

Women at Local Governance: Would the national pattern follow? 21st March The Local Bodies Elections In The Netherlands:

The campaign has officially started! The voters in the Netherlands will choose who will have access to resources and the mandate to maintain and improve the living conditions of citizens and their direct businesses and social and political interest in respective municipalities: Who will benefit if the aircompanies are charged to pay flying above their skies?; Who will be moving through their waters?; Will high speed trains tracks be allowed, causing further pollution in their areas?; Which budgets will be allocated to deal with the refugee crisis and the security situation in their regions? Would it matter if all these decisions are made on parity basis? There is already parity in a way if you look at the highly balanced **male/female voter composition**. It only differs when it comes to the level of decision-making parity. Women`s inclusive governance is an issue in Europe and even after having nearly 100 years of acknowledgement of women`s right to vote in the Netherlands, it is evident that the political gender parity instruments are outdated in the country.

As an international gender and development organisation that has specialized in recognized election observation internationally, in commemoration of 100 years of women`s voting rights (passive voting rights in 1917, and active voting rights in 1919), Gender Concerns International observed the Dutch National Elections last year in March through its [GEOM \(Gender Election Observation Mission\) NL 2017](#). The Netherlands is regarded as one of the strong promoters of global gender equality; however the recent lowering of its international gender equality ranking demonstrates a widening gender gap in the country. According to the Annual Report of the World Economic Forum, the Global Gender Gap¹ in the Netherlands has dropped from rank 16 in 2016² to a rank 32 in 2017.³ When the ranking for women`s political empowerment is concerned, the Netherlands fell further from 14th in 2016 to 25 in 2017⁴.

Prior to the above mentioned report, earlier that year, [The GEOM NL 2017 Final Report](#), indicated that the gender disparities are embedded and continue to persist in the Dutch election system. The report points out that a significant reason for this disparity is the declining number of women achieving high-level political representation. The number of Female MPs decreased in the last election, as **only 2 women headed the candidate lists** of the political parties. Continued efforts to bridge the electoral gender gap and to promote more women assuming political decision-making positions, the upcoming local elections in the Netherlands will provide further evidence to measure the persistence of the gender-gap in the Netherlands.

Prior research has shown that the underrepresentation of women in local politics is an even bigger challenge than on the national level⁵. Women`s participation in local decision-making processes is an imperative to ensure female political leadership, as an important predecessor to women`s further involvement in politics and policy-making on the national level.

As a follow-up to our GEOM 2017, Gender Concerns International will observe the emerging trends in upcoming local elections in The Netherlands. Commemoration of 100 years of women`s political rights continues in coming years as an endorsement to our vision and commitment to the mission.

¹ World Economic Forum (2017) *The Global Gender Gap Report*, available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf.

² World Economic Forum (2016) *The Netherlands Feature Demonstration Report*, available at: <http://reports.weforum.org/feature-demonstration/files/2016/10/NLD.pdf>

³ World Economic Forum (2017) *The Global Gender Gap Report*, p 13.

⁴ World Economic Forum (2017), p 13.

⁵ Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (4 February 2016), Onderzoeksrapport Vrouwenstemmen in de raad, https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV_00111589.pdf.