

Perceived discrimination in the Netherlands 2019

11 Towards an inclusive society?

11.1 A study of perceived discrimination

In this report we present a description of the nature and extent of perceived discrimination in the Netherlands. *Perceived* discrimination need not always correspond with *actual* discrimination. The findings in the report do however make clear that the perception of discrimination is in itself sufficient to have an impact on people's behaviour and emotions. In addition, shifts in perceived discrimination provide an insight into societal changes: where people feel their position in society is more - or less - unfair. A study of perceived discrimination thus also offers an impression of processes of emancipation in society.

11.2 Underlying societal developments in shifts in perceived discrimination

A quarter of inhabitants of the Netherlands experienced one or more incidents in 2018 which they perceived as discrimination. That is the same proportion as five years ago. Not much changed in the total extent of discrimination between those years, though there were some changes as regards where and who experienced how much discrimination. The degree of perceived discrimination increased among women, but fell among people with a migration background (especially Dutch Turks and Moroccans). People with a disability experienced more discrimination in education and when looking for work than in 2013. It is plausible that societal developments played a role in these shifts. For example, the #metoo movement probably not only redrew the boundaries of what constitutes acceptable interpersonal behaviour more clearly, but also increased the recognition - and intolerance - of infringements of those boundaries. The #metoo debate has been conducted very widely both nationally and internationally, clearly highlighting the fact that women in particular are regularly victims of behaviour which goes beyond acceptable sexual boundaries. The fact that famous women (and the occasional man) went public with their experiences led to the (partial) breaking down of a taboo and made it easier to discuss personal experiences. Many women who had previously kept silent out of shame now also dared to share their experiences. The #metoo debate also led to more discussion about what behaviour was and was not considered acceptable, and thus also led to a stricter norm. The increase in perceived gender-based discrimination may be linked to these developments. The #metoo movement was followed in the United States by the #youknowme movement, a protest against the stricter abortion legislation. Women who have undergone an abortion share this publicly in order to break through the taboo on abortion and to claim the right to self-determination. The abortion legislation in the Netherlands is not under pressure, but anti-abortion movements do appear to be manifesting themselves more emphatically (e.g. demonstrations at abortion clinics, the annual March for Life and a flyer which was delivered house-to-house in November 2019), and claim that they are receiving more support and donations.¹ A recent study of attitudes to abortion (Muis et al. 2019) showed that, on average, younger generations now hold more conservative views on abortion than preceding generations. De Swaan

¹ www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/06/12/anti-abortuslobby-voelt-wind-in-de-rug-a3963341.

(2019) sees this as a backlash against the continuing emancipation of women. The resultant conflict between emancipation on the one hand and conservative views about the role and position of women on the other can make instances where men and women do not receive equal treatment more visible, in turn possibly leading to an increase in perceived discrimination.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into effect in the Netherlands in 2016, with the aim of ensuring that people with a disability are able to play a full part in society, and on an equal footing with other citizens. This may have led people with a disability to be more inclined to link unequal treatment to their disability or chronic illness.

Finally, the Dutch economy also changed between 2013 and 2018; there were considerably fewer people out of work in 2018 than in 2013, both with and without a migration background. This is reflected in our data, which show a smaller proportion of jobseekers reporting that they have difficulty finding work. However, the number of people who felt they were subject to discrimination when looking for work remained unchanged. Groups which five years ago scored high on perceived discrimination when looking for work (people aged over 45 and people with a migration background) now less often feel that discrimination plays a role. The observation that more people with the same background find work may increase the sense of inclusion and mean that incidents are less often linked to discrimination in other areas, too. The decline in perceived discrimination extends to other areas particularly among Dutch citizens with a Moroccan background. The labour market is often seen as a key area in fostering the integration of groups in society, partly because it gives people the opportunity to increase their resources (income, knowledge, skills, network, etc.), opening up society to them in the process. Participation in the labour market also appears to play a role in the more general perception of inclusion in society. The central role played by the labour market makes it all the more painful that people with a disability find it hard to obtain work.

11.3 Discrimination not equally distributed

In the different chapters of this report we presented a picture of different groups' experiences with discrimination. In doing so, we looked not only at the extent of discrimination, but also at the nature of that discrimination. This revealed both differences and similarities between groups. In this section, we describe a pattern of perceived discrimination, in which we place groups on the two largest dimensions of perceived discrimination: the extent to which a group feels it is subject to negative attitudes and the extent to which a group feels it is subject to unequal treatment. To be able to compare groups with each other, in each case we take the share of the total subgroup in the entire Dutch population as a starting point (and thus not just those who feel they have experienced discrimination). So now we look at what percentage of, for instance, all Dutch Moroccans in the Netherlands have encountered negative attitudes in the last twelve months. The experiences of the different groups are then plotted against the experiences of a 'control group' consisting of indigenous heterosexual Dutch men without disabilities, aged between 35 and 54 years.

The control group is located at the bottom left in figure 11.1: they experience little discrimination, either in the form of unequal treatment or negative attitudes. People aged over 65 are situated close to the control group; they too experience little unequal treatment and even less in the way of negative attitudes than the control group. However, bear in mind that people over-65 often no longer participate in a number of domains of society which were asked about in our study, such as education and the labour market, and that this will in part explain their favourable position.

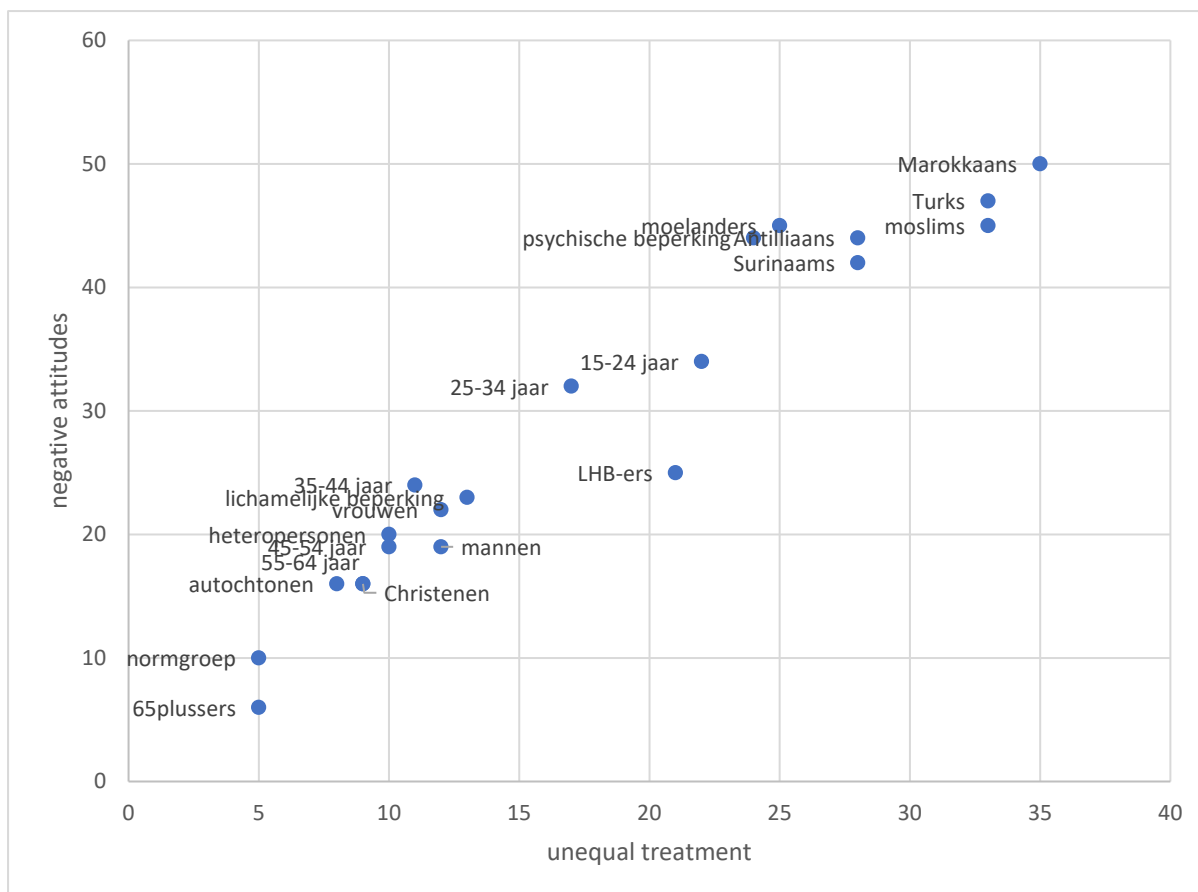
Situated at the top right in figure 11.1 are Dutch citizens with a Moroccan and Turkish background, and Muslims. These groups, which also heavily overlap each other to some degree, encounter a great deal of both negative attitudes and unequal treatment. They are heavily stigmatised in Dutch society and are perceived as threatening by a proportion of the majority group. This perceived threat is based mainly on a cultural interpretation, for example a perceived conflict in values or fear of losing a particular cultural identity or way of life (Andriessen 2019; Ivarsflaten 2005; Schneider 2008; Sniderman & Hagendoorn 2007). They occupy a low position in the ethnic hierarchy, a ranking of ethnic groups in a society (Andriessen 2016). The lower a group's position in the hierarchy, the more they are stereotyped as socially and culturally 'other' (Snellman 2007; Snellman & Ekehammer 2005), and the more they encounter discrimination (Snellman 2007). People with a Surinamese or Antillean background and people from Central and Eastern Europe experience slightly less discrimination. Their position in the ethnic hierarchy is slightly above that of Dutch people with a Turkish and Moroccan background (Andriessen 2016).

There is a striking difference between people with psychological and physical disabilities. People with a physical disability experience both fewer negative attitudes and less unequal treatment and are therefore located in very different positions on the axes in figure 11.1. This too can be explained by the degree to which groups are perceived as threatening (Fiske et al. 2002). People with a physical disability tend to evoke feelings of empathy and sympathy, whereas people with a mental health disorder are viewed more negatively and sometimes elicit fear.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual persons occupy an intermediate position, a situation they share with young people aged 15-24 years.

Figure 11.1

Degree of perceived negative attitudes and unequal treatment, by group, total Dutch population aged 15 years and older, 2018 (in percentages)



negatieve bejegening	negative attitudes
ongelijke behandeling	unequal treatment
Marokkaans	Moroccan
Turks	Turkish
moslims	Muslim
moelanders	Central and Eastern European background
psychische beperking	psychological disability
Antilliaans	Antillean
Surinaams	Surinamese
15-24 jaar	15-24 years
25-34 jaar	25-34 years
LHB-ers	LGBs
35-44 jaar	35-44 years
lichamelijke beperking	physical disability
heteropersonen	heterosexuals
45-54 jaar	45-54 years
55-64 jaar	55-64 years
autochtonen	native Dutch
mannen	men
vrouwen	women
christenen	Christians
normgroep	control group
65-plussers	over-65s

Source: SCP/CBS (ED'18)

Figure 11.1 makes clear that different groups experience discrimination to differing degrees. To the extent that perceived discrimination is a reflection of actual discrimination, the figure also indicates a 'stigmatisation ladder'. Groups at the top right are more heavily stigmatised than groups at bottom left. Chapter 1 of this report described how perceived and actual discrimination need not correspond, for example because actual discrimination may not be experienced as such ('miss'), or because something that is in reality not discrimination may in fact be experienced as discrimination ('false alarm'). Repeated exposure to discrimination can make it more recognisable, which in turn can drive the two extremes on the axis further apart. According to Baron and Inman (1996), groups which experience little discrimination are less inclined to ascribe negative situations to discrimination because this explanation is less cognitively accessible for them. At the same time, discrimination as an explanation is not only more cognitively accessible for groups who encounter frequent discrimination and negative stereotyping, but the prototype is also more complex and more comprehensive. In addition, discrimination is a term that is strongly associated with *ethnic* discrimination. In chapter 1 of this report, for example, we described how people who felt discriminated against by this study of discrimination thought they had been invited to take part in a study about ethnic discrimination, based on their 'different' ethnicity. The strong association between ethnicity and discrimination may be an indication that discrimination on other grounds is less readily recognised as such and less often called discrimination. If that is the case, it may be that discrimination on other grounds is being underestimated.

11.4 Consequences of perceived discrimination

If people have a sense that they are less seen or heard and that they matter less in society, this can have consequences for their attitude and feelings towards that society and its core institutions. People may for example withdraw more from society (affectively, but also in terms of their willingness to invest through participation in society) and may lose trust in the institutions which form the basis of the constitutional democracy. On the other hand, people may become motivated to challenge the status quo and try to change it by engaging in or supporting social actions. Our data reflect both these alternatives. People who experience chronic discrimination withdraw more from society and lose trust in core institutions such as the government, the courts and the police. The willingness to participate in actions against discrimination rises when people experience chronic discrimination, but most of these actions do not take place in an organised context.

There are also behavioural consequences in key areas such as education and the labour market, from which people withdraw as a result of discrimination, so they give up their education or stop looking for work. The fact that people no longer (wish to) participate in these areas can have major consequences for the individual themselves, and possibly for others in their immediate setting, such as children. Education and employment offer access to income, social contacts and a day-to-day structure. Withdrawing from education and the labour market can result in a low income, smaller network and a different daily rhythm, all of which can lead to negative outcomes. Withdrawal from society and from key domains can also have consequences for the wider society. There can be financial consequences if people are forced to rely on social security and other forms of support, but a society can also miss out on the talent and potential of people who could have made a contribution. When withdrawal from employment and education as a result of discrimination is combined with distrust of the state, this could cause those concerned to feel less bound by laws and

regulations. Some of them may then seek alternative ways to meet their daily needs. Finally, discrimination is a concept that is completely at odds with the notion of mutual connectedness and solidarity within a nation. If groups of citizens become marginalised, they will have fewer interactions with others where they can share their perspectives and experiences, which might ultimately and dangerously result in groups who no longer have a shared understanding of the world in which they live (Bovens et al. 2014).

10.5 Towards an inclusive society?

In this report we present a broad description of perceived discrimination in the Netherlands. This not only provides an insight into the societal domains from which people feel excluded, but also which groups feel more or less included. In this sense, the report presents a picture of where we are in the progress towards an inclusive society. Have we come any closer?

If we compare the extent of perceived discrimination now with five years ago, there is little cause for optimism. Perceived discrimination is still widespread in the Dutch population and the percentage of people who have experienced one or more discriminatory incidents has not fallen. Some groups still have a strong sense of stigmatisation and exclusion.

On the other hand, we also see shifts in who experiences discrimination and on what grounds.

Compared with five years ago, for example, women appear to be more assertive and are demanding attention for their position in society. If these groups are able to mobilise a broader base to increase the awareness of their disadvantaged position, this could foster their emancipation process.

People with a migration background experience less discrimination than five years ago. This is also reflected in a recent study by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). One factor may be that people experience less difficulty in finding paid work, which may also reduce the broader feeling of being marginalised. Labour policy thus appears to be crucial for achieving an inclusive society.

Participation in this key domain can be highly significant in fostering a general sense of inclusion.

Given the cyclical nature of the economy, there will be times when the favourable labour market performs less strongly. Earlier studies have shown that ethnic minorities then particularly vulnerable; they relatively often lose their jobs, and are frequently the first to do so, partly because in many cases they were the most recent entrants. Particularly in economically difficult times, it is therefore key to pursue a policy aimed at keeping people employed - not only for people with a migration background, but for all groups who are in a more vulnerable position in society. For people with a disability, access to education and the labour market is crucial in the move towards an inclusive society. Earlier SCP research has however shown that many employers do not attach high priority to recruiting people with a disability: although employers often feel a responsibility for sustainable employability and an inclusive labour market, they do not always take specific measures to achieve this, or else they feel that is the government's job (Van Echteld et al. 2019a). If employers fail to adequately recognise and acknowledge discrimination, they are less likely to take measures to prevent or address it, because they do not believe it is an issue (TNO 2019²).

Our data make clear that a great deal still needs to be done in order to achieve the inclusive society that is the government's goal. Actions against discrimination can ensure that the topic is consistently placed on the agenda and that steps are taken towards achieving a society in which more people

² www.tno.nl/nl/over-tno/nieuws/2019/10/onderzoek-tno-onvoldoende-bewustzijn-en-kennis-over-arbeidsdiscriminatie.

feel they are permitted and able to participate. In order to achieve effective changes, those groups who feel more included will also have to put their weight behind the theme of equal treatment. Our data suggest that the willingness to do this is currently low. This does not mean that people tacitly approve of discrimination; earlier research shows that only 7% of the Dutch population do not disapprove of discrimination (Den Ridder et al. 2017). That research also showed that people are often very unclear about precisely what constitutes discrimination, and that around three-quarters of the public believe that others rush too quickly to claim that they are victims of discrimination. This lack of clarity means that the public debate often focuses mainly on whether discrimination is actually real. This repeatedly puts minority groups in a position of having to prove that there is discrimination, and as a result, possible solution pathways often attract little attention or receive little support. Many people will for example acknowledge that men and women should have equal opportunities to progress to more senior positions in their careers, but the debate is about whether the limited progression of women to the most senior positions is actually due to discrimination. Scepticism about discrimination means that measures to enforce more equal career progression, such as quotas, are seen as disproportionate or unfair to other groups.

The wide differences in the extent to which groups feel included or excluded show that an inclusive society is still a long way off. The small shifts in the last five years do however suggest that movement is possible under the influence of societal developments. For example, we suspect that the positive economic development has played a role in the decline in perceived discrimination by people with a migration background, and that the #metoo movement has made women more aware of the unequal position they still often occupy in society. Exposing inequality can lead to pushback and friction, because of differences in experiences and ideas about what equality is or should be. Friction arises when people have a sense that their group identity means they are unable to occupy the place in society that they regard as fair or legitimate. What feels legitimate and fair is time-bound and place-bound and is a continual subject of public debate. Feelings of discrimination can therefore provide an indication of the struggle for emancipation. This also means that the path to an inclusive society is not a straight one, but the result of ever-changing public debates and negotiations about what course this path should take and where it should end.