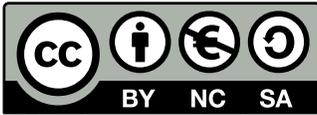


**ANTIDISCRIMINATION DATA:  
PRACTICES WORLDWIDE AND VIEWS OF STUDENTS  
AND STAFF OF COLOUR AT DUTCH UNIVERSITIES**

**SUMMARY AND POINTS TO  
CONSIDER IN FUTURE DISCUSSIONS**

The Young Academy  
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The Young Academy seeks to contribute to an informed and nuanced discussion on the collection of data for the purpose of combatting ethnic discrimination and racism at Dutch universities. Dutch universities do not currently collect data on the migration background, ethnicity or racialisation (that is: perceived as belonging to a certain 'race') of Dutch university staff; data collection on students is limited to migration background. There are growing calls to collect such data as input for effective diversity policies, but there is also considerable opposition to doing so. Statistical data classifying people into ethnic and racial categories can lead to exclusion and discrimination, for example when politicians argue that there are 'too many' people of a certain category in a country. Data of this kind can, however, also be used to identify, understand and combat ethnic discrimination and racism.

The Young Academy has therefore carried out two studies. The first explores the ways in which universities in other countries collect data to combat ethnic discrimination and racism. The results of that study, conducted by Sharon van Geldere, Rozemarijn Stadens and Linnet Taylor, can be found in the report *Antidiscrimination data collection in academia: An exploration of survey methodology practices outside of the Netherlands*. The second study surveys opinions about data collection on ethnicity and racialisation held by people of colour in the Dutch university community. This study was conducted by Saskia Bonjour, Shanelle Hasselbaink, Chaima Nbigui and Shivano Raghoenathsingh and is entitled *An exploration of the views of staff and students of colour regarding antidiscrimination data at Dutch universities*. The findings of these studies are summarised below. Full texts of the reports are available on the website of [The Young Academy](#).

## Antidiscrimination data collection in academia: An exploration of survey methodology practices outside of the Netherlands

- This study is meant to inform The Young Academy’s project on categorisation and self-categorisation in Dutch academia, which examines both practices and views associated with ethnic and racialised categories used in academic institutions as part of antidiscrimination policies. We requested self-identification forms from institutions in a number of countries and, where possible, interviewed those involved in administering them to understand their rationale and purposes.
- Under the rubric of their countries’ national equality laws and related institutional requirements, academic institutions collect data on people’s personal background, including their ethnic identity, social group membership, and legal and physical attributes. These data collection practices differ widely from one country and institution to another.
- Institutions vary somewhat in their reasons for collecting data, the data they collect, and the type of accountability such data collection stems from and in turn makes possible. There is no particular approach or set of priorities we can point to as dominant; instead, local history and circumstances appear to be the defining factors.
- There is no legal prohibition in the EU against collecting such information, but data protection law does require a legal basis to be created first. This makes collecting data for antidiscrimination purposes a question of political will, as does the presence/establishment of oversight to make the data actionable.
- We identify some protections and features that make these surveys both more effective in representing diversity and more acceptable to employees in terms of data use and management:
  - offering participants the option of updating the information they have provided;
  - offering participants the option of elaborating on the answers they have given;
  - allowing participants to tick multiple boxes to denote intersecting identities;
  - acknowledging that there are far more identities than the surveys can realistically accounted for;

- communicating the broader objective of the survey and indicating how the information will (and will not) be used;
  - clarifying data management and privacy matters by offering binding statements on access and purpose limitation.
- The surveys collected for this project suggest that we might draw a distinction between using data for institutional diversity oversight (i.e. institutions' upward accountability to government or equality institutions) and using data to support and inform antiracist action (possibly different in form, and created in response to demands for 'downward' accountability towards staff).

## **A survey of the views of staff and students of colour regarding antidiscrimination data at Dutch universities**

Students and staff belonging to discriminated groups should play a key role in decision-making about university antidiscrimination policies. If an antidiscrimination policy involves data collection, they should have a say in how these data are collected, analysed and published. The purpose of this project was therefore to explore what students and staff of colour at Dutch universities think about data collection.

This report is based on interviews with eleven staff of colour at Dutch universities and five representatives of multicultural and/or antiracist student organisations. The findings we present here are a preliminary exploration: they do not offer a representative sample of the opinions held by staff and students of colour in the Netherlands concerning antidiscrimination data. Since it was not feasible to conduct a representative survey with the available means, we set out to explore the widest possible spectrum of views. We cannot draw firm conclusions and recommendations from this study. What we can do is highlight some points that we hope will be considered in future discussions.

A majority of our respondents favour the collection of data to combat ethnic discrimination and racism. Most proponents, however, also express a certain reluctance: they see data collection as a ‘necessary evil’.

The main argument put forward by the proponents of data collection is that quantitative data are needed to show that racism and ethnic discrimination exist at universities: ‘Without data, they won’t believe you when you tell them about racism’. Another respondent refers to ‘legitimising the experiences of people of colour’.

A minority of our respondents believe that the disadvantages of quantitative data collection outweigh the advantages. They emphasise the risk of ‘pigeonholing’. Instead of categorising people, the university itself should be the subject of research. These respondents would prefer to see qualitative research identifying the individuals or groups for whom the university is not a welcoming and safe place, and examining why that is the case.

Having a say in the data collection and analysis is crucial for many of our respondents. Several respondents emphasise that the categories identified in antidiscrimination data should be defined in consultation with those affected, i.e., the people who actually experience ethnic discrimination and racism.

Stigmatisation can only be prevented through participation, these respondents believe.

Almost all respondents prefer self-categorisation (with students and staff being asked to self-identify) to categorisation by third parties based on data from population statistics (as is currently customary in the Netherlands). In the view of these respondents, it is crucial to give staff and students of colour a say in how they are categorised when collecting antidiscrimination data.

Respondents' opinions about data collection are shaped by their trust or lack of it in the institutions that collect these data. In the wake of the Childcare Benefits scandal, our respondents' trust in government has been severely shaken. Many respondents also do not have a great deal of trust in universities and their administrators. Universities and other government institutions can only regain this trust by showing that they are collecting and using data in a way that does not harm but rather benefits minorities.

For many of our respondents, it is important that the categories used in data collection match their self-identification, so that they can 'recognize themselves' in a survey instrument. Others prefer to think more strategically about categories: for them, the main purpose of categorisation in data collection is not to capture the complexity and layeredness of each individual identity, but to facilitate policies or interventions that serve the interests of minorities.

Many of our respondents prefer self-categorisation using categories based on 'origin' or 'descent'. In their view, a category based on geographical origin and family history best captures their identity. A few respondents prefer survey questions about nationality or place of birth. Several respondents feel that religion should be included in data collection meant to combat ethnic discrimination and racism.

A significant majority of respondents emphasise that it is not enough to collect data on ethnicity and racialisation alone if the purpose is to understand and combat inequality and discrimination. The data collected should cover gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, disability, and geographical origin in the Netherlands.

Several respondents say that they found answering questions about ethnicity and racialisation to be stressful and difficult. They emphasise the importance of caring for respondents before, during and after data collection.