

## ISLAM IN THE NETHERLANDS

The position of Muslims on the Dutch labour market is a difficult one. They are more often unemployed than Dutch people. If they have a job, they have less income and the job itself is tiring or little interesting. Several circumstances play a role here.

The first generation of migrants had an poor education or no education at all. They got work in the harbour or in the heavy industry but didn't have much possibilities to develop themselves. Even today many of them are not able to speak the Dutch language. Their children went to school and in that respect they made large step ahead. But despite of their training they didn't get the more attractive jobs. One of the reasons is that Dutch employees are even more educated and the preference of employers frequently goes to Dutch employees.

It is certain that processes of exclusion and discrimination are at work on the labour market. In a recent debate concerning the Islam in Rotterdam it appeared that Muslims regard discrimination as the main problem in the Netherlands today. Nevertheless we should not stick to a purely moral approach of this problem. Although there are no excuses for discrimination, there are several reasons for which employers do not prefer a Muslim, even when he or she has the required diplomas.

What also a role plays is that the heavy industry has disappeared from the Netherlands. At present 70 per cent of the jobs belongs to the service industries. In that kind of work social skills play a central role. The modern employee must speak perfectly Dutch, have a large psychological insight and must know the cultural context of his job. In other words: the modern employee must develop quite a lot of social, cultural and intellectual capital and in that respect most Muslims perform less well. More over: in the last decades the level of requirements for employees grew increasingly higher and higher. It often concerns small differences but as a result, the employer mostly prefers Dutch employees.

This phenomenon provokes quite a lot of anger and frustration among Muslims in our country. And the situation is worsened by the sharp debates on the role of Islam in the Netherlands since the last two years. The assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh has been only a last step in this process. More and more young Muslim feel themselves rejected by the Dutch society and feel attracted to radical ideas and hostile attitudes. This in combination with systematic disadvantages on the labour market provides a dangerous situation.

Therefore it is urgent, I think, to ensure that as much as possible Muslims get a paid job. But good intentions and moral preaches

don't help. We have to take other measures to ensure that Muslims not only get a paid job but also a job which suits their talents and education better than today.

One of the measures could be that municipalities appoint head-hunters to search for talented and well trained people. Frequently young Muslims themselves are not able to discover all possibilities or to make contact with employers in a proper way. They might be helped by head-hunters in that respect.

Another measure is that Muslims who have already a job get a personal coach. This coach might stimulate them to follow new education and to look for interesting new possibilities in their domain. This personal coach can also play a role by recommending the employer in situations that several candidates are available for one job.

A third measure is that the local authorities try to appoint more Muslims in their municipal services. In the city of Rotterdam Muslims make approximately a third of total population. But I don't think that a third of municipality staff consists of Muslims. Therefore the municipality can give the good example itself and stimulate other companies to follow this policy.

A fourth measure is that local government facilitates the entrepreneurial attitude among migrants. That is possible by creating specific areas with less bureaucracy or legal rules. It is also possible by enhancing the economic and organisational skills of arriving entrepreneurs and by reinforcing their abilities through training or coaching.

A last measure is that talented and ambitious migrants are adopted by more strong and big companies. They are able to help the these migrants in overcoming social resistances and to open their own network in case of difficulties.

These are only a couple of proposals concerning the way governments and companies could help migrants and Muslims in the social and economic domain. Generally it is not lacking in contacts, creativity or financial resources. Mostly its lacking in the sense of social responsibility that the strongest shoulders in a region should feel. But in the end their own reputation is better of if they comply with these requests.

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