



**Final Report**

**GENDER ELECTION OBSERVATION  
MISSION (GEOM)**

**The Netherlands 2017**



Facilitated by  
Gender Concerns International

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal
CEDAW	United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CWI	Clara Wichmann Institute
D66	Democrats 66
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
FvD	Forum for Democracy
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEOM	Gender Election Observation Mission
HRC	United Nations Human Rights Commission
IO	International Observer
KVINFO	Danish Centre of Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity
LGBTQ+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Queer+
MP	Member of Parliament
NVR	Dutch Women's Council
PPR	Political Party of Radicals (1991 known as Green Left Party)
PvdA	Labour Party
PvdD	Animal Party
PVV	Party for Freedom
SDAP	Social Democratic Labour Party (post-1945 known as the Labour Party)
SGP	Reformed Political Party
SP	Socialist Party
ToN	Proud on the Netherlands
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VVD	People's Party for Freedom & Democracy

## Preface and Acknowledgements

On behalf of Gender Concerns International, I would like to express my gratitude for having the opportunity to set a critical milestone in European electoral system by observing the 2017 Parliamentary Election in the Netherlands, and assess its standard of electoral practice from a gender perspective. First and foremost, I would like to kindly thank the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands for the invitation to observe the elections and begin a new chapter in gender equality advocacy and integration. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Election Commission for their cooperation in enabling the GEOM to be conducted.

The 2017, Netherlands Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) marking 100 years of women's suffrage in the Netherlands, has provided an opportunity to endogenously assess and evaluate its democratic processes. Although the Mission encountered various hurdles during its pursuit of addressing and evaluating the numerous obstacles that continue marginalizing gender equality, it is with great pleasure I state that the Mission and its comprehensive methodology has received a very positive response. In addition to overwhelming support by various international stakeholders, women's organisations around Europe have pledged their commitment to ensuring the Mission's success. This extensive evaluation of the Dutch electoral system not only enhances the baseline of knowledge with regards to the regulation of democratic processes, but it also contributes to the start of a more critical approach to European political and socioeconomic processes that prioritize gender equality.

As Europe's first-ever election observation from a gender perspective, the Mission recognizes the vital importance in assessing elections through a gender lens. In doing so, the Mission identified various gaps where improvements are necessary to enhance gender equality and produce a holistic integration of a gender perception throughout all political and socioeconomic institutions. Recommendations provided within this report seek to contribute to continued adherence to international European frameworks and legal obligations, of which the Netherlands is signatory to: the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Furthermore, the recommendations aim to contribute to the nations' continued adherence to the 1954 Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the 2008 Constitution of the Netherlands, the 1989 Elections Act<sup>1</sup> and the 1989 Elections Decree, which stipulate equal opportunities for all inhabitants of the Netherlands.

Gender Concerns International has established expertise in observing elections from a gender perspective. After facilitating many GEOMs in countries including Pakistan (2008, 2013); Tunisia (2011, 2014); Myanmar (2015); and Morocco (2011, 2015, 2016), it has been an honour to have this opportunity to conduct the GEOM where our organisation has based its Headquarters, in The Hague.

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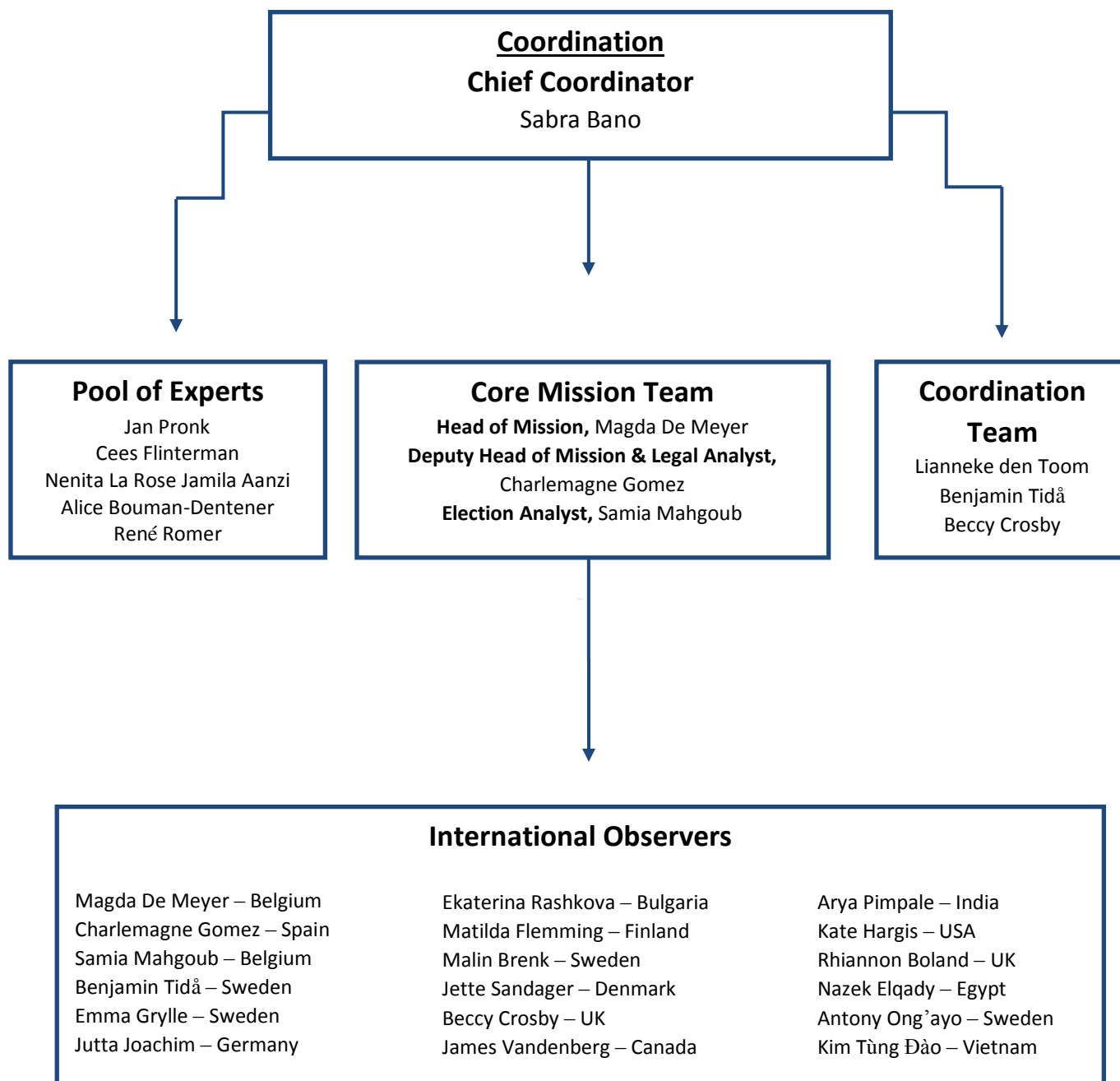
<sup>1</sup> Last amended by Act of 29 October 2009, Bulletin of Acts and Decrees 2009, no. 452.

Additionally, as Mission Chief Coordinator, I expressly wish to thank the commitment and dedication of Mission management and coordination who, from the launch of the initiative, worked tirelessly to coordinate with relevant stakeholders and national authorities for accreditation and Mission preparation. I am most grateful to the Board of Advisors and Board of Directors for their valued input; and am further indebted to the time, expertise and guidance from the Pool of National Experts, that has made a major contribution to the success of the Mission. I am thankful for the Core Team; the Head of Mission, Deputy-Head of Mission and the Election Analyst, for their expertise and training that has guided the team. I am also pleased to acknowledge the dedications and commitment of the eighteen International Observers, including representatives from various European organisations, as well as academics and youth. Finally I would like to thank FAM! Network, for their great help during Election Day, especially with regards to logistical assistance throughout the Limburg region.

The Mission derives the conclusions and recommendations of this report independently and in accordance with the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observations of the United Nations.

Sabra Bano,  
Chief Coordinator, GEOM  
Director, Gender Concerns International

## Mission Composition



## 1. Introduction: 100 years of Passive Women's Suffrage in The Netherlands

In the late eighteenth century, women rallied to demand women's suffrage throughout Netherlands. They established numerous women's organizations, including the Association for Women's Suffrage in 1894, which was born out of the first Dutch women's organisation established in 1889, the Free Women's Association. In 1915, the Association for Women's Suffrage held a meeting on the petition for constitutional equality between men and women. The meeting was led by Aletta Jacobs who presented the petition to the government.<sup>2</sup> A year later, a parade of 18,000 women and men united at Museumplein in Amsterdam to protest women's lack of political rights.<sup>3</sup> After multiple demonstrations and much protestation to demand women's suffrage, a constitutional reform transpired in 1917, granting women their fundamental right to stand for election. This extraordinary milestone signified a transition to a more equal society while spurring a wave of democratic action across the nation. In the same year, all men over the age of twenty-five were granted universal suffrage.<sup>4</sup>



**Image 1:** The protest against women's lack of political rights in 1916

Next, in 1918, Suze Groeneweg of the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDAP) became the first female Member of Parliament. Groeneweg supported paid labour for women and protested against the unfair dismissal of married female civil servants. Unfortunately, a champion of women's suffrage, Aletta Jacobs missed out on a seat in the 1918 general elections due to male party members elected by preferential voting.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (2 June 2016), *Vrouwenkiesrecht in Nederland*, <https://www.atria.nl/nl/publicatie/vrouwenkiesrecht-nederland>.

<sup>3</sup> Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (3 June 2016), *Een betoging voor vrouwenkiesrecht*, <https://www.atria.nl/nl/publicatie/betoging-voor-vrouwenkiesrecht>.

<sup>4</sup> Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (2 June 2016), *Vrouwenkiesrecht in Nederland*, <https://www.atria.nl/nl/publicatie/vrouwenkiesrecht-nederland>.

<sup>5</sup> Tweede Kamer, *De invoering van het vrouwenkiesrecht*, <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/zo-werkt-de-kamer/tweede-kamer-door-de-eeuwen-heen/1848-1922-strijd-voor-rechten/vernieuwing>.



On July 10, 1919, the Elections Act was amended to completely embed women's active voting rights in the Constitution. For the first time, women could vote in the elections. In the same year, the first female municipal and state members were elected; one hundred women were elected into councils, which was one per cent of the total number of elected candidates. In comparison to the rest of Europe, in Finland (1906), Norway (1913) and Denmark (1915), women's suffrage had already been achieved. The United Kingdom, Germany and Austria granted women the right to vote in 1918. The Netherlands took the lead in granting universal suffrage with respect to France, Swiss and Belgium, where women's active suffrage was only granted after World War Two.<sup>6</sup>

In 1922, universal suffrage was officially embedded in the constitution, granting women and men over the age of twenty-five the right to vote in parliamentary elections. The voting age was not lowered to eighteen until 1972. Seven women were elected into the Lower House in the 1922 Parliamentary elections, including the re-election of Suze Groeneweg. With the exception of one, all seven women were suffrage activists who fought fiercely to establish equal space for women in political spheres and institutions.<sup>7</sup>

Two elections later, in 1937, only three women were elected into the Lower House. This shift was attributed to the societal blame placed upon women who were held accountable for the economic crisis and high unemployment rates as a result of their demands for paid work and economic independence.<sup>8</sup> The number of women in parliament remained under 10 per cent until the 1970s.

It was not until 1977 that Ria Beckers<sup>9</sup> became the first female party leader in the Netherlands for the Political Party of Radicals, a progressive Christian and green political party.<sup>10</sup> By the mid-1980s, the number of female MPs had risen to twenty per cent. Since the 1990s women make up slightly more than one third of the Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Netherlands.

## 2. The GEOM Netherlands

To mark one hundred years of the acknowledgement of women's passive suffrage in the Netherlands, Gender Concerns International launched its first European Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) to assess the elections from a distinct gender perspective in The Netherlands. The observation of elections provided an in-depth analysis of Dutch electoral processes and enabled an evaluation of democratic participation and assessment of demographic exclusion. The GEOM Netherlands observed women's electoral participation as voters and candidates within the election management bodies and election administrative processes to ensure a comprehensive and holistic assessment. The main objective of the Netherlands GEOM was to investigate the Dutch election system to unveil any forms of discrimination against women and minorities that prevent equitable participation and inclusion in the election process and the crystallization of gender equality.

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<sup>6</sup> Women Suffrage and Beyond, *Europe*, [http://womensuffrage.org/?page\\_id=97](http://womensuffrage.org/?page_id=97).

<sup>7</sup> Parlementair Documentatie Centrum van de Universiteit Leiden, *Historische ontwikkeling kiesstelsels en kiesrecht*.

<sup>8</sup> Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (2 June 2016), *Vrouwenkiesrecht in Nederland*, <https://www.atria.nl/nl/publicatie/vrouwenkiesrecht-nederland>.

<sup>9</sup> Ria Beckers was a member of Parliament from 1977 – 1993 and leader of for the PPR for elections in 1977, 1981, 1982 and 1986. The PPR succeeded into the GreenLeft (GroenLinks) in 1989. Beckers became the first leader of this new party, which earned her the nickname 'Akela of GreenLeft'. After retiring from politics, she later became an active board member of environmental organisations.

<sup>10</sup> Parlementair Documentatie Centrum van de Universiteit Leiden, *Drs. M.B.C. (Ria) Beckers-de Bruijn*, [https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09llhwfpyv/m\\_b\\_c\\_ria\\_beckers\\_de\\_bruijn](https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09llhwfpyv/m_b_c_ria_beckers_de_bruijn).

Furthermore, the Mission strived to spark dialogue regarding the state of gender equality throughout the Dutch political system and to identify remaining obstacles that currently hinder gender parity. Accordingly, this analysis provided the required contextual details to compose a comprehensive road map that supports women and women's organizations while guiding the State and Civil Society alike to a more gender equal society and democracy.

While the Dutch political system has historically achieved various milestones in terms of gender equality, multiple obstacles continue preventing the equal participation and representation of both women and men. Consequently, the focus of the mission has been to identify political and social barriers to gender equality and encourage public discourse and debate. It is imperative that civil society engages in public dialogue regarding gender equality so local dynamics can be realized and innovative solutions can arise through cooperative and collaborative efforts.

The GEOM's findings are valuable for relevant state institutions as well as for women's and other civil society organisations. The evaluations derived from the Mission serve as tools to influence policy to further enhance women's political participation in the post-election period. The GEOM Netherlands has formulated recommendations that support fundamental human rights, contribute to enhancing gender equality and increase the inclusion of minority communities in governance. The Mission contends that these changes are critical in ensuring a sustainable development trajectory and inclusive democracy that prioritizes gender equality in electoral processes and all democratic functions.



**Image 2:** A part of the GEOM team at the trainings day, 14 March 2017

The GEOM Netherlands was led and established by a professional team of female electoral experts from across Europe, ensuring the facilitation of an international collaboration of representatives to provide valuable observation insights from a broad range of perspectives. The team included 18, predominantly female, international observers including representatives from European women's organisations, such as the European Women's Lobby, Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna, Danish Centre of Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity KVINFORM, as well as academia, experts and youth.

## **3. Legal Framework**

### **3.1. The Dutch Constitution**

In 1848 the liberal politician Johan Rudolph Thorbecke drafted a new constitution, which forms the foundation of the current Dutch political system and parliamentary democracy; it gave less power to the king and more to the parliament. Currently, the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1954) is the highest constitutional settlement in the Netherlands and has the legal responsibility to establish political order and sound relationships between the four countries that constitute the Kingdom of the Netherlands; the Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten. After the Charter, the Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (2008) follows which protects the fundamental rights of citizens and regulates the organisation of the state.

Chapter I of the constitution consists of fundamental democratic political and social rights. The chapter consists of the classic civil rights, such as the right to vote and to stand for election; the freedoms of press, expression, religion; the right to privacy, the confidentiality of correspondence and telephone communication, the right to legal assistance, the right to hold property and the right to liberty. Article I of the electoral framework detailed in the Constitution reads: “[a]ll persons in the Netherland shall be treated equally in equal cases”. Discrimination on the grounds of “religion, epistemology, political persuasion, race, sex or any other ground is not permitted.” The state commits and guarantees equal opportunities between women and men and guarantees access to all levels of responsibility and duties across all domains.

### **3.2. The International Framework**

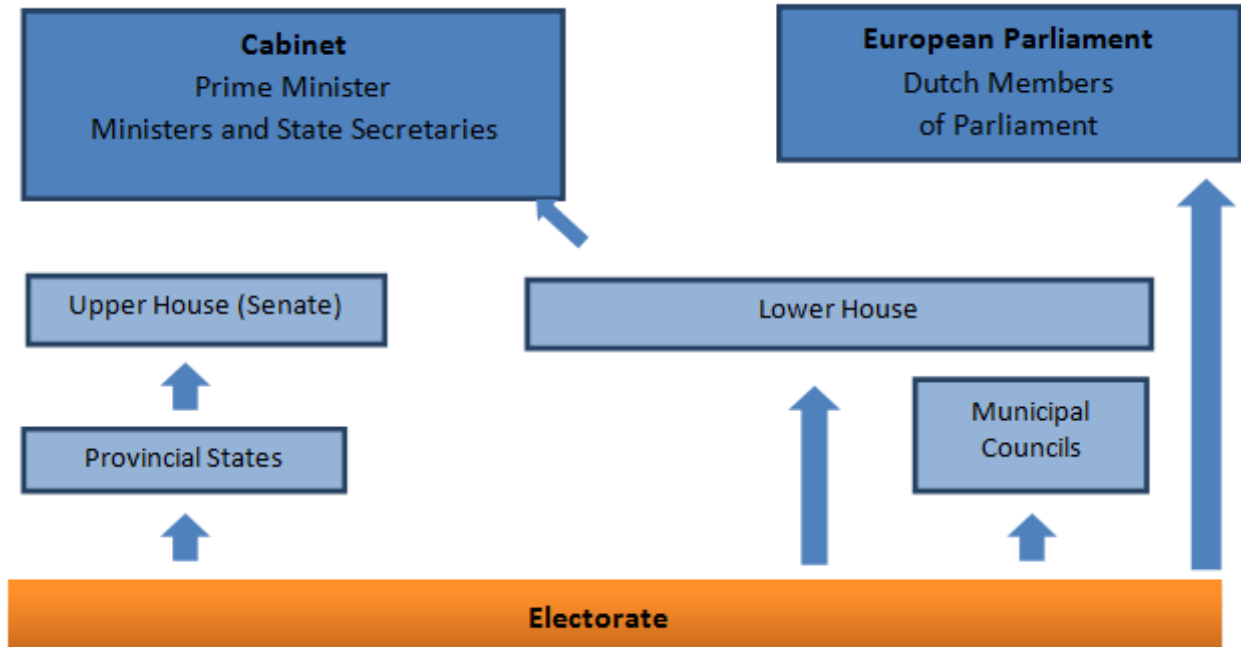
The results of the Netherlands GEOM and analysis of the Dutch electoral law and democratic processes convey that its elections are held accountable to globally common National and International standards, ensuring a transparent and inclusive process that supports a politically active civil society. More specifically, The Netherlands is signatory to all the key international instruments relevant to elections including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the 2003 UN Convention against Corruption; the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. The Netherlands is also a member of the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission and Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

### **3.3. Electoral System**

The elections and democratic processes in the Netherlands are regulated by the 1954 Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the 2008 Constitution of the Netherlands, the 1989 Elections Act and the 1989 Elections Decree. The electoral process is further regulated by the 2013 Political Finance Act, the 2009 General Administrative Law Act, and the 1994 Criminal Code.

The Dutch political system is based on a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy of two Houses. Parliamentary elections are held every four years. However there are exceptions to this, as in 2012, Parliamentary elections were held on 12 September, instead of the original scheduled date in May of 2015, due to the collapse of a coalition of parties. Rutte 2 (2012-2017) was the first cabinet that stayed in office for the full period since 1998.

On March 15, 2017, eligible members of the electorate voted for one hundred and fifty representatives to the Lower House (*Tweede Kamer*) of the Dutch parliament, via a system of proportional representation on the basis of preferential voting (see Graph 1). The country is divided into 20 electoral districts which is divided into several regions. Candidates that obtain votes equal to at least twenty five per cent of the electoral quota are elected notwithstanding their position on the list. No legal threshold exists for parties and candidates to obtain representation and seats in the elections. Candidates are then given the remaining seats based on the order of the list.



**Graph 1:** Organogram of the Dutch political system

There are no legally binding quotas to fulfill for electoral seats to be reserved for women, so the configuration of the parliament assembly depends on the numbers of seats won by female candidates. While a proportional representation system is deemed to favour female representation in the elections, the lack of female party-heads and a legally binding alternation on the list does not guarantee an optimal and equal representation of women as compared to men. Therefore, despite a favourable legal context, the challenge remains to nominate women as head of candidacy lists and to ensure that women and men are placed alternately, safeguarding women from being relegated to the end of the list.

## 4. Background

### 4.1. The Status of Women in the Political Arena in the Netherlands

#### Position of the Netherlands

The Netherlands, widely regarded as an emancipated, liberal and tolerant country, currently ranks seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) world-wide on the Gender Development Index (GDI)<sup>11</sup> according to the 2016 United Nations Human Development Report (UNDP).<sup>12</sup> However, its position on the Global Gender Gap Index has declined to 16 from its rank at 11 in 2012.<sup>13</sup> Contrarily, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to work within the framework of the European Union Gender Action Plan and United Nations Women to maximize its contributions to improving gender equality... It is clear that the Netherlands consistently makes a positive effort to fulfil its commonly cited role, in Europe and around the globe, as an exemplary nation with a stable level of female political inclusion.

The Netherlands passed the Equal Treatment Act in 1994, embedding gender equality within Dutch Law and explicitly forbidding all forms of gender discrimination. Nonetheless, since the implementation of the Act, sufficient measures actively promote female political inclusion have not been thoroughly developed or have been implemented to the adequate degree. The UNDP Report illustrates this point, revealing that gender disparity in the Netherlands persists in leadership and decision-making positions. For example, the Netherlands ranks in the lower percentiles with regards to percentage of female legislators, senior officials and managers.<sup>14</sup> As a result, Dutch politics remains largely a male-dominated arena, reinforcing marginalizing patriarchal social norms and practices that inhibit participation and weaken legitimacy. Additionally, the most recent report of the CEDAW Committee in 2016 recommended the Netherlands to: 'Continue to take targeted steps to further increase the representation of women in political and public life, in particular in local government, academic institutions and the Foreign Service'.<sup>15</sup>

#### Cabinet

The Netherlands have never had a female prime minister and the first, and the only female vice prime ministers were appointed at the same time in cabinet Purple II, from 1998 until 2002.<sup>16</sup> This is a different situation than in most Western-European countries.

A total of 20 European countries have had women as Heads of Government in the past, including Iceland (2009-2013), Norway (1981; 1986-1996), Lithuania (1990-1991; 1999-2000), Ireland (1990-1997), France (1991-1992), Latvia (2014-2016), Croatia (1982-1986; 2009-2011); United Kingdom (1979-1990) and Denmark (2011-2015). Currently there are four women as Heads of Government in Europe;

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<sup>11</sup> The GDI measures differences between male and female achievements in three basic dimensions of human development: health, measured by female and male life expectancy at birth; education, measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children, and female and male mean years of schooling for adults ages 25 and older; and equitable command over economic resources, measured by female and male estimated earned income.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Development Program (2016), *Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone*, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf), 198.

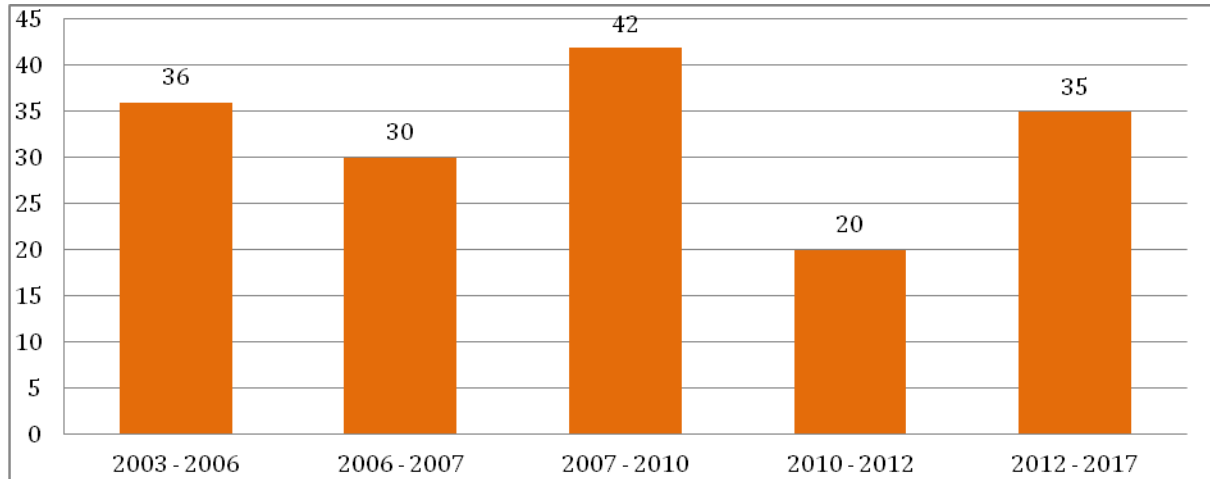
<sup>13</sup> World Economic Forum, *Netherlands*, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/#economy=NLD>.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Development Program (2016), *Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone*, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf) 259.

<sup>15</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (24 November 2016), *Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the Netherlands*, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/402/93/PDF/N1640293.pdf?OpenElement> 9.

<sup>16</sup> Isgeschiedenis (10 April 2014), *Vrouwen in de regering*, <http://www.isgeschiedenis.nl/nieuws/vrouwen-de-regering/>.

United Kingdom (since 2016), Germany (since 2005), Poland (since 2014) and Norway (since 2013).<sup>17</sup> Globally, currently 10 women are Head of States and 9 are Head of Governments.<sup>18</sup> The Netherlands remains one of the 26 countries in Europe which has not yet had a female Head of Government. In the past, 24 European countries have had deputy Heads of Government. Currently there are 9 female deputy-Heads across European countries including Ireland, Sweden, Croatia, and Bulgaria.



**Graph 2:** Percentage of women in the Cabinet, including Prime Ministers 2003 – 2017

In the Netherlands between 2012 and 2017, there were seven women out of a total number of twenty occupied positions in cabinet. For the same years, there were five female ministers out of a total of eleven, 46.7 per cent, ranking the Netherlands 4<sup>th</sup> out of 28 countries for the number of female ministers.<sup>19</sup> However, various key ministerial positions in the Netherlands have never been represented by a woman, including Foreign Affairs Minister, Finance Minister nor a Minister of Security and Justice. This is a relatively low standard in comparison to the rest of Europe as 21 European countries have had female Foreign Affairs Ministers, including the United Kingdom, Austria and Italy, and 26 European countries have had female Finance Ministers, including Poland, France and Switzerland.

### Key positions

In 1988, Els Borst became the first female *informateur*, a position that oversees the government formation after the parliamentary elections acting on behalf of the Queen. Since 2012 the *informateur* has been elected by the Lower House.<sup>20</sup> In 2017, Edith Schippers became the second female to be appointed to the post of *informateur*. She is also still serving as Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport, a position she took in the 2010 elections representing VVD.

In 1998 Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven became the first female president of the Lower House. Since 2006, the position of President to the Lower House has been occupied by three women: Gerdi Verbeet of the PvdA

<sup>17</sup> Alicia Adamczyk (11 July 2016), *All These Countries Have Had a Female Head of State (Before the U.S.)*, <http://time.com/money/4362191/female-heads-of-state/>.

<sup>18</sup> UN Women (August 2016), *Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation*, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#notes>.

<sup>19</sup> The number of female ministers is subject to change when the new government and cabinet is decided upon. Netherlands is therefore ranked 4<sup>th</sup> out of 28 European countries for the number of female ministers based on the formation of the Cabinet from the last government. George Arnett (9 April 2014), *UK seventh worst in EU for cabinet minister gender balance*, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/apr/09/uk-seventh-worst-eu-cabinet-minister-gender-balance>.

<sup>20</sup> Tweede Kamer (22 April 2015), *The formation process*, <https://www.houseofrepresentatives.nl/formation-process>.

(2006-2012), Anouchka van Miltenburg of the VVD (2012-2015) and Khadija Arib from 2015 until present. The President oversees the execution of decisions, leads sittings of the House, and represents the Second Chamber externally, for example, to contact with foreign parliaments.<sup>21</sup>

In 2003 Yvonne Timmerman-Buck became the first female president of the Upper House. Timmerman-Buck was succeeded by René van der Linden of the CDA (2009-2011). Ankie Broekers-Knol was appointed to the position of President of the Senate in 2013 succeeding Fred de Graaf of the VVD (2011-2013) and remains in this position.

While women in the Netherlands have carved stronger political inroads than some of its European neighbours, it is important not to overstate women in senior political positions as ‘female success stories’. The few females in such positions are being mentioned whilst the unspoken are the male majority. Furthermore, recent elections illustrate a steady decline in the number of women in key positions and the 2000 target of 50 per cent is nowhere in sight.

### Lower House

Elections in 2017 have confirmed the continuing decline in the number of female electoral candidates and parliamentarians since 2010. Of the twenty-eight political parties that participated in the 2017 electoral process, only four had a female leader, of which one is an established party.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, out of 1,114 nominated candidates, 35 per cent were female, which is an increase of the 31.2 per cent in 2012.<sup>23</sup> However, in 2017 only 36 per cent out of 150 members of the new parliament are women. This is a decrease from the 2012 elections, which saw 38.7 per cent of women in the Lower House, and an even bigger decline from the 2010 parliamentary elections, which had 40.7 per cent of women in the Lower House (see Graph 3).

According to these figures, the Netherlands remains above the EU average of 28 per cent women in Parliament. The UN Economic and Social Security Council (ECOSOC) Resolution of 1990 recommended targets for increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions to 30 per cent by 1995 and 50 per cent by 2000. Additionally, the critical mass of at least 30 per cent was further reiterated in the Beijing Platform of Action, which called for governments to take measures to ensure women's equal space in political and socioeconomic spheres to insure equitably inclusive governance and decision-making.<sup>24</sup> Despite the Netherlands complying with the 1995 target, 36 per cent is still a long way from adhering to the ECOSOC target of 50 per cent which was meant to be reached by 2000, as males continue to dominate across all levels of political spheres in the Netherlands.

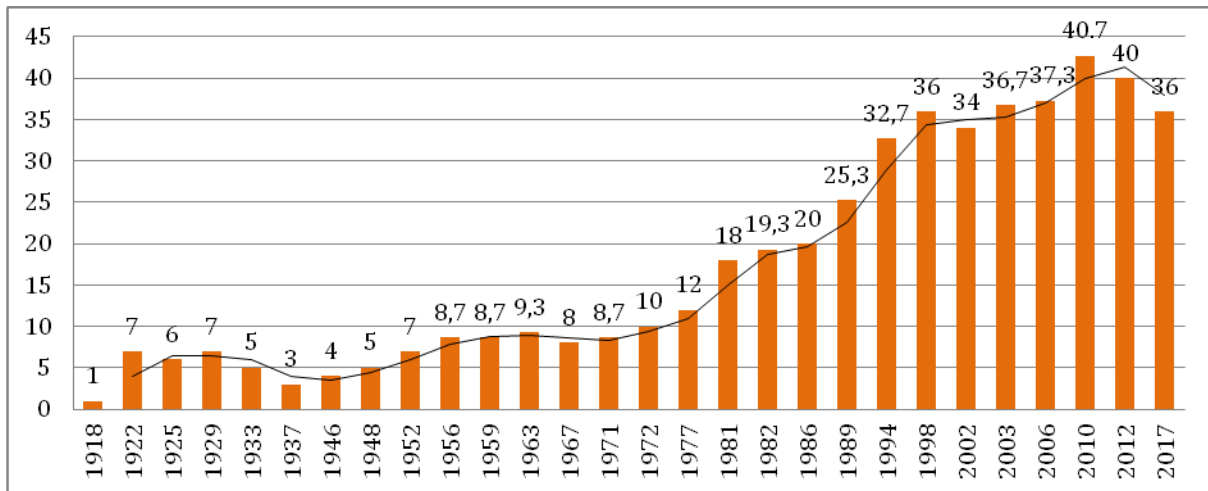
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<sup>21</sup> Parlementair Documentatie Centrum van de Universiteit Leiden, *Voorzitter Tweede Kamer*, [https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrp8wt4/voorzitter\\_tweede\\_kamer](https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrp8wt4/voorzitter_tweede_kamer).

<sup>22</sup> This is the Animals Party for a small party, which is established in parliament since 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Kiesraad (2017), *Uitslag van de verkiezing van de leden van de Tweede Kamer van 15 maart 2017*, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/binaries/kiesraad/documenten/rapporten/2017/3/kerngegevens-tweede-kamerverkiezing-2017/kerngegevens-tweede-kamerverkiezing-2017/Kerngegevens+Tweede+Kamerverkiezing+2017.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> In 1995, delegates to the United Nations (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women unanimously signed the Beijing Platform for Action. Described as a ‘new agenda for women’s empowerment,’ its mission statement called for the removal of all “obstacles to women’s active participation in all spheres of public and private life”. The Platform set a 30 per cent target for women in decision-making, to be achieved through a wide range of strategies, including positive action, public debate, and training and mentoring for women as leaders.



**Graph 3:** Percentage of women in the Lower House from 1918-2017<sup>25</sup>

To this end, gender inequality remains a hindrance in the Dutch political system as one third of women in Parliament does not subscribe to a fully representational body of the total population of which women currently make up 51 per cent. This directly effects female participation in future elections as the low visibility and the decreasing number of female politicians has potential to discourage women even further from entering the political sphere and becoming politically active. Furthermore, the lack of female representatives in parliament can negatively affect legislation and policy-making with regards to combating anti-gender laws (see Box 1 for an example). This underrepresentation of women and minimal progress with regards to policies pertaining to gender equality hinders the country’s credibility as a global force for human rights and a harbinger for change in the realm of women’s rights.

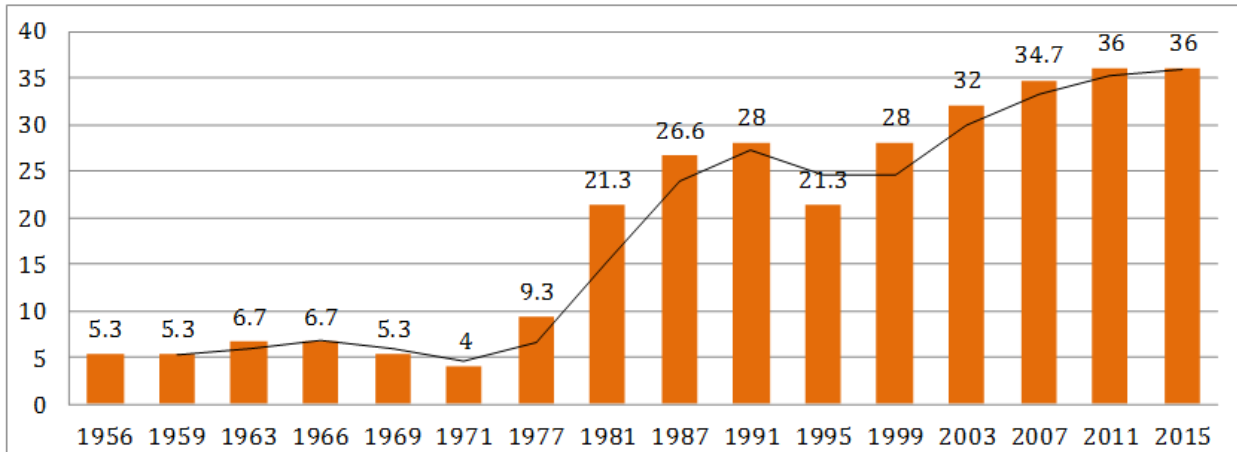
As mentioned above, women occupy 36 per cent of the seats in parliament, ranking the Netherlands 26<sup>th</sup> in the world on the basis of male-female participation within the Lower House of Parliament.<sup>26</sup> With regards to the EU parliament, the Netherlands is 8<sup>th</sup> out of 27 countries for having 42 per cent of the seats occupied by women.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, there has been a slow and fluctuating trend in the number of women in key political positions, not only as members of the Lower House, but also the Upper House, as well as Mayors and Councillors. The following graphs illustrate these fluctuations.

<sup>25</sup> Parlementair Documentatie Centrum van de Universiteit Leiden, *Vrouwen in de Tweede Kamer*, [http://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrre0zv/vrouwen\\_in\\_de\\_tweede\\_kamer](http://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrre0zv/vrouwen_in_de_tweede_kamer).

<sup>26</sup> This is a decline of six points as compared to the results of the elections conducted in 2012

<sup>27</sup> European Parliament (2014), *Men and women distribution*, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>.

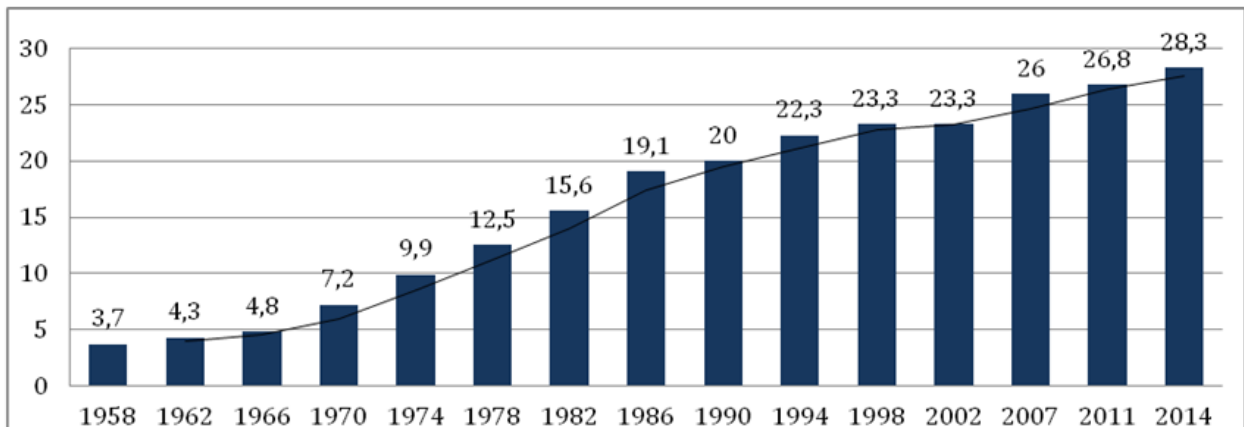




Graph 4: Percentage of women in the Upper House 1956 – 2015<sup>28</sup>

### Municipalities

While the Lower House is only composed of 36 per cent women, the situation worsens when assessing gender parity at a municipal level. Currently only 21 per cent of the aldermen’s are women and 22 per cent of Mayors are women.<sup>29</sup> Despite gaining the right to contest in election in 1917, it was not until 1946 that Truus Smulders-Beliën became Mayor of Oost-, West- en Middelbeers, the first female Mayor of the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> Amsterdam and Rotterdam have never had a female mayor, however, The Hague appointed its first female mayor in March 2017. According to statistics, the majority of Mayors are white, male and middle-aged members of CDA, PvdA, and VVD, resulting in an underrepresentation of female and migrant groups on a local level.



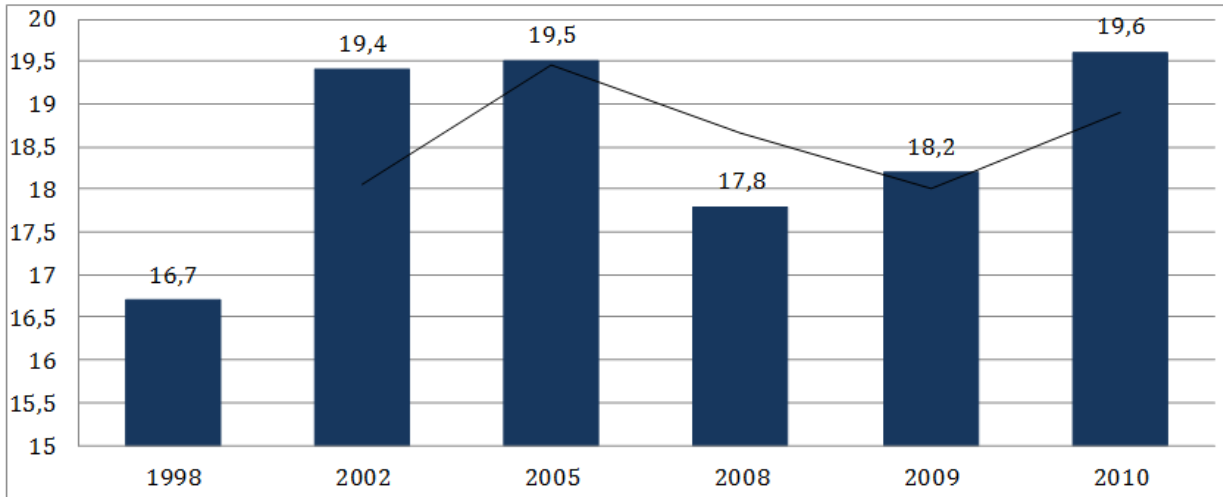
Graph 5: Percentage of women females in Municipal Councils 1958 – 2014<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Vrouwenbelangen (13 November 2012), *Percentages vrouwen 1956 – 2012*, <http://www.vrouwenbelangen.nl/percentages-vrouwen-1956-2012-3/>.

<sup>29</sup> The most recent municipal elections were held on March 19, 2014. The next municipal elections are scheduled to be held on March 21, 2018.

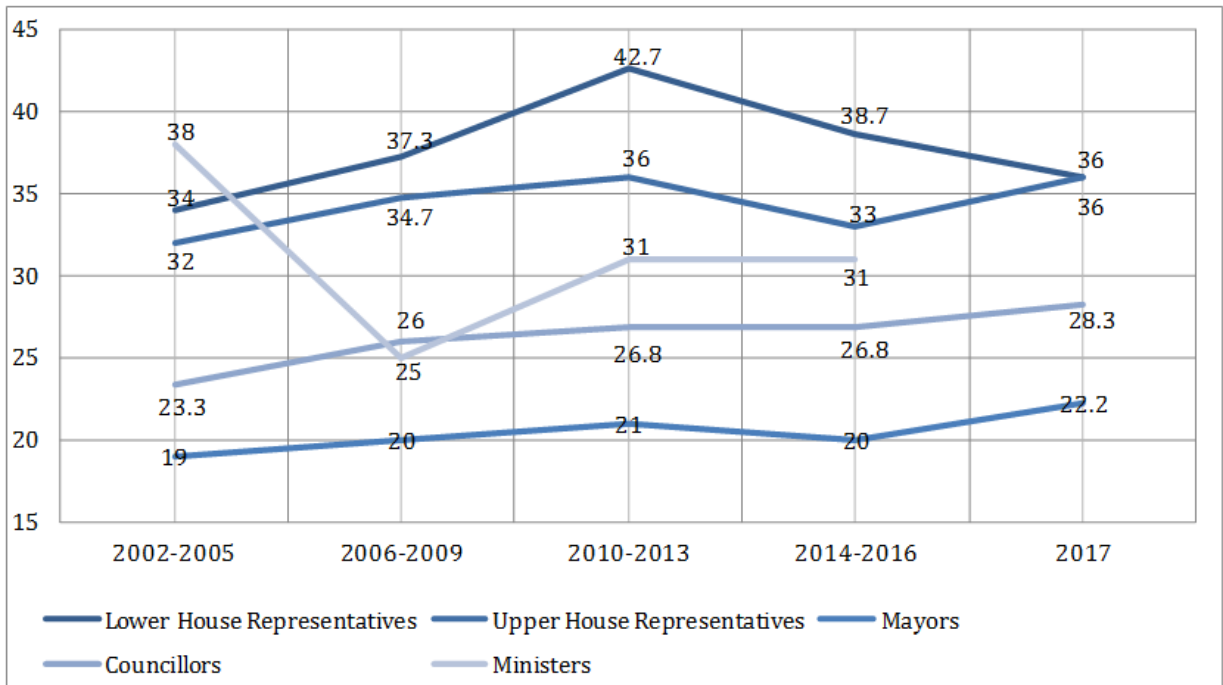
<sup>30</sup> The mayor is appointed by the King on the recommendation of the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations renewable six-year term. The aldermen are appointed by the municipal council, which is elected during the municipality elections. Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (4 February 2016), *Onderzoeksrapport Vrouwenstemmen in de raad*, [https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV\\_00111589.pdf](https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV_00111589.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (4 February 2016), *Onderzoeksrapport Vrouwenstemmen in de raad*, [https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV\\_00111589.pdf](https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV_00111589.pdf).



**Graph 6:** Percentage of female Mayors 1998-2013

While the number of female Mayors has been increasing slightly since 2008, this number has never superseded 25 per cent. Furthermore, the number of female Mayors is negatively related to the size of a municipality. According to this study, as the size of a municipality increases the probability of having a female mayor decreases.



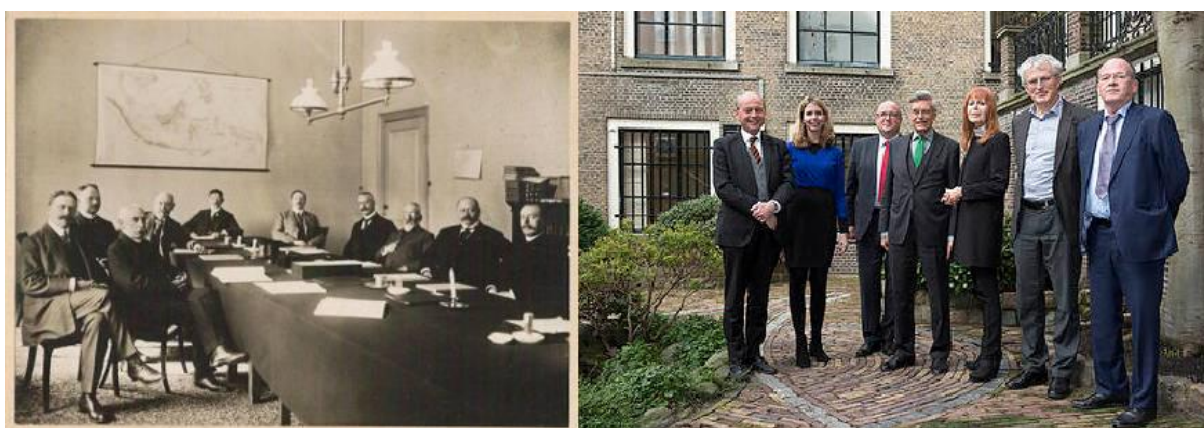
**Graph 7:** Percentage of women in key decision-making positions from 2002-2017

This Graphs show the fluctuation of women as representatives of the Lower and Upper Houses, and as ministers and mayors. The only area of female political participation that reflects a consistent – though marginal – increase is women as members of municipal councils, increasing from 23.3 per cent in 2002 to 28.3 per cent in 2014.

## 5. Election Administration and Women's Representation

The elections are overseen by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations at a national level, and issues regulations related to the electoral process. While the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations is responsible for regulating the process of elections at the national level, municipalities oversee the conduct of the elections within the 388 municipal governments, and are also responsible for the registering of voters, distributing voting cards and staffing the polling stations.

The Election Commission is responsible for registering the names of the political parties and the candidate lists for all districts, numbers the list of candidates, manages the final election results and assigns mandates. Additionally, it functions as an advisory body to the government and the Lower House on election-related matters. The Mayor and Municipal Executives are responsible for conducting the elections at the local level.<sup>32</sup> The Dutch Election Commission is a permanent and independent body made of seven members (currently two women and five men) who are chosen by the government. Members of the Election Commission are supported by a secretariat, which conducts the administrative and secretarial duties, consisting of 18 employees, 8 female and 10 male.



**Image 3:** The Electoral Commission only had male members in the past, the current Commission has two female members<sup>33</sup>

As can be noted from the table below, the number of female representatives in the current Election Commission account for 29 per cent of the overall board. This has dropped from nearly 43 per cent in 2011, 2013 and 2014 when three out of the seven board members were female.

Year	Male	Female
2006	4	1
2008	5	2
2009	5	2
2011	4	3
2013	4	3
2014	4	3
2015	5	2
2016	5	2

**Table 1:** Members of the Election Commission.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Kiesraad, *Organiseren verkiezing*, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/verkiezingen/inhoud/tweede-kamer/organiseren-verkiezing>.

<sup>33</sup> The right photo is made by Henriëtte Guest.

<sup>34</sup> With support of the Waybackmachine: [www.kiesraad.nl](http://www.kiesraad.nl).

## 5.1. Recruitment Procedures

The Mission’s Coordination Team and International Observers (IOs) met the Election Commission on March 13, 2017. The Commission stated that they actively encourage ‘women and disabled persons to apply for positions at the Commission.’ However, the last vacancy (2015) advertised on their website for board members, did not appeal directly to disabled persons.<sup>35</sup> Instead the Electoral Commission states it wants proportionality and inclusivity within the Commission by being inclusive of men, women, and individuals from ethnic and cultural minority communities. No mention was made to targeting disabled persons.

### Recruitment of Polling Station Staff

With regards to the recruitment process of polling station staff, according to section E 4 paragraph 1 of the Electoral Act, the Mayor and Municipal Executives of each municipality are responsible for appointing members of the polling station committee. The GEOM was informed that specific efforts were made to encourage women and disabled persons to apply. In order to ascertain the veracity of this statement, municipalities were contacted where Election Day observations took place to enable a more rounded analysis of those particular regions, rather than gaining scattered information from across the Netherlands, which is not always readily available.



**Image 4:** Poling staff at a polling station on Election Day in The Hague

Collecting data on the number of men and women within election administration as well as the positions they hold is essential to identify gender disparities. Identification is crucial to enabling the rectification of gender imbalances that inhibit the functioning of an equitable, sufficient and sustainable democracy. Nonetheless, GEOM was unable to obtain full statistics disaggregated by sex who were either already present in the data bases and/or subsequently selected.

To this end, as can be seen under Graph 7 below, GEOM has conducted a sample analysis of a number of municipalities in order to ascertain how many women acted as polling staff, presidents and counters

<sup>35</sup> Kiesraad (9 January 2015), *Vacaturetekst Kiesraadlid 9-1-2015*, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/adviezen-en-publicaties/publicaties/2015/01/vacaturetekst-kiesraadlid-9-1-2015/vacaturetekst-kiesraadlid-9-1-2015>.

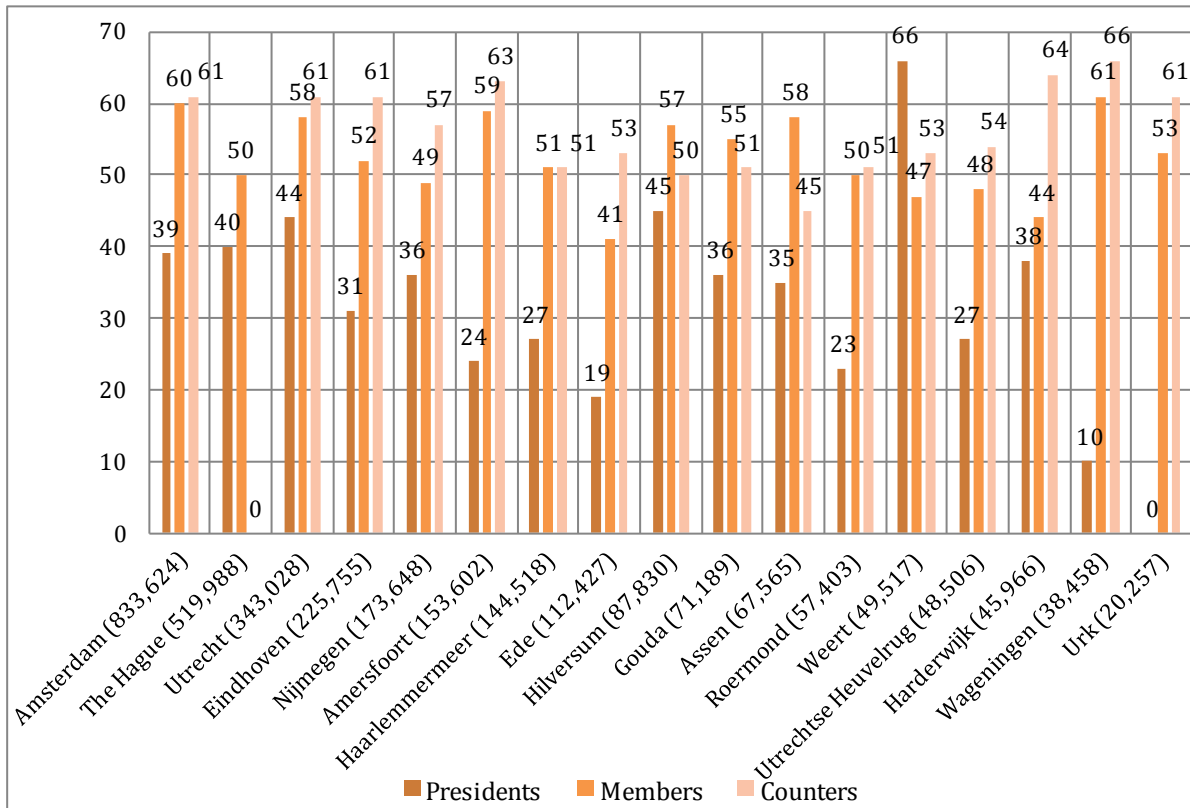
(someone who helps conduct the counting of the votes at the end of the day). Notwithstanding, due to the scarcity of information and the fact that this type of information is not necessarily kept by the municipalities or at the national level, the sample does not represent all 388 municipalities.

The Mission was informed that some municipalities, including Utrecht, Maastricht, Nijmegen and Roermond, have a database of former polling station staff to which they sent out letters inviting them to sign up as a staff member, acting either as a President or counter. For example, Maastricht municipality has a database of approximately 600 people. Nonetheless, the GEOM was unable to obtain information as to how many women and how many men were present in each of these databases. Where staff numbers were low after messages were circulated to those in the database, recruitment campaigns were launched. Appeals for polling station staff recruitment were made through various mediums. For example, Utrecht municipality circulated the request for polling station staff via their Facebook page, website and displayed the message on internal information screens.

To encourage recruitment, Utrecht municipality declared their attempts to assign staff as close to their home address as possible. Additionally, Nijmegen municipality representatives alleged that their recruitment campaigns via their website, Facebook, as well as approaching schools and student organisations, led to more than double the number that is needed in terms of occupancy at all polling stations, showing effective recruitment procedures, particularly with regards to age diversity. Furthermore, all municipalities will provide compensation to the polling staff. This compensation is different in each municipality, Amsterdam for example provided EUR 175.00 to all members plus a meal allowance of EUR 15.00, and the ballot-paper counters received the amount of EUR 37.50. Upon completing attendance to the e-learning training session of 2-2.5 hours prior to Election Day, polling station members also received an amount of EUR 20.00.



**Image 5:** International Observers at a Polling Station in Arnhem



**Graph 8:** Percentage of female polling station staff per municipality with total population in descending order<sup>36 37</sup>

Graph 8 illustrates a sample of the percentage of women as presidents, members and Ballot-paper Counters across thirteen municipalities within eight provinces across the Netherlands, including Utrecht, North Brabant, Gelderland, North Holland, South Holland, Drenthe, Limburg and Flevoland. In all municipalities, except for Weert, there were less female presidents than men presidents and in every municipality there were more female Ballot-paper Counters than male counters. From data analysis there seems to be no correlation between the population of municipalities and the percentage of women as Presidents, members or counters.

It is not clear as to whether concerted efforts were actually made across each region to ensure that women and men were targeted and represented equally. Nonetheless, some municipalities stated that they did ensure inclusivity of gender and age when it came to staff recruitment; others stated that they did not. For example, Roermond municipality stated that they first took into account experience, and were conscious of recruiting individuals from all sexes and different ages. While, Gouda municipality representatives stated that recruitment was based on the following criteria: availability, knowledge and experience, and did not take into account the sex of applicants.

While Roermond has noted an imbalanced amount of presidents for the 2017 parliamentary elections – 30 men and 9 women – they expressed awareness of this imbalance and, in communication with the GEOM Mission Coordination team, stated that the ratio of male-female presidents will be adjusted to become more equitable gender representation for the next election. The municipality of Delft was unable to provide data on female-male ratio of station staff because, as a spokesperson of the municipality stated:

<sup>36</sup> Data on the sex of Presidents at polling stations in and data on sex of counters in The Hague was not obtainable

<sup>37</sup> All the following municipality population statistics have been obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

'The city of Delft has never examined this issue [number of female polling station staff, compared to males]... You are the first requesting the information. I take this question with the completion of the elections project and submit it to the principal so for another election this data should be collected.'

Similarly, Rotterdam municipality could not provide disaggregated data by sex of polling stations, as they stated that "when possible we do not register the sex of people in the context of gender equality". In this case, with regards to polling station staff, registering the sex was irrelevant. Arnhem and Groningen reported that they too did not gather information disaggregated by sex.

As acknowledged above, it is difficult to ascertain the number of women present at the municipal level and while some numbers were provided to the GEOM on the number of female polling station members, the information is sometimes scattered hindering the ability of the GEOM to make an overall assessment as to how many women were actively involved in the electoral process and what positions they had been assigned.

### **Training of Polling Station Staff**

Polling station staff are required to have sufficient knowledge and skills with regard to the election process and to be sufficiently trained in their task. The Ministry of Interior has prepared instructions for the training of polling station staff which are dispersed to all municipalities and can be utilised by municipalities if they so please. These instructions come in the form of a 33-slide PowerPoint presentation and 23-page hand-out and offer guidance on the code of conduct for Election Day procedure in accordance with the electoral law. The topics that are covered include the roles and responsibilities of the polling station staff and presidents; where the polling stations and ballot booth should be placed; examples of ballot papers, including security features; election-day instructions and procedures; valid forms of identification; information on proxy voting procedure and the *kiezerspas*.<sup>38</sup> Emphasis is made on the prohibition of more than one person entering a ballot booth. However, a child could accompany the voter in the booth when it is clear that the voter is not being influenced by the child, for example a three-year-old child. The voter has to ask permission to the President of the polling station and the final decision will be made by the President.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, voters who appear mentally disabled or have language problems cannot receive assistance in the polling booth. An exception to this rule is voters who do not have the capacity to vote because of physical disability.

The Mayor and Municipal Executives may also choose to outsource the training of polling station staff through a private company. The Electoral Commission nor the Ministry of Interior do not supervise the training of polling staff nor regulate the private training companies. One such company utilised by Utrecht and Amsterdam municipalities for training of polling station staff is Metier Academy Benelux. As an alternative to e-learning, other municipalities, such as Nijmegen, Amsterdam and Roermond, create their own PowerPoint according to the same structure of the aforementioned presentation received by the Ministry of Interior, with incorporated additional information concerning the municipality, such as number of polling stations within the area. Rotterdam municipality ensure that all polling station staff sit a test to ensure that they understand the procedures. The municipality declared that the test is not stipulated by law and is implemented at the discretion of the municipality. The test serves as assurance to the municipality that staff have sufficient knowledge to fulfil their roles.

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<sup>38</sup> The *Kiezerspas* enables voters to cast their vote to any municipality outside of the one in which they are registered, enabling flexibility and freedom for the location in which they vote. The *Kiezerspas* has to be applied for 14 days prior to Election Day.

<sup>39</sup> Kiesraad, Tweede Kamer: *Mogen kiezers kinderen meenemen in het stembokje?*, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/adviezen-en-publicaties/vragen-en-antwoorden/tweede-kamer-stemmen/mogen-kiezers-kinderen-meenemen-in-het-stembokje>.



**Image 6:** A polling station in Weert

## 6. Political Parties

### 6.1. Registration of Political Parties and Candidates

Political pluralism is a prominent feature in the Netherlands.<sup>40</sup> For the 2017 general elections, a record number of eighty-one political parties were registered, with eighteen of them being newly registered. Political groups who wish to register for elections must do so up to forty-three days before the deadline for candidate list nomination. Out of the eighty-one political parties that registered, only twenty-eight participated in the elections. In order to register a candidate list, political parties, who are not in the parliament, must submit a deposit of EUR 11,250<sup>41</sup>, supply thirty support signatures from each of the total 20 constituencies, and written consent from all the candidates. While the majority of political parties did include women on their party lists, the SGP (Reformed Political Party) did not nominate any female candidates

The Vrouwenpartij (Women's Party) was removed from the electoral register by the Electoral Commission because the party did not pay the deposit of EUR 11,250 - and did not provide the required supporting signatories. The party sought a preliminary injunction against the Dutch State, together with the political party ToN, as they believe the political party registration requirements are contrary to the fundamental rights of citizens. Party leader of the Women's Party, Monique Sparla, states that the Dutch Electoral Commission acts as a barrier to participation in the elections due to the high deposit of more than EUR 11,000 and therefore treats participants in elections unequally. The party lost the case, but

<sup>40</sup> The Netherlands has never had a party majority with over 75 seats in the Lower House. Currently, the party with the most seats is VVD with 31. Therefore, since the PR system was put into effect in 1917, all governments have been formed by coalitions.

<sup>41</sup> The amount of the deposit required is 11,250 EUR. The deposit is refunded if at least 75 per cent of the quota was reached. The quota for the 2012 parliamentary elections was 47,122 votes.



claims that a false and unjustified decision was made. For this reason, the party has appealed to the ECHR. The case is still ongoing.

According to international standards and best practice, 'conditions relating to nomination dates, fees or deposits should be reasonable and not discriminatory. Fees-Deposits should be of an amount that prevents frivolous candidates but not be overly restrictive.' The same applies to the number of supporting signatures, whereby the number should be 'reasonable and not act as a barrier to candidacy'. It is not evident as to whether any other parties considered the deposit amount of EUR 11,250 excessive or the minimum number of supporting signatures unreasonable.

## 6.2. Campaign Environment

The media, and particularly electronic media, play a crucial role in shaping voter interest in and attitudes about an election. The way the media portray women, how they deal with issues of special concern to women, and whether they convey effectual voter education messages can have a major impact on women's participation – both as voters and as candidates – in an election.

A positive portrayal of candidates in the media is vital to enhance party popularity and disseminate knowledge of the election to the electorate, as well as providing an opportunity to ensure that female candidates are portrayed on an equal footing as their male candidates. Research conducted on previous Dutch elections reveal that media coverage of parliamentary candidates is on average equal in terms of exposure, though not free of gender related differences.<sup>42</sup>

Research shows that in 2016 male politician were far more visible in the media than female politicians, even when the political party leaders were left out. Male politicians (inclusive party leaders) received 3.7 times more attention than female politicians and without the party leaders male politicians received 3.3 times more attention.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> A. Bijker (2015), *Gender Differences in the Dutch Media. Three mixed-gender elections investigated.*

<sup>43</sup> Politiek in de media, *Vrouwen in de minderheid*, <http://www.politiekindemedia.nl/vrouwen-in-de-minderheid/>.



**Image 7:** A campaigning poster of the Animal Party, which is the only elected party with a female leader. The poster states: 1917-2017 Hundreds Years Women suffrage – Animal Party Plan B.

In the run-up to the elections, elaborate national debates were organized between the party leaders of the more established political parties. As only one of those party leaders is a women (PvdD), it automatically creates a men dominated campaigning environment. Moreover, almost all the debating leaders are men, for example the first debate with the party leaders in Groningen: there were 8 party leaders present, all men, and two debating leaders, both men. In addition to that, in the first big television debate, there were 6 male party leaders and one male debating leader. Also in the analyses and commentary of the political debates on television almost all experts were male. This clearly shows that the campaigning environment is dominated by men not only as candidates but also as media representatives and events moderator. However, there were also debates with all the second candidates of the list of the six main political parties, the ‘first ladies’. These debates were organised on television (not on prime time) and in a cultural debating centre ‘Rode Hoed’.



**Image 8:** The party leaders of the established parties

However it is interesting to note that when a leader of a Political Party Denk was found campaigning at an event in Gouda, organized by a joint network of Muslim organisations (SWVIO), where only men were allowed to attend, his act provoked criticism from a wide range of individuals and groups. GEOM observes the potential to conduct a thorough and extensive research on gender media monitoring, as evident. As a result, GEOM identifies the need to look into this further in order to ensure an equitable campaign environment for all participatory candidates.

### 6.3. Women in Political Leadership Positions

In 1992, the government introduced measures to try to increase the number of women in politics, influenced by EU policies on the number of women in political decision-making. These measures consisted of recommendations to political parties to increase the proportion of women candidates and MPs. However, there remains no laws or penalties enforced upon political parties that fail to increase the number of women.

Nonetheless there are a pocketful of parties who have introduced a number of official measures to promote women within the party, in 2004, for example the Christen Unie (Christen Union) adopted a resolution which called national and sub-national party boards and committees to ensure that at least one in every three candidates are women.<sup>44</sup> The Labour Party uses national lists that are in principle alternated between men and women, although other concerns such as age and ethnicity are also considered. Finally GroenLinks established voluntary quotas for women. In relation to the 2017 elections, the percentage of women elected for Christen Unie did not increase from the previous election in 2012. However with 40 per cent of the elected candidates being female, they did achieve their resolution of more than one out of three (33 per cent) of candidates to be women (for further information see Table 3). Despite losing a total of 29 seats, the PvdA had an increase of 5 percentage points in the percentage of females elected, from 50 to 55 percent. GroenLinks had the most successful achievement of having more women elected with an increase of 7 percentage points from 50 to 57 percent.

<sup>44</sup> Stockholm University and International IDEA 2009.



Image 9: The front page of national newspaper (10 March 2017) 'Algemeen Dagblad', shows that the positions of party leaders are dominated by white middle-aged men.

Referring to the candidacy lists of the 2017, for each party which gained a seat – with the exception of PvdD, which has women in the top two positions, and SGP and FvD which has men at the top two positions – the number one candidate is a male and the number 2 candidate is female. This is the same for the 2012 elections, again with the exception of PvdD and SGP and FvD. The progressive D66 party has only once been led by a woman, for the 1998 elections. Only GroenLinks and PvdD hold the most equitable track record with regards to female leadership having had a female-male joint leadership for the 1994 elections and a female leader, Femke Halsema (Groenlinks), for the 2003, 2006, and 2010 and Thieme (PvdD) from 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2017. However, although most of the parties have a female candidate in the top two position, it does not correspondence with the actual party hierarchy. For example, in the first formation negotiations, between VVD, CDA, D66 and GroenLinks, all political leaders

were accompanied by an important Member of Parliament from their own party and only the GroenLinks party leader was accompanied by a woman.<sup>45</sup>

## 6.4. Number of Female Candidates from Ethnic Minorities & LGBTQ+ Community

Few intersectional statistics are maintained with regard to ethnic minorities and women, as they are often treated and counted as separate categories (see Box 1 for a definition of ‘ethnic minority’). According to most figures, ethnic minority women in local politics were less than one per cent in 2010.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, in 1985, non-Dutch nationals are eligible to contest as a candidate and have the right to vote in municipal council elections. They must have lived legally in the Netherlands for 5 years or more. The first ethnic minority representatives entered the Dutch parliament for the PvdA in 1986. Until the 1990s, ethnic minority candidates have been male. However in 1999, ethnic minority women entered the

### Box 1. Ethnic minorities

This section defines ‘ethnic minorities’ as those whose ethnicity/ethnic heritage differentiates from the social majority of the country in which they reside and are thus deemed as emanating from a migration background. The representation of minority groups has become salient and politicised, which thus draws our attention to the inclusion of ethnic minorities within the political sphere, heightened by an undercurrent of Islamophobia endemic across the country.

national and federal parliaments in the Netherlands. Between 2002 and 2012, 70 per cent of the ethnic minority representatives in the Lower House were women. Subsequent to the 2010 elections, an almost gender balanced representation of ethnic minority men and women was achieved.<sup>47</sup>

The recruitment of ethnic minority representatives is seen most often in parties with left-wing ideologies. For example in 1995, GroenLinks established the Colourful Platform, which aims to influence GroenLinks’ stance on migration, to contribute to a positive view of multiculturalism within the party and society as a whole, and to include in the party more members and candidates of immigrant origin.<sup>48</sup> Although it grew less active in the

mid-2000s (with its members working separately from the party, which was seen as not doing enough for ethnic minorities), the growing influence of the right-wing populist politician Geert Wilders (PVV) informed the revitalisation of the platform. As a result of the Colourful Platform, GroenLinks had the highest share of ethnic minority candidates with 21.4 per cent for the 2012 elections. This was followed closely by the PvdA with 20.2 per cent.<sup>49</sup> However, many of those candidates were placed in almost un-electable positions on the list.

Between 2012 and 2017, 12 per cent of Parliamentarians had an ethnic minority background. In 2017 15 new candidates were elected that have a non-Dutch background; five are Turkish (3.3 per cent) and eight are of Moroccan (5.3 per cent) descent. The 2017 election results saw the departure of Amma Asante (PvdA), who was a member of parliament since September 2016, resulting in the absence of black parliamentarians in the Lower House. The 349,000 Surinamese, 150,000 Antillean and more than

<sup>45</sup> Tweede Kamer, *Kabinetformatie 2017*,

[https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat\\_en\\_vergadering/uitgelicht/kabinetformatie-2017](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/uitgelicht/kabinetformatie-2017).

<sup>46</sup> Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (4 February 2016), *Onderzoeksrapport Vrouwenstemmen in de raad*, [https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV\\_00111589.pdf](https://www.atria.nl/epublications/IAV_00111589.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Karen Celis, Silvia Erzeel, Liza Mügge, Alyt Damstra (September 2013) *Quotas and intersectionality: Ethnicity and Gender in Candidate Selection*, <https://ecpr.eu/filestore/paperproposal/65ea7bbf-d3dc-4a59-8b89-b8e32a83f3ad.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> GroenLinks, *Kleurrijk Platform*, <https://kleurrijkplatform.groenlinks.nl/>.

<sup>32</sup> R. van der Zwan, M. Lubbers (2016), *The political representation of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands: nominated and elected ethnic minority candidates*.

813,000 other non-Western visible minority groups in the Netherlands remain unrepresented in the Lower House.<sup>50</sup>

For the 2017 elections, there were two openly, self-identified LGBTQ+ candidates; from GroenLinks candidate number 35, Sophie Schers, and from unelected party, Artikel 1 (Article 1), candidate number 9, Olave Basabose. However, neither of these candidates won a seat.

The first state secretary with an ethnic minority background joined the cabinet in 2002. After 2002 only two other state secretaries with an ethnic minority were part of the cabinet (2007-2010). In the Netherlands there has never been a minister with an ethnic minority, unlike many other European countries.

## 7. Voters

### 7.1. Voter Registration

The Kingdom of the Netherlands consists 17 million people, spread over four constituent countries, The Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten, and municipalities including Bonaire, Sint-Eustatius and Saba. 10,563,456 Dutch nationals were automatically registered to cast their vote out of a potential 12,893,466. The Election Commission does not keep records of voter data. Their main focuses are to arrange issues around the election process, ensure logistics are sound, and determine the results of the elections. This means that the Commission does not gather data disaggregated by sex. Contrarily, according to the Electoral Commission it is not their task to suggest such issues to the parliament, but it is the task of the Ministry of Interior. While in the last couple of decades there has failed to be a serious discussion about gathering data disaggregated by sex, the current political landscape justifies a more in depth evaluation of this possibility.

Polling stations do not hold specific lists and eligible voters are required to vote at stations within their municipality. Voter registration is passive and citizens are automatically included in the list, however, all residents are required to register within the municipality they currently reside. Data from this registration process is used to create a voters register. Citizens of the Netherlands who are aged eighteen years or older are eligible to vote, except for those who have been convicted of certain crimes. There are no restrictions for persons with mental disabilities to cast their vote but they are not afforded any assistance during the voting process unlike those persons with physical disabilities. For the 2017 elections, there were approximately 850,000 new voters who are now eligible to vote after turning eighteen.

Voters who are living abroad need to register themselves six weeks before the elections, the procedure is dependent on the place of residence. There are three ways of voting, by letter, proxy or by voting in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. During elections of 2017 there were lots of complains from voters, who lived abroad, and did not receive their voting pass on time. A parliamentarian of D66 went, on behalf of 154 voters, to the court to extend the term of voting for voters abroad. The court had rejected the claim.

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<sup>50</sup> The numbers of non-Western minority groups are provided by CBS and only include the first and second generation.

Year	Total number of eligible voters	Total number of voters
2017	12,893,466	10,563,456
2012	12,689,810	9,462,223

Table 2: Electorate for the 2012 and 2017 elections<sup>51</sup>

## 7.2. Voter Education

The Ministry of Interior and municipalities are responsible for voter education that consists of information to the elderly, first-time voters and voters abroad. Subsequent to the election, the Ministry runs an assessment to determine areas for potential improvement.

The ministry conducts a nationwide campaign and presents the materials available to the municipalities.<sup>52</sup> People who were voting for the first time (i.e. youth) were particularly targeted. The channels that the government has utilised include radio and TV spots, banners on websites and social media, snap chat, Facebook, digital screens at the main train stations. The campaign was directed both to disseminate factual information, such as when you can vote, what you need to bring in order to vote, as well as to motivate people to vote, using the phrase, 'Every Vote Counts'.

During the election campaign, several women's organisations launched the campaign 'Vote for a Woman', which suggested to voters not to vote for the first woman on the candidate list but to vote for women who were positioned lower down the list. To clarify, there was no nation-wide governmental campaign to promote women; this initiative was created and advocated by non-governmental women's organisations, but did capture attention from the media and fuelled the discussion in general on the position of women on the ballot. The 'Vote for a Woman' campaign demonstrated a particular voter education effort that specifically targeted women voters with the aim of overcoming barriers to gender equality and an inclusive democracy. In other words the campaign targeted to increase the number of women at the top of candidacy lists.<sup>53</sup> See section 8.1 Preferential for the outcome of the campaign.

## 8. Election Day Observations

### 8.1. General Observations

The GEOM deployed a total of 18 observers to 10 of the 12 provinces in the Netherlands, visiting a total of 26 municipalities. In all, the International Observers (IOs) were able to visit seventy-two polling stations and were present at three of the counts. While this does not necessarily constitute a representative sample of the country, the observation allowed the GEOM to identify key areas where further analysis or research might be needed in order to enhance women's participation in the electoral process for the future.

<sup>51</sup> Kiesraad (21 March 2017), *Officiële uitslag Tweede Kamerverkiezing 15 maart 2017*, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/actueel/nieuws/2017/03/20/officiële-uitslag-tweede-kamerverkiezing-15-maart-2017>.

<sup>52</sup> Rijksoverheid (18 October 2016), *Toolkit Tweede Kamerverkiezingen 15 maart 2017*, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2016/10/18/toolkit-tweede-kamerverkiezingen-15-maart-2017>.

<sup>53</sup> Stichting Stem op een Vrouw, *Stemtactiek*, <https://stemopeenvrouw.com/stemtactiek>.

## 8.2. Voter Turnout

On March 15, 2017, 10,563,456 (81.9 per cent) voters cast their vote in 9,357 polling stations across the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This was the highest electoral turnout since the parliamentary election of 1986, which had a turnout of 85.82 percent. A total number of 15,876 (0.0015 per cent) blank votes were cast, which is approximately 1,128 less than the previous election in 2012, and a total number of 31,539 (0.0029 per cent) votes were invalid. Similar to the data with regards to election administration, the number of voters disaggregated by sex is unavailable. As a result, this lack of data means that female political participation as voters and as members of the election administration remains unmonitored. It is therefore difficult to ascertain if more women than men turned out to vote, and if there were any areas of the country where female participation was noticeably higher or lower than the national average.

Notwithstanding in the 10 provinces that were observed, at the time of observation, men tended to supersede the number of women in the queue, however this varied from region to region and was dependent on the time the observation took place. When asking a number of the polling station staff if there was a particular time when more women or men voted, many answered that there was a gender dimension to the attendance at the polling station, with many women coming in the evening with their children, while men would tend to try and vote prior to commencing work. To this end, it should be noted that while the Dutch Election Day is indeed a long one, it enables both genders the ability to vote at a time suited to their own individual timetable. Additionally, the wide array of polling station locations that were observed in train stations, libraries, and so forth, also made accessibility and convenience a high priority and arguably boosted the voter turnout.

## 8.3. Accessibility

With regards to accessibility in polling stations, IOs witnessed a high level of accessibility for those with physical disabilities. In each of the polling stations observed, except one, IOs found that polling station staff was helpful with providing assistance and allowing ease of accessibility for votes to be cast. Within all polling stations observed there was at least one polling booth accessible for wheelchair users, as well as a magnifying glass for those with impaired vision to read the ballot paper. While this is commendable and access into the actual polling station was facilitated, in the majority of the stations observed, the elderly and the disabled were often not given priority to vote and many disabled and elderly persons found themselves waiting in long queues. The procedures did not foresee such a facility and there were diverse views amongst polling station staff whether an official procedure should be in place.

As was reiterated above, disabled voters are afforded assistance while those with mental disabilities are not. The inclusion of mentally disabled persons in electoral processes and how one should define their level of capacity is still a grey area of electoral international law. Nonetheless, the Human Rights Committee has now had opportunities to formulate its interpretation of articles 12 and 29 of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD). According to the CRPD Committee's pronouncements on specific countries<sup>54</sup> and individual cases, denying suffrage rights on the ground of mental incapacity is no longer acceptable under any circumstances. Nonetheless it is not evident whether this also extends to providing assistance in the polling booth to those mentally impaired. Observers witnessed one incident whereby a person who appeared to be mentally impaired was denied the right to vote as he had asked for assistance and this was not provided.

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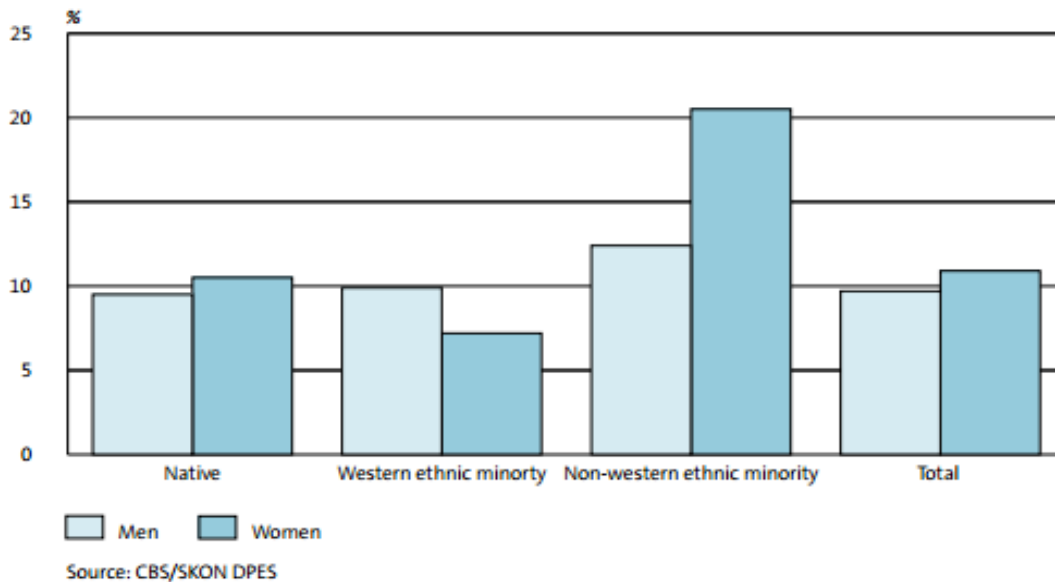
<sup>54</sup> See, for example CRPD Committee (23 Sept 2011). *Concluding Observation on Spain*, <http://www2.ohchr.org/SPdocs/CRPD/6thsession/CRPD-C-ESP-CO-1%20.doc>.



An additional obstacle for all voters was the size of the voting card as all IOs witnessed voters struggling with the vast size of voting paper. This interrupted the flow of the voting process, especially for the elderly and disabled persons.

### 8.4. Proxy Voting

For the 2017 elections, 9.1 per cent of voters voted by proxy, which is an increase of the 7 per cent who voted by proxy in the 2012 elections. In 2010, the CBS conducted research of people’s opinion on proxy voting. 84 per cent of people wanted to continue the practice of proxy voting, 9 per cent believed that individuals should cast their own vote, and 6 per cent did not have a clear opinion.



**Graph 9:** Proxy voting by country of origin and gender from 2006 and 2010.

According to the training material supplied by the Election Commission, granting power of attorney within the polling station is prohibited.

In the 2006 and 2010 elections there was no recorded difference in those applying to vote by proxy between men and women or by level of education. With regard to age there is a difference of 12 per cent of people below the age of 45 who voted by proxy, from 45-65 years old, 9 per cent voted by proxy and from 65 years or older, 7 per cent voted by proxy. There is also a difference with regard to the background of voters. 16 per cent of the non-western migrants voted by proxy, 9 per cent from the Western migrants and 10 per cent the native population.<sup>55</sup> Proxy voting by non-westerns female migrants is 21 per cent and by non-western male migrants is 12 per cent.<sup>56</sup> During the 2017 elections incidences of proxy voting was observed in every station, in some areas, especially the minority areas, there seemed to be a slight increase in the number of persons voting by proxy. Nonetheless, given the small sample of polling stations observed, it is impossible to ascertain whether proxy voting is more prevalent amongst minority groups. In the GEOMs observation, it was evident that more males were observed to vote on

<sup>55</sup> In the elections of 2006 the turnout of non-western migrants was 60 per cent and of western-migrants 72 per cent. This changed in the elections of 2010 were the turnout of non-western migrants was 68 per cent and 68 per cent for western migrants.

<sup>56</sup> CBS (16-03-2015), *Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek 2006-2012*, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/publicatie/2015/12/nationaal-kiezersonderzoek-2006-2012>.

behalf of others than their female counterparts<sup>57</sup>. Notwithstanding, observers were unable to ascertain whether males were always voting on behalf of other males or predominantly females.

What was evident in a small sample of stations was that many individuals in the minority areas were unsure of the procedures for voting by proxy, and were either turned away or asked to come back with the correct documentation. Observers were also witness to a number of voters whom were not able to speak Dutch and therefore did not understand the process, both of voting and that of voting by proxy. While no official language other than Dutch exists, there are municipalities which are predominantly occupied by a certain ethnic group, and both municipalities together with local groups and even political parties should endeavour in the future to provide more information prior to the vote in local languages to ensure complete understanding of the process, especially with regards to proxy voting. Such a facility will be in line with the UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment, no. 25, para. 12.

While voting by proxy is often frowned upon in many elections as it is deemed to curtail the secrecy of the vote, it would seem that the availability of using this procedure in the Netherlands most definitely boosted turn out figures. To this end, prior to coming to any conclusions on whether the use of voting by proxy is being abused by any particular gender or group, it would be useful to have figures on who and why persons are voting by proxy. The Election Commission could of course keep an informal record of how many proxy votes were registered, (which they already do) but they could also include the gender of the person on whose behalf the voter is voting. Obtaining access to this information would enable GEOM in the future to make an initial analysis as to whether there are more men or women voting by proxy and who is voting on their behalf. Nonetheless, while this information is important and could have the potential to highlight a gender discrepancy, it would still be important to conduct surveys; to deduce as to why voting by proxy is so popular and whether women or a particular group are being denied their right to exercise the vote of their choice.

## **8.5. Polling Station Staff**

As section 3.2 above reveals, the number of female polling staff and that of males were quite proportionate, although a higher number of female counters were stated to be present in the small sample analysed. Nonetheless, the equality in the number of female and male presidents was not evident in the 72 polling stations observed. According to the GEOM, on Election Day, there was almost double the number of male presidents than female presidents observed. Contrarily, the ratio of male to female polling staff was more or less in proportion with slightly more males being present. Furthermore, there were also a number of minority areas whereby either no female President was found, or very few ethnic minorities were represented amongst the polling stations staff.

## **9. Election Results**

On March 15, 2017, 13 political parties won enough votes to get a seat in the Lower House. This is the highest number of parties within parliament since 1972, which had 14. A total of 54 women were elected into the Lower House in 2017, which is four less than the 2012 parliamentary elections. As a result, Dutch parliament is not representational of the population whereby 51 per cent are women, and only 36 per cent of women were elected.

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<sup>57</sup> Observers witnessed 73 males as opposed to 46 females casting a vote on behalf of someone else. It should be noted however, that it is unclear as to whether the proxy voter was male or female.

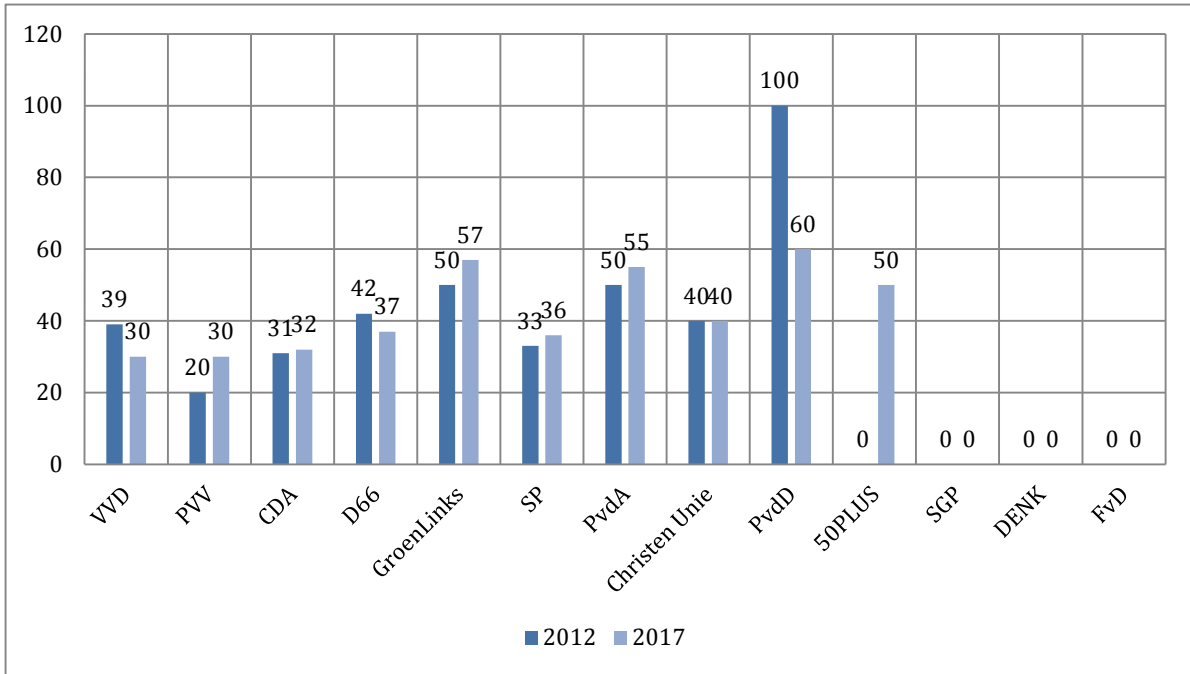


**Graph 10:** Male-female percentages of the population of the Netherlands compared to male-female percentage of membership of the Lower House.

Political Party	No. seats in Lower House (Total 150) in 2012	No. seats in Lower House (Total 150) in 2017	Number & percentage (%) of females elected per party in 2012		Number & percentage (%) of females elected per party in 2017	
VVD	41	33 (-9)	16	39	10	30
PVV	15	20 (+5)	3	20	6	30
CDA	13	19 (+6)	4	31	6	32
D66	12	19 (+7)	5	42	7	37
GroenLinks	4	14 (+10)	2	50	8	57
SP	15	14 (-1)	5	33	5	36
PvdA	38	9 (-29)	19	50	5	55
Christen Unie	5	5 (+/-)	2	40	2	40
PvdD	2	5 (+3)	2	100	3	60
50PLUS	2	4 (+2)	0	0	2	50
SGP	3	3 (+/-)	0	0	0	0
Denk	0	3 (+3)	0	0	0	0
FvD	0	2 (+2)	0	0	0	0

**Table 3:** Election results per political party for the 2012 and 2017 election<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Kiesraad (21 April 2017), *Officiële uitslag Tweede Kamerverkiezing 15 maart 2017*, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/actueel/nieuws/2017/03/20/officiële-uitslag-tweede-kamerverkiezing-15-maart-2017>.



**Graph 10:** Percentage of women elected per political party for the 2012 and 2017 elections

According to the data above, the parties with the majority of seats, the VVD, PVV, CDA and D66 have a low proportion of female Parliamentarians in comparison to political parties that have fewer seats but a higher proportion of female representatives. For example, the majority party, VVD has 33 seats with only 10 occupied by women. Contrarily, the PvdA has a total of nine seats, with over half of seats occupied by women, illustrating that the most prominent political parties have a gender-imbalance in their parties (see Box 2<sup>59</sup>).

**Box 2 Agenda Political Parties**

The policy agendas of political parties have been analysed with regards to their priorities towards gender equality. The following themes were taken into account: reproductive rights and parental leave, reducing the gender wage gap, violence, racism and discrimination, and equal representation. Political parties PvdA, D66, GroenLinks, PvdD, Denk, and unelected Artikel 1 rank most highly with regards to a favourable agenda towards women. While parties CDA, SP, and Christen Unie have specific agendas to reduce and prevent the number of so-called honour killings and gender-based violence, their agenda remains absent on the topic of equal representation of women in leadership positions. The VVD, PVV, SGP, 50PLUS and FvD have no mention of a political agenda to combat gender equality and gender discrimination.

<sup>59</sup> Atria, Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en vrouwengeschiedenis, *Genderscan verkiezingsprogramma's*, <https://www.atria.nl/sites/atria/files/atoms/files/genderscan-verkiezingen.pdf> and the political party programs.

## 9.1 Preference Voting

A total of three women from the 2017 election were elected through preferential voting. They include, Lisa Westerveld (candidate number 14) and Isabelle Diks (candidate number 19) from GroenLinks, and Lilianne Ploumen (candidate number 10) from PvdA. To be selected via preferential voting, the candidate needs more than 25 per cent of the quota (prior to 1998, the quota was 50 per cent); for the Senate 50 per cent of the quota is required, and for the European Parliament, 10 per cent of the quota is required.<sup>60</sup>

Research on preferential voting reveals that preferential voting occurs amongst voters who more recently had the right to vote.<sup>61</sup> Importantly, 30 – 40 per cent of preferential voters refer to gender as the most important factors to explain the casting of a preference vote. Although gender is not the sole reason for voters, female voters voting for female candidates has featured prominently in preference voting. This reveals a system whereby voters – predominantly female – vote for female candidates to increase the number of women at the top of candidacy lists.

Country	Percentage of Female Representation	Last Election	Electoral System
Sweden	45.0	2014	List PR
Finland	41.5	2015	List PR
Iceland	41.3	2016	List PR
Norway	39.6	2013	List PR
Belgium	39.3	2014	List PR
Spain	39.2	2016	List PR
Denmark	37.4	2015	List PR
Germany	36.5	2013	Mixed
<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>List PR</b>
Slovenia	35.6	2014	List PR
Portugal	34.8	2015	List PR
Austria	32.2	2013	List PR
Italy	31.4	2013	List PR
United Kingdom	29.4	2015	First-Past-the-Post
Luxembourg	28.3	2013	List PR
Poland	27.4	2015	List PR
France	26.2	2012	Two-Round System
Latvia	25	2014	List PR
Bulgaria	24.6	2014	Mixed
Lithuania	24.1	2016	Mixed
Estonia	23.8	2015	List PR
Greece	21	2015	List PR
Czech Republic	19.5	2013	List PR

**Table 4:** Percentage of women in European governments

<sup>60</sup> Electoral Law 1989, art. P 19.

<sup>61</sup> R. B. Andeweg, J. van Holsteyn (2011) *Second Order Personalization: Preference Voting in the Netherlands*, 20.

Since 1959 - 2017, there have been a total of 16 candidates elected via preferential voting, 9 of which have been women. Seven of those women superseded the position of a man on the candidacy list.<sup>62</sup> As a result, it could be seen that preferential voting works in the favour of female candidates and that the 2017 'Vote for a Woman' campaign was relatively successful as a total of three women were elected via preferential voting. Despite the relative success of the 'Vote for a Woman' campaign, the Netherlands has decreased in rankings with regards to the percentage of female representation; it is now ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) in comparison to female political representation in European countries. Additionally, the decrease of female parliamentarians in the Netherlands shows a different trend than its neighbour countries. In the last elections of Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, France and United Kingdom the percentage of female parliamentarians increased.<sup>63</sup> However, in countries like Sweden, Norway, Finland and Spain the percentage of female parliamentarians decreased. While a proportional representation system is favourable to women in comparison to the employment of other electoral systems, it does not completely guarantee parity if quotas and other special measures are not introduced.

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<sup>62</sup> Parlementair Documentatie Centrum van de Universiteit Leiden, *Voorkeurstemmen*, <https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrouwzc/voorkeurstemmen>.

<sup>63</sup> The World Bank, *Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)*, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>.

## 10. Conclusions and Recommendations

Gender Concerns International commends Dutch electoral administrative bodies for exemplary practices in electoral procedure. The conduct of the parliamentary elections was witnessed by the GEOM and is deemed to be of high quality, demonstrating an efficient and competent democratic system. The voter turnout of 81.9 per cent was enabled by the competent and well-trained polling station staff, the high-level of access to polling stations in a variety of locations as well as an efficient proxy voting procedure.

While the scope of the observation on Election Day was limited, it did allow the GEOM to pinpoint possible weaknesses in the procedures that warrant further investigation. The possibility of disaggregating data by sex should be considered in order to ascertain whether female participation is hindered on Election Day. While it is difficult to derive substantiated conclusions with regards to how election procedures may impact female participation, the information gathered during this GEOM illustrated demand for a deeper analysis of the electoral process as a whole. This is especially imperative when taking into account the vast variability of women in high-level positions. It must be publically and institutionally acknowledged that while the quantity of women in decision making positions is important, the qualitative aspect must also be a key focus in future research and observations.

A number of specific observations have led to a concern that some women, especially from ethnic minority backgrounds lack complete understanding of the election procedures. Firstly, multiple incidences arose where proxy voting forms were incorrectly filled out and voters were denied until form completion met the required standards. There is the possibility that this issue may stem from language barriers which suggests there may be sufficient demand for constructing voting cards in a more diverse range of languages. However, further research and data is required to provide a more comprehensive insight into the obstacles faced by minorities during electoral processes. More specifically, future investigations should focus on the dynamics and possible abuses of family voting and discriminatory practices in which women are denied the right to choose their preferred candidate.

While the Election Commission has undertaken a concerted effort to promote women both at the national and local level, it could ensure that future schemes would encourage more women, especially from minorities, to become presidents of polling stations and most certainly to have more women at the decision-making level of the Commission. Additionally, targeted information for women both as voters and as candidates could be increased. This will contribute to achieving gender parity during electoral process and election administration.

With regards to women as decision makers, although a number of inroads have been made, a worrying decline in the number of women achieving high level political positions is a concern. In some instances, the Netherlands is falling behind its previous achievements and is being overshadowed by its European neighbours who have ensured a higher level of parity with the use of special measures and/or campaigns. To date, not a single European country has achieved parity in the parliament although there are a number of countries who are not far off the ECOSOC 2000 target of 50 per cent. As a leading harbinger for change and inclusiveness, the Netherlands could consider new measures to ensure that the nation leads the way and achieves greater parity in the next elections.

As a factor for positive democratic enhancement of the Dutch political system to attain parity, the GEOM makes the following recommendations addressed to the electoral stakeholders. These targeted measures and initiatives contribute to increasing female participation and representation in the political sphere, particularly with regards to municipal and national government procedure.

The following are key recommendations addressed to different stakeholders whose separate but complementing roles are fundamental to securing gender equality within the Dutch political and electoral process.

### **Election Commission**

1. Consider the introduction of disaggregated data by sex in order to monitor issues such as, voter turnout and proxy voting to increase transparency and enable a more thorough investigation of gender roles in the voting process. Consultation with leading national women's organisations can be a valuable asset.
2. Enhance efforts to promote women's participation at all levels of the electoral process, including recruitment within the electoral authorities at the local and national levels.
3. Initiate targeted campaigns that empower and support women during the registration and voting process. Additionally, select campaigns should target potential female candidates to ensure sufficient support for valuable participation.
4. In areas where there is a high population of ethnic minorities, explore measures to enhance the populations understanding of the electoral process with emphasis on proxy voting, and ensuring information is provided in conjunction with local organisations in local languages of the population.
5. Commence discussions with political parties on how best to promote women on the party lists and ensure the alternation of gender which has potential to result in a higher proportion of qualified female candidates being elected to office.
6. Consider the current size of the ballot paper to make the voting process more accessible, smoother and environmentally friendly.

### **Political Parties**

7. In accordance with the Equal Treatment of Women and Men Law 1980 and the Equal Treatment Law 1994, ensure the introduction of legal measures to guarantee women's higher and more effective position within the political parties. This should include promotion of women in the higher echelons of political parties, as well as ensuring legal quotas for each political party to abide by. Gender focused measures also have the probability of promoting equality as well as parity and can ensure women are positioned in the list to facilitate their chance of election.
8. Parties are advised to increase support for women from migrant minorities, especially those of Afro-Caribbean and other smaller migrant community backgrounds, and ensure they are adequately and properly represented on the candidacy list.
9. Political parties in conjunction with other organisations such as women's organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations must encourage women's political participation in politics and their involvement throughout all levels of government, with particular attention to the upcoming municipal elections to be held in 2018.

### **Government**

10. To comply with national and international commitments, the new government of the Netherlands should increase support for women and ensure social norms and practices reflect the invaluable contributions of women as agents of change.
11. Empowering women, especially those of a minority background is vital in boosting participation and increasing the number of female candidates on all levels.
12. Considering that the appointment of mayor is directly controlled by the government, it is encouraged that the appointment of a larger number of qualified women to mayor-ships with emphasis on women with ethnic minority backgrounds would not only improve inclusive governance and further integrate a gender equality scope within institutions but it would also help solidify equitable gender norms and practices.



13. According to the ECOSOC resolution to achieve gender parity, the newly elected government should promote female members of the Cabinet and key ministerial positions to enhance women's participation in key decision-making bodies of the country, ensuring that greater attention is paid to establishing gender-sensitive policies.

**Media**

14. Undertake a number of round table events and workshops to discuss how media could enhance the portrayal of female candidates. Measures to monitor media content could be introduced in time for the municipal elections to advocate a more empowering representation of women in political processes.
15. Improve the gender framing of female candidates and representations of their candidacy in media. Incomprehensive coverage has the probability of negatively implicating the outcome of their candidacy, and inhibits total female political participation. It is important to highlight these subtleties and determine the treatment of women in the political process and campaign environments to identify barriers and formulate holistic solutions.

## **Annex I. Coordination Team**



### **Chief Coordinator** **Sabra Bano**

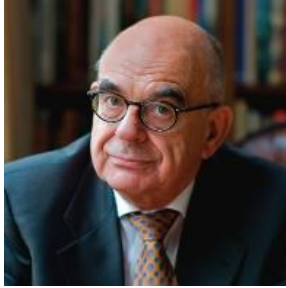
Sabra Bano works as a director at Gender Concerns International. Ms. Bano designed and implemented the Gender Election Observation Missions (GEOM) internationally, and has pioneered awareness raising campaigns on the issue of gender-based electoral reform. She is a Dutch international gender expert and a lobbyist who, in 2008, as a Head of Mission led the first ever GEOM to Pakistan followed by similar missions to Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Myanmar.



### **Team Coordination and Management** **Lianneke den Toom**

Ms. den Toom as a key coordinator to GEOM Netherlands has been fully engaged in the successful execution of GEOM Netherlands supporting the Mission from its inception to its completion and the post-completion outreach. As a Management and Outreach Officer, Ms. den Toom works at The Hague based Head Office in The Netherlands.

## Annex II. Pool of National Experts



### Jan Pronk

Jan Pronk is Chair in the Theory and Practice of International Development at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, as well as teaching professor at various Universities. Mr. Pronk was the former Dutch Minister of Development and Co-operation (1989-1998) and a former Minister of Environment, Spatial Planning and Housing (1998-2002). Mr. Pronk has held several positions in the United Nations including Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Sudan.



### Cees Flinterman

Cees Flinterman is honorary professor of international and European law at Utrecht University and Maastricht University since 2007. He is a former member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (2003-2010) and former member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) (2011-2014). He assumed position of a director of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) and the Netherlands School of Human Rights Research.



### Nenita La Rose

Nenita La Rose is the President of the Dutch Women's Council (NVR). She currently acts as an independent advisor and mediator. From 2007 until mid-2015, she worked as the Executive Director of Child Helpline International (CHI), engaging with governments around the world, addressing the UN Economic and Social Council to advocate for the rights of children and young people. La Rose studied Law at the University of Amsterdam, and started her career at the City of Amsterdam.



### Jamila Aanzi

Jamila Aanzi has been appointed 2017 UN Women's Representative as nominated by the NVR and will be attending the Committee of the Status of Women in March and the UN General Assembly in October addressing the theme of women's economic empowerment. Ms Aanzi has an educational background in business economics and Communication and Organization. As part of the European Leadership programme, Ms Aanzi was in 2014 a 40under40 European Young Leader.



### Alice Bouman-Dentener

Alice Bouman is a member of the Advisory Board of Gender Concerns International. She is Honorary Founding President of the Women for Water Partnership. Former Secretary General of the NVR. She holds the membership of a steering Committee of the Global Water Partnership and the European Water Stewardship programme. Ms. Bouman represented Dutch women at the United Nations General Assembly in 1999.



### René Romer

René Romer is a member of Board of Director of Gender Concerns International. Mr. Romer is a marketing and communications expert and author of books on both multicultural and social responsibility marketing. Mr. Romer is a specialist in multicultural marketing and runs TransCity, a marketing and communications agency fully specialised in multicultural marketing.

## Annex III. Core Team



**Head of Mission,  
Magda De Meyer**

Magda De Meyer is President of the Dutch-speaking Women's Council in Belgium. Ms. De Meyer has been elected three times as member of the House of Representatives in the Belgian Federal Parliament. Ms. de Meyer is Political Coordinator of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of Central Africa for AWEPA (Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa). Ms de Meyer served as Deputy Head of Mission for the Gender Election Observation Missions in Pakistan, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya. Ms de Meyer also led the Belgian Election Observation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006.



**Deputy Head of Mission & Legal Analyst,  
Charlemagne Gomez**

Charlemagne Gomez has extensive experience of working in the areas of democracy and gender. She has participated in over fifteen election observation missions as an expert member for the EU, OSCE, the Carter Centre and Gender Concerns International. Ms Gomez has worked as Gender and Legal Advisor to the National Parliament of Timor-Leste and has conducted a number of evaluations for the European Commission, United Nations and various international NGOs.



**Election Analyst,  
Samia Mahgoub**

Samia Mahgoub is former Country Director of Libya for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. She is also former consultant for the Sudanese National Election Commission in 2013. Ms Mahgoub is co-founder and senior advisor of the Arab Centre for Citizenship, Democracy & Elections and has extensive experience in the field of elections and electoral assistance within countries across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

## Annex IV. International Observers



**Benjamin Tidå**  
Sweden  
*GEOM Morocco 2016*



**Ekaterina Rashkova**  
Bulgaria  
*Assistant Professor, Utrecht University*



**Matilda Flemming**  
Finland  
*Policy Officer, European Women's Lobby*



**Jette Sandager**  
Denmark  
*Consultant, KVINFO*



**Emma Grylle**  
Sweden  
*GEOM Myanmar 2015*



**Jutta Joachim**  
Germany  
*Assistant Professor, Radboud University*



**Malin Brenk**  
Sweden  
*Regional Manager, Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation*



**Antony Ong'Ayo**  
Sweden  
*Lecturer & Phd researcher, Webster University*



**Beccy Crosby**  
UK



**Lina Stotz**  
Germany



**Kate Hargis**  
USA



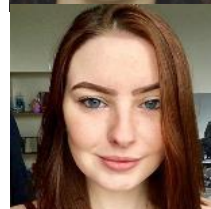
**Nazek Elqady**  
Egypt



**James Vandenberg**  
Canada



**Arya Pimpale**  
India



**Rhiannon Boland**  
UK



**Kim Tùng Đào**  
Vietnam

## Pamphlet

# GEOM Netherlands 2017

**Objective:** To investigate the current electoral process and political context with emphasis on evaluating the degree of female participation throughout all levels of governance. The findings are intended to assist in advocating a gender-sensitive policy reform that ensures equitable participation of women and inclusion of minority communities for long-term sustainability.

**Who:** A women-led Mission facilitated by Gender Concerns International.

**What:** The Mission will observe gender disparities affecting equitable participation amongst voters, candidates and administrators.

**When:** 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017

**Where:** The Netherlands, from a local, provincial and National perspective.

**Why:** 100 years since women's right to vote, yet gender disparity prevails in The Netherlands.

**Strategy:** Evaluating the historical trajectory over the past 100 years is considered critical in formulating future plans to overcome prevalent obstacles preventing gender equality. The Netherlands GEOM 2017 will facilitate an international collaboration of representatives from Women's Organisations, and academia, experts and youth. The Mission aims to contribute to achieving an institutional gender parity that will ensure a sustainable gender-sensitive development trajectory that benefits society as a whole.



*100 Years of Women's Voting Rights*

## **GEOM Netherlands 2017**

### **Gender Election Observation Mission**

*'Netherlands Votes, GEOM Observes!'*

15<sup>th</sup> March 2017

21 International Observers across 12 Provinces

### **Disparity in Parity: Bridging the Gender Gap**

Magda de Meyer, Head of Mission  
Charlemagne Gomez, Deputy Head of Mission  
Samia Mahgoub, Election System Analyst

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## Annex VI. GEOM Photos



GEOM Team attend meeting with Ministry representatives at the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations on March 13, 2017.



Training and pre-election press conference at Huis van Europa, The Hague on March 14, 2017.

From left-to-right: Lianneke den Toom, Leonie van Gils, Magda De Meyer, Kim Tùng Đào, Jette Sandager, Matilda Flemming, James Vandenberg, Nazek Elqady, Charlemagne Gomez, Rhiannon Boland, Arya Pimpale, Beccy Crosby, Samia Mahgoub, Alice Bouman-Dentener, and Sabra Bano.



IOs observing the opening of the polling stations at the Town Hall in The Hague on Election Day, March 15, 2017.

From left-to-right: Kim Tùng Đào, Matilda Flemming, Beccy Crosby, Benjamin Tidå, Jette Sandager, Arya Pimpale, Samia Mahgoub, Charlemagne Gomez, and Sabra Bano.





**Image 11:** Malin Brenk, Alice Bouman-Dentener and Magda De Meyer at a Polling Station in The Hague



**Image 12:** Charlemagne Gomez is talking to the press at a Polling Station in The Hague



**Image 13:** A Polling Station in The Hague, where the Prime Minister was expected to vote



**Image 14:** The Pool of National Experts and the GEOM Coordination Team at the GEOM Office



**Image 15:** The GEOM coordination team is meeting AEGEE, one of the other International Observers



**Image 16:** De Head of the Mission, Magda De Meyer is giving a Press conference

### Annex VII. Deployment Map of the Netherlands<sup>64</sup>



<sup>64</sup> The map pin points the provinces in which observations took place.

## **Annex VIII. Post-Election Press Release**

### **International Gender Election Observation Mission Commends Dutch Election Management Bodies for Good Practices in Voting Access**



The Hague, March 2017

Magda De Meyer, the Head of the Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) Netherlands 2017, congratulates the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations and the election management bodies of the Netherlands for having an exemplary electoral practice.

The positive conduct of the general elections illustrated a stable democratic structure of high quality. Dutch voters casted their votes in remarkably high numbers due to the availability of easily accessible polling stations equipped with helpful and considerate staff. Meticulous organisation enabled an exceptional turnout of 80.2%, the highest electoral turnout in the Netherlands in the last 30 years.

Gender Concerns International launches its first ever European GEOM in the Netherlands. To mark 100 years of women's voting rights in the country, GEOM Netherlands 2017 focused on women's electoral participation as voters, administrators and candidates.

The Mission was made up of 20 International Observers that were deployed across 10 provinces, from Maastricht to Groningen, Rotterdam to Utrecht and from Schilderswijk in The Hague to Urk. The Mission focused on demographically contrasting regions including areas with many voters belonging to minority communities, as well as to locations across the Bible-belt.

The final report will be issued within 3 weeks after Election Day, highlighting various recommendations with an aim to contribute to promote gender parity in the Netherlands, ensuring continuous, long-term and sustainable progress for a gender-sensitive electoral process and advanced inclusive democracy.

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In order to promote the holistic formulation of a gender-equal society, Gender Concerns International works to increase the political participation and empowerment of women while raising societal awareness with regards to the intrinsic value of gender equality.

The inclusion of women is vital for any nation that strives to compose and successfully implement a long-term sustainable development trajectory. Women in civil society and Women's Organizations around the world must be provided with the support and resources necessary to unite in solidarity, collaborate together and maximize resources and networking capabilities. Only then can a truly fair and equal democratic process be integrated into political institutions.

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