



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in the ESIF and national budgets


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### Comments paper - The Netherlands



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# Gender Budgeting in the Netherlands

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## Abstract

This paper assesses if the Netherlands uses gender budgeting in its policies, especially in relation to its use of the European Structural Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). An in-depth evaluation of the use of ESF for Active Inclusion in the Netherlands shows the importance of a gender analysis to redress potential gender imbalances, but it remains unclear whether the Dutch government will use this information on gender inequalities to guide future projects and actions of the next ESF-programme to promote a gender balance within ESF projects. The Dutch Government presents no information about if and how it uses the ERDF to promote gender equality.

*The Dutch government makes little or no use of gender impact assessments and gender budgeting, while there is enough expertise available, plenty of data disaggregated to gender and other indicators, and despite earlier urgent appeals from Dutch Parliamentarians, Dutch NGOs and the CEDAW Committee.*

In the past, the Netherlands has applied gender mainstreaming. It still successfully promotes international norms on equality between women and men through its overseas development assistance and diplomatic channels. More pressure will be needed for the country to do something. Therefore, we emphasise the need to provide clear and binding guidelines to Member States, and compulsory requirements on gender equality in all the post-2020 Operational Programmes in all funds.

## 1. Relevant country context of the Netherlands

### 1.1 Gender budgeting or no gender budgeting?

The Netherlands is well-known for its promoting of international norms about equality between women and men through its diplomatic channels (IOB, 2015). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, the Netherlands has introduced gender budgeting, undertakes structured dialogue with civil society to assess the impact of gender budgeting, and reports 'to allocating financial resources as overseas development assistance to be used to promote gender equality in developing countries' (Downes, Von Trapp, & Nicol, 2017). Gender budgeting refers to 'a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and

expenditures in order to promote gender equality' (Council of Europe, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. In this comments paper, we will assess if the Netherlands indeed uses gender budgeting in its policies and if the Netherlands uses the European Structural and Investment Funds, especially the European Structural Fund and the European Regional Development Fund to promote gender equality.

## 1.2 European Structural Fund

Social inclusion and higher employment are at the core of the Netherlands' strategy for ESF investments. By offering disadvantaged people the chance to get skills and improve their employability, the Netherlands aims to achieve both objectives together (European Social Fund - European Commission, n.d.). In its report 'Who is targeted by the ESF? (2007-2015)', the Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2017) distinguishes age, gender, country of origin and generation, labour market position and education level. However, an analysis<sup>2</sup> of possible existing imbalances between men and women is lacking and, hence, it remains unclear if and how the ESF supports redressing potential gender imbalances. Because the ESF explicitly requests projects to incorporate promoting gender equality in its goals, the fourth in-depth evaluation of the ESF Active Inclusion (Oostveen, Bouterse, & Gorter, 2019) has taken this on board. The results immediately show the importance of a gender analysis, because equal opportunities between men and women are lacking, according to the evaluation. Among all target groups, men are more likely to find (better) work than women, both after completing the programme and after a year. This is in line with earlier research, the evaluation continues, which indicates that the outflow from social security to work among men is higher than among women. The inequality of opportunity varies considerably between the different target groups that are counselled by municipalities, and disadvantages particularly (asylum) status holders and people that have difficulties entering the labour market (Oostveen, Bouterse, & Gorter, 2019, p. 74). It is yet unclear whether this information on gender inequalities will be used to guide future projects and actions of the next ESF-programme in the Netherlands, in order to promote a gender balance within ESF projects.

## 1.3 European Regional Development Fund

Findings from a research about the 'Gender dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy' requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (REGI) show that 'the implementation of gender mainstreaming has been poor, particularly in those ERDF domains not usually perceived as related to women and gender equality' (Samek Lodovici, Drufuca, Ferrari, Patrizio, Pesce, De Silvis and

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<sup>1</sup> For more academic texts on the multiple meanings and practices of gender budgeting, see Çağlar 2010; Elson 2003 and 2016; O'Hagan 2015; O'Hagan and Klatzer 2018; Quinn 2016 and 2017.

<sup>2</sup> In Belgium, for instance, the government of Flanders strives within ESF projects for a balanced approach to men and women. Based on an analysis of possible imbalances that exist between men and women, actions are proposed to promote gender balance within the organization / project. See: <https://www.esf-vlaanderen.be/nl/gender>

Moja, 2018). One could say that the Netherlands is part of the problem (in addition to the eight Member States that were part of the research), as the country doesn't mention anything about if and how it uses the funds to promote gender equality (Parliamentary Papers II 2017–2018, 21 501-08, nr. 706).

Perhaps it is unclear how actions supported by the ERDF could promote gender equality, the REGI-researchers indicate. They therefore provide the following example: 'The ERDF can support measures directly promoting business start-ups and entrepreneurship among women, as well as indirect measures addressing the gender gap in research and innovation, in access to physical, ICT and social infrastructures.' Assuming the Netherlands gathers statistics similar to those available for the ESF, it could (to a minimum) provide numbers of women and men that have benefited from the ERDF.

#### **1.4 The Netherlands has gender expertise, but gender budgeting is lacking**

Looking at recent history, the Dutch government has a lot of expertise regarding gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. In the policy review of the emancipation policy 2006-2007 (Keizer, 2007), for example, gender budgeting is mentioned as one of the tools used by the Directorate Emancipation (DE).<sup>3</sup> It was piloted at the level of the government and municipalities, yet, it disappeared afterwards, and in the latest two policy reviews gender budgeting is not mentioned at all (Auditdienst Rijk, 2014; Harthoorn, Weerd, & Klaver, 2018). In fact, in 2016 Dutch NGOs critically assessed the 6<sup>th</sup> reporting of the Dutch government to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). They conclude that 'despite earlier urgent recommendations from the (CEDAW) Committee, the Dutch government makes little or no use of instruments such as gender impact assessments and gender budgeting' (Dutch CEDAW-network, 2015). In the next section we will elaborate on this further.

## **2. Policy debate**

### **2.1 Motions on 'Gender Mainstreaming' and 'Gender Budgeting'**

On 12 December 2003, a motion about 'Gender Mainstreaming' was accepted in Dutch Parliament. The Amsterdam Treaty and the European Framework Strategy on

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<sup>3</sup> Currently, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science hosts the Directorate Emancipation (DE) and its policy focuses on promoting equal rights, opportunities, liberties and (social) responsibilities in society for women and men. The policy also aims to improve the position and acceptance of homosexuals in society. The budget for the emancipation policy is limited in size. In the period covered by the latest policy review (2014-2018), the average annual amount is € 14 million (this has remained similar over the last two decades) (Harthoorn, Weerd, & Klaver, 2018). The authors noted that with this limited budget, DE has to cover various priority themes and serve a large target group, because women, girls and LGBT people together make up more than half the population.

Gender Mainstreaming stipulate that Member States will promote equal opportunities for women and men and take concrete measures to integrate the emancipation perspective in all areas of European policy. Progress should be reported annually to the European Council from 2004 onwards. Every minister will start in 2003 with the drafting of a plan of action aimed at strengthening the gender equality perspective in policy-making and implementation (Parliamentary Papers II 2005-2006, 30 420 nr. 2). On 26 June 2007 another motion was accepted that calls on the government to investigate how 'gender budgeting' can be applied in accountability for foreign policy and to report on this to the House of Representatives, and to at least show the effects of spending on women and girls as a first step in the results report (Parliamentary Papers II 2006-2007, 31031 V 19). If and how were these motions and consequent policy put into practice?

## **2.2 Visitation Committee for Emancipation (2004-2007)**

The Visitation Committee for Emancipation (VCE) was established on 1 July 2004 on behalf of the Dutch cabinet by the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment. This Committee aimed to monitor, assess and stimulate the progress of the gender mainstreaming process at the central government in the period up to 2007. Within the Ministry of Finance, the Committee concluded that the knowledge about gender mainstreaming that is available does not have a structural place within the organization. Gender budgeting would be very relevant, but is not included in the Dutch cycle from policy budget to policy accountability (VCE, 2007b). This is a missed opportunity according to the Committee, given the influence of tax measures (both positive and negative) on the position of women in Dutch society or other budgetary influences that would contribute to reducing gender differences or promoting emancipatory developments. Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the field of development cooperation, to the contrary, the Committee mentions that 'this Ministry deserves much appreciation for the way in which the gender perspective is shaped in policy design' (VCE, 2007a). The committee highlights that development cooperation has established rather a substantial gender-unit and pays attention to the development of this expertise. Equally, the committee appreciates that development cooperation pledged to participate in a further exploration of gender budget analysis; that this department is included in the assessment trajectory of the annual plans of all departments and foreign posts; that work is being done on gender accountability; that there are thematic experts and focal points on foreign posts; and that there is a focus on gender in development cooperation training.

## **2.3 Divergence in gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in internal and external affairs**

### **2.3.1 External affairs: development cooperation**

In 2015 an evaluation took place to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and efficiency of the way in which the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs had implemented its international gender policy between 2007 and 2014 (IOB, 2015). The evaluation contains a positive appraisal of the Netherlands' efforts through its

diplomatic channels to promote international norms about equality between women and men as well as continuance of these norms, and of the financial support provided to organisations that promote and uphold the rights of women in many countries (Dutch CEDAW Network, 2016). However, the Netherlands did not consistently fulfil its ambitions in the area of gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of all policies, programmes and projects, other than those dealing with women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (Dutch CEDAW Network, 2016). Whereas the Ministry used to have a lot of gender expertise, this deteriorated, and in 2012 the Parliament was concerned about the lack of gender expertise in the Ministry and the Dutch embassies (Parliamentary Papers II 32735-68, 2012: 29). Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs used to have a dedicated 'gender training' for its staff, but this was stopped in 2011. 'For people who are interested, a link is available to the Danish e-learning programme on gender on the Ministry's Intranet' (IOB, 2015). Due to raising this issue, it was decided that the Ministry would maintain its gender-expertise and, eventually in 2014, created a new Task Force Women's Rights and Gender Equality (TFVG) that still exists.

### 2.3.2 Internal affairs

During the deliberations of the 6<sup>th</sup> reporting of the Dutch government to the CEDAW Committee, the NGOs recalled the Committee's encouragement during the previous round to systematize assessment of the gender impact of legislation and policies among the various ministries (CEDAW/C/NLD/CO/5 paras. 4 and 19) (Dutch CEDAW Network, 2016). Gender impact assessments, if carried out at all, are not accessible to the Parliament, NGOs and CSOs, the Dutch CEDAW Network emphasised. On the contrary: useful instruments for gender mainstreaming developed in previous decades seem to have been streamed away and got lost (Van Eerdewijk, 2010; Roggeband and Verloo, 2006). As soon as gender is said to be integrated into mainstream policy it becomes invisible, disaggregated data is rarely maintained and the policy's result remains unknown (Dutch CEDAW Network, 2016). Equally important is the attitude towards promoting gender equality. As the authors of the country specific information from the European Institute for Gender Equality indicate: 'Typical for Dutch emancipation policy today is that a sense of political urgency is missing and gender inequality watchdogs have been disbanded in favour of horizontal gender mainstreaming' (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019).

Based on these critical notes and after a deliberation with the Dutch government, the CEDAW Committee recommended that the State Party:

- (a) Develop and adopt a unified and comprehensive national policy and strategy for the implementation of the provisions of the Convention, strengthen the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy at municipal and other levels and ensure that all government bodies involved receive appropriate guidance and support in their implementation efforts, including sufficient human, technical and financial resources;
- (b) Continue to strengthen effective coordination and ensure clear and coherent management of the national machinery for the advancement of women at all levels;

(c) Ensure accessibility to human rights impact assessment results and transparency in the conduct of compliance checks (CEDAW/C/NLD/CO/6).

### 3. Transferability aspects

The Netherlands has a lot of data disaggregated to gender and other indicators and has a lot of expertise on gender equality, gender mainstreaming and intersectionality. However, this expertise is mostly located outside the government and tapped into through the partnerships that the government enters into with Dutch NGOs. Although this is a way to systematically involve stakeholders, these partnerships are temporarily and make NGOs dependent on insecure financial flows (Schulpen, Van Kempen, & Elbers, 2018) and perhaps reluctant to be critical towards the policies that promote gender equality. To be more productive, these partnerships would have to be more institutionalised.

What the Netherlands could learn from Czech Republic (Maufras Černohorská, 2020) is to actually feel the urgency and need to apply its expertise in the area of gender equality, and reanimate activities that are in line with the Netherlands' excellent international reputation on gender equality. The currently growing extreme right-wing political parties vote against almost all measures that would promote gender equality (Verloo, 2018).

We appreciate Austria's critical assessment of its gender mainstreaming policies (Bachtrögl, Bock-Schappelwein, Mayrhuber, & Schratzenstaller, 2020). From Austria the Netherlands could learn that setting clear gender equality objectives and investing in a strong gender unit to coordinate the activities is very important.

In its follow up on Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Committee urges (again) the Dutch government to systematically collect data on all forms of violence against women, disaggregated by age and the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, as well as on protection measures, prosecutions and sanctions imposed on perpetrators (MK/follow-up/Netherlands/72). The Netherlands could learn from Slovakia (Rozborová, 2020) that has substantially approved projects focusing specifically on prevention and elimination of gender-based violence. We comment the Dutch Ministry of Justice & Security (J & V) and the Ministry of Health (VWS) for very recently taking the initiative for a biannual prevalence survey of domestic and sexual violence (de Graaf & Marra, 2019).

### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

Although the OECD indicates that the Netherlands uses gender budgeting to promote gender equality, we have not found any evidence of this being the case. The Netherlands does not apply gender budgeting in its policies. We assess that the Netherlands has applied gender mainstreaming in the past, that it successfully promotes international norms about equality between women and men, and that it has



plenty of data disaggregated to gender and other indicators, yet the country does hardly use those data.

More pressure will be needed for the country to do something. Based on our assessment and on recommendations that followed from the CEDAW Committee to the Netherlands, we fully align ourselves with the recommendations from the research for the REGI Committee 'Gender Dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy' (Samek Lodovici, Drufuca, Ferrari, Patrizio, Pesce, De Silvis and Moja, 2018). We underline and emphasise the need to provide clear guidelines and support to Member States, through:

- The introduction of compulsory requirements for gender equality in all the post-2020 Operational Programmes with specific and transversal gender equality measures in all funds, as well as specific obligations (e.g. in selection criteria and monitoring systems), and binding guidelines to enhance compliance;
- Maintaining the ex ante requirement of developing national gender equality strategies to enhance synergies and improve Cohesion Policy's effectiveness and added value;
- Supporting the creation of effective and institutionalised partnerships with gender equality representatives from civil society.
- Developing gender-related tools, guidelines and training programmes tailored to the specific policy domains addressed by Cohesion Policy, with concrete examples of how to implement a gender perspective;
- Creating and/or strengthening gender equality coordination, monitoring, and technical assistance bodies to support gender mainstreaming in all policy domains of Cohesion Policy and all programme phases;
- Ensuring a strong political commitment to gender equality at European and national/regional level, in order to mainstream the attention and commitment of national and local Cohesion Policy stakeholders.

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