of other gender discrimination against women in the selection process up to the interview.

If anything, employers appear to show a minor preference for female applicants when they make their initial longlist (but this is only marginally significant). Once applicants pass through this first stage, employers do not differentiate between men and women, at least until the interview phase.

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Policy Implications

Socioemotional skills matter for the labor market, but may be country and industry dependent – as ever, context matters. In the hiring process in Turkey, socioemotional skills matter only when they are sufficiently relevant to the employer for them to be explicitly solicited in a vacancy ad.

Although socioemotional skill signals are generally thought to boost candidates' chances of securing job interviews and advancing through the hiring process, candidates must be careful when considering inclusion of such signals in their CVs. A CV that maximizes signaling the candidate's qualifications, at least in terms of socioemotional skill signals, without considering vacancy requirements may backfire due to employers' potentially negative perception of unsolicited skill signals. This appears to be especially true for female applicants.

Whereas the study focused on the initial stage of recruitment and we find limited evidence of gender and socioemotional skills making a difference, it is plausible that employers evaluate candidates' socioemotional skills at the interview stage that the study does not cover, and that these skills can

ultimately make a difference between landing the job or not. It might also be that at the final stage, when deciding between female and male candidates, the preference for a male candidate is made explicit.

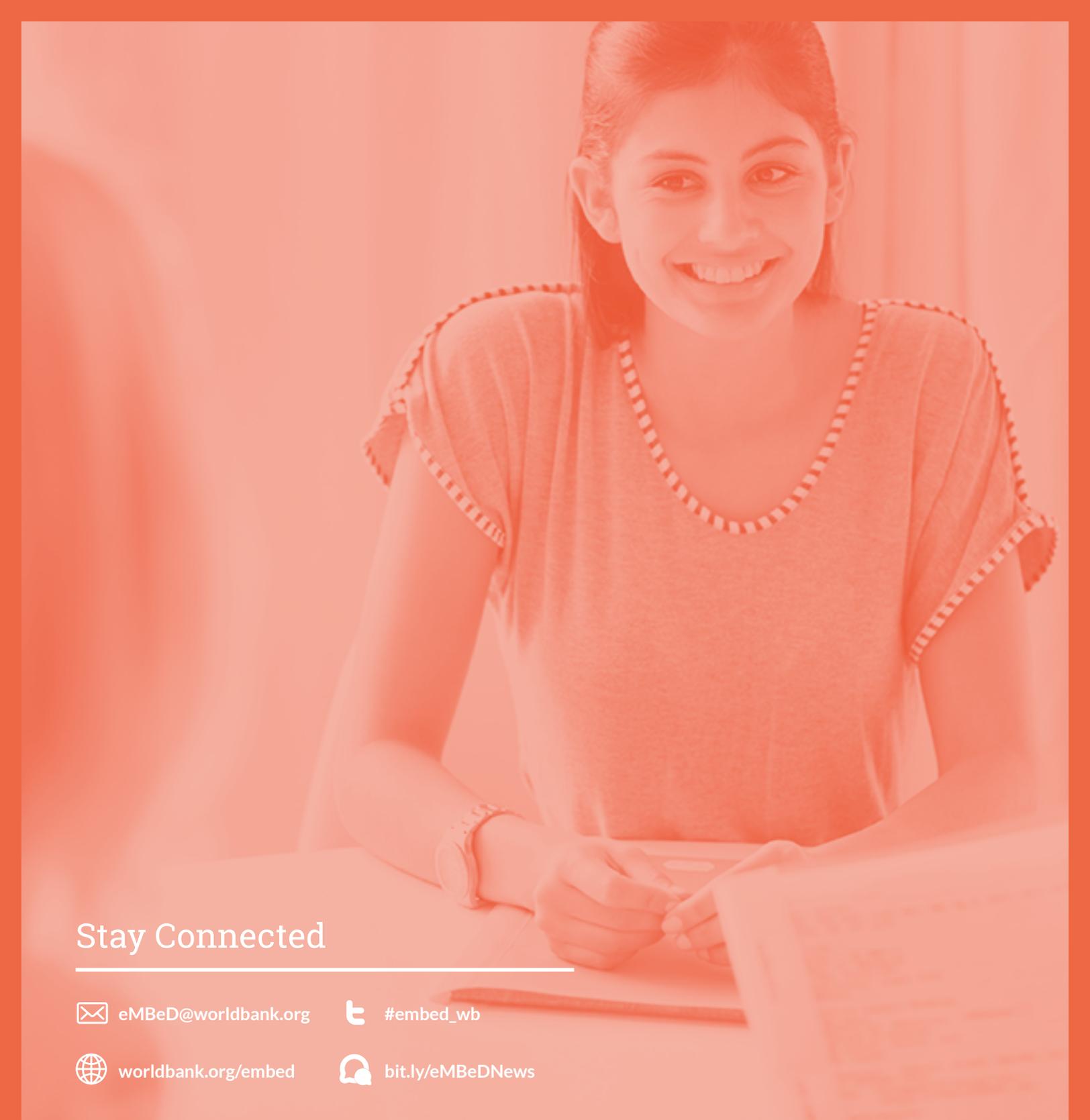
Bias may still be a factor in hiring. It is possible, for instance, that employers might see a female candidate who includes an unsolicited socioemotional skill signal as overconfident, and that overconfidence is perceived as a negative characteristic for women but not for men. Or it can be that employers perceive unrequested socioemotional skill signals for these female candidates as compensating for lower capacity or performance in other skills (even when this is not the case).

Clearly, further research is needed on how gender and socioemotional skills play out in the hiring process. Continuing to study the complex interplay between employers' value of socioemotional skills in recruitment and candidates' signaling of these skills is important, more so as active labor market programs and intermediation services aiming at helping job seekers get an upper hand in the recruitment process emphasize the signaling of a diversity of skills beyond technical ones.

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About eMBeD

The Mind, Behavior, and Development Unit (eMBeD), the World Bank's behavioral science team in the Poverty and Equity Global Practice, works closely with project teams, governments, and other partners to diagnose, design, and evaluate behaviorally informed interventions. By collaborating with a worldwide network of scientists and practitioners, the eMBeD team provides answers to important economic and social questions, and contributes to the global effort to eliminate poverty and enhance equity.



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