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Xenophobia on the increase in the Netherlands

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The results of an internet poll show that one in ten Dutch people regard themselves as racists and about 50 percent have an aversion to Islam. Despite these disturbing statistics, however, the Dutch still appear to be less xenophobic than many other Europeans.



The Netherlands Centre for Foreigners regards the results of the most recent research into racism and xenophobia among the Dutch as "extremely shocking". A survey of 1,020 people - carried out by Motivaction research bureau via the internet - shows that 'native' Dutch people have a fundamental dislike of ethnic minorities in their country.

Some 58 percent of the respondents believe a neighbourhood will go downhill if too many people from minorities live there, while 42 percent want 'native' Dutch teachers for their children.

Muslims are particularly unpopular. Half the respondents said they are afraid of Islam and its influence on Dutch society. They regard Islam as a non-peaceful religion at odds with modern life in Europe.

Indispensable

Despite the fact that half the respondents appear to be Islamophobes, the other half say they regard 'non-natives' (Dutch citizens with at least one parent from an ethnic minority) as likeable people. In fact, one-third regards minorities as indispensable to the Dutch economy.

More disturbing was the degree of open racism. Around 10 percent of respondents were ready to describe themselves as racists. Pollster Martijn Lampert from the Motivaction research and strategy agency explains how this racism was measured:

"It can be seen, for instance, in the opinion

Motivaction asked the survey respondents to react to the following assertions in order to determine their level of racism:

1. In the event of dismissal, 'non-native' people should lose their jobs first.

2. Dutch people should not 'mix' with other nationalities.

3. I find it unpleasant when racist terms are used to describe people from a particular ethnic group.

that workers from ethnic minorities should be the first to be sacked if a company is doing badly, that people regard themselves as superior to members of minorities or that they regard 'native' Dutch people as more intelligent than 'non-natives'."

Mr Lampert points out that racists not only have racist opinions, they are also prepared to act in a racist manner.

Aggression

Racists object to the presence of 'non-natives' in the Netherlands - some of them in an aggressive manner. A few will take part in protest marches or otherwise express the aggression they feel towards ethnic minorities. Young people tend to express their racism through the dress code of Lonsdale sportswear or bomber jackets or by wearing fascist symbols.

At the moment, though, racism in the Netherlands is generally restricted to repeating slogans like 'our people first'. That doesn't mean there is no active discrimination: people from ethnic minorities have more difficulty finding employment and young 'non-natives' regularly complain of discrimination at the doors of discotheques and clubs.



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Across Europe

Clearly, dislike of the multicultural society has grown in recent years, but that's also true outside the Netherlands. Islamophobia has been on the rise throughout Europe since the 11 September attacks of 2001. In fact, in terms of xenophobia, the Dutch score less than the European average.

Across the board, some 58 percent of Europeans regard ethnic minorities as a threat. Italy, Belgium and the Czech Republic score above the European average in their dislike of foreigners. Researcher Martijn Lampert also thinks the Dutch situation isn't that bad:

"Ten percent racist - I think that racism is something timeless. If you compare this with situation in France, where one in three French people describes themselves as racist, then the situation here is, relatively speaking, not that bad."

Not that bad, maybe, but also not that good, certainly not in the view of migrant organisations. The Dutch government also isn't happy about the outcome, which is why it's coming forward with a plan of action for the country's seven main cities where large numbers of people from ethnic minorities live. Eight government ministers will take on the role of 'ambassador' for the problem districts in these cities, and maintain direct contact with the local authorities in order to call a halt to negative developments in these areas.

RNW Internet translation (imm)