

Dear resident of the Netherlands,

Many people in the Netherlands are treated differently because of who they are. They face discrimination and racism. For example, because of their skin colour, sexual orientation or religion. This has serious consequences. For instance, people feel unsafe. Or they feel that they do not belong. This can lead to them having less trust in other people and in the government. This has to change! In this letter, you can read about what the State Commission against Discrimination and Racism has already done. And what the government can do. And what you yourself can do.

Research into discrimination and racism

The House of Representatives ensured that the State Commission against Discrimination and Racism was established. As a state commission, we have spent four years researching discrimination and racism throughout the Netherlands. This includes the Caribbean Netherlands. We have also investigated how the government deals with discrimination and racism. And what needs to change. We spoke to many people: residents, civil society organisations, academics, civil servants and administrators. And now our work is complete. We have produced a final report on all our research.

The main findings

Our research shows that discrimination is everywhere. It is not just people who discriminate. Discrimination can, for example, also be hidden in laws or policies. Some groups of people face this more often than others. Sometimes it is not even immediately clear why. This was the case, for example, with the Dutch childcare benefits Scandal. It was only after an investigation that it became clear that parents were being discriminated against based on their income or nationality.

Discrimination has existed for a long time and is not being adequately addressed. Why is that? Our research shows that many people feel the government does not listen to them closely enough. This is especially true for people who experience discrimination more frequently. It also applies to residents of Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba. The government does not employ enough people from all segments of society. As a result, the problems faced by certain groups are often overlooked.

There is another problem. Currently, the government usually only takes action after someone has already been discriminated against. People then have to file a report themselves or take the matter to court. The government must ensure that people are not discriminated against. So discrimination must be prevented.

Furthermore, politicians and administrators are not doing enough. They do not speak out strongly enough against discrimination. As a result, discrimination seems to be becoming increasingly normalized.

How can we improve this?

We believe the approach to discrimination needs to change. It is important to recognize and prevent problems—not just intervene after things have already gone wrong. To this end, we have developed practical solutions for the government. Here are three examples:

1. We believe the government should implement the Public Sector Equality Duty. Currently, the law only protects people after they have been discriminated against. And people

have to prove that themselves. We believe this needs to change. When developing new policies, the government must carefully consider from the outset: does this policy treat people fairly and justly? It shouldn't wait until after the fact.

2. We have developed a discrimination assessment for the government. This allows the government to assess whether policies and rules are discriminatory. The discrimination test also helps the government discuss these issues with residents and improve policies and rules. Initial experiences with the discrimination test show that it works well. More than 40 government agencies are eager to start using it, and many other organizations are already doing so. We're happy about that!
3. We believe the government should use fair methods to monitor people. The government wants to know which people it should monitor more closely—for fraud, for example. To do this, the government is increasingly using complex computer systems and vast amounts of personal data, such as information on education, postal code, and age. This carries a high risk of discrimination, as certain groups of people are more likely to be subject to extra scrutiny. We believe the government should stop doing this if there is a high risk of errors being made. The government must use fair methods, such as random checks. That way, everyone has an equal chance of being checked.

We also need your help

It's not just the government that needs to fight discrimination and racism. Everyone in the Netherlands has an important role to play in this: politicians, public officials, the media, businesses, and residents. That includes you. So speak up if you see someone being discriminated against. Or file a report. Because everyone has the right to equal treatment. There is still a lot of work to be done. And change takes time. But together, we can ensure that equal treatment doesn't remain just a nice promise on paper. All residents of the Netherlands should see it reflected in their daily lives. Will you join us?

Sincerely,

State Commission against Discrimination and Racism