



Government of the Netherlands

Gender & LGBTI Equality Policy Plan
2018-2021 | The Netherlands

Putting principles into practice



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Foreword

In the 1950s, homosexual applicants were barred from public-sector jobs in the Netherlands purely on the grounds of their sexual orientation. Married women were considered legally incapacitated until 1956, and until 1957 the law required that female civil servants be dismissed when they married.

Since those days, we have come a very long way along the path to equality for women and LGBTI¹ persons. The right to equal treatment is now enshrined in Dutch law, and there is broad public support for such principles as equal employment rights and the right to form your own identity and determine your own personal life, as well as to be safe from violence at home and in public space.

Considering how much the Netherlands has achieved in recent decades, and how both legislation and cultural norms have evolved, there is reason to be optimistic. Nevertheless, our now widely supported principles are still not always sufficiently reflected in practice.

The past year has seen a clear new trend in our society. Whether it is the lingering pay gap between men and women, the fact that many young women are working part-time when they would rather not be, the countless #metoo experiences or the violent attacks on LGBTI persons in public areas, there is widespread disbelief and impatience about the inequalities which persist in our country. Awful as these abuses may be, it is a good thing that they have come out into the open and aroused such general indignation in the public arena. This demonstrates unequivocally that there is a strong, broad support for change.

This Gender and LGBTI Equality Policy Plan sets out how the Dutch government intends to put its principles of gender and LGBTI equality into everyday practice between now and 2021. Our guiding tenet is that everyone should be able to live their life as they wish. If we set that against current practice, we see that there are three interrelated domains in which we still face stiff challenges: (i) the labour market, (ii) safety, security and acceptance, and (iii) gender diversity and equal treatment. These domains are therefore the primary focus of this document, with a separate chapter devoted to each of them.

The Dutch government has ambitious aspirations in all these areas, encompassing both gender and LGBTI equality.

The topics covered in this document are closely related to one another. Stereotypes around masculinity and femininity affect the acceptance, security and safety of women and LGBTI persons. Their lack of income makes women more vulnerable to domestic violence. More female leaders in the workplace would improve organizational cultural norms and safety for all employees and also break down stereotypes. A step forward in one area is also good for the others.

Moreover, equality is inextricably bound up with sustainable development. As such, it is an integral part of our efforts to implement the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²

The Dutch government stands unequivocally for gender and LGBTI equality. For equal treatment, for equal opportunities and for the right to live your own life in safety. To put these principles into practice, though, we need help from many quarters: from citizens, who have to make room for equality and take up the opportunities it provides, but also from employers, trade unions, the media, schools, civil society organizations, local authorities and, of course, our own governmental institutions.

With the backing of all these stakeholders, we in government are convinced that we can make significant strides forward during our current term of office.

Ingrid van Engelshoven
Minister of Education, Culture and Science – The Netherlands



¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

² With regard to gender and LGBTI equality, the following SDGs are especially important: 3 (health and well-being), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 10 (reduced inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (international partnerships).

1. Labour market

independence, more women
at the top and equal pay



The Dutch government is committed to gender equality in employment and incomes, with a particular focus upon the following aspects:

- Financial independence for women
- The appointment of more women to senior positions
- Eliminating the gender pay gap

Financial independence for women

Over and above its existing commitment to economic independence for women, the government has added a new and even more ambitious policy objective.

An individual is defined as *economically* independent if their personal income equals or exceeds the so-called “social minimum” level, which itself is 70 per cent of the statutory full-time minimum wage. At present, only 59.1 per cent of women meet this criterion, compared with 78.7 per cent of men.

The government continues to work to ensure that more women become economically independent each year. 70 per cent of the minimum wage is just enough to live on as a single person. But it leaves very little financial leverage. And it is certainly not sufficient for someone also bringing up children, as many women do. For this reason, the government’s new supplementary objective is to increase the proportion of women earning at least 100 per cent of the full-time minimum wage; they can then be considered *financially* independent. At present, that figure is 48.4 per cent (for men, it is 73.8 per cent).

The gender gap is thus considerably wider when looking at financial independence than in the case of economic independence.

Being able to make everyday purchases for yourself and your children without having to rely upon a partner, charity or local-authority provisions means greater freedom of choice and personal autonomy. Moreover, an adequate income of their own gives women more financial security in the event of divorce, the death of a partner or the loss of earnings. It also keeps children out of poverty. A large proportion of youngsters growing up below the poverty line are being cared for by single mothers in a weak position in the labour market.³ Older women, too, are less likely to be economically independent; in 2016, only 51.9 per cent of women aged 45-65 were.⁴ This number is growing, however: in 2011 it was 46.9 per cent.

The Dutch government is striving to increase both the number of women in work and the number of hours they work. This not only gives them greater financial independence, it also enables them to make better use of their talents. Increased participation in the labour market is an important source of economic growth, too;

³ Of Dutch single-parent families with only minor children, 23 per cent had a low income in 2016. And more than four out of ten children at risk of poverty were living in a single-parent family. Source: Statistics Netherlands, *Armoede en sociale uitsluiting* [Poverty and social exclusion], 2018.

⁴ Of all women, excluding students, 59.1 per cent were economically independent.

it boosts consumer purchasing power and generates more tax and national-insurance income. The current shortages of labour in some sectors might also be overcome more quickly if more women were available as potential recruits. Indeed, it has been calculated that greater gender equality in the labour market could add 4 per cent to gross national product per capita.⁵

The female net employment rate (the proportion of women actually in paid work) is 71 per cent. Growth is certainly possible here, and there is even more room for improvement in the number of hours they work. Almost three-quarters of all working women in the Netherlands are in a part-time job, compared to one-fifth of working men. Even at the beginning of their careers, before they have children, women are more likely than men to work part-time. And those women who start their working lives as part-timers tend to remain so, again more than men do. These statistics emerged recently from a study conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau*, SCP) on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.⁶

⁵ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), *Economic benefits of gender equality in the European Union*, 2017.

⁶ The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, *Werken aan de start – Jonge vrouwen en mannen op de arbeidsmarkt* [Work at the Start – young women and men in the labour market], 2018.

The rate of employment of older women is lower than average. Of those aged 55-60, some 67.4 per cent are employed. In the 60-65 age group, that figure is just 44.7 per cent. And in both categories they are more likely than younger women to work part-time: 78 per cent of working 55-60-year-olds do so, and 81 per cent of working 60-65-year-olds.

The government does not want to limit opportunities to work part-time. After all, many people – mainly women, but also men – choose quite deliberately to combine paid work with bringing up children or providing informal care for family members. Part-time jobs have in fact contributed to the relatively high number of women in paid work. But they also have their disadvantages, especially those with limited hours. The less people work, the less they earn and the fewer opportunities they have to develop professionally and to climb the career ladder. Small part-time jobs, in particular, maintain the unequal gender division between paid employment and unpaid care.

Moreover, taking on part-time work is certainly not a free choice for everyone. As of the end of 2017, there were 420,000 part-time employees who wanted to work more hours and were available to do so.⁷ Nearly two-thirds of them were women.

⁷ This equates to 10 per cent of all part-time workers.



Decisions around the number of hours a person works are still strongly influenced by traditional gender role patterns. Consciously or subconsciously, many women feel that it is “their place” to devote more time to care duties. And many men feel that it is theirs to be the main breadwinner. In certain sectors historically regarded as “women’s work”, such as care and education, a lot of employers still seem to offer part-time jobs almost as a matter of course. That said, in healthcare in particular many are now asking their part-timers to work more hours in order to cope with actual or impending staff shortages.

The government is committed to combatting the self-evident choice for traditional and gender-based social roles, especially amongst the younger generation. There is still plenty of ground to be gained here, in distributing work and care duties more equally between women and men. This is also a matter for educational institutions, trade unions and other stakeholders in sectors with a lot of part-time working states the SCP in the conclusion to its study. Educational institutions, for example, could pay specific attention to career expectations as part of their students’ professional orientation activities. And employers’ organizations and unions could undertake action to encourage companies in all sectors to do more to facilitate young women in their careers and to remove the obstacles they face.

The appointment of more women to senior positions

The number of women in senior positions is still too low, especially at the very top of organizations, and this situation is not changing fast enough. Appointing women at this level is important not just from the perspective of social justice, but also because only then do we make the most of the abilities of the increasingly well-educated female half of the workforce. An economy thrives best when it utilizes all talents the nation has to offer. The government is committed to diversity and inclusivity in the broadest possible sense, and is promoting them actively within companies and organizations. Greater diversity in the upper echelons can also help create a more inclusive climate at every other level.

Eliminating the gender pay gap

No-one disputes that there exists a pay gap between men and women in the Netherlands. Although figures from Statistics Netherlands for 2008-2014 show that the gender pay gap is decreasing, in both the public and the private sectors, it is still far from being eliminated.

It is important here to distinguish between the gender pay gap on the one hand and pay discrimination on the other. The former is the difference between the average gross hourly pay of male and female employees, expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly wage of the male staff. The gender pay gap can have a variety of causes, such as differences in education or between sectors. It may also be due to pay discrimination, which is when a woman (usually) is paid less than a man for work of equal value.

In the Netherlands, the overall pay gap of some 16 per cent – approximately 20 per cent in the private sector and 10 per cent in the public sector – is caused largely by the different positions generally occupied by women and men in the labour market. For example, the fact that women are less likely to hold senior roles, that they have less work experience on average and that more of them are employed in sectors where wages are lower.

The government is endeavouring to achieve greater gender equality in the labour market by, for example, increasing female participation and improving opportunities to combine work with care. These policy measures should help narrow the pay gap.

The position of women in the labour market is not the only cause, however. Outright pay discrimination also plays a part. Women are still sometimes paid less than men for equal work. In many cases this is the result of ingrained habits, such as inappropriate grading of a person’s starting salary, basing pay rates upon previous earnings rather than the requirements of the job, incorrect application of salary increments and providing salary guarantees, particular in the wake of a merger or reorganization. All of these entail a risk of the rewards not matching the value of the work being done, and that usually puts women at a disadvantage.

In its fight against pay discrimination, the government will shortly be issuing a plan of action with a particular focus upon discrimination in application procedures and pregnancy discrimination, and providing the Labour Inspectorate with strong supervisory and enforcement powers. Further policy measures to address pay discrimination are also in the pipeline.

Summary of labour-market initiatives

- Since local authorities are primarily responsible for guiding job seekers into work, whether or not they are on benefits, the government is cooperating with them to increase women’s economic independence. As part of this effort, the Economic Independence Programme (*Programma Economische Zelfstandigheid*) has been extended for 2018. The government thus provides 50 per cent financing for projects in 24 districts. Meanwhile, the Education for Women with Ambition (*Educatie voor Vrouwen met Ambitie*, EVA) project being conducted by the Dutch Literacy Foundation (*Stichting Lezen en Schrijven*) is helping to improve basic proficiency in language, computing and digital skills, areas in which more women than men in the Netherlands have difficulties that hinder their entry into the labour market.
- The government is exploring additional policy measures to counter pay discrimination.
- Compliance with the Corporate Governance and Supervision Act (*Wet bestuur en toezicht*), which sets an advisory “comply or explain” target of women holding 30 per cent of positions on boards of directors and supervisory boards, remains disappointing. Progress is too limited. Since a majority of companies do not seem to have made a priority of achieving

the target, something has to change. The government will review the situation in 2019 and is prepared to impose firmer measures if compliance is still inadequate.

- The government is planning a meeting with leading members of the Dutch business community to agree upon ways to accelerate the growth in the number of women in senior positions between now and 2019.
- The government continues to speak out on the importance of greater diversity in the upper echelons of business. Women's ability to rise "through the ranks" is an important factor in achieving this, so corporate career-advancement policies aimed at women need to be encouraged.
- At present, only 19 per cent of university professors are women. As a result, a wealth of academic talent remains unutilized. Fortunately, the Dutch universities attach great importance to gender balance and have compiled targets for the number of female professors in 2020. In recent years, all have made progress on this front. The Westerdijk Talent Impulse (*Westerdijk Talentimpuls*), which in 2017 provided them with support to appoint a hundred new female professors at a stroke and to up their previous targets, appears to have been a success: the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (*Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, NWO*) has indeed been able to confirm 100 nominations. These so-called Westerdijk professors do not count towards the existing target figures; whether they have been achieved will become clear in 2021.
- The national government itself is a major employer. In the field of gender equality, we score better than the private sector with a gender pay gap just half that of commercial businesses and 33 per cent of senior positions occupied by women. All the ministries have committed themselves to promoting diversity at the workplace by signing the Diversity Charter (*Charter Diversiteit*). In practice, this means working actively to prevent even subconscious prejudice, to create an open organizational culture and to encourage the recruitment, retention and promotion of employees, regardless of disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or cultural, ethnic or religious background. The government also supports Workplace Pride, the network of Dutch companies and institutions with an LGBTI-inclusive personnel and organizational policy. Various LGBTI staff networks are active within our own organizations, and are affiliated to Dutch Government Pride. In 2017 the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations held a number of sessions for diversity co-ordinators within government, to share know-how and experiences. Rijk 2025, our current strategic review of government HR policy, is paying particular attention to diversity and inclusivity.

Interdepartmental labour-market participation strategy

- The government is taking the following policy measures to increase female participation in the labour market, both in absolute terms and in the number of hours worked, and to achieve greater gender equality in the division of work and care tasks:
- With effect from 2019, partners will receive five days of paid parental leave. It is intended that from 1 July 2020, they will also be entitled to an additional five weeks on 70 per cent of their salary. When men spend more time looking after their new-born child, this tends to encourage a more equal distribution of care tasks between the parents in the long term. Moreover, a more generous overall leave entitlement should enhance female labour-market participation by reducing the discrepancies between men and women in this respect.
- The government is investing €250 million in childcare allowance. This means that many families where both parents work can expect to receive a more generous allowance if their child goes to daycare.
- The tax burden on working people is to be eased by reducing income-tax rates and increasing employee tax credit. This will make it more financially attractive to enter the workforce, and for part-time workers more rewarding to extend the number of hours they work.
- Particular attention is to be paid to groups of women whose economic independence is relatively limited, especially single mothers, those with few educational qualifications and those with a migrant background. The government considers it important that single parents be active in the labour market, preferably through paid work, so that they serve as role models for their children and to prevent poverty being passed on from one generation to the next. For those with a non-Western background, we are currently establishing the programme Further Integration with the Labour Market (*Verdere Integratie op de Arbeidsmarkt, VIA*) to reduce their distance from suitable jobs.

- We are actively fighting discrimination in the labour market, and before the summer recess we will present a follow-up to the current Employment Discrimination Action Plan to Parliament. This will include measures against age discrimination.
- As part of its Pregnancy Discrimination Action Plan, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is financing a project to encourage working women and female job seekers of childbearing age to stay in or find work during pregnancy and early motherhood.
- To combat discrimination against transgender persons in the labour market, the government is planning awareness-raising, coaching and workforce-integration activities. The Transgender Network Netherlands (*Transgender Netwerk Nederland, TNN*) recently submitted a proposal to introduce paid transition leave.

To achieve greater gender equality in the labour market, co-operation with all its stakeholders is crucial. The government cannot achieve this goal without more awareness on the part of employers and the general public. To this end, we have entered into strategic partnerships with two alliances of civil society organizations.⁸

- “Together It Works” (*Samen werkt het*) encourages men and women, but especially women in a financially vulnerable position, to take advantage of the opportunities available to combine paid work with unpaid care duties.
- “Work and the Future” (*Werk.en.de.Toekomst*) seeks to break down employment-related gender stereotypes in education, the labour market and government.

⁸ With effect from 1 January 2018, eight strategic partnerships between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and civil society organizations have been initiated in pursuit of various equality objectives. They include the two alliances described below.

2. Safety, security and acceptance
safe communities, education,
vulnerable minorities,
sustainable infrastructure

The Dutch government is committed to safety, security and acceptance for everyone in the Netherlands, with a particular focus upon the following aspects:

- Less harassment and violence against women
- Greater safety, security and acceptance for LGBTI persons

More than other groups, women and LGBTI persons face sexual assault and other forms of violence or feel unsafe, both in public space and at home, at school, at the workplace, in healthcare and in sport.

Despite slight recent improvements, acceptance of LGBTI persons in some bicultural and religious communities is still a cause of concern.

Sexual and gender-based violence against women is rooted in unequal power relations between women and men, reflecting the structural inequalities experienced by women in all aspects of their lives, from education to work. Such violence should not just be seen as a “women’s problem”; the majority of perpetrators are men, after all.⁹ They have to be part of the solution as well.

The causes of violence against LGBTI persons include intolerance of gender and sexual diversity.

Summary of safety, security and acceptance initiatives

- The Dutch government is extending its partnerships with so-called “Rainbow Cities” (*Regenboog Steden*) – local authorities committed to improving the public acceptance and safety of LGBTI persons – to 2022. An increasing number of authorities are introducing active, positive LGBTI policies, and some provinces are also joining this effort. Within the partnerships, we shall be examining how that provincial input can strengthen initiatives at the local level.
- The Safe Cities (*Veilige Steden*) project focuses on combatting sexual violence in public space. While a lot of gender-based violence occurs behind closed doors, many women report harassment or assaults on the streets, at the workplace, on public transport and in nightlife. Safe Cities financially supports local safety initiatives focusing upon women. Between now and 2022, cooperating local authorities will receive financial contributions to tackle problems as street harassment and sexual aggression and violence in nightlife. Where possible, activities will be linked to local initiatives around LGBTI safety and the sexual resilience of girls and boys.
- Over the next three years, the government will be supporting the activities of Fier and Femmes for Freedom, organizations targeting harmful traditional practices and helping girls and women from migrant and refugee communities to fulfil their ambitions.

⁹ Two-thirds of sexual assaults on men aged 16 and over are also committed by men. Source: Rutgers, *Monitor seksuele gezondheid* [Sexual health monitor], 2018.





- In the spring of 2018, the government and the Association of Dutch Local Authorities (*Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten*, VNG) are launching a joint programme against domestic violence and child abuse.
- Together with the police, the government supports the national Naturally Together Alliance (*Alliantie Natuurlijk Samen*), set up to tackle hate crimes against LGBTI persons in the domestic environment and public space. We are now studying whether this approach can be extended to combat other grounds of discrimination.
- The government is exploring the possibility to support national diversity initiatives targeting sports clubs, trainers, supporters, referees and umpires. The primary focus here is co-operation with Rainbow cities, sports organizations and LGBTI advocacy groups.
- The government supports the activities of the still vulnerable national networks of bicultural LGBTI persons¹⁰ and of LGBTI Christians.¹¹
- To better understand the needs and experiences of parents of intersex/DSD¹² children, the National Research Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) is conducting a review intended to result in an online compendium of “real-life” experiences, a report containing policy recommendations for the childraising, social, educational and care sectors and an expert meeting for education and healthcare professionals.
- At the request of the Transgender Network Netherlands, the government is to review policy and regulations in such areas as gender registration, labour-market participation, social security and research with a view to improving the situation of transgender persons.
- Culture can encourage debate about sensitive issues. For this reason, more support is to be provided – from the international cultural policy budget – for cultural activities related to gender and LGBTI equality. The government also contributes to the internationally renowned library and archive of IHLIA in the area of LGBT heritage.
- The government supports the LGBTI community in the Dutch Caribbean and on Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten¹³ through, for example, contributions to local initiatives around the sexual resilience of young people in the Caribbean Netherlands. An alliance of national LGBTI advocacy group COC Netherlands, the Transgender Network Netherlands and the Netherlands Intersex/DSD Network (NNID/Interseks) administers the so-called Pink-Orange Agreement project on the islands.

¹⁰ Maruf/European Queer Muslim Network.

¹¹ LCC+/LKP/Holy Females/Contrario/Verscheurd/CHJC/Mirre/FORUM.

¹² The medical abbreviation for intersex variations. Officially, DSD stands for “disorders of sex development”. However, many intersex persons prefer the term “differences of sex development”.

¹³ The Dutch Caribbean is the islands of Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, which are administered as “special municipalities” of the Netherlands proper. Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten are self-governing – autonomous – territories within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Implementation of safety, security and acceptance commitments in the national coalition Rainbow agreement (Regenboogakkoord) – Orange is always part of the rainbow

- The national government coalition agreement states that a number of existing educational goals are to be refined, including those concerning sexuality and sexual diversity. These are to incorporate sexual resilience. Firm proposals to this effect will be ready by the end of 2019.
- Safety, security and acceptance, including acceptance of sexual diversity, becomes part of the secondary-level teacher-training curriculum with effect from the 2018-2019 academic year. It is also to be included in the curriculum of the primary-teacher training colleges.
- Together with the National Council for Secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET), the government is strengthening citizenship education, which includes the theme of sexual diversity. The Dutch Inspectorate of Education (*Inspectie Onderwijs*) is overseeing this improvement. Meanwhile, the School and Safety Foundation (*Stichting School en Veiligheid*) is supporting the VET sector in compiling safety policies and creating a safe climate in its schools and colleges.
- The Sexual Diversity in VET (*Seksuele Diversiteit in het MBO*) project is being extended to 2020. Developed jointly by COC Netherlands and Theater AanZ, this project uses an interactive theatrical performance to instigate discussion of sexual diversity in a manner appropriate to VET students. Another important aspect is a tutor training session, in particular supporting those teaching Careers and Citizenship, under which sexual diversity falls.
- The government is backing initiatives to prevent LGBTI youth suicides, proposals for which are currently being developed by Movisie (the Netherlands Centre for Social Development), 113 Suicide Prevention and COC Netherlands. The focus here is upon involving parents, updating the website ledereenisanders.nl,¹⁴ evaluating e-learning opportunities and using the national network of in-school Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs a.k.a. Gay Straight Alliances) to break the taboo surrounding this theme.
- Whilst the Netherlands considers itself part of a European community of values, unfortunately those values are not always shared in practice across the continent. Especially when it comes to the freedom of LGBTI persons to be who they are, the picture is a very mixed one. In some regions legal protections, equal

treatment and the social acceptance of sexual minorities are making significant advances, but elsewhere this space is actually shrinking.

- Internationally, the government remains committed to freedom and equal rights for LGBTI persons. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is calling specifically for abolition of the criminalization of homosexuality, action to combat discrimination and violence, and the promotion of social acceptance. The Minister for LGBTI Equality intends – together with like-minded colleagues – to seek broader and extended support for the European LGBTI network and strategic partners (ILGA Europe, Transgender Europe, IGLYO Europe and OII Europe), and to further embed exchanges of good legislative and policy practices. These plans are to be presented at the annual meeting of ILGA Europe in October 2018.
- Because the Dutch Caribbean, Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten are relatively advanced in their region in terms of LGBTI equality, the government intends to work with local community representatives, public officials and advocacy organizations (such as Out Right and COC Netherlands) to consider holding a regional meeting to encourage equal rights for LGBTI persons in the Caribbean.
- The government continues to pursue its policy of supporting equal rights for LGBTI persons worldwide.

In implementing the above commitments, the government works closely with civil society organizations which have formed the following strategic partnerships around the theme of safety, security and acceptance:

- Shared Pride, Shared Happiness (*Gedeelde Trots, Gedeeld Geluk*): an alliance of LGBTI groups focusing upon safety, security, education, employment, the media, health, politics, law and lifestyles.
- Change from Within (*Verandering van binnenuit*), with a focus upon the personal safety of women and LGBTI persons, as well as the acceptance of gender equality and sexual diversity within refugee and migrant communities.
- Act4respect, which aims to prevent gender-based violence among children and young adults. It focuses upon both victims and perpetrators, actual and potential.

¹⁴ Operated jointly by Movisie and COC Netherlands for LGBTI youngsters, their parents and professionals.

3. Gender diversity and equal treatment the media, the young and stronger legislation



The Dutch government believes in personal freedom to shape one's own identity, regardless of imposed gender norms and without discrimination, with a particular focus upon the following aspects:

- Better media representation of women and LGBTI persons
- Facilitating gender diversity for children and young adults
- Equal treatment as outlined in the so-called "rainbow agreements" in the national government coalition agreement

The term "gender neutrality", sometimes used when discussing sexual identity, can be interpreted as meaning that people should no longer feel or act like men or women. The government therefore prefers the term "gender diversity": the goal is not uniformity, but rather space for more choices.

Today's society makes certain expectations of people on the basis of gender norms – that is, ideas about how women and men should behave. These can have adverse effects, however. They may impede the individual development of a girl who, despite her talent for mathematics, does not go on to study a technical subject. Or a boy who would make a great primary-school teacher but opts for another profession instead. And they are why women are still paid less than their male colleagues for doing the same job, or gay footballers stay "in the closet" for their own safety.

By combating stereotypes, the Dutch government aims to increase freedom for everyone: men and women, girls and boys, and also those people who cannot be pigeonholed that easily. In this way we promote equal treatment and reduce social problems such as bullying, unequal division of labour and care duties, LHBTI-phobia and violence in dependency relationships.

Better media representation of women and LGBTI persons

Both traditional and new media show us a limited picture of our society. Neither women nor ethnic minorities are well-represented and, like LGBTI persons, they are often depicted in stereotypical ways. Indeed, the proportion of women appearing on Dutch public-service television actually decreased between 2010 and 2015. Even media professionals are often not aware of the true situation. For example, more than half believe that 20-40 per cent of on-screen experts are female, whereas the actual figure is 12 per cent. Such skewed representation, combined with stereotypical perceptions, maintains preconceived ideas about gender, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation. Which in turn affects our behaviour as media consumers, and our opportunities in life. The media deserve specific attention in this respect because they continuously influence how people think and judge, and because they play an important role in perpetuating existing stereotypes.

In the Netherlands, freedom of media expression is guaranteed in the Constitution. There is no question of challenging this, of course; quite rightly, the government should be very reticent in impinging upon such a fundamental principle. However, the media, including the advertising industry, do operate in a social context. So it is important that they be aware of changing attitudes regarding sexist and other stereotypes, and of their own influence in this area. The government therefore encourages and facilitates their self-regulation where necessary, desirable and possible. Countering media stereotyping of women and LGBTI persons is one way in which the government is implementing the recommendations of the international Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Facilitating gender diversity for children and young adults

The government believes that all young people, and society as a whole, benefit from abandoning stereotype-driven educational choices in favour of making space for each individual pupil to choose subjects and studies in line with their own abilities and interests, regardless of gender.

Equal treatment as outlined in the “rainbow agreements”

- During its term of office, the current government intends to work energetically to implement the agreements contained in its coalition agreement to strengthen LGBTI equality and promote equal treatment.¹⁵
- Summary of gender diversity and equal treatment initiatives and proposals
- NGO Women Inc is endeavouring to broaden the alliance of media professionals raising awareness within the industry of the importance of balanced female and LGBTI representation. In this way the government hopes to enhance diversity throughout the media, including advertising.
- The government is considering how the representation of women and LGBTI persons in the media can be investigated in a structural manner.
- The government is to conduct a preliminary internal review of its own communication, on the basis of which we can initiate a debate on how to set the right example by making this as neutral as possible.
- The government plans to discuss stereotyping in educational resources with publishers and other stakeholders. While we cannot and will not prescribe anything in this area, we can stimulate debate.

- The government is contributing to initiatives to encourage more boys to pursue careers in primary education and more girls to go into STEM.
- The Transgender Persons Registration Act (Wet erkenning transgenderpersonen) has recently been evaluated by the Utrecht Centre for European Research into Family Law. The evaluation report is due to be compiled shortly, together with an official policy response.
- The alliance Work and the Future is developing a database of “counterstereotypes”, featuring role models working in sectors typically seen as male or female.
- When it comes to health, there are still major differences between the sexes. Women suffer from poorer health than men. Gender awareness in this area means that sex-specific care is often required; in other words, equality of care requires unequal medical treatment. LGBTI persons also have specific needs in this respect. The government is committed to inclusive care for all. As part of this effort, the Bespoke Healthcare Alliance (Alliantie gezondheidszorg op maat) promotes gender-sensitive and LGBTI-sensitive care and treatment.

Implementation of gender diversity and equal treatment commitments in the national coalition Rainbow agreement – *Orange is always of the rainbow*

- The government is fast-tracking a parliamentary bill amending the Criminal Code to increase maximum sentences for hate speech.
- The government plans to commission studies on parental authority and multiple parentage.
- The government is committed to limiting unnecessary gender registration wherever possible, as well as the use of gender as a personal-data variable. It is already investigating possibilities in this respect, and further consultations are to be held this spring with advocacy groups, patient organizations and academic institutions.

¹⁵ In addition to the measures already being taken by the government in this area, two legislative proposals are currently under consideration. One would amend the Equal Treatment Act (*Algemene wet gelijke behandeling*) to clarify the legal status of transgender and intersex persons. The other seeks to add sexual orientation and disability to the grounds for discrimination prohibited under Article 1 of the Constitution.



Canal Parade, Amsterdam

Orange is always
part of the rainbow

