



Equal Justice Equal Pay Foundation

Pigmentstraat 51  
1019 AN, Amsterdam

*Response from the Equal Justice Equal Pay Foundation (“Foundation”) to “Answers to Parliamentary Questions Regarding the Parliamentary Letter ‘Written Response to the Report “The Flag Register and the Country of Residence Principle: Economic and Strategic Value” dated 28 September 2026 (Aanhangsel Handelingen II 2026, nr. 2026Z16887)”*

### **Minister acknowledges wage gap on Dutch ships but refuses to take responsibility**

Members of the Dutch House of Representatives Vellinga-Beemsterboer and Nijenhuis (both D66) have posed questions to the Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management, Mr. Karremans, regarding the practice on board Dutch ships of paying Filipino and Indonesian seafarers less than half the hourly wage of their European colleagues. This is due to the application of what is known as the “country of residence principle.”

However, the “country of residence principle” is not a general legal principle. Labor should be compensated according to the value of the work performed, regardless of the qualified individual in question.

The members asked the minister to respond to two reports that were prepared on the (un)equal pay of Indonesian and Filipino seafarers, each of which paints a completely different picture:

- The report commissioned by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management suggests that 50 to 70% of Dutch shipping companies would flag out if they were required to pay their seafarers equally.
- However, the report prepared by *SEO Economisch Onderzoek*, at the Foundation’s request, shows that at most 20% of shipping companies would do so and that, moreover, there is no indication that the economic impact of this would be significant, since the flag has little bearing on shore-based activities within the maritime cluster.

Unfortunately, the Minister refuses to acknowledge that this “country of residence principle” is problematic. He states that there is “no court ruling” indicating that this would not be permitted. However, Dutch law and the Dutch Constitution are clear that discrimination is prohibited. Furthermore, in 2025, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights decided that this distinction based on race and nationality is prohibited. The Minister believes that this concerns only the parties to the collective bargaining agreements, and not the Dutch State. The Foundation finds this incomprehensible, given that the Dutch government declares these collective bargaining agreements generally binding year after year.

The Foundation is also disappointed that the Minister does not address the well-being of seafarers at all.

The Minister goes no further than saying that he can imagine that the underpayment of certain seafarers “raises questions.” In order to adjust the compensation system, a discussion would have to take place at the global level. The Foundation has no objection to consultations at the European or global level. At the same time, international consultation must not serve as an excuse to allow this clear national issue to persist any longer. After all, the issue at hand is unequal pay by Dutch shipping companies on Dutch ships sailing under the Dutch flag.



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The Minister writes that he has instructed the Dutch National Agency for the Maritime Manufacturing Industry to conduct additional research into the effects in the Netherlands if distinctions based on race and nationality are no longer made, and that the House of Representatives will be informed of the findings in the spring of 2027. The Foundation hopes that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management will, on that occasion, pay closer attention to the unique position of seafarers and that this prohibited discrimination will be brought to an end.

In the meantime, the Foundation is preparing further legal action.

September 30, 2026

Kees van Ast, Chair of the Equal Justice Equal Pay Foundation

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