

PNN statement on racism, exclusion, and discrimination at Dutch universities

The violent death of George Floyd at the hands of white American police officers on the 25th of May in Minneapolis has inspired thousands of people across the world to protest racism and police violence, and to examine established structures of power and exclusion. The Black Lives Matter movement has also encouraged universities in the Netherlands to question their own structures of racism and exclusion, and to reflect upon what steps can be taken to become more inclusive and diverse.

Little data is available on diversity among academic staff in the Netherlands, especially in terms of ethnic and cultural diversity. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment recently completed the pilot *Barometer Cultural Diversity*, in which the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA) participated as a pilot employer. Results show that in 2018, only 10% of HvA staff had a non-western migration background. Moreover, most of those were support staff: only 8% and 5% of teaching personnel and management respectively has a non-western migration background.ⁱ This is in striking contrast to the almost 25% of Dutch citizens with a migration background, 13,7% of whom have a non-western migration background.ⁱⁱ These numbers exclude the so-called ‘third generation’: those who have at least one grandparent born outside of the Netherlands are estimated to comprise around 8,3% of the population.ⁱⁱⁱ PNN encourages universities to request data on the diversity of their staff from Statistics Netherlands and to be transparent about the results, in order to make the problem visible.^{iv}

Universities are not immune to racism, exclusion, and discrimination. Over the last six years, universities throughout the Netherlands have institutionalized ‘Diversity Officers’ to tackle some of these issues. Leiden University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam were the first to install a diversity officer in 2014, followed by Erasmus University Rotterdam (2015), University of Groningen (2016), University of Amsterdam (2017), and Maastricht University (2018). The University of Twente will follow this year. Though this is a good step forward, PNN recognizes that real change requires more than appointing a diversity officer: above all, it requires critical self-reflection and a willingness to (learn how to) do things radically different.

Ensuring ethnic and cultural diversity among PhD candidates is crucial to building inclusive universities fit for the future. PNN is committed to examine the drivers of (the lack of) diversity among PhD candidates in the Netherlands, to provide support to PhD candidates that have experienced racism, exclusion, and discrimination at their institutions, and to ensure equal conditions and opportunities among PhD candidates from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, PNN is committed to critically examine its own inclusiveness and to continuously improve its ability to present the interests of the diverse PhD community in the Netherlands.

PNN wants to urge PhD candidates who have experienced or observed racism, exclusion, or discrimination on the basis of the colour of their skin, their ethnicity, or any other grounds within their institutions to get in touch with their confidentiality counsellors, their local PhD council, and/or PNN. Also, PNN welcomes ideas on how to support and encourage diversity and equality among PhD candidates in the Netherlands. A failure to change anything at the entry point to academia will only reproduce and solidify established structures of power and exclusion.

ⁱ <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/maatwerk/2019/05/pilot-barometer-culturele-diversiteit-pilotwerkgevers>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/dossier/dossier-asiel-migratie-en-integratie/hoeveel-mensen-met-een-migratieachtergrond-wonen-in-nederland->

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/47/wie-zijn-de-derde-generatie->

^{iv} <https://nederlandseinclusiviteitsmonitor.nl/de-migratiebarometer-voor-cijfers-over-diversiteit/>

^v <https://www.trouw.nl/economie/de-migratiebarometer-levert-harde-cijfers-over-diversiteit~b616c3da/>