



Forgotten women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women in the Netherlands

Key findings

There are no statistical data on the number of Muslim women in the Netherlands as there is no comprehensive equality data collection disaggregated by ethnicity or religion. The Netherlands does not register self-identified religious affiliation nor does it systematically disaggregate statistical data along these lines. Therefore it is necessary to rely on sample surveys amongst groups that were selected on the basis of their national origin to arrive at an estimation of the size of the Muslim population in the Netherlands. An estimated 80% of Muslims in the Netherlands have a Turkish, Moroccan, Afghani, Iraqi, Iranian or Somali background.

Statistics Netherlands estimates that in 2014, 4.9% of the Dutch adult population is Muslim. The PEW Research Centre estimated in 2010 that the Muslim population in the Netherlands including minors is 6%, which would be around 1 million persons.

The lack of data disaggregated along ethnic/religious lines and the use of different proxies, definitions and categories were an obstacle during the research. Moreover, cases of discrimination and hate crime remain highly under-reported.

Situation and discrimination in employment: additional obstacles when a women and a Muslim

Women

The net labour participation of women was 59.8% and 73.4% of men in the third quarter of 2015. Since 2005 the number of working women increased, namely from 3.4 million in 2005 to 3.8 in 2015. Still there is a noticeable gender difference in unemployment rates, with 9.7% of women unemployed versus 7.2% of men.

Furthermore, there is a group of 3.8 million people neither working nor looking for a job or available for it (due to illness for example). The majority of this group is registered as woman, accounting for 2.2 million members.

More men than women work fulltime. In 2013 26% of women worked fulltime compared to 80% of men.

By the end of 2014, respectively 9.6% and 11.2% of the Boards of Directors and Supervisory Boards of Dutch companies are women.

In the National Human Rights Institute's annual reports for 2013 and 2014, it noticed the continuing discrimination on the basis of gender with regards to pregnancy, with women's contracts not being renewed or female applicants being rejected. In 2014, 44% of requests for an opinion on situations possibly concerning unlawful discrimination on the basis of gender related to disputes over pregnancy.

Ethnic minorities/Muslims

Based on research with 34 large companies and interviews with experts, national newspaper *De Volkskrant* estimates that 1-2% of these top positions are occupied by someone with a non-western migration background.

By 2015, 21.5% of non-western migrant youth (aged 15-25) is unemployed, versus 8.8% of 'autochtoon' Dutch youth. In 2012, 26% of the Turkish-Dutch youth was unemployed and 37% of Moroccan-Dutch youth. In 2009, 40% of the Somali-Dutch youth is unemployed, versus 30% of the Afghani-Dutch and Iraqi-Dutch and 27% of the Iranian-Dutch youth.

A 2014 Netherlands Institute for Social Research report on experiences of discrimination amongst the Dutch population found that 46% of Muslims had experienced being discriminated against on the basis of their religion in the twelve months prior to the research was conducted. Furthermore, 65% of Muslims said they had felt being discriminated against on the basis of religion or other grounds.

In 2010 and 2011, 100% of the discrimination cases on the grounds of religion dealt with by the Public Prosecution concerned Islam. In 2012, this was 91% of those cases and in 2014, 75%.

When we look at the figures of anti-discrimination bureaus we see that in 2014, 59% of the complaints about discrimination on the grounds of religion were submitted by Muslims. Next to this over the period 2010-2014, 53% of the opinions issued by the Equal Treatment Commission and later the National Institute for Human Rights on cases relating to discrimination on the basis of religion were in fact about Islam.

In 2010, it was found that when similar CVs and application letters were sent to employers with only different names or places of birth of the applicant, 'autochtoon' Dutch had a chance of 44% to be invited for a job interview compared to 37% of non-western migrants.

Muslim women

By 2012, 64% and 56% of the Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch men had a paid position for a minimum of 12-hours a week compared to 40% and 35% of the women from these groups. The Somali group has the smallest labour participation rate for both men (34%) and women (14%).

The annual survey on discrimination of the municipality of Rotterdam found that in 2014, 29% of the Muslim participants had been discriminated against (compared to 14% in 2014). A significant increase of discrimination experienced by women is signalled.

According to a 2014 Institute for Social Research study, out of three Turkish-Dutch students and one out of four Moroccan-Dutch students said to have experienced discrimination when applying for an internship position compared to 2% of 'autochtoon' Dutch generated some political attention (official term used to identify native Dutch, including 3rd generation). In particular, attention has been drawn to Muslim women students who were rejected for an internship position because of their headscarf.

Muslim women wearing a headscarf experience considerably more discrimination on the basis of religion than women who do not wear a headscarf: 11% of Afghani-Dutch Muslim women not wearing a headscarf said to have experienced discrimination on the basis of religion compared to 73% of Afghani-Dutch who do wear a headscarf. For Iraqi-Dutch these figures are 9% versus 45%, for Iranian-Dutch 8% versus 45%, for Somali-Dutch 20% versus 49%, for Moroccan-Dutch 15% versus 39% and for Turkish-Dutch 14% versus 55%. This makes it reasonable to assume that Muslim women with a migration background wearing Islamic dress are likely to be negatively affected by direct and structural discrimination on multiple grounds simultaneously.

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) finds that 76% of the complaints of discrimination on the basis of religion in the labour context, submitted to anti-discrimination bureaus in the years 2004-2006, are submitted by women. Over half of those complaints concern the phase of recruitment and selection, and all complaints about internships involve the headscarf.

According to SCP, hearing hurtful jokes, being called derogatory names, being bullied or excluded are not uncommon experiences. One-third of Muslims said to have experienced one of these incidents, by either their direct colleagues, supervisors, customers or external relations of their employer

Violence against women, hate crime and hate speech: Muslim women at the intersection of violence

75% of cases of domestic violence reported with the police in 2012 concerned women as victims. Physical abuse is also more likely to occur in the domestic sphere. 3 out of 10 cases of physical abuses affecting women are committed by the (ex-) partner or a family member. In 2013, 37% of women experienced violence at work versus 29% of men.

Most racist violence incidents occur in and around shops (25%), closely followed by being yelled at or called derogatory names (22%). Furthermore, 7%-9% of Muslims said to have been threatened or have had violence used against them.

According to MDI (*Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet*), in 2014, 53% of the online statements against Muslims were punishable according to the Dutch Penal Code, for hate speech against Moroccan-Dutch this was 39% and against Turkish-Dutch 56%.

According to the 2015 national research institute the *Verwey-Jonker Instituut* 24% of Muslim discrimination incidents included violence and 14% included threats. Incidents are not systematically disaggregated along lines of gender.

The grassroots initiative *Meld Islamofobie* collected 89 complaints over the period January – June 2015 of which a striking 90% involved a Muslim woman as a victim. Moreover, 98% of the women were identifiable as Muslim because of their Islamic dress. 71% of the perpetrators were men, signalling a clear gender dynamic between perpetrator-victim. 33% of all complaints concerned violence, a category that is defined by *Meld Islamofobie* as including both physical intimidation and threats as well as physical violence. Of all the incidents reported by women, 41% involved violence.

Good practices

Two special **hotlines for internet discrimination** (*Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet*, herein after MDI and *Meldpunt Internet Discriminatie*, herein after MiND) collect complaints about hate speech online, incitement to hatred and incitement to violence. MDI has been existent for many years, but lost its funding recently. Nevertheless they continue their work. MiND started two years ago. After receiving a complaint, they investigate whether the statement concerned is punishable and approach the owner of the webpage with a request to remove the statement, which is frequently complied with. When necessary, they report the punishable statement to the Dutch authorities.

The Rotterdam-based **platform for Islamic organisations SPIOR** launched a hotline to report discrimination. SPIOR closely cooperates with RADAR, the anti-discrimination bureau in Rotterdam, so as to bridge the distance between local Muslim communities and this institution.

A project specifically targeted at Muslim women, *Tipje van de Sluier*, was said to have been successful in empowering the participating Muslim women. It assisted them in navigating the processes of job hunting and application and increased awareness amongst employers about stereotypes and biases in the recruitment and selection process.

Political spaces

Geert Wilders, leader of the right-wing Freedom Party (PVV) captured the public debate in 2009 by advocating for a special tax on headscarves. He condescendingly named this tax '*kopvoddentax*', '*kopvod*' being a derogatory word for headscarf. The proposal was to introduce special permits to wear headscarves costing 1000 Euro per permit. Profits were to be re-directed to shelters for victims of domestic violence. By rhetorically connecting the headscarf to these shelters, Wilders associates the headscarf with violence against women. This further allows him to avoid the framing of his own proposal as oppressive, and instead depicts it as a plan that helps to 'save women'. Wilders's proposal was never translated into policy, but it did capture the imagination of Dutch society and has been an important marker in the public framing of headscarves.

Discriminatory case

The municipality of Tilburg argued recently that an applicant's headscarf and abaya (long traditional dress) did not comply with the municipality's code of conduct and moreover would impede effective communication with colleagues. Hence they rejected the woman for the internship position. However, the National Human Rights Institute issued an opinion stating that the municipality could not evidence that communication with colleagues would severely be obstructed and thus considered it to be a case of unlawful discrimination. Consequently the municipality adjusted its code of conduct and had it reviewed by the Institute to ensure it is now compliant with Dutch equality legislation.

Hate crime case

In April 2014, the 27 year-old Um Hafsa headed towards the supermarket with her baby when she was hit in the back by two men. They then pulled off her niqab and accompanied their actions by chanting “Hup Holland Hup!” (Go Holland go!) and “We do not want these things in our country”. Um Hafsa says she feels extremely vulnerable in public spaces following the attack and forced to stop wearing a face-veil in Dutch public spaces.

Main recommendations

- Acknowledge that Muslim women face multiple and unique obstacles pertaining to the intersection of their gender, ethnicity and religion in Dutch society and on the labour market.
- Commission further research into the dynamics of discrimination on the basis of religion against Muslim women and men on the Dutch labour market, similar to what has been done with researching discrimination on the basis of ethnicity.
- Within the government’s generic and gender-neutral approach to emancipation, include focussed attention to the unique position and experiences of Muslim women in Dutch society. Acknowledge the heterogeneity of women associated with their varied social positions, and develop due strategies to combat the obstacles they face.
- Acknowledge that racist violence may affect some women disproportionately and thus has a profound gender dynamic. Include plans to combat Islamophobic violence in policies that should end and prevent violence against women.
- Register Islamophobic speech and violence as racist incidents. Encourage the registration of Islamophobia as well as gender-based discrimination when incidents of discrimination against Muslim women are reported with the relevant authorities and institutions, so that the gendered dynamic of Islamophobic violence and speech can be accurately monitored and analysed.

This factsheet is written by ENAR and based on the findings from research undertaken by Mariska Jung in the Netherlands in the frame of ENAR’s project “Forgotten women: the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women”. The research was conducted between December 2014 and January 2016.

With the support of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union, the Open Society Foundations and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

