

## The next generation: Experiences of higher educated Turkish-Dutch on The Hague labour market

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### Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between education and labour market positioning in The Hague, a Dutch city with a unique labour market. One of the main minority groups, Turkish-Dutch, is the focus in this qualitative study on higher educated minorities and their labour market success. Interviews reveal that the obstacles the respondents face are linked to discrimination and network limitation. The respondents perceive “personal characteristics” as the most important tool to overcoming the obstacles. Education does not only increase their professional skills, but also widens their networks. The Dutch education system facilitates the chances of minorities in higher education through the “layering” of degrees.

**Keywords:** the Netherlands; second generation; Turkish-Dutch; higher education; labour market entry.

In a constantly changing labour market, different groups compete to attain better positioning. In the Netherlands, immigrant groups often are at a competitive disadvantage to native groups. Earlier research indicates that for Surinamese in Amsterdam<sup>1</sup> the general educational status increased from 1991 to 2002, but these higher educational levels did not result in an improved labour market position. Overall, their labour market position was stable, while their educational attainments increased (Nijhoff, 2006).

In this paper qualitative data are used to explore the labour market experiences of higher educated Turkish Dutch. The focus is on The Hague, the third most populated city in the Netherlands, where the government is seated and international organizations are concentrated. The focus of Dutch government policies has been on education as a means to emancipation and upward mobility. The effects of the increased educational qualifications of a minority group are explored in relation to the labour market experiences of that group.

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<sup>1</sup> Research based on a secondary analysis of two large data sets compiled by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Agency (SCP), the SPVA: Social Positioning and Use of Resources (*voorzieningsgebruik*) by Minorities in 1991 and 2002.



## Background

Immigrant labour market success is not solely explained by human capital characteristics such as education (Hunkler, 2010; Liebig & Schröder, 2010; Tienda, 1993; Torres & Torre, 1991). Group characteristics, the local labour market context, and structural barriers influence the opportunities for migrants and their descendants. In 2010 there are about 348.000 people of Turkish descent living in the Netherlands, two per cent of the total population. The first generation, 51.1 % of Turkish in the Netherlands, arrived in the 1960s, mainly from poor and underdeveloped regions in Turkey (CBS/SCP, 2010; Cottaar, 1998, 2003; J. Lucassen & Penninx, 1997).

**Table 1:** Population of The Hague, by Ethnicity, 2009

	Number	Percentage
Turkish	35.070	7,3
Moroccan	26.165	5,4
Surinamese	46.142	9,5
Antillean	11.117	2,4
Other origins	109.851	22,7
Not migrated	254.165	52,7
Total	482.510	100

Source: *www.denhaag.buurtmonitor.nl*

## Group characteristics

Migration started with the recruitment of Turkish guest workers for manual labour where no skills were needed. The average education level of the group was low and their labour market participation was confined to a limited part of the labour market. The average education level of a group creates possibilities (or a lack of possibilities) for other members of that group: if a group's education level on average is low, regardless of ethnicity, the next generation has a harder struggle to achieve (for example see L. Lucassen & Willems, 2010). In addition, lack of networks that include potential employers, and the limited job search methods used by minorities will make it harder for certain groups to succeed in different sectors (Dagevos, 2006).

## Local context

The Hague is the third biggest city and is unique in the Netherlands because it is the governmental capital of the Netherlands and international organizations are concentrated in The Hague. These characteristics would suggest an important service industry - a specific labour market context - and more opportunities for the higher educated (Decisio, 2011).

Studies confirm the continuing burden of discrimination on the Dutch labour market against minority groups (Andriessen, et al., 2007; Bovenkerk & Breuning-van Leeuwen, 1978/1979; Gras & Bovenkerk, 1999). Important markers for discrimination and exclusion of minority groups are race and religion (van Tubergen, 2010).

### Dutch education

In the Dutch education system, students are guided towards different tracks after elementary school. The choice is based on standard tests in combination with the teacher's assessment. There are different levels of schooling, but the system is not rigid (see appendix 1 for more details). Students can reach the highest levels of education (*hbo/wo*) in different ways, a direct path or a longer track (de Valk & Crul, 2008).

#### *Labor Market Positioning*

One way of measuring the position of minorities in the labour market is by assessing if minorities are represented among all or most of the sectors and levels in the labour market. Among the second generation, there is an increase in the average level of jobs. In general, the increase seems to have uplifted ethnic minorities from the lower regions of the labour market. According to Gijsberts & Dagevos (2009):

“The shift has been large and probably reflects the large increase in average education level. [...] Migrants and their children have significantly increased their positions in higher and scientific professions in 2008 compared to 1996.” (p.13, my translation)

A second way of measuring the labour market position of groups is through unemployment percentages. Table 2 presents national data related to education levels, minority status, and unemployment.

**Table 2:** Education, Unemployment and Minority Status, 2010

	Minorities	Non-minority	Difference
Elementary school	14%	8%	1,8
Lower secondary	14%	5%	2,8
Middle secondary	10%	4%	2,5
Higher education	8%	3%	2,7

*Sources: CBS/SCP, 2010.*

Table 2 reveals several points. First, for both minority and non-minority groups, an increase in education level leads to a decrease in unemployment levels. Second, although the unemployment percentages decrease with higher education, the difference between unemployment of minorities and non-minority *increases* with higher education: for the lower educated, the percentages of unemployment differ the least, while unemployment among higher educated minorities is low, it is even lower for non-minorities. When the per-

centages are compared, the percentage unemployment among higher educated minorities is over 2.7 times greater in 2010 compared to non-minorities.

For people of Turkish descent the national unemployment percentage in 2009 is 10% compared to 4% of the non-migrated population. This percentage is slightly lower than the average unemployment for minorities in general, which is estimated around 11%. Unemployment is high among people between the ages 15 to 25: 18%. Nationally the unemployment percentage for higher educated Turkish-Dutch is less than 1% (CBS/SCP, 2010).

## Methods

Research on migration and the migrant experience in the Netherlands before the 1990s focused on both quantitative analysis and qualitative experiences (for example Bovenkerk, 1978/1979; Essed, 1991; Willems & Cottaar, 1989). In the 1990s this focus seems to have shifted more towards quantitative research (Gijssberts & Lubbers, 2009; Pietersen, 2010). An analysis of the research on labour market success of minority groups, where members of these groups talk about their experiences, reveals several topics. In education, minority students often take 'the long route' to a degree in higher education. The accumulation of degrees is important to address their earlier disadvantages. Personal characteristics are seen as one of the most important factors of success and discrimination is seen as the most important factor blocking that success. Anti-discriminatory measures by the government are rarely mentioned as a way to overcome unequal treatment (Bouw, et al., 2003; de Koning, et al., 2008; Gent, et al., 2006; Jungbluth, 2007, 2009; Muskens, 2007; Nijhoff & Trompetter, 1995). These aspects have been included in this study.

To explore personal experiences of migrants, 30 people of Turkish descent who live and work in The Hague were interviewed by two students for their bachelor thesis. They used their networks and snowball sampling to find respondents. The selection of participants was based on education level (higher education), Turkish migration background, and place of residence and work (The Hague). The interviews were held in the early months of 2010 by Aysel Kiliç and Vahide Bilici who focused their questions on participants' entry into the labour market, their motivations, and the obstacles they experienced. They interviewed 17 women and 13 men. Of the informants, nine have a university degree (*wo*), the others have a degree in applied sciences (*bbo*). There is variation in the specializations, with a prevalence of social and economic degrees. Seventeen followed the accumulation track, while twelve followed the regular route to a degree in higher education.

The transcribed interviews were analysed separately for the purposes of this paper. In the analysis, the information was organized in topics that describe different obstacles in the transition from school to the labour market.

## Migrant Voices

### *Motivation*

Parents and other family members are important motivators in education and labour market choices of the respondents. For one man, the image of “guest work heritage” was a motivation to succeed: “We have to get rid of the image that foreigners are only good for guest work, that they can only do cleaning or janitorial work. Yes, that has been an important factor for me” (M1). One of the women discusses the importance of her mother: “Especially my mother [was important]. My mother stimulated me to achieve as much as possible. She did not go to college and married when she was 19. She always told me to be independent and to find a good job” (F10). Some of the respondents indicate that religion and family are important. Women also emphasize inner strength as an important source of motivation.

Women experience more difficulties during their education than men. They indicate that the accumulation system is very demanding and that the connection between the different schools is hard. They feel that there needs to be more coordination between the different levels of schooling. Discrimination is evident: two women indicate that they feel that teachers did not appreciate their capacities. Two women wearing head scarves explain that they have difficulties finding an internship (which is required for a *bbo*-degree): “I have often been refused. One of the institutions was honest and told me he did not want to lose any clients because of my head scarf” (F2).

### *From Education to Labour Market*

The entry to the labour market is by no means easy for the respondents. This is not necessarily due to their background, and might (partially) be explained by their age and lack of experience. There are additional factors that make it harder for the Turkish-Dutch.

“[...] That makes you think, you wonder why you did not get the job even though you have the diploma, you have the capacities. It makes you think it might have to do with discrimination, it is a feeling. Openly, no, I did not experience blatant discrimination.” (M1)

One of the men expressed:

“I won a case [at the Dutch Commission of Equal Treatment] but it did not help me because their advice is not binding. So I tried it a different way. I applied for jobs twice: once with a Turkish name and once with a Dutch name. Everything else in my resume was the same. For the application with the Turkish name I received a rejection letter, for the application with the Dutch name I was invited for a job talk [...] There is a lot of discrimination in these big companies.” (M8)

Another respondent confirms this story: he did not experience this himself but he points to a study<sup>2</sup> where a similar procedure was followed.

Experiences differ for women who wear or do not wear head scarves. The women who do not wear a head scarf do not express experiences of discrimination: “If you are competent and you fit the job, you can get the job. If you can adjust yourself to the culture of the company, you have the same chance of being hired as anybody else” (F16).

For the women who wear a head scarf, discrimination is obvious: seven of the eight women indicate that they experienced discrimination based on their religion (ethnicity). For some it was a ‘feeling’, for others it was more:

“When you are invited for a job interview and you walk in and they see your head scarf, you see them look at you in a weird way. Their facial expressions change. They might not say it but you see it, in their facial expressions, in their gestures.” (F6)

### *Networks*

Only one of the respondents speaks elaborately about his networks:

“In general, when you ask your father, do you know somebody where I can be an intern, he will be like ‘oh, I know this guy with a supermarket in the neighbourhood, or your uncle, he works in a factory, maybe you should talk to him. Or you can talk to the butcher, I know him pretty well. He might have an opening for you, or a Turkish insurance agency, check there.’ These are all networks of your own background, and it won’t really help you if you want to achieve something in the larger society. [...] That larger network, you really have to fight for it.” (M1)

He also says: “If you have good networks, it helps a lot finding a job. A good way of finding a job is through the internship, which works out great. You probably won’t be refused then.”

The importance of networks is evident in the activities of the students. They all are part of student networks where they meet people from outside of their background. When they elaborate about how they found their internship or job, the importance of their newly formed networks becomes obvious.

### *Solutions*

To end the interview, the following question was asked: “What advice would you give to people that often apply for jobs but do not get hired?” The respondents answer in multiple ways, but focus primarily on personal characteristics: 23 of the 29 mention *perseverance*. Other suggestions are: prepare well; be conscious of your self-presentation; learn about the employer and the job; get educated; start low and grow; be honest and open. These answers all point to

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<sup>2</sup> The Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Agency conducted a similar experiment between May and December 2008. They found a significant difference in the percentage of people from Dutch or from migrated origin who were invited for a job talk after sending a letter (NRC Next 22/07/10, p.12)

individual characteristics, and do not focus on structural obstacles as discrimination. “I have met people that volunteered for a few years, and they got a contract afterwards, because they showed who they were. They proved to the company that they were worth hiring” (M1).

### Conclusions and discussion

“My parents, they came with nothing and they had to start at the bottom. It is beautiful to see what they achieved. They did not have an education, they did not know the language, and my mother could not read or write, they came from nothing. And yet they were able to raise children that are role models in the community today.” (F8)

The interviews give an impression about processes in the transition from education to the labour market in The Hague. The group reached higher education and faced structural and personal barriers in entering the labour market.

Individual characteristics are frequently mentioned as important in achieving goals. Despite the importance of the experience of discrimination, it seems that the respondents do not think government measures can help. Perseverance is one of the most mentioned ‘factors’ seen as important to obtaining a good position in the labour market. The support of family and friends is perceived important as well, whereas teachers and mentors are less frequently mentioned. Overcoming discrimination in the labour market is thus an individual endeavour, in the eyes of the respondents.

Education increased the opportunities of the participants in more ways than their professional training. Besides the increase in knowledge and skills, there was also an increase and a widening of their networks. The connections within the community are strong but limited. Education has expanded networks outside of the community. This is an important aspect of participation in higher education.

The respondents talk about the importance of volunteer work, of student organizations and of other connections and experiences that they had during their time in university. There seems to be an unconscious understanding of the academic terminology about networks, bridging and bonding, and social capital. The respondents understand and realize the importance of getting connected outside the group. Knowledge is vital for participation in the labour market for the higher educated, but without networks and social capital, the step to successful labour market participation is difficult.

The route to higher education that many minority members follow mitigates a start that began in the lower strata of the educational system. Regardless of the causes of the high amounts of minority students in this accumulation route, it is important to maintain that route until other solutions are found. The literature reviewed and the interviews emphasize that it is important for the government to ensure that this route remains accessible.

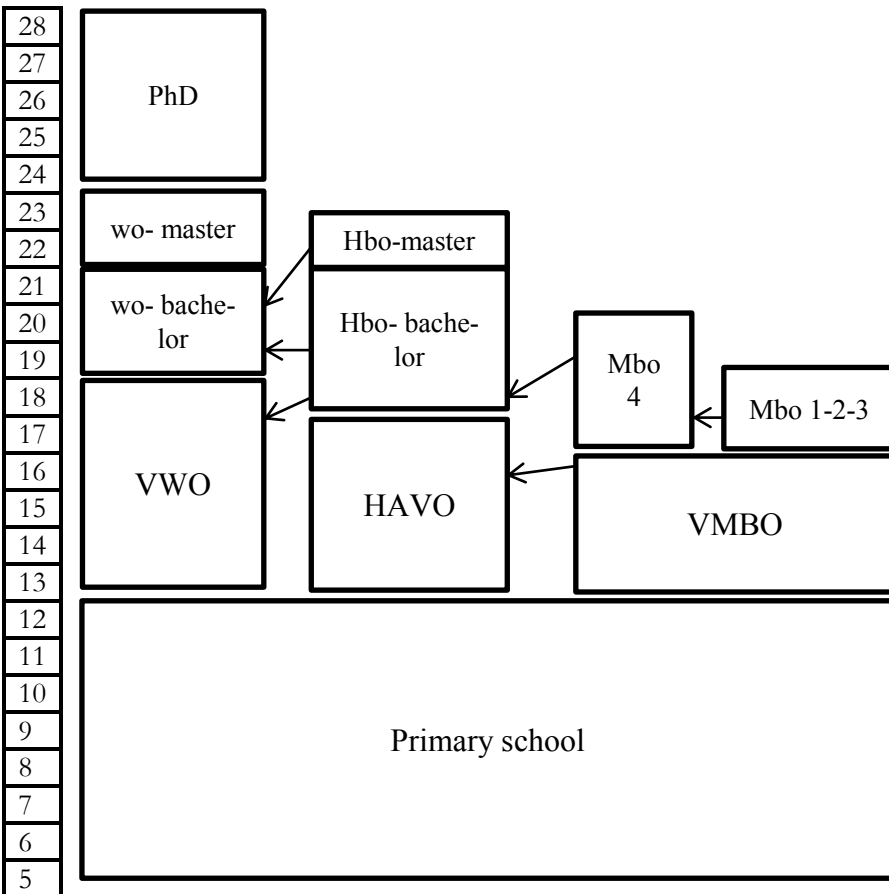
Discrimination plays a role in the entrance of the labour market. Ethnicity and religion are used to exclude minority members from the labour market. It seems that religion is a more important marker for the women interviewed than ethnicity. Women without head scarves did not say they experienced discrimination, while the women wearing head scarves clearly stated that they were excluded from certain positions because of their dress. For the male respondents, the experience of discrimination was prominent, but not as prominent as for the women with head scarves. While the respondents feel that the individual has to overcome discrimination, local and national government must look at ways to grant equal access for all.



**Appendix 1: Dutch educational system**

The Dutch system is layered, an accumulation track in which you can attain different levels of degrees or diplomas in different strata of education. Elementary school is the same for all and after these six years, pupils can choose from a variety of paths. One direction of education is vocational training which has three components: lower, middle and higher vocation training. Higher vocational training (*hbo*) ends with a bachelor-degree of applied sciences. The students need to finish a certain level of middle vocational training to be considered “qualified for the labor market” (middle vocational training, *mbo*, has 4 levels, level 3 and up are end qualifications). Besides the vocational track, students can attend two types of theoretical high school. A diploma of the six-year high school (*mvo*) provides direct access to the university (*wo*), the diploma of the five-year high school (*havo*) provides access to higher vocational training (*hbo*).

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Source: Adapted from [www.expatsguideholland.com](http://www.expatsguideholland.com) (07-12-2010).

**Appendix 2:** Some characteristics of the Turkish-Dutch informants

	Type of bachelor	Layering	Major	Age	Labor market position
F1	Hbo	Y	Social work	29	
F2	Hbo	Y	Social work	24	Child care
F3	Hbo	N	Teachers education	28	Teacher elementary school
F4	Hbo	Y	Accountancy	27	
F5	Hbo	N	Social work	24	
F6	Hbo	Y	Social work	26	Social worker
F7	Hbo	Y	Social work	26	Social worker
F8	Wo	Y	Business Administration	27	University Leiden
F9	Wo	N	Law	25	Working on MA degree
F10	Wo	N	Law	24	Just graduated
F11	Hbo	Y	Social work	24	?
F12	Hbo	Y	Social work	33	Director special education (in Turkey)
F13	Hbo	Y	Nursing	30	Psychiatric nurse
F14	Wo	N	Business	29	Trainee dept. Traffic
F15	Hbo	Y	Unknown	27	Elementary school and nursing
F16	Hbo	Y	Social work	40	Youth social work
F17	Hbo	Y	Pedagogy	26	Social work advisor
M1	Hbo	N	European Studies	29	Senior manager dept. of infrastructure
M2	Wo abroad	N	International law	39	Mental support at <i>Par-nassia</i>
M3	Wo	N	Psychology	25	Psychologist at <i>Nova</i>
M4	Unclear	--	--	--	--
M5	Hbo	N	Business Administration	27	Project advisor government
M6	Wo-ma	N	Koran/Islam sciences	37	Manager prison, adj. head
M7	Hbo	Y	Accountancy	31	Accountancy office
M8	Hbo	Y	Commercial economics	29	Administrative associate
M9	Hbo	Y	Commercial economics	27	System manager
M10	Hbo	Y	Teachers education	51	?
M11	Hbo	N	Information technology	33	IT specialist
M12	Hbo	Y	Social work	26	Youth worker
M13	Wo	N	Business Administration	26	Bank employee

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