

Combating discrimination in the workplace

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline

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|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 2015 Implementation | 2016 Implementation | 2017 Implementation |
| 2018 Implementation | 2019 Implementation | 2020 Implementation |
| 2021 Implementation | 2022 Implementation | 2023 Implementation |
| 2024 Implementation | 2025 Implementation | |

ID number 28443

Objectives

The main objective of this policy is to combat the problem of high youth unemployment among migrants confronted with difficulties in finding an internship.

Description

In 2015, within the City deals programme, the labour ministry concluded agreements with the Netherlands' five main cities: Amsterdam, The Hague, Eindhoven, Leeuwarden, Zaanstad (including: their municipalities, schools, the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), employers and intermediate organisations). Measures already developed include awareness-raising meetings in schools and training courses for internship coordinators, teachers and students. A toolbox with methods to tackle the problem has been published.

SBB provides webinars for training companies on how to select trainees without prejudice and support equal treatment. The content of the webinars is also included in training courses for new practical trainers working in companies supporting work-based learning.

2015 Implementation

2016 Implementation

2017 Implementation

In 2017, the Minister for Education, on behalf of vocational education and the business community, launched the workplace discrimination hotline (*Meldpunt Stagediscriminatie*) on the website of the Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB). Any reports of discrimination are followed up immediately by SBB. The most severe sanction is to withdraw the company's training company licence. Between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2018, the workplace discrimination hotline received 17 reports of incidents. SBB has investigated all of them.

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

In the school year 2018/19, there were 62 statements of workplace discrimination reported to the workplace discrimination hotline.

Together with the partners involved in the policy to prevent internship discrimination, the education ministry has set up a more accessible contact point. Various VET colleges and JOB (the Youth Organisation for VET) have put a link to the contact point on their websites.

2020 Implementation

In November 2020, the campaign Choose me (KIES MIJ) was launched. The campaign aims to raise awareness about internship discrimination and how it should be tackled. It supports students, schools and companies. With personal stories of VET learners who had experienced internship discrimination, spread through various digital channels, the campaign aims to reach a wide audience. The relevant online platform targets employers, schools and learners to support them in addressing the issue.

The campaign is a joint initiative with multiple partners, the education ministry, SBB, JOB, the council of VET schools (*MBO Raad*).

2021 Implementation

Motions from the Dutch Parliament aim to strengthen the arrangements of 2018 to improve equal opportunities for internships. The minister answered the motions with several commitments:

- (a) to educate companies on ways to recognise and prevent discrimination during selection;
- (b) new conditions for becoming a recognised internship company are postponed to the new cabinet;
- (c) students are aware of the workplace discrimination hotline and the usefulness of reporting discrimination via the 2020 KIESMIJ campaign;
- (d) setting up an expert team / advisory committee, consisting of experts and those who experienced discrimination, to advise VET institutes and companies on ways to combat discrimination;
- (e) to make VET institutes responsible for the application internship procedures. This way VET institutes can detect and prevent discrimination early in the application process. VET institutes can judge whether the workplace is recruiting and selecting students objectively. This is expected to be an effective method to combat discrimination and prejudice in the internship workplace.

2022 Implementation

The education ministry proposed a plan - called '*stagematching*' (*internship-matching*) to oblige companies to accept interns that VET schools present to the company. This proposal should help prevent discrimination on the workplace. The proposal places the school in the role of *matchmaker*, and thereby puts the responsibility of finding a suitable internship on the schools, rather than on the students themselves. This proposal has not been accepted yet since some stakeholders are not (yet) convinced of the plan's benefits. JOB (*Youth Organisation for VET*) states for instance that *internship-matching* limits the freedom of choice for students and possibly shifts discrimination from the selection process to the workplace itself. The MBO-Raad (*Council for upper secondary VET schools*) is worried about the workload and pressure of education professionals and the VNO-NCW (*National Association of Employers*) believes that it will limit the freedom of employers.

2023 Implementation

In February, the education minister and the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment

In February, the education minister and the minister of Social Affairs and Employment along with stakeholders from education and business, signed an Internship Pact (*Stagepact*). One of the objectives of the Internship Pact is to eliminate internship discrimination.

To combat internship discrimination among first year students, the Minister of Education focusses on internship matching (*stagematching*). Internship matching means that together with their supervisor, students draw goals and are then placed in a training company, based on these goals. This process aims to provide equal opportunities by focusing on competencies and learning needs rather than subjective factors like a personal 'click'. This initiative was presented to the parliament in April 2023 and is part of the broader Internship Pact MBO 2023–2027, which includes commitments to eliminate internship discrimination, ensure sufficient internship opportunities, provide quality mentoring, and establish fair internship compensation.

2024 Implementation

In February, the Minister of Education informed the parliament about the Inspectorate's research into VET institutions' policies on internship discrimination. The study revealed several key findings:

- (a) most VET institutions acknowledge the importance of combating internship discrimination;
- (b) many stakeholders find it difficult to recognise internship discrimination;
- (c) VET institutions do not have a clear understanding of how often internship discrimination occurs, as very few reports are formally reported. One reason therefore is that students do not know where they can safely report it;
- (d) where anti-discrimination policies exist, they are often still in their early stages of development.

Based on these findings, the Inspectorate made three recommendations to address internship discrimination:

- (a) increase awareness and recognition of internship discrimination;
- (b) establish clear social norms against internship discrimination;
- (c) foster a culture of safety to encourage reporting and address discriminatory practices effectively.

In April, the Minister of Education informed the parliament about the outcomes of different studies related to internships and apprenticeships.

Key findings of the studies include, first, that many VET students do not receive an appropriate internship fee, with their compensation is often significantly lower than that of students in higher education. This financial disparity underscores the need for equitable support for VET students during their internships. To address this issue, the Internship Pact MBO 2023–2027, includes agreements to promote fair and adequate internship fees, ensuring that VET students are appropriately compensated for their contributions. Second, the studies reveal that over 10% of students with disabilities report experiencing discrimination during internships. Alarmingly, discrimination based on disability is perceived as more socially acceptable than discrimination based on factors such as skin colour.

As a result of these findings, the researchers made five key recommendations to address the challenges faced by students with disabilities during internships:

- (a) encourage awareness of the issue among educational institutions and employers, ensuring all stakeholders understand the prevalence and impact of discrimination;
- (b) promote objective and inclusive recruitment practices among employers to ensure fairness in the selection of interns;
- (c) encourage employers to establish anti-discrimination policies to create a more equitable and supportive environment for interns;
- (d) inform employers about the financial and other support options available from the government to assist them in guiding students with disabilities during

- internships;
- (e) foster a culture where students feel safe and supported in reporting discrimination experiences to address issues effectively and build trust in the system.

2025 Implementation

The government has begun monitoring developments in achieving fair and adequate internship compensation on an annual basis. In a policy letter of March 2025, the Minister informed Parliament that, according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the share of MBO students receiving an internship allowance increased slightly in 2024 compared with 2023. Whether students receive an allowance continues to depend largely on the sector in which the internship takes place.

An analysis of collective labour agreements (CAOs) shows several positive developments:

- a. a higher number of CAOs now include agreements on internship compensation compared with 2023;
- b. the amounts of internship allowances are more frequently specified; and
- c. more CAOs stipulate equal internship payments for all students, regardless of education level.

However, only 8% of CAOs include compensation for out-of-pocket expenses (e.g. travel costs, certificates of conduct), although such reimbursement was agreed under the Internship Pact. The Minister concludes that the Pact's commitments are not yet fully met and that further progress is required to ensure fair and equitable internship compensation.

The letter also presents findings from a study on the advantages and disadvantages of introducing a statutory minimum internship allowance. As feasibility, enforceability and potential consequences remain uncertain, the Minister has decided not to introduce a legal minimum internship fee at this stage.

Finally, the Minister notes that, as of 2025, the national workplace discrimination hotline (Meldpunt Stagediscriminatie) operated by SBB has been discontinued. VET students must now report incidents of internship discrimination directly to their institution.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB)
- Council for upper secondary VET schools (MBO Raad)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Entities providing VET

Companies

Thematic categories

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional

development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET promoting equality of opportunities

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Toolbox internship discrimination](#)

[Workplace discrimination hotline on the SBB website](#)

[Letter to parliament: progress on the approach to discrimination in internship, 25 October 2019](#)

[Choose me campaign](#)

[Netherlands: internship discrimination, what to do about it?](#)

[Policy letter with reactions to motions and commitments VET, Education Ministry, 2 July 2021](#)

[Decision note on questions about a proposal to oblige companies to accept interns, 4 November 2022](#)

[Policy letter about youth empowerment measures, Education ministry, 13 April 2023](#)

[Policy letter about internship discrimination, Education ministry, 1 February 2024](#)

[Policy letter internships, Education ministry, 24 April 2024](#)

[Policy letter internships, Education ministry, 12 March 2025](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Citizenship education

Citizenship education plays a vital role in preparing students for full participation and functioning in society. In the Netherlands, this means fostering a culture of mutual respect, upholding democratic principles and the rule of law, and recognising and respecting individual freedoms.

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET

2022 Completed

Civic Agenda 2017-21

In 2017, the education ministry and the Association of VET colleges (*MBO Raad*), representing all VET schools, launched an agenda to strengthen civic competences of VET learners by updating VET curricula.

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET

2022 Completed

Guidance arrangements

In September 2016, the Secretary of State for Education announced in a letter to parliament measures to improve career orientation and guidance in general and in vocational education. The most important actions implemented were:

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Completed

Action plan for equal opportunities in education

In response to a range of surveys showing that students do not always have equal opportunities, and the trend of growing inequality, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science submitted to parliament in October 2016 an action plan for equal opportunities in education.

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 **Completed**

Quality agreements

Quality agreements centre on a (partly) performance-based funding scheme introduced in 2015. They were concluded between public upper secondary VET schools (MBO schools) and the education ministry and monitored by account managers (ministry officials).

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” Cite as

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28443>