



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

The role of men in
gender equality
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Comments Paper – the Netherlands

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There is more to “the role of men” than parental leave, and not enough in the Netherlands

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1. Introduction

In this comments paper, written for the seminar *The role of men in gender equality*, we respond to discussion papers on good practices in three countries: Finland, Austria and Iceland. We will first introduce the Dutch case and Dutch debates, and will reflect on the transferability of the policy practices of the three countries to the Netherlands. Although we are critical of a limited focus in two of the three papers - on men as fathers, and within that, on parental leave - for the Dutch case maternity/paternity leave is something that is indeed in need of attention. The Netherlands could also benefit from good practices mentioned in the Finnish paper.

1.1. What is the role of men in gender equality?

Actress and appointed UN Women goodwill ambassador Emma Watson recently stated that involvement of men in gender equality is needed. She argued that: “*Men don't have the benefits of equality either*” and that changing gender stereotypes is needed so men and women would both feel free to be “strong” and “sensitive”.

Besides positive responses, Watson's speech was critiqued by feminists for not calling men into real action and for identifying non-involvement of men in gender-equality action merely as caused by feminists creating an uninviting environment, neglecting that part of the strive for gender-equality is that men need to give up certain benefits, and that non-involvement is caused by privileged positions of men (www.blackgirldangerous.org/2014/09/im-really-emma-watsons-feminism-speech-un/ consulted 10-10-2014).

This highlights key issues in involving men in gender equality. In working on gender-equality, what is beneficial for women can be, but is not necessarily, beneficial for men. Moreover, men and women should not be seen as homogenous dichotomous groups. That is, intersecting inequalities should be taken into account. However, we do see that involvement of men in gender justice could be helpful and a focus on what is beneficial for men could help to involve men, and overcome a lack of solidarity (Connell 2010). Men, in this sense can be seen as the gatekeepers of gender equality (Connell 2005). A mere focus on what is beneficial for men can, however, also distract from what is important for women and what is less beneficial for men (which is not the same ‘for all women’ and ‘for all men’) (van der Haar, van Huis, Verloo 2014).

Seeing the role of men in gender equality as de facto involvement of men is an attempt at social justice in which more equality is reached throughout the whole

spectrum of social life, and taking into consideration intersecting inequalities. To grasp this wide spectrum, we can analytically divide the role of gender in domains: polity, economy, civil society, violence, (based on Walby 2009) sexuality (Connell uses the term cathexis for intimate relationships and sexual desire 2010: 229) and knowledge and truth construction (Verloof 2011). On a more practical level we identify the categories here as **care and labour** (including education), **violence, sexuality, health and politics**.

Where gender gaps are present within these domains, policy (or other) interventions could involve men more where needed, and could let (privileged) men give necessary space to women, but also LGBT, ethnic and other minorities, in order to achieve a more just and democratic representation in all domains.

In the European EIGE gender equality index the Netherlands do relatively well. They are fourth in ranking and score relatively well in care and labour and less in the category power (e.g. positions in politics) (<http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equality-index> consulted: 14-10-2014). We will show which specific gender gaps still exists in the Netherlands and what is the role of men in these gaps, based on the above mentioned domains.

1.2. Role of men in the Netherlands

The breadwinner model has been the dominant family ideology in the Netherlands for a longer period than it was for most European countries, and it still continues to be important. Until the 1990s institutions and regulations were highly adapted to this ideal, which made change difficult. Driven by feminist and economic demands, institutions and regulations have become more adapted to dual and one and a half earner households. The amount of day care centres has grown, and newly implemented laws and regulations aim for participation of women in paid labour (van Huis, Verloof, van der Haar 2011). Currently, compared to other EU countries, a high percentage of Dutch women participates in paid labour (64% in 2011, SCP/CBS 2012:53). Most however work part-time (73% in 2011, SCP/CBS 2012:59), and men hardly started contributing more in care. Moreover, the role of men in the domains of violence, health and sexuality and politics is also problematic. In the following sections we will give an overview of the Dutch situation in bullet points.

Care and labour

Care and domestic work

- Men spend less time on domestic work than women (Men: 9.7 hours per week; women: 21.3 hours per week). There is no increase at the beginning of the last decade (2000-2005) (Cloïn, Schols & van den Broek 2010: 28-29). Between 2006 and 2011 both men and women spend less time on domestic work, but without a change in the gender gap (Cloïn et al 2013).
- Men spend less time on the care for children than women (2.8 hours per week, against 6.7). From 2000-2005 men spent more time caring for their children, but women have increased the time spent on caring for children even more, leading to an increase in the gender care gap between 2000 and 2005 (Cloïn, Schols & van den Broek 2010:28-29). In 2011 men with a child younger than 18 years old spend 5,9 hours per week on the care for children, women 11,5 hours per week. When spending free time with

children, or keeping an eye on children who play, is taken into account this is 8,8 for men and 20,1 for women (Cloïn et al 2013:13).

- Men spend less time on informal care for sick or elderly than women (Men: 0.6 hours per week, Women: 1 hour per week). This hasn't changed since the 1970s (Cloïn, Schols & van den Broek 2010:32).
- Since 1990 there have been leave regulations that are in a rather constant process of amendment and adaptation. Currently, all parents as parents only have the right to unpaid leave, but collective agreements can diverge with respect to duration and pay. Although regulations for parental leave for men and women are the same (except for maternity and paternity leave), men take less parental leave than women (27%, against 49%) (SCP/CBS 2012:14).
- The difference in time men and women spend on domestic tasks is smaller for high educated men and women than for low educated men and women, because high educated women spend less time on domestic work, not because high educated men do more (Ooms, Jonker, & van der Torre 2009:23; figures from 2011 indicate the same: Cloïn et al 2013:68).
- Men currently only have a right to two days (!) non-mandatory paid parental leave. Collective agreements can diverge with respect to duration and pay.
- After the economic crisis resulting in cutbacks, also in childcare, more parents stayed at home to take care of the children. For some the increased expenses for childcare have been the reason to work less hours (1 in 7), but for most it was loss of employment itself that resulted in taking care of children at home (SCP 2014:1).

Labour and education

- More men than women do paid work, they work more hours, have higher wages and more influential positions. Compared to other EU countries a high percentage of Dutch women work (64% in 2011 SCP/CBS 2012:53), but most of them have small part-time jobs. Targets for 2010 to get more women in top management positions and to have 15% female professors in universities were not achieved (SCP/CBS 2010:193). However, some years later the 15% target for female professors at universities was reached (15,7% in 2013) (<http://www.lnvh.nl/files/downloads/232.pdf> consulted 14-10-2014).
- There are 19% of men who work part-time (SCP/CBS 2012:59). Most men who have part-time jobs don't have children living at home (Portegijs et al. 2008:16).
- A "gendered kickoff" is identified in the Netherlands (Wiesmann 2010): 91% of men work the same hours or more after childbirth, whereas almost half of women start working less or stop working (SCP/CBS 2010:114). Especially many low educated women stop working. Moreover, men start spending less time on domestic work after the birth of the first child (Ooms, Jonker, & van der Torre 2009:23). Higher wages for men, a limited paternity leave

regulation, and lack of explicit decision making between partners, are the most plausible causes for this “kick off” (Wiesmann 2010).

- Dutch boys do less well in school than girls (SCP/CBS 2010:39). The difference is however small compared to the overrepresentation of (also young) men in the labor market, higher wages, and higher positions.
- Boys tend to choose more for technical education, while girls are overrepresented in education preparing for care or teaching work. Initiatives to make education less segregated have resulted in more girls choosing for technical education, until now without results in segregation in higher education (SCP/CBS 2012:33).
- There is an overrepresentation of boys who ‘drop out’ of school, or achieve very low qualifications, especially among migrant boys (SCP/CBS 2010:56). There is an active policy against school dropouts and the number is decreasing (for boys with a migration background: from 22% in 2004 to 15% in 2011) (SCP/CBS 2012:37).

Although men do more domestic work and care work than at the beginning of the 21st century (certainly since the 1970s) and generally have positive attitudes towards a close relationship with their children (Duyvendak & Stavenuijter 2004), the Dutch situation still shows a continuation of the breadwinner norm (Widener 2006), especially among the low educated. Other researchers refer to the Netherlands as the ‘1.5 breadwinner model’ or a ‘unsupported universal breadwinner model’ (Ciccia & Verloo 2012). In the case of a ‘unsupported universal breadwinner model’, ‘leave policies provide very limited supports and those few provisions are fundamentally intended to the protection of maternal and child’s health and to facilitate women’s recovery from childbirth’ (Ciccia & Verloo 2011).

Violence

- There are gender differences in the impact and causes of types of violence. Men have a higher chance of becoming the victim of molestation, women of domestic violence, sexual violence human trafficking and honour related violence. Moreover, women experience more fear, because of expected inability to defend oneself and to cope with the consequences of violence (SCP/CBS 2012:9). Men have a higher chance of being a perpetrator of violence (most types).
- The Netherlands since 2002 has a nationally coordinated policy against domestic abuse. Since 2002, shelters and social work that focus on domestic abuse have professionalized; all municipalities have local infrastructures against domestic violence; and there are more judicial possibilities for higher sentences and restraining orders (Dutch Parliament 5-6-2012).
- Specific for the Dutch domestic violence policy is that it is framed in gender neutral ways and is (partly) ethnicised by specific attention for honour-related violence, genital mutilation, marital coercion etc.(Movisie 2013).
- There are 35 specific offices in the Netherlands to report and ask questions about domestic violence, in order to lower the threshold for reporting with the police. In 2013 a code for professionals (in health care, education, child care

etc.) has been set up to report assumptions of abuse, and to give professionals the right to do so (Movisie 2013).

- In 2012 an awareness campaign has started that urges people to report suspicions of domestic violence (Movisie 2013).
- Between 1997 and 2010 there has been an estimated growth of reporting of domestic violence with the police, due to policy initiatives. In 1997 about 12% of cases are reported and in 2010 20% (based on comparisons with research results and police reports). In 20% to 25% of reports the perpetrators are arrested. There, however, is an expected underrepresentation of male victims of domestic violence in police reporting (van de Veen & Bogaerts 2010:15). A strong correlation of victimhood and being a perpetrator (ibid), would argue for a need of attention for intergenerational abuse.

Health

- Life expectancy is lower for men than for women, but the gender life expectancy gap is decreasing because life expectancy for men is increasing faster than for women. Life expectancy for boys born in 2012 is 79.1 and for girls 82.8 (SCP 2013).
- Men have a higher risk to die of cancer and lung diseases. Women currently have a higher risk of dying of heart diseases, which is also a high risk for men. More men die of unnatural causes like traffic accidents, suicide, or violent crimes and more men have problems with alcohol and drug abuse (Largo-Jansen 2005:2; SCP 2013).
- There is recent attention for gender sensitivity in medicine (Dutch Parliament 10-5-2013).

Sexuality

- Less Dutch men have a positive attitude towards homosexuality than women. Acceptance of homosexuality is higher in the Netherlands than in other European and Western countries. Social acceptance of homosexuality is however relatively low among ethnic minorities, orthodox religious groups and youth (Keuzenkamp 2011:9).
- There is a combined Dutch policy for the emancipation of women and LGBT people (Dutch Parliament 10-5-2013).

Politics

- Men have more and higher positions in politics (SCP/CBS 2012). There are more women in Dutch Parliament compared to other European countries: 39% vs. 23% in EU-27 (Gender Equality Index 2013:103).

2. Policy debates

2.1. Debates on the role of men

It is hard to identify if there is a growing explicit attention for the role of men in gender equality in the Netherlands, but there are some signs that point in that direction. There was already attention for masculinity related to gender equality policy in 1976 (Brouns & Scholten 1997:14), but has then dissolved.

Recently, there has been discussion in parliament on the role of marginalised men in gender equality (van der Haar 2012) after an almost exclusive attention of gender equality and integration policies for migrant women (Roggeband & Verloo 2007). These debates were followed by gender specific policies for marginalised (“vulnerable”) men that worked on “participation and emancipation” of “low educated and socially isolated” men. This consisted of policy that financed the set-up of so called father centres, and of fatherhood and participation programmes to make men more involved fathers, and at the same time work on their participation (as volunteers) in society (van Huis 2014; van Huis & van der Haar 2013).

Moreover, some well-known feminists write about the role of men in gender equality in columns, opinion articles in national newspapers and in books, and there have been public discussions on the role of men in the Netherlands in civil society.

Some, however, identify a lack of attention for the gendered division of care, resulting from predominantly economy driven gender equality policy, leading to a focus on more women in employment rather than more men in care (Evenhuis ed. 2006; de Boer & Wijers 2006). Moreover, there is a government-supported myth of achieved gender equality for the Dutch white population ‘delegating’ gender inequality mostly to the migrant population (Roggeband & Verloo 2007:19; see also Pels 2004).

Overall Dutch gender equality policy is criticised by many. In 2005 a national committee evaluating the Dutch emancipation policy indicated that gender mainstreaming at the level of Dutch government needed serious improvement (Visitatie Commissie Emancipatie 2007). At the time of this report, many policy makers in Dutch bureaucracy were not aware of their responsibilities to implement the emancipation objectives of the Cabinet in their own work. In the majority of departments, required knowledge and expertise were restricted to a too limited number of civil servants.

3. Transferring good practices to the Netherlands

The Netherlands differs from Austria, Finland and Iceland in their configuration on gender in politics, which also varies over time in these countries (whether governments are formed, or supported by right wing parties, whether there are ministers responsible for gender equality etc). These differences influence whether the good practices are transferable.

3.1. Transferring good practices for parental leave to the Netherlands

Transferring one of the systems of parental leave to the Netherlands would probably decrease gender gaps. However, formal initiatives for change in paternity leave are so far limited. Attempts to implement a paternity/maternity leave system that offers partners 5 days of paid leave after childbirth have failed in 2011. Currently, a bill to provide partners with the right to 3 days unpaid leave on top of the non-mandatory 2 days of paid leave has yet to be accepted by the Dutch Parliament and Senate.

Finland and Iceland had comparatively early strives for gender equality in many domains of social and political life. In contrast, in the Netherlands the breadwinner model continues to be influential. Less women work and women work less hours compared to Finnish women, and gender equality initiatives in the Netherlands highly are associated with the past of the second wave of feminism, except when it concerns ethnic minorities.

Attitudes that are measured in 2008 show that 85% Finnish men believe they will benefit from gender equality. Similarly, a (smaller) majority of Dutch men say they want equal amounts of working hours (55% say this), time spend on domestic tasks (63%), and care for children (75%) as their partners (SCP/CBS 2012:116). The figures, however, also show that women in the Netherlands are even less inclined to such type of equality and lean even more towards the one-and-a-half breadwinner model than men (ibid).

Finland's case also shows that there has been a long struggle for parental leave quota for men, compared to the Netherlands. Although the Dutch parental leave (after maternity and paternity leave) is equal for men and women (26 times weekly working hours of unpaid leave, to be taken up before the child is 8 years old), less Dutch men take up leave, although the number is increasing (27%, against 49% of women, SCP/CBS 2012:14). Surprisingly, more Dutch men use parental leave than Finnish men (11,9% in 2007) (Vuorenmaa 2014:6), even though the leave is (partly) unpaid in the Netherlands and paid in Finland. An explanation could be that in Finland, the days were transferable to partners and therefore mostly taken up by women. A second explanation is that part of the leave in the Netherlands is also (partly) paid, because of regulations for this in collective agreements (80% of employees fall under such a collective agreement). However, because there are around 1100 different agreements, it is currently unknown how many employees precisely offer paid leave. Yet, we do know that 56% of parents who take up leave have paid parental leave (mostly employees in education and government employees) (CBS 2011).

Finland's good practice consists of a new 6+6+6 model in which six months of leave are non-transferable, so partners lose their days of leave if they are not taken up, forcing both partners to choose between taking up leave or losing it. The extra 6 months can be divided by choice.

In a sense this incentive is already present in the Dutch policy, but not for all employees (nor for self-employed workers). The incentive that is missing in the Netherlands, however, is a paid leave for every parent like in Finland (in Finland this will be 80% of the previous earnings). A paid leave for all parents in the Netherlands might increase parental leave used by men.

In Austria the division of care and labour is described as even more towards a conservative breadwinner model than that of the Netherlands, although there are changes towards a less conservative model.

The Austrian parental leave model with choice options for longer, lower paid leave, or shorter, higher paid leave, has proven not to be an incentive for men to take up much more parental leave. Also, the outcome of an unpaid “daddy month” for civil servants is very limited (1 in 8 fathers take up this leave). The ability to choose between shorter and longer periods of paid leave, with varying payments, would be an improvement to the Dutch system that does not offer paid leave (except in an unknown number of collective agreements). However, the model does seem to give an incentive to take up limited periods of leave, because they get paid the most. Moreover, does it create inequality between men and women when women are forced to take up longer periods of leave with lower payment? This perhaps depends on childcare facilities. Are there other options for the care of children than sharing between the two main caretakers?

The Netherlands, like Austria, does have options to reduce weekly working hours (in the Netherlands: after one year of employment and only with companies with 10 employees or more; in Austria: after three years, only with companies with more than 20 employees).

Iceland also has a paid parental leave model (80% of previous payment, with a ceiling), providing each parent with an independent right to maternity/paternity leave, with an additional three months that can be divided. Parental leave is detached from gender, custody, or shared residency with the child(ren), as long as there are agreed arrangements for visiting rights (this is the same in the Netherlands). Unemployed parents receive a fixed minimum compensation. The leave is paid from employers' insurances levies and by the government.

The Icelandic policy results in a high amount of fathers taking up parental leave (88% in 2007!). Moreover, fathers take up a large proportion of the three months (100 days). Women take up more: almost all of the three months, plus the three sharable months, with an average of above 180 days. More importantly, more couples started to take care of their children in more gender equal ways.

A transfer of the Icelandic policy to the Dutch situation, like the other forms of paid leave, would most likely increase fathers' participation in care, and women's employment. Although there are no formal initiatives at this moment, the policies can function as examples for politicians, policy makers and citizens to take steps towards such changes.

3.2. Transferring other gender equality policies to the Netherlands

In contrast to the good practices of Austria and Iceland, the paper on Finland addresses many more aspects of the role of men in gender-equality than parental leave and the role of men as fathers.

Finland is developing gender sensitive school systems and teaching. In Finland as well as the Netherlands, although women are getting higher educated than men, education is highly segregated. Therefore the Netherlands could benefit from the

initiatives Finland is developing. Exchange of knowledge about school systems and teaching could be helpful for Dutch policy makers.

In the Netherlands, like in Finland, there has been attention for boys and men in education (and upbringing). Especially a continuing policy focus on early school leave of boys with a migrant and working class background is needed. However, the gender gap where women are more successful than men in education, is relatively low, compared to other gender gaps (only 1%) and does not (yet) translate into higher wages, employment or positions. Therefore, a focus on gender segregation, and school drop-outs is currently more important than on the overrepresentation of successful female students in education.

Like in Finland, in the Netherlands there is a need for attention for the social construction of men's health, as well as attention for biological gender differences in health.

We agree that attention for violence against women by men as well as against men and children by men and women is needed. It is important to be aware that no one will benefit from turning it into a competition. However, it is also important to keep in mind that violence by men against women, as well as violence against children, because of average physical and power differences have generally - but not always - higher physical, social and psychological impacts, especially when perpetrators are also partners, or family members.

Iceland can function as an example in the domain of politics as it has gender quota in public committees, councils and boards as well as in boards of companies with more than 50 employees, and an active gender mainstreaming strategy. In the Netherlands there are only non-mandatory, so called "target" laws by which large companies (i.a. 250 employees and above) are urged to report the representation of women in company boards, with a target of 30% seats for women and men (Lückerath-Rovers 2014).

Furthermore, gender mainstreaming has been criticised in the Netherlands (*Visitatie Commissie Emancipatie 2007*), whereas Iceland has active gender mainstreaming. In reaction to the crisis of 2008 Iceland has actively monitored the consequences of the crisis and of further (in)action on "both sexes" (Eydal 2014:5). This continuous attention for gender-equality, also in times of economic crisis is something Dutch government and policy makers can learn from. In contrast to Iceland, in a context of budget austerity after the economic crisis of 2008, Dutch politicians seem to consider gender equality (for example paid parental leave) as a luxury, and in conflict with economic development (even though the Netherlands have one of the highest GDP per capita in the world).

In conclusion, we would like to say that a wider and intersectional perspective on gender equality is needed, not just a focus on the role of men as fathers. Where men are addressed as fathers, we would like to note that there are more policy options than just the option of an effective parental leave policy (however important and urgent that would be!). Fatherhood programmes, like the ones in the Netherlands, could promote awareness of involved fatherhood, of gender equality issues, and of intersecting inequality issues. Having said that, we want to emphasise that the three papers show inspiring examples. Especially the paid options for parental/paternity leave, gender sensitivity in education, and active gender mainstreaming could function as examples for the Netherlands.

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