

Employment obstacles for black and immigrant women - A case study from the Netherlands

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Statistical data⁵ show that a large gap between the employment situation of ethnic minorities and that of the dominant Dutch population continues to exist. In general, the white Dutch population scores with an unemployment rate of 4% better than people who belong to non-dominant groups of society. However, figures vary among the different immigrant groupings: while 19% of Moroccans, 19% of Antilleans and 18% of Turkish people are unemployed, immigrants with a Surinamese background are comparatively better off. 12% of Surinamese are without work.

Figures from the Annual Integration Report 2007⁶ show that among white Dutch women, 58% are active on the labour market, while labour participation among women of Surinamese descent has increased (to 61%) above the level of the white Dutch women: however, there are striking differences among ethnic immigrant groups concerning labour participation. In particular, participation among Turkish and Moroccan women turns out to be low: only 31% of both female groups are employed.

Research in the Netherlands also shows that non-dominant

female groups are confined to specific sectors in the labour market. For instance, half of the Turkish and Moroccan women work in the sector in which white women do not (want to) work. Not only do immigrant and refugee women have to accept the less wanted jobs; they often also have to perform work far beneath their educational level.

In general, non-dominant groups are over-represented in elementary and lower profes-

sions. Data⁷ also indicates their over-representation in agriculture and industry, i.e. sectors involving hard and unskilled labour. One in four Turks and Moroccans and one in five non-western immigrants work in such sectors. In contrast to that, 16% of the Antillean minority, 12% of the Surinamese and only 6% of white Dutch are employed in this field. Representation in the other economic sectors is almost the same among the white Dutch, Antilleans and Surinamese people⁸.

Facts and figures:

- ★ The Netherlands have a population of 16.4 million of whom 3.2 million are persons with a foreign background. Around 1.7 million belong to the non-dominant groups (blacks or immigrants) or to groups targeted by Dutch integration policy¹.
- ★ The unemployment of non-dominant people is much higher than the average of 4% among the only-white Dutch population. Unemployment among Moroccan people is, for instance, 19%, among Antilleans 19%, among Turkish people 18% and among people with a Surinamese background 12%.²
- ★ According to CBS data, 22% of young black and immigrant people were unemployed in 2006. In comparison, among their white age group the unemployment rate was only 9%.³
- ★ In 1996 and 1997 unemployment amongst black and immigrant people was 3.5 times higher than among white Dutch. In 2006 the situation still remains the same.⁴

1 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007

2 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007, Annex B6.5a

3 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007, p.141

4 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007, p.139

5 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007, Annex B6.5a

6 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007 Annex B6.1a

7 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007, Annex B6.8

8 SCP Jaarrapport Integratie 2007, Annex B6.8

Specific areas of concern are the high unemployment among young people, the increasing numbers of long-term unemployed Turks, Surinamese and Antilleans/ Arubans and the poor employment position for people with a refugee background. Although some groups, especially the young males and females from non-dominant groups, are highly educated they often start their career working below their qualification levels and upward mobility is regularly slow.

Furthermore, the situation for members of ethnic minority groups with a handicap or a long-term illness needs attention. These people often face multiple discrimination, thus rendering their labour reintegration into a long and difficult process. Projects for reintegration do not reach many handicapped members of ethnic minority groups because official institutes are inept or insufficiently equipped to address the specific problems faced by these groups⁹.

Black and immigrant women, who have lower employment rates and wages than their white peers, also have a fractured pension building thus making them vulnerable

to poverty in old age. Also their employment conditions are poorer because they are concentrated in particular low-paid and unregulated working sectors of the economy. Thus there is not only inequality in payment - despite the directive 'equal pay for equal work' - between women and men in general, but also a pay gap between black/ immigrant women and white women.

“There are striking differences among ethnic immigrant groups concerning labour participation.”

Interestingly, it is often stated that such a situation arises because these women are poorly integrated into society and therefore incapable of entering the labour market or even climbing up the career ladder. But this argument prompts a question concerning the second or third generation of women among non-dominant groups. These descendants were born, raised and finished their education in the 'host' country. They speak the language and often have

an impressive track record of appropriate voluntary work. Still they are not accepted, and continue to be treated as if they were invisible. Thus it can be concluded that this is due to racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.

Two crucial factors need to be taken into account when examining the persistent lack of social economic mobility among non-dominant groups, namely: power and education.

First, the status of immigrant groups in the Dutch society is defined by the source of power they can effectively wield: positional or role power, power of possession of goods and services or the power of skills, competences and abilities to provide services that others desire¹⁰. When scrutinizing the social stratification of black, immigrant and refugee communities and/or their second or third generation of descendants in the Netherlands the picture is clear: there is as yet no fundamental base of equality to wield any appropriate measure of power structurally and at a groundbreaking level.

Secondly, education which should facilitate social mobility could also constitute an

⁹ Dick Houtzager, 2000, Dutch Monitor Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, Analytical report on the employment sector

¹⁰ Tumin M.M., 1992, Social Stratification. The forms and functions of inequality



Participants at the TIYE seminar “Towards a Workforce without Discrimination”

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necessary cultural change will indeed take place. This should not only be instigated by governments at a European level, but also by social partners and through local initiatives.

TIYE International recommendations to improve the situation of black and other ethnic minorities in the Netherlands and Europe:

- 1) Enlarge the visibility of all discriminated groups (on grounds of race, ethnic origin, handicap age and gender) by research and publicizing specific data regarding these population groups;
- 2) Increase the participation of non-dominant groups (men and women) in decision making in all aspects of civil, political, legal, economic, social and cultural life;
- 3) Stimulate the media to pay more positive attention to issues regarding people of non-dominant groups and their positive contribution to society;
- 4) Reveal the impact that discrimination has on the lives of those who are confronted with racism, ageism, sexism or other forms of discrimination;

obstacle when continuously implemented on unequal terms. Whether the accessibility to education is affordable or selective - due to high fees, certain grades, quotas or specific networks - the most defining factor is the quality of the education. It has to be maintained and upheld for everyone in any type of school. Therefore, if teaching units are incompetent, unmotivated, prejudged by unfounded conceptions towards black and migrant communities and as professionals unable to deliver high standard education to all pupils regardless of their background, they should be held accountable and penalised for not reaching the normal standards of outputs.

Education in its formal and informal approach should be a life long learning process, a catalyst for social mobility. That is why the recognition of competences, diplomas and occupational levels gained outside of Western Europe should be addressed more sufficiently.

In this ‘European Year of Equal Opportunities for All’ and in the upcoming ‘Year of Intercultural Dialogue’ the enhancement of participation from non-dominant groups must not only concern the workforce, but also decision-making on all aspects of civil, political, legal, economic, social and cultural life. Only under such conditions, it can be ensured that

- 5) Raise awareness to implement anti-racist and anti-discriminatory education at all levels of the education system;
- 6) Organise for junior black and immigrant managers informal meetings with senior managers to enhance their networks vertically;
- 7) Develop a comprehensive approach for anti-discrimination policies and the fight against discrimination on different grounds (on national and European level);

- 8) Identify the existing 'gap' in all European countries between legislation and the actual level of anti-discrimination policies;
- 9) Ensure mainstreaming of measurements to prevent violence and harassment against representatives of non-dominant groups.

TIYE International - established in 1994 - is the umbrella organisation of Dutch, national associations of black, migrant and refugee women. TIYE has special consultative

status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. Besides activities to influence policies in favour of the social-economic position of black, immigrant and refugee women, TIYE International also develops awareness-raising campaigns regarding gender, race, ethnicity and equality.

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