



## European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

### FLASH REPORT

<b>Country:</b>	Netherlands
<b>Title:</b>	National action plan for diversity and inclusion in higher education and research
<b>Date:</b>	1 October 2020
<b>Expert:</b>	Marlies Vegter and Karin de Vries
<b><u>Context</u></b>	
<b>Issue at stake:</b>	Adoption of action plan
<b>Grounds of discrimination:</b>	Sex, Racial or ethnic origin
<b>Field of application:</b>	Education, Employment
<b>Source:</b>	Policy development
<b>Applicable law:</b>	General Equal Treatment Act ( <i>Algemene wet gelijke behandeling</i> )

### **Content**

**Policy development:** On 1 September 2020 the Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science presented a national action plan for greater diversity and inclusion in higher education and research. The action plan was drawn up in cooperation with a number of organisations representing the research and higher education sector, including the Dutch Research Council (NWO), the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH). The action plan recognises the existence of structural barriers to diversity and inclusion in higher education and research. The term diversity is interpreted broadly to refer to a range of characteristics (besides gender, cultural/ethnic background, sexual orientation, religion and disability, also class, 'work style', education and experience).

The action plan contains five objectives, to be achieved by 2025:

- criteria relating to diversity will be integrated into existing assessment instruments, such as protocols for scientific reviews and course accreditations and will be taken into account in the evaluation of research proposals and course curricula;
- improved monitoring of diversity and, where possible, of inclusion and safety from harassment;
- the Netherlands will subscribe to a diversity charter at the European level or develop a charter at the national level;
- a format for institutional diversity strategies will be developed at the national level, to strengthen strategies developed by universities and other institutions;
- a national centre of expertise will be financed for a period of at least 5 years.

The action plan also mentions three short term objectives, which are to 1) formulate new targets to increase the number of female professors and investigate the possibility of formulating targets for other groups and functions, 2) publish an advisory report on the prevention and combating of misconduct and harassment in research and 3) open a new

grant programme for researchers with a 'non-western migration background'<sup>1</sup> and refugees.

In addition to the above measures, a committee of experts will be installed per 1 October 2020 to provide advice to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and to organisations and institutions in the field of higher education and research.

**Key points of analysis:** Although the term 'diversity' is interpreted broadly in the action plan, the proposed measures appear to focus mostly on improving gender and ethnic diversity. This is understandable, but the other categories should not be forgotten.

The action plan recognises that available data do not provide sufficient insight into existing levels of diversity and inclusion and that better data collection is needed. The collection of data on ethnicity and migration background is regarded as sensitive in the Netherlands and such data are generally not available. However, the action plan suggests ways to overcome this barrier. That is important, as without specific data it is hard to draft an accurate policy.

The action plan contains a number of concrete goals, including the setting up of a national centre of expertise, the formation of an advisory committee on diversity at the national level and the introduction of a new grant programme for refugees and researchers with a non-western migration background. Especially the grant programme appears to be useful. However, it remains to be seen if such a programme would be in line with the case law of the CJEU in case the programme would only be open for academics with a migrant background. Initiatives like setting up a centre of expertise and forming an advisory committee might help, but in the end the actual measures must be taken at the workplace. In the recent past many soft law measures have been taken already, but the results have not always been impressive. In this respect it is relevant to note that the action plan expressly states that, in case of insufficient results in 2025, further reaching measures will be considered, including quota.

**Internet link source:**

<https://www.government.nl/documents/reports/2020/09/01/national-action-plan-for-greater-diversity-and-inclusion-in-higher-education-and-research>.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Netherlands (CBS) uses the term 'persons with a non-western migration background' for persons who are born or with at least one parent born in a country in Latin-America, Africa, Asia (other than Japan or Indonesia) or in Turkey. The term is generally used in Dutch policy discourse to indicate persons who form the target group of integration policies.