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Human rights and economic challenges in Europe – gender equality

Netherlands

Report presented by the national delegation



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Equality between women and men

In the Netherlands, equality between women and men is taken for granted. But just because something is taken for granted does not mean that it comes naturally. Therefore, each successive cabinet must promote emancipation using specific measures and policy development. The Dutch Multi-Year Policy Plan on Emancipation was adopted in 2000. This policy plan contains the objectives for the period up to 2010 and policy actions for the first four years. The present cabinet is currently taking stock of the progress towards these objectives so far.

The most important conclusion is that although progress has been made in the past five years, there is still much work to do. For this reason, the primary objectives of the emancipation policy remain unchanged. At the heart of the emancipation policy is, and remains, the goal of having more women work more hours, and to bring about better utilisation of their talents and qualities. This is good for women, for society and for the future. The unique talents of both men and women are of critical importance for the quality of society in all its aspects: social, economic and moral.

The cabinet does add one new objective, that of social participation. Although the citizenry itself has, on the individual level, an important responsibility in the development and utilisation of the talents of its members, not everyone is capable of building up an independent life and achieving economic independence. This is particularly true for a large number of women. The cabinet wishes to keep these women from being left behind and falling into social isolation. Promoting social participation of women in a vulnerable position is therefore added as a principal objective for the emancipation policy in the coming years.

Substantial progress

In the first five years of the policy period, substantial progress was achieved. The rise in women's educational level continued slowly but surely. More women are participating in higher forms of education and are receiving their diplomas/degrees faster than men. In addition, more and more women are holding paid jobs. Women's participation in the labour market has increased by approximately one percent per year and is now over 54%.¹ The most successful in this picture

are young women with intermediate and higher-level education. Previous concerns about women's connection with the knowledge society have proved largely unjustified. The use of computer, internet and mobile telephone has firmly caught on among many women. The participation in and mobility within the labour market is slowly but surely being seen in the numbers of women in man-

agement and high-level political positions. Women now hold approximately one-fourth of all management positions. The representation of women in the composition of the cabinet, the Lower House of Parliament, and the Dutch delegation to the European Parliament, increased significantly at the last elections.²

1. Sources, if not stated: CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) or *Emancipatiemonitor* 2004.

2. *Voortgangrapportage vrouwen in politiek en bestuur 1997-2003* ["Progress report: women in politics and administration"], *Emancipatiemonitor* 2004, SCP.

More commonplace, but more work to be done

Emancipation has become more of a basic assumption, but acceptance is not yet total. This can be said of all components of the Dutch emancipation policy: workforce participation leading to economic independence, security (combat-

ing violence against women), social participation and decision-making/management. These same main themes are at work in the foreign agenda.

Regarding the main theme of the conference, we focus on two of the five

themes of the Dutch Multiyear Policy plan for this paper, namely economic independence and security (combating violence against women).

Economic independence

Economic independence is the core objective of the emancipation policy. An independent income offers freedom for

personal and social growth and protection against dependence, reliance on social benefits, and poverty. Participation

in the workforce offers opportunities for equality and integration and social contacts outside of one's own community



and family circle. Economic independence can also strengthen a woman's defences against domestic violence and help to prevent violence. The participation of women in the workforce is increasingly important to the economy. In order to be able to maintain our high level of prosperity and to continue to be able to pay for the welfare state, today's ageing society and globalising economy needs all the talent available. Female talent and female qualities increase the performance of companies and management teams, and can make or break a modern service economy.

What has been achieved since 2000

In the period from 2000-2005, legislation was introduced to facilitate the combination of work and care, and in so doing to enable workforce participation and economic independence of women to increase. The Work and Care Act was introduced, incorporating the right to take pregnancy and birth leave, maternity/paternity leave, adoption leave, paid and unpaid parental leave, care leave and emergency leave. The Working Hours (Adjustment) Act also became effective in this period. This act allows employees to either reduce or increase their working hours. The Child Care Act safeguards the quality and regulates the financing of child care. In principle, the Act places responsibility jointly with employers, employees and the government. The Life Course Savings Scheme, which becomes

effective in 2006, offers employees the option to save for a period of unpaid leave. Parents who take their statutory parental leave and participate in the life course savings scheme can obtain a tax benefit in the form of an extra tax credit.

The first evaluation of the Work and Care Act was sent to the Lower House of Parliament in 2005.

The evaluation shows that the use of the leave schemes is not yet optimal. Men take advantage of the act (such as by applying for parental leave) more frequently than women. In many cases, holidays or ADV days (days off under the Reduction of Working Hours Scheme) are used where statutory leave could also be taken. Part of the explanation, according to the cabinet, lies in the fact that the act is relatively new (at the time the evaluation was written, the act was just one year old), and the cabinet expects that the systems offered in the act will be used more frequently as time goes on. The first results of the monitor of the act are expected to be available in 2006.

The evaluation of the Working Hours (Adjustment) Act was discussed by the Lower House of Parliament in 2004. This evaluation shows that the act is functioning well. Since the introduction of the act, an increase in the number of applications to change working hours can be observed. In many cases, an appeal to the act is unnecessary, and the employer and employee arrange the adjustment of the working hours in consultation. But the act works in favour of the employee over the employer. Legal precedent shows

that if it comes to litigation, the employee usually wins. The cabinet does observe that there is still a need for more awareness, particularly among employees and small employers.

The new Child Care Act has been in place since 2005. Various studies are currently tracking the effects of the act, such as the study of the users of child care. The results of these studies will be available in 2006.

Developments initiated by means of Daily Routine Arrangements have facilitated a good work/care combination in many areas. Examples are daily routine arrangements for children aged 0-12, arrangements geared towards more flexible working hours, working at home and supporting services for informal caregivers.

In conclusion, in recent years many measures have arisen with the goal of facilitating the combination of work and care, and thereby workforce participation by women. Nonetheless, in terms of hours worked, participation lags behind that of our neighbouring countries. Supplemental measures are needed to increase the workforce volume in women's working years. In order to increase workforce volume, women who now work in small part-time jobs need an incentive to work more hours. More hours worked will also, logically, be a positive step towards the objective of economic independence: the more hours women work, the more they will earn.



Objectives to be reached in 2010

Primary objective	Secondary objectives
Primary objective: Increasing the economic independence of women <i>Indicators</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The number of economically independent women is at least 60% in 2010. 2. Participation in the workforce by women is at least 65% in 2010. 3. Women's share of all income from work is at least 35% in 2010. 4. 40% of care tasks are performed by men in 2010. 	Secondary objective 1: Social system In the social system, workforce participation and the combination of work and care are facilitated so as to create equal opportunities for economic independence and a sustainable life course income for both men and women. (Social Affairs and Employment)
	Secondary objective 2: Schools, child care, and daily routine arrangements In 2007, schools will be responsible for organising/contracting before-school, in-school and after-school care for children from 4-12 years of age. (Education, Culture and Science/Social Affairs and Employment)
	Secondary objective 3: Time for work and care Social partners and municipalities will make arrangements on reducing problems in relation to combining work and private life. (Social Affairs and Employment)
	Secondary objective 4: Ethnic minority women Arrangements on increasing participation in the workforce by ethnic minority women will be defined and implemented. (Social Affairs and Employment)
	Secondary objective 5: Equal opportunity in industry Projects will be implemented in co-operation with business sector partners focusing on improving equal opportunity for women and men in the labour market and reducing wage discrepancies. (Social Affairs and Employment)
	Secondary objective 6: Female-run businesses Creating incentives for women to go into business. (Economic Affairs)

Violence against women and girls

Security is a fundamental human right and should be enjoyed by all, including women and girls. Security ensures bodily integrity, the basic precondition for participation in society. Security offers physical freedom of movement, but also the freedom to think independently and speak freely. Together they provide the freedom to make independent choices on education, work and partner. Preventing and combating violence, therefore, is a key issue in emancipation policy.

What has been achieved since 2000

The Ministries of Justice and the Interior have given domestic violence a place in the Security Programme and the Major Cities Policy. The cabinet is investing a great deal in tackling domestic violence. This is underscored by the collective efforts of civil society organisations and the government and the policy-based co-ordination of the Ministry of Justice. Measures from the policy document *Privé Geweld – Publieke Zaak* ("Private violence – Public concern") are being enacted in a programme-oriented and interdepartmental method.¹

A national in-service training programme, "Dealing with domestic violence

in school", has been developed on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Along with reinforcing the school's warning function, a central focus of this training was on the steps to be taken when a suspicion of domestic violence in relation to a student arises. For relevant upper vocational education programmes, educational modules have been developed to prepare future professional practitioners for identifying and dealing with domestic violence.

Schools have a reporting obligation for sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Special officers who provide confidential counselling, known as *vertrouwens-inspecteurs*, are available to the Education Inspectorate. Among the areas focused on in the Sexual Harassment Prevention Project is the "loverboy" problem (young/adult men who lure asylum-seekers and other vulnerable girls and women into the sex trade with romantic favours are referred to as "loverboys").

While the Netherlands held the chairmanship of the EU in 2004, as part of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment produced three indicators for sexual harassment in the workplace. The Social and Economic Council approved these indicators in December 2004.²

In its approach to honour-related crimes, the cabinet is making efforts to increase Security for victims, effectuate

prevention and increase expertise among the police, women's shelters, and other relevant organisations. The police force in Haaglanden, in co-operation with the police force in Zuid-Holland-Zuid will be conducting a pilot project until spring 2006 to increase insight into the nature and extent of honour-related crimes and reinforce a police approach to the problem. Development of a police approach will also continue after the conclusion of the project. National use of a protocol, in part to provide for arrangements on co-operation, roles and responsibilities of parties involved, intervention options and contact persons, will be encouraged. Women's shelters are creating an adequate supply of places for emergency shelter, and are starting to keep record of incidents of honour related crimes. In addition, investments are being made in educating and training professionals to improve the identification of honour-related crimes. The Board of Procurators-General will expand the Domestic Vio-

2. These indicators are: 1. the number of reported work-related cases of sexual harassment in the workplace as a percentage of the total labour population; 2. the number of public and private companies with a preventive policy in place, as a percentage of the total number of companies; 3. the number of public and private companies that have drafted procedures for sanctions against perpetrators of work-related sexual harassment in the workplace, as a percentage of the total number of employers.

1. *Privé Geweld – Publieke Zaak. Een nota over de gezamenlijke aanpak van huiselijk geweld.* April 2002, The Hague.



lence Instruction to include instructions for dealing with honour related crimes.

The cabinet is also calling on citizens to help in strengthening prevention and improving Security of potential victims. The ministries of Immigration and Integration and Social Affairs and Employment will subsidise initiatives that will contribute to more effective ways that people encountering honour related crimes in their environments can act.

In the spring of 2005, at the order of the Minister of Public Health, Welfare and Sport, a special commission of the Council for Public Health and Care (RVZ) released recommendations on the options for effectively preventing and tracing female genital mutilation, and to move forward with combating the practice.¹ Following these recommendations an action plan was drafted. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport is

1. Commission for Combating Female Genital Mutilation, *Bestrijding vrouwelijke genitale verminking. Beleidsadvies* (2005), Council for Public Health and Care, Zoetermeer.

paving the way for the cabinet's position based on the RVZ's recommendations. A letter on this area was sent to the Lower House of Parliament on 26 August 2005.²

Violence against women has become a serious area of attention in legislation and policy. There is now an infrastructure with regional Domestic Violence Counseling and Support Points. Municipalities, judicial authorities, law enforcement and the health care sector all have personnel working specifically in this area. Partly due to the lack of cohesion between existing incident registration systems and the lack of a national population screening, the effects of the policy cannot be assessed as yet.

The theme has received attention in regional PR campaigns, and a national campaign is being considered.

National support for municipalities and professionals has been established at

2. Letter in response to RVZ study concerning genital mutilation, Parliamentary Documents II, meeting year 2004-2005, 22 894 with annex 29 800 XVI, no. 66.

expertise centres. A legislative proposal for instituting a *huisverbod* (temporary prohibition on entering one's home) for perpetrators of domestic violence will be sent to the Council of State in early 2006, and an implementation procedure is in preparation. The police monitor domestic violence nationally (56 000 victims in 2004), and this continues in 2006. The police expect the number of reports to rise, due to the increased awareness of and attention to the subject.

The co-operation between the links of the chain has increased and is improving. The goal is to better reach victims and perpetrators of ethnic communities, and in so doing to strengthen the approach in this area. In a pilot project in 2006, the police in the regions Zuid-Holland-Zuid and Twente will record the backgrounds of both perpetrators and victims of domestic violence, with the goal of increasing insight and finding links that will contribute to an effective approach to domestic violence among minorities.

Objectives to be reached in 2010

Primary objective	Secondary objectives
Primary objective: Preventing and combating violence against women and girls Increasing the willingness of victims and bystanders to report incidents and reducing the number of repeat reports of domestic violence in the major cities.	Secondary objective 1: Preventing and combating violence against women Creating domestic violence support and advising points in 35 inner-city municipalities and a policy plan for domestic violence in 250 municipalities for 2007. (Public Health, Welfare and Sport/Justice)
	Secondary objective 2: Trafficking in women Prevention and combating of trafficking in women by implementing the National Action Plan on the Trafficking in Humans. (Justice)
	Secondary objective 3: Female genital mutilation Prevention and combating of female genital mutilation. (Public Health, Welfare and Sport)
	Secondary objective 4: Young people: resistance and sexual development In the period up to 2010, generate systematic attention to sexuality and violence prevention to focus on young people. (Public Health, Welfare and Sport/Immigration and Integration/Education, Culture and Science)
	Secondary objective 5: Prevention of violence against women and girls In the period up to 2010, support at least 75 projects focusing on preventing and combating violence against women and girls. (Social Affairs and Employment)
	Secondary objective 6: Female-run businesses Creating incentives for women to go into business. (Economic Affairs)

Investment in young people and the next generation of adults

The cabinet considers it of major importance for the next generation to be prepared for tomorrow's society. This means preparing girls and boys for a lifestyle in which both men and women will be expected to combine work and care, and in which every educational programme and every profession will be open to both women and men. Caregivers

and educators have an important role in this.

The business sector also has a responsibility and interest in this, because all talents will be needed in the ageing society and globalising economy of tomorrow. Image stereotypes, glass ceilings in industry, and direct and indirect gender/race discrimination in recruitment and selection need to be brought out into the

open and dispelled. Young people, both girls and boys, must be able to gain work experience regardless of background or colour. The cabinet will continue to keep tabs on the situation, support good examples in business sectors and companies and, when problem areas are identified, make arrangements with social partners on improvements.



In education, civic development has been included as one of the core objectives. The curriculum will devote attention to themes such as the rule of law,

democracy and freedom. The themes of dealing with violence and sexuality will also be examined. Awareness of limits and building up resistance against behav-

iours that exceed those limits can contribute in an important way to emancipation and the reduction of violence, even for adults.

Emancipation as an element of all policy areas

Still, there is a great deal of work ahead, in a range of areas of the cabinet policy. Emancipation should be a natural part of the portfolios of the specialised ministers and members of the various permanent parliamentary committees. At the end of 2006 the cabinet will release a cabinet position answering the question of how to best safeguard and support emancipation in all policy areas and whether a co-ordinating role is required. The report of the Auditing Committee Emancipation, which gives an evaluation of the embedding of the emancipation perspective in all ministries, will be involved in this cabinet position.

In the national and international emancipation policy for the period 2006-2010, the specialised departments' individual responsibilities will be stepped up. A limited number of primary and secondary objectives have been formulated, in which various different ministries have the initiative. This creates a clear framework for implementation and reporting

in the coming years. The specialised ministers themselves will report to parliament on the policy and the effects of this policy on the position of women and men.

The co-ordinating minister for emancipation will continue to support the specialised ministers in their task during this cabinet period. He will do so by placing new issues on the agenda and supporting the specialised ministers more intensively in the policy development and implementation, where necessary and desirable. He will also continue to use subsidies to support emancipation projects of national scope or projects developed by and for the target group. The initiatives from the target group itself which go beyond the local level are the initiatives that are in fact the most important for the progress of the emancipation process in society.

Two institutions receive institutional subsidies: E-Quality, knowledge centre for emancipation in the multicultural

society, and the IIAV, an institution documenting the cultural legacy of women in the past and present. E-Quality can advise and assist ministries, provinces, municipalities and civil society organisations in expertise development, the performance of Gender Impact Assessments and projects oriented towards the improvement of the position of women. The IIAV is a resource for information on the position of women used by women's organisations, academics, policy-makers, journalists and others. Important discussion partners in the area of emancipation are the national women's organisations that represent and promote the interests of women, such as the Netherlands Women's Council (NVR), Tiye International and the national organisations for minorities united under the LOM (National Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee), and the various new groups for young and adult women from ethnic minorities. ■