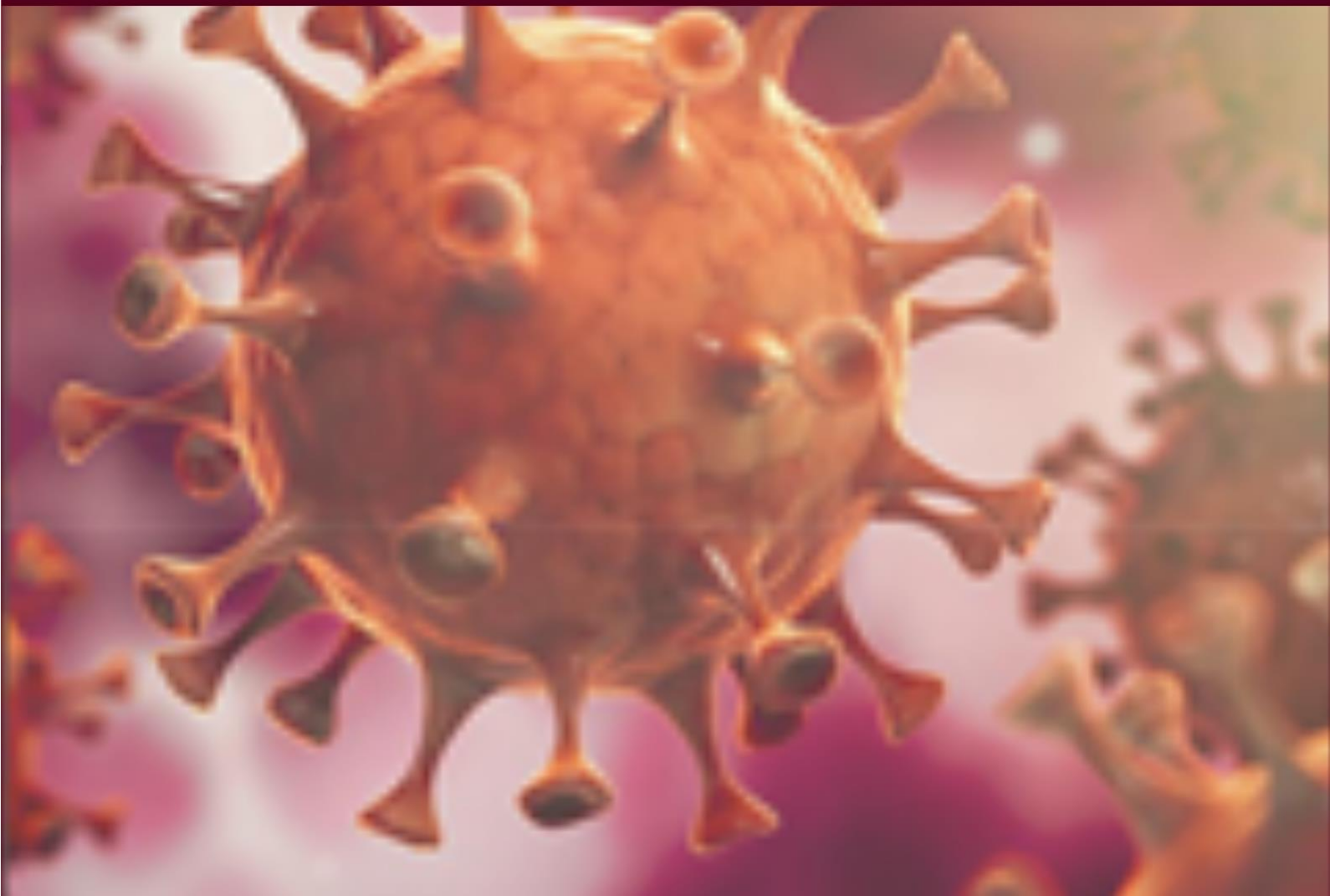


Gender Election Observation Mission
The Netherlands 2021

GEOM NL 2021

FINAL REPORT

1st September 2021



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Final Report GENDER ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION (GEOM)

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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:

I would like to express my gratitude for having the opportunity to observe the Parliamentary Election held this year in The Netherlands. This election has been a historic event, not only for Dutch civil society, but especially for all women and female candidates, as the highest historical number of women in parliament was reached. It has been an honor and a privilege, that Gender Concerns International had the opportunity to assess the standard of electoral practice from a gender perspective, facilitated through the second Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) in The Netherlands. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who supported the mission and contributed to its successful completion.

The election 2021 is considered unique due to its great adaptability to the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures introduced to ensure that voting progressed safely reflect the excellent Dutch commitment to the institution of democracy. Moreover, the number of political parties participating in the elections was exceptional with a listing of 37 parties in total. 10 parties were led by women, which is the highest number in the history of Dutch parliamentary elections.

I would like to kindly thank the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations of The Netherlands for the invitation to observe the elections, and the support and guidance provided by Her Excellency the Minister Ollongren and her team in the lead up to the election. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Election Commission for their cooperation in enabling the GEOM 2021.

As stated in GEOM NL 2017 report, 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 only election observation from a gender perspective, the Gender Election Observation Mission recognizes the vital importance in assessing elections through a gender lens. In doing so, gaps and possible improvements can be identified 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 nation's continued adherence to [the 1954 Charter of the Kingdom of The Netherlands](#), [the 2008 Constitution of The Netherlands](#), [the 1989 Elections Act](#) and [the 1989 Elections Decree](#), which stipulate equal opportunities for all inhabitants of The Netherlands.

I am thankful to the Joint Head of Mission and the Core Team for their inspiring dedication throughout the GEOM observation and reporting process. I am also pleased to acknowledge the commitment of all Observers, including representatives from various European organisations, academics and most importantly our young team members. Gratitude is extended to the team that has helped in finalizing the report for public information.

Based on its findings, Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) The Netherlands 2021, draws its conclusions, and presents its recommendations through this report independently and as a signatory, in accordance with the 2005 United Nations Declaration of Principles (DoPs) for International Election Observations.

It is my hope that the findings of the report contribute to identify Gender Gaps in political equality that persist in The Netherlands and its recommendations provide motivation and guidance to all relevant stakeholders who have power to empower. Thank you!

Sabra Bano

Head of Mission

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. Nevertheless, despite women constituting at least half of the electorate in the majority of countries, women continue to have unequal access to political and economic decision-making processes.

1.2 GEOM NL 2021: Objectives of the Mission

In order to monitor and support female participation in Dutch politics, Gender Concerns International was invited by the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations of The Netherlands to observe the national election.

The GEOM NL 2021 was a female-led and mainly female-operated Mission, equipped with a great amount of expertise in election observation. It poses the follow-up Mission to the GEOM NL 2017.

During the three-day election, taking place in 15th, 16th and 17th of March 2021, 19 observers were deployed in all 19 electoral districts of the mainland of The Netherlands. They observed all aspects of the opening, polling, closing and counting. Special attention was also paid to COVID-19 restrictions, as this was the first Dutch Election held in the pandemic.

A comprehensive analysis of the pre-electoral framework, the elections themselves and of the results follows in this report.

1.3 Context

The Netherlands is widely regarded as an emancipated, liberal, and tolerant country, allowing for female participation in public life. Nevertheless, key positions in politics have never been represented by a woman, such as Head of Government or Foreign Affairs Minister.

After the 2017 Elections, women achieved 35% representation in the national parliament, remaining above the EU average of 28%. Only one established party was led by a woman in the last national election.

Special measures, for instance, legally binding quotas to fulfil for electoral seats to be reserved for women, are not in place. The proportional representation voting system is deemed to favor female representation in elections, however, it does not guarantee gender parity on candidate's lists and in parliament.

1.4 Electoral System

The country is divided into 20 electoral districts, which consist of several regions. Candidates, who obtain votes equal to at least 25% of the electoral quota, are elected notwithstanding their position on the list. Candidates are then given the remaining seats based on the order of the list. No legal threshold exists for parties and candidates to obtain representation and seats in the elections.

There are 150 representatives to the House of Representatives, voted via a system of proportional representation and based on preferential voting.

A new record of 89 parties registered for the election, with 37 finally participating. Out of these 37, 10 were led by a woman, another record.

1.5 Electoral Administration

126 polling stations in The Netherlands were observed by Gender Concerns International. 52.595% of the polling staff was found to be female overall, and 47.405% was male. 53.6% were headed by women and 44.8% by men. This is an advance of female electoral participation and implementation of the recommendation made by GEOM NL 2017, which demanded gender parity in all positions of polling staff. However, it was also found, that not all districts record the gender of polling station heads and staff, on account of a gender-neutral policy.

1.6 Voter Registration

The Election Commission does not keep records of voter data, which is kept by municipalities, as their main tasks are to facilitate the election process, ensure the logistics are complete, and determine the results of the elections.

Eligible voters must have Dutch nationality, be 18 years or older and not be excluded from the right to vote. Voters, who are registered at a Dutch municipality, can also participate from abroad, via post or in the form of proxy vote.

1.7 Election Campaigning

Election campaigning is unregulated in The Netherlands. There is no official campaign period, and campaigning may take place up to and on Election Day. However, campaigning at polling stations is forbidden.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, campaigns heavily relied on the use of the online and social media platforms. A gross amount of €13,772,054 was spent in the media on campaigns, online display advertising and social media.

During the campaigning period, parties, that submitted candidate lists in at least 19 out of 20 electoral districts, received additional free airtime. Male politicians were featured twice as much as women, with Prime Minister Rutte being seen and heard the most often (214 times). Even though women appear less, they speak for longer, when they do appear, at an average of 2 minutes and 5 seconds, whereas men appear for 1 minute and 11 seconds.

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.

1.8 Election Day

GEOM NL 2021 observed a total of 4059 people cast their vote. 2030 of these were women, and 2029 were men, an almost exact gender split. Women were observed to be more often accompanied by a child and asking for help in the polling station.

The COVID-19 pandemic was taken into consideration by providing health checks, hygiene measures, early voting, postal voting and proxy voting.

1.9 Election Results

10,462,677 people voted in the Dutch Elections for the House of Representatives, making the turnout 78.81%.

Of the 150 available seats, a total of 59 women were elected to the House of Representatives in 2021. Therefore, 39.3% of the seats are held by women, which is not representative of the population of The Netherlands, constituted of 51% women.

Despite the fact, that the number of female parliamentarians has risen for 3 of the top 5 parties, they still only make up a relatively small percentage of the parliamentary representation. Only the PvdA, that won total of 9 seats in both the 2017 and 2021 elections, consists of 55% women in parliamentary seats, showcasing more than an equitable representation of women. In the Elections 2021, 3 women were elected to the House of Representatives through Preferential Voting. 1 was from Volt, and 2 were from GroenLinks. 2 of these women superseded men, who were listed higher on the candidate list.

1.10 Conclusion

The 2021 Elections were historical for women. Never before have that many political parties been led by women and the number of women in parliament increased. Within Electoral Administration, gender parity has also been achieved in many polling stations. The role of women in electoral politics has therefore been confirmed and stabilized.

However, obstacles remain. The Dutch female population is not adequately represented in politics yet and further support and capacity-building is necessary, to encourage female political participation.

To this end, Gender Concerns International has therefore formulated key recommendations (see table of recommendations) in order to galvanize the work already done and harness further support in order to ensure that the level of women's empowerment achieved to date is seen as a benchmark to beat and not a threshold to be maintained.

Introduction

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) every citizen has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through chosen representatives. These political rights are recognized as universal, inalienable, and indivisible. Nevertheless, despite women constituting a majority population in many countries, and considering a global movement towards democratization, women are marginalized and remain largely underrepresented at the levels of political, environmental, and economic decision-making.

In 1995, the **Beijing Platform for Action** called upon countries to reach the aim of having 30% women in decision-making positions. The Platform highlighted women's rights as human rights, placing it on the top priorities at public policies. With the recognition of the rights of the women and the progress made during the past decades, the average worldwide women's political representation is still at a dismal 20%. The European average of political representation of women in national parliaments is at 28%.

As the notion of gender-inclusive decision-making gained weight, various measures have been taken to address the issue of female underrepresentation in politics. In Europe, the number of women politicians has increased and stabilized, however, not yet reached the goal of parity. Gender-specific concerns on European political agenda create further obstacles to achieve democracy based on gender equality.

Gender Concerns International recognizes this gender disparity and actively works to bridge the gender-gap. The tool of the Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) was designed to identify gender discrimination in electoral systems worldwide. GEOM, led, managed, and reported by women, aims at observing elections and electoral processes through a gendered lens. Since about a decade and a half GEOM are conducted internationally. Based on the observations made, GEOM findings and conclusions are drawn to design recommendations for improvement, specifically tailored for the respective country and within a relevant context.

GEOM NL 2021 was launched to observe the General Election of March 2021 in The Netherlands. The Mission has been facilitated by Gender Concerns International to assess women's electoral participation in The Netherlands, especially as a follow-up to GEOM NL 2017, marking the progress made and recommendations adopted during the past years.

GEOM NL 2021 keenly noted as to how a global pandemic can disproportionately affect women's political and electoral participation and how well-equipped the Election Council, the municipalities and the polling stations were to cater the needs of women during Covid-19 pandemic.

Through its findings, GEOM contributes to highlight the wide political participatory gender-gap that perpetuates gender discrimination and is still prevalent within Western Europe.

Conclusively, GEOM recommendations are designed to inspire and contribute to attaining the goal of parity base governance, accelerated through a fair and transparent electoral system, free from any gender discrimination.

2. Gender Election Observation Missions (GEOM)

Gender Concerns International has been facilitating Gender Election Observation Missions since 2008, building on its expertise in observing elections from a gender perspective. Such Missions have been launched and concluded in Pakistan (2008, [2013](#)); Libya ([2012](#)) Tunisia ([2014](#)); Myanmar ([2015](#)); Morocco ([2016](#)); Netherlands ([2017](#)). All GEOMs have been conducted in accordance with the [Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation](#) and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, as one of the 55 international signatories.¹

2.1 GEOM NL 2021

The first GEOM The Netherlands Mission was launched, in 2017, to mark one hundred years of the acknowledgement of Dutch women's suffrage. Succeeding the success of this observation Mission in 2017, a follow up observation Mission for the Dutch 2021 general elections has been facilitated. It has been an honour to have this opportunity to conduct the GEOM where the organisation has based its Headquarters, namely in The Hague. The GEOM NL 2021 observation Mission required extra logistical and strategical planning due to the COVID-19 virus.

This Mission is a predominantly female observation team, observing the elections with a gendered lens. The areas of observation are focused on the participation of women as **election administrators, voters and candidates**. The observation guides mainly to collect information on male female and broader gender balance of polling station staff and heads of the stations. GEOM NL 2021 has particularly observed COVID-19 rules impact on female participation by observing, if women are fully included as voters, polling officials and candidates in the electoral process on election day. The Mission highlights its findings and draws recommendations to improve on the future democratic process in The Netherlands, as elections provide a significant opportunity for women in The Netherlands to participate in the political structures that shapes future economic and social reforms.

2.1.1 Mission Deployment

Following many years of good cooperation and contact with the Dutch Election Commission (Kiesraad), GEOM NL 2021 successfully underwent the accreditation process in the beginning of 2021. 19 members were awarded with the honourable title of international observer, after which the team gathered in an online environment to discuss the logistics and specifics of the Mission. Most coordination, including training and expert exchange sessions, were held online. Many regular coordination meetings and consultations were organized with the core team. Several pre-election training and consultation sessions were facilitated with GEOM Observers, led by the Head of Mission. A three-day observation Mission by a team of 19 has provided an opportunity to observe 19 out of 20 electoral districts and gain an insightful observation experience.

¹ <http://www.genderconcerns.org/publications/GEOM-NL-2021-code-of-conduct/>



One of the two Internal training sessions.

The GEOM NL 2021 Team was honoured to attend an information session organized by the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations. The Minister of Interior, Kajsa Ollongren, warmly welcomed all International Observers to the country and briefed them about the preparation of the election by the Election Commission and her Ministry in detail. Head of GEOM Mission director and GCI Sabra Bano expressed her gratitude to the Minister for facilitating the international election observation in The Netherlands and congratulated her Ministry for organizing the Information Session and the accreditation of the Missions. The GEOM Head praised the Ministry for an efficient and cordial cooperation with International Elections Observation teams and especially with such an improved interaction with observation Missions.

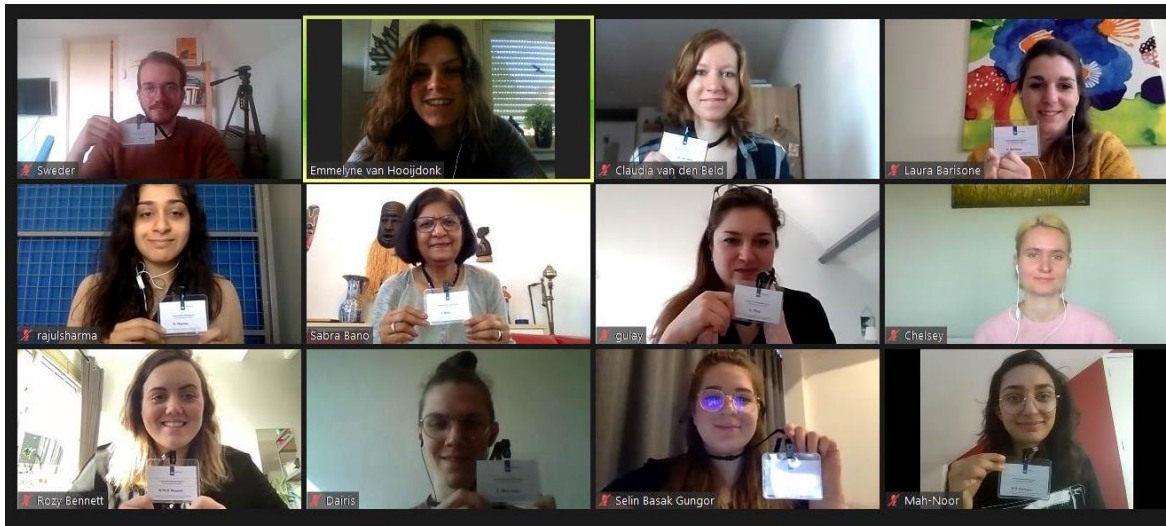
The Minister cordially spoke with all Head of the Missions. Following the Information session with the ministry, the GEOM NL 2021 Head of Mission reached out to all other international Missions and offered cooperation to them, GEOM being a home-based Mission in The Netherlands.



Information Session with Minister Kajsa Ollongren.

2.1.2 Post-Election Period

After the elections, the GEOM Team came together virtually to discuss the field experience, remarks and other notable observations.



Final GEOM NL 2021 Meeting.

2.2 Composition of GEOM NL 2021

The GEOM NL 2021 was led and established by a professional team of female electoral experts, ensuring the facilitation of an international collaboration of representatives to provide valuable observation insights from a broad range of perspectives. The international observers team consisted of 19 people, 14 of whom were women, 4 males and 1 non-binary person, as listed below.

Head of Mission

- Sabra Bano

Joint Head of Mission

- Lucyna de Graaf

Core Team

- Coordinator: Rosalind Bennett
- Communications: Emmelyne van Hoojdonk
- Legal Support: Chelsey Healy
- Organisational Liason: Mah-Noor Heitlager

International Observers

- Ahmed Hussain
- Amara Verhoosel
- Antoinette Mutesa
- Claudia van den Beld
- Dairis Dravniek
- Gülay Fitoz
- Kate Pos
- Laura Barisone
- Mah-Noor Heitlager
- Rajul Sharma
- Selin Başak Güngör
- Sweder Breet
- Tristan Widodojoatmodjo
- Wouter Hartog van Banda

2.3 Aims and Objectives

The main objective of the GEOM NL 2021 has been to observe the Dutch Election Management System to identify the Electoral Gender Gap and to note if any form of discrimination against women and minority voters subsists that prevents their equal participation and full inclusion in the electoral process.

The Mission recognises the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into electoral processes, through the engagement of civil society organisations and by capacity building of the national institutions.

Further, GEOM NL 2021 ensures the credibility of observations conducted during a crisis recovery phase. Observing elections through a gendered-lens and reporting its findings, is vital to the integrity of the democratic process. Lessons learnt during COVID-19 elections observation offer guidance to other Election Management Bodies and Observations Missions for holding free, fair and transparent elections during this pandemic. GEOM NL 2021 provides an opportunity to distinguish any gender disparities during voting due to COVID-19 measures.

The Mission oversees, if women's participation in policy making structures is hindered due to health crises or global pandemics. The Mission aimed to follow as to what extent the Dutch COVID-19 measures were being implemented, and that to what magnitude the pandemic may derail the democratic process and whether the elections are held by compromising its reliability.

Additionally, the Mission's objective is to shed light on the differences in the findings of 2017 and 2021 GEOM NL to mark any progress made on gender electoral parity.

GEOM NL 2021 aims to report on electoral administration from a gender perspective and the role of national electoral institutions in ensuring that the gender equal electoral access is in place and there are measures taken to further improve this situation. The Mission anticipates also to mark the progress made at the Electoral Commission in facilitating international election observation practice. Furthermore, GEOM NL 2021 hopes that its findings will spark a dialogue regarding electoral gender equality between national institutions and civil society organizations to jointly work towards closing the political gender gap.

GEOM NL 2021 aims that its observation-based findings and recommendations may serve as tools to influence policy focused on enhancing women's political participation in the post-election period.

3. The Status of Women in the Political Arena in The Netherlands

3.1 Position of The Netherlands

The Netherlands is widely regarded as an emancipated, liberal, and tolerant country. According to the Gender Equality Index, The Netherlands ranks 5th in the EU, with 74.1 out of 100 points, which is 6.2 points above the EU's score.² 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. The Netherlands consistently makes a positive effort to fulfil its commonly cited role, in Europe and around the globe, and stands out as an exemplary nation encouraging women in governance and at leadership positions.

² "Gender Equality Index, Index score for Netherlands for the 2020 edition," EIGE Europa, accessed May 7th, 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/NL>.

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 promoting female political inclusion have not been thoroughly developed or have been implemented to an adequate degree. Dutch politics remains largely a male-dominated arena, reinforcing marginalizing patriarchal social norms and practices that inhibit participation and weaken legitimacy.

The Netherlands has not yet had a female Head of Government. In a recent survey conducted in The Netherlands, 36% of men did not agree with having a female Prime Minister.³ Various key ministerial positions in The Netherlands have never been represented by a woman, including the Foreign Affairs Minister, Finance Minister and the Minister of Security and Justice. This is a relatively low standard in comparison to the rest of Europe.

3.2 House of Representatives

There has been an increase in the number of women parliamentarians since the 2017 elections, where there was 1 political party with a female leader, and 54 women in total, in the House of Representatives. In 2021, 59 women were elected to the House of Representatives, and 7 of the 17 parties in the House of Representatives are led by a woman. This increases the proportion of women in the House from 35% to 39%.

In the 2017 elections, of the 28 participating parties, 4 had a female leader, but only 1 was an established party. Out of the 1,114 nominated candidates, 35% were female⁴. In 2021, of the 37 parties running, 10 were ran by women. Of the 954 nominated candidates, 36.4% were female. Therefore, in 2017 there were 390 women running, and 347 women running in 2021. As this is a small percentage increase overall, this may indicate a movement towards gender parity on candidate lists.

The Netherlands remains **above the EU average of 28% 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% by 1995 and 50% by 2000. Additionally, the critical mass of at least 30% 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.

Despite The Netherlands complying with the 1995 target and the recent increase in female political participation, **39% is still a long way from adhering to the ECOSOC target of 50% which was meant to be reached by 2000, as males continue to dominate politics in The Netherlands.**

³ “Opinions on having a female Prime Minister in The Netherlands 2019, by gender,” Statista, accessed May 7th, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/981317/opinions-on-having-a-female-prime-minister-in-the-netherlands-by-gender/>.

⁴ “Final Report, Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM), The Netherlands 2017,” Gender Concerns International, (Report), 14, <http://www.genderconcerns.org/pdfs/Final%20Report%20GEOM%20Netherlands%202017%20-%20digital%20version.pdf>.

4. The Legal Framework of The Netherlands

4.1 The Dutch Constitution

The current Dutch political system is underscored by the constitution, originally created in 1848. Article I of the electoral framework detailed in the Constitution reads: “All persons in The Netherlands 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. The Dutch political system is based on a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy of two Houses.

4.2 The International Framework

The Netherlands is a signatory to 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).

4.3 House of Representative Elections

Elections for the House of Representatives are held every four years. The country is divided into 20 electoral districts, which consist of several regions. Candidates, who obtain votes equal to at least 25% of the electoral quota, are elected notwithstanding their position on the list. Candidates are then given the remaining seats based on the order of the list. No legal threshold exists for parties and candidates to obtain representation and seats in the elections.

There are 150 representatives to the House of Representatives, voted via a system of proportional representation and based on preferential voting. There are no legally binding quotas to fulfil 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.

5. Political Parties

5.1 Registration of Political Parties and Candidates

A new record of 89 parties registered with the national voting council for the March 17 General Election, beating the previous record of 81. This includes 26 new parties. Political groups must register for the election up to forty-three days before the deadline for candidate list nomination. However, COVID-19 related temporary rules introduced an increase in the timeframe for the collection and verification of supporting signatures from 14 to 28 days, with the period for nomination opening earlier and the 1 February deadline remaining. In order to register a candidate list, political parties, who are not in the parliament, must submit a deposit of 11, 250 Euro, supply 30 support signatures from each of the total 20 constituencies, and written consent from all the candidates. Out of the 89 political parties that registered, only 37 participated in the elections: the rest failed to meet the criteria outlined above. Parties that obtained at least 15 seats in the previous parliamentary elections may include a maximum of 80 candidates on their lists, while other parties are limited to 50.

5.2 Women in Political Leadership Positions

In 1977, the PPR Party (now known as Groen Links) became the first party to be led by a woman. Although this appeared to be a step in the right direction, slow progress has been made in securing women in political leadership positions. In 1992, the Dutch government introduced measures to facilitate an increase in 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 are no laws or penalties enforced upon political parties that fail to increase the number of women.

Some parties have introduced several measures to promote women within the party. In 2004, Christen Unie adopted a resolution to ensure that at least one in every three candidates are women. The PvdA works with national lists that are in principle alternated between men and women, although other concerns such as age and ethnicity are also considered. Groen Links established voluntary quotas for women.

Record breaking improvements have been made in the 2021 election with 10 of the 37 parties having a woman as party leader.

Female Leaders of Political Parties in the 2021 Elections, used as part of the Gender Concerns International 1:1 Campaign.



It is important to have women in leadership positions to represent and advocate their own perspectives and concerns. Of the four MPs, who are to pass a private member's bill through the House that regulates equal wages for equal work, three are women.⁵

5.3 Candidates from Ethnic Minorities & LGBTQ+ Community

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 national and federal parliaments in The Netherlands. Between 2002 and 2012, 70% of the ethnic minority representatives in the House of Representatives were women. Subsequent to

⁵ Hanneke Keultjes, "Ten Female Party Leaders, a record: 'Visibility of women in politics is crucial,'" *AD News*, February 16th, 2021, <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/tien-vrouwelijke-lijsttrekkers-een-record-zichtbaarheid-vrouw-in-politiek-cruciaal~a770cf8d/>.

the 2010 elections, an almost gender balanced representation of ethnic minority men and women was achieved.⁶

The recruitment of ethnic minority representatives is seen most often in parties with left-wing ideologies. For example, GroenLinks established the Colourful Platform in 1995. The Platform 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, although this grew less active in the mid-2000s.⁷

Between 2012 and 2017, 12% of Parliamentarians had an ethnic minority background. In 2017, 15 new candidates were elected that have a non-Dutch background; five were Turkish (3.3%) and eight were of Moroccan (5.3%) descent. The 2017 election outcomes resulted in the absence of black parliamentarians in the House of Representatives. For the 2017 elections, there were two openly, self-identified LGBTQ+ candidates, neither of these candidates won a seat.

In the 2021 election, BIJ1 became the first party to obtain a seat in the House of Representatives with a black woman as party leader. There were no black people in the House of Representatives at all for the past four years. Additionally, the first transgender woman and the first woman who wears a headscarf were elected to the House of Representatives. Two of the newly elected MPs have a physical disability. 28 MPs have a migration background, 25 of which are non-Western. Nearly 17% of Dutch MPs come from a non-Western background.

5.4 Disparities in attitudes towards female and male candidates

Women candidates are particularly targeted for negative campaigning. Emerging trends of sexism towards female candidates have been worrisome, especially as social media has played a role in the rise and spread of such campaigns. A recent report by the Utrecht Data School found that 10% of all tweets (339,932 tweets monitored between October 1 and February 26, this year) aimed at women on Dutch electoral lists contained hateful comments or sexist threats.⁸ A TV talk show featuring a panel of female politicians, triggered an increased number of misogynistic tweets. One tweet read: "What are all these women doing on TV at dinner time?"

Female politicians have faced harsher criticism when elected to a position of authority. One female Minister received 13,235 hate tweets over a five-month period. Another Minister revealed her unease with how she was perceived when appointed the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in 2021, as the media labelled her appointment as a 'surprise', which she perceived as a form of disguised sexism. Research focusing on 50 Dutch girls and women interested in pursuing a career in politics found that 30 of the participants listed online hate as a primary cause for giving up of their political ambitions.

Following the 2017 election campaign, several women's organisations relaunched the campaign 'Vote for a Woman', which continued to suggest 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. By voting for them, the share of elected women in the House of Representatives would be a lot higher. This initiative was created and advocated by non-governmental women's organisations, and captured attention from the mainstream media, social media influencers and magazines whose primary target audience are female. 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.

⁶ Karen Celis, Silvia Erzeel, Liza Mügge, Alyt Damstra, "Quotas and intersectionality: Ethnicity and Gender in Candidate Selection," September 2013, <https://ecpr.eu/filestore/paperproposal/65ea7bbf-d3dc-4a59-8b89-b8e32a83f3ad.pdf>.

⁷ "Kleurrijk Platform," GroenLinks, accessed May 7th 2021, <https://kleurrijkplatform.groenlinks.nl/>.

⁸ Sarah Tekath, "Dutch Election: Is online sexism holding women back from being MPs?," *EuroNews.*, March 17th, 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/03/17/dutch-election-is-online-sexism-holding-women-back-from-becoming-mps>.

6. Voters

6.1 Voter Registration

The Kingdom of The Netherlands consists of 17 million people, spread over four constituent countries: The Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten, and municipalities including Bonaire, Sint-Eustatius, and Saba. The Election Commission does not keep records of voter data, which is kept by municipalities, as their main tasks are to facilitate the election process, ensure the logistics are complete, and determine the results of the elections.

To be allowed to vote in parliamentary elections, a voter must have Dutch nationality, be 18 years or older and not be excluded from the right to vote. Voters will receive an invitation to vote at their home address no later than 14 days before the elections. The requirements to vote also apply to residents of the Caribbean Netherlands. Dutch residents of the islands of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten can only vote, if they have been a resident of The Netherlands for at least 10 years or are employed in Dutch public service on one of these islands.

6.2 Voters Abroad

Any Dutch nationality holder and an eligible voter, who is temporarily or permanently residing abroad, is entitled to vote, if registered at a Dutch municipality. The vote cast can be by post or by written proxy. In 2021, 92,772 Dutch nationals registered abroad to vote in comparison of 80,660 voters in 2017. Ultimately, in 2021, 63,340 voters abroad cast a (valid) postal vote.⁹

6.3 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.

7. Election Observations

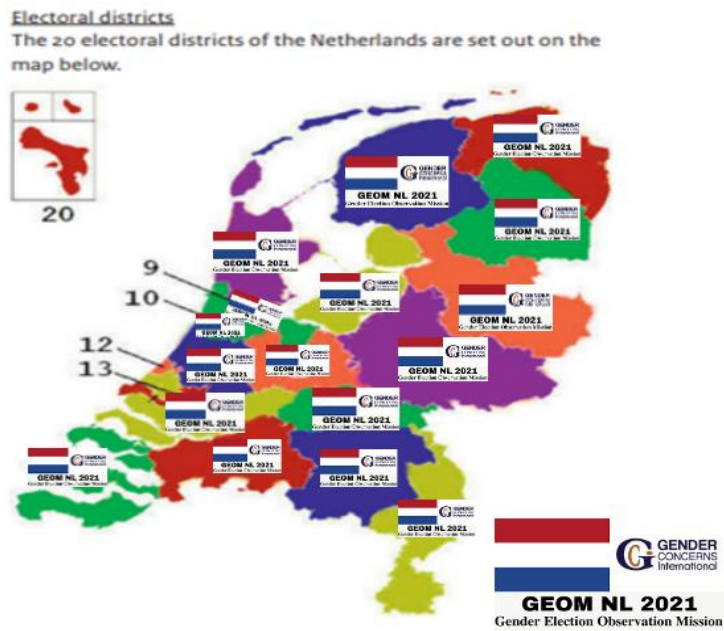
From the 15th to the 17th of March 2021, the GEOM NL 2021 observed 126 polling stations across the 12 provinces of The Netherlands. The key findings of the international observers show that the number of voters was balanced on gender. However, most of the polling staff and the heads of polling stations were women. More women voters were seen to ask for help, and more women attended the polling station with a child. It was observed that the more men voted on behalf of someone else (proxy voting). Most polling stations followed COVID rules by providing hand sanitizers, regularly cleaning the election material and having clearly identifying 1.5 distance markers.

The map below illustrates the variety of locations attended covering 19 of the 20 electoral districts, missing only the areas outside of mainland Netherlands.

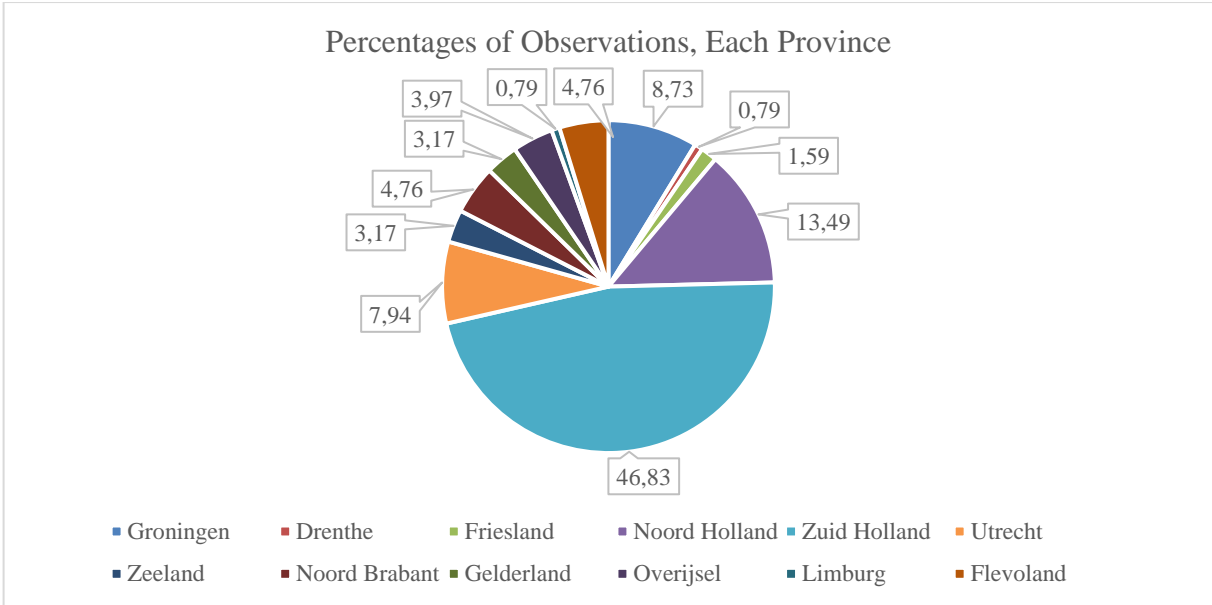
⁹ “Official result of the election to the House of Representatives on 17 March 2021,” Kiesraad, March 26th, 2021, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/03/26/officiële-uitslag-tweede-kamerverkiezing-17-maart-2021>.



Map of The Netherlands, highlighting where observations were undertaken.



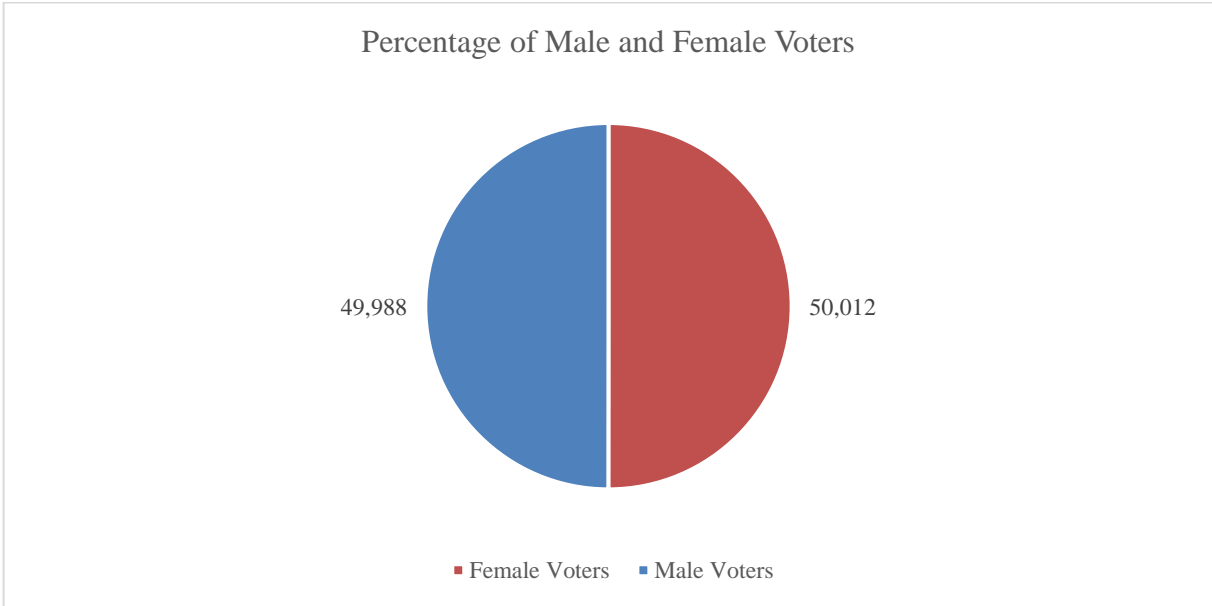
Map of the 20 Electoral Districts with the GEOM Presence.



Pie Chart demonstrating the percentage of total observations that took place in the different provinces.

7.1 Voter Turnout

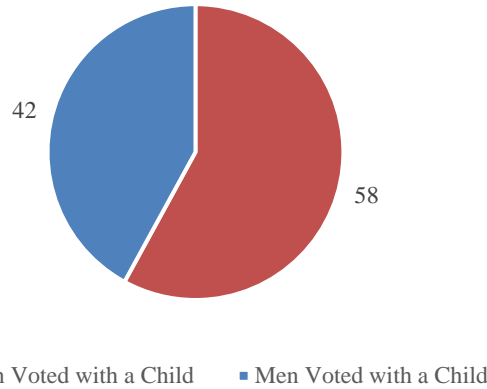
GEOM NL 2021 observed a total of 4059 people cast their vote. 2030 of these were women, and 2029 were men, an almost exact gender split.



7.2 Accessibility

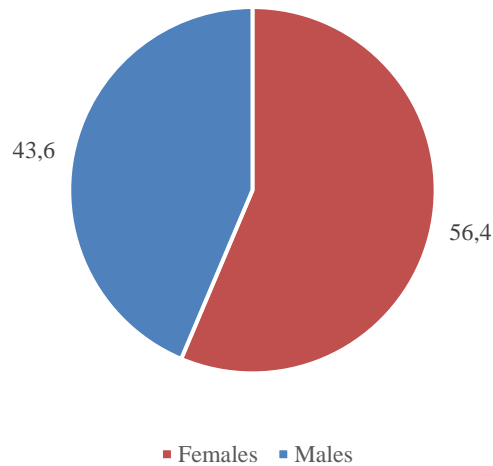
GEOM NL 2021 observed that the 58% of female voters were accompanied by a child, in comparison to 42% male voters.

Percentage of Males and Females Observed who Voted Accompanied with a Child



GEOM Observers recorded the number of people who enquired for assistance, which demonstrated that women asked for help in most cases, as shown in the below table.

Percentage of Voters Who Asked For Help



56.4% of these instances were women, whereas 43.6% were men. The vast majority of requests for assistance were met with very helpful and accomodating staff, and a very small minority were described as indifferent. No one recorded that asking for help went unnoticed, or was met with a dismissive or aggressive response.

The COVID-19 rules facilitated early voting days for elderly and vulnerable voters to vote on the 15th and 16th of March. This prevented the group to avoid the rush on the 17th March, where less elderly and vulnerable people were seen at polling stations. There were a few voters, who required priority in jumping the queue to vote. People in need of priority included voters with children, with disability and elderly voters.

7.3 Polling Station Staff

For the 2021 elections, about 70,000 polling staff were estimated to be available at the polling stations. There were more people needed than in previous years. An additional staff was appointed

at each station to ensure that the election administration continued in full adherence to the coronavirus measures.¹⁰ Each polling station required to have a chairperson, polling staff and counters.

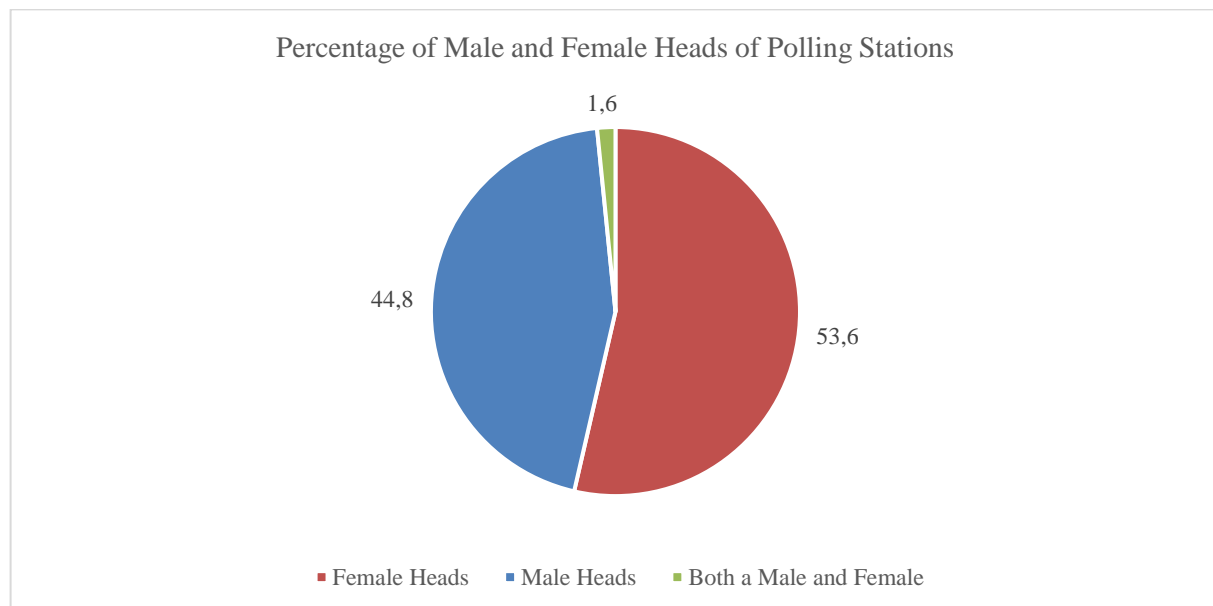
Recruitment of polling staff was encouraged through a national campaign, as well as more local level initiatives. Social media, newspapers, websites, municipal communication, and information notes further supported the nation-wide appointment of the polling staff. Many provincial authorities reached out to previous staff asking them for their return.

To avoid any COVID-19 pandemic related calamities, such as absentees falling ill, an extra recruitment of staff was carried out. This created reserve ensuring that each polling station could open and operate normally.

Each municipality determined how much it may offer its polling staff, and this averaged from 100 to 150 euros. However, the counters may earn 40 euros. Many provinces did not offer any higher reimbursement to attract staff, whereas some municipalities did provide a COVID-19 bonus. The polling station staff must be at least 18 years of age on election day. They must have a good command of the Dutch language, but having a Dutch nationality is not required. Job requirements demand staff to be ‘flexible, enthusiastic, resistant to stress, representative, helpful and accurate’ and ‘physically able to endure a long working day’. There is no need for relevant experience and a digital training course was arranged by the local municipality. Staff were expected to be available from 7:30am to 9pm and worked in shifts. Food and beverages were provided by the municipality, either directly or through vouchers.¹¹

7.3.1 Gender of Polling Station Staff

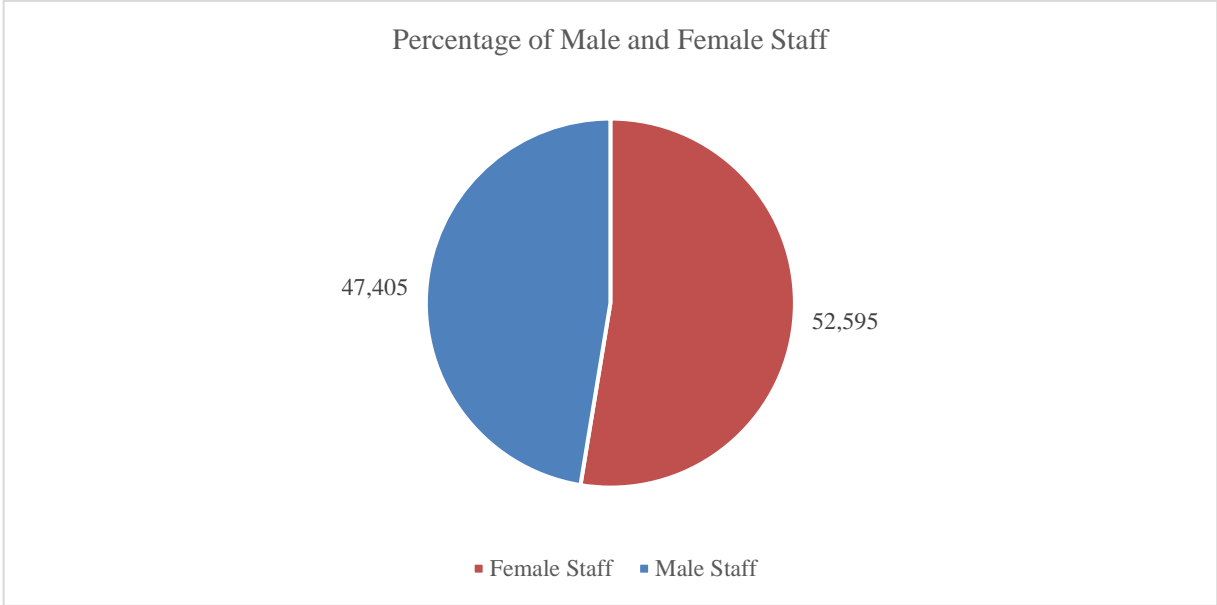
According to the polling stations observed by GEOM NL 2021, 53.6% were found headed by women and 44.8% by men. 1.6% polling stations observed were headed by both a woman and a man.



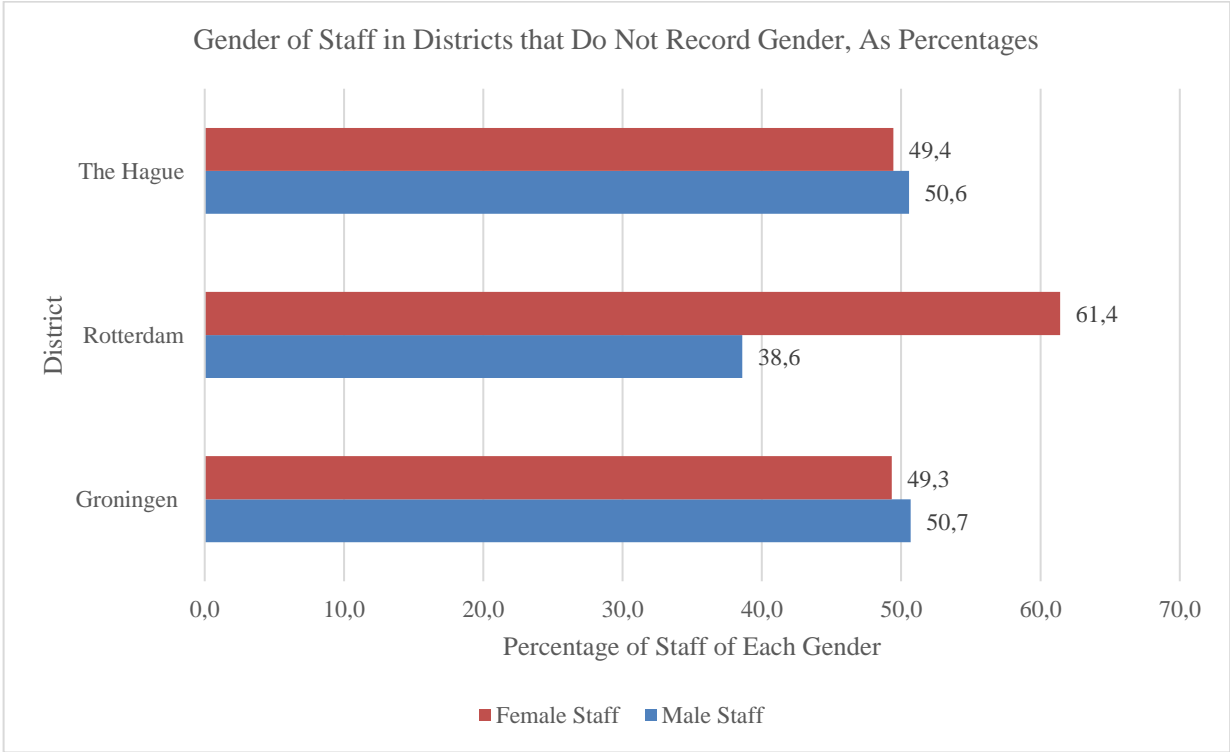
¹⁰ Niobe Moen, "Recruiting polling station members: what about compensation?," *Gemeente.nu*, March 10th, 2021, <https://www.gemeente.nu/bedrijfsvoering/burgerzaken/stembureauleden-werven-hoe-zit-het-met-de-vergoeding/>.

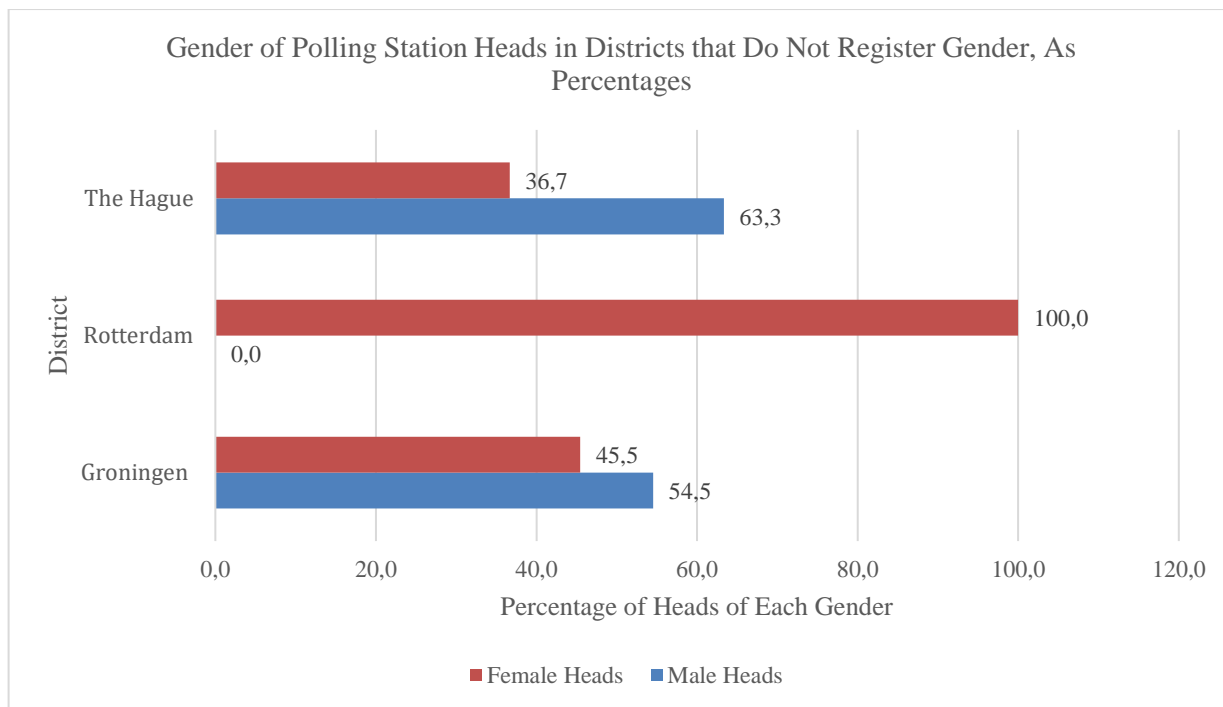
¹¹ "Frequently asked questions about working at a polling station," *Rijksoverheid*, accessed May 7th, 2021, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/verkiezingen/vraag-en-antwoord/veelgestelde-vragen-over-werken-op-een-stembureau>

Similarly, of the polling stations observed by GEOM NL 2021, there were overall more female staff than male staff. 52.595% of staff were female overall, and 47.405% were male.



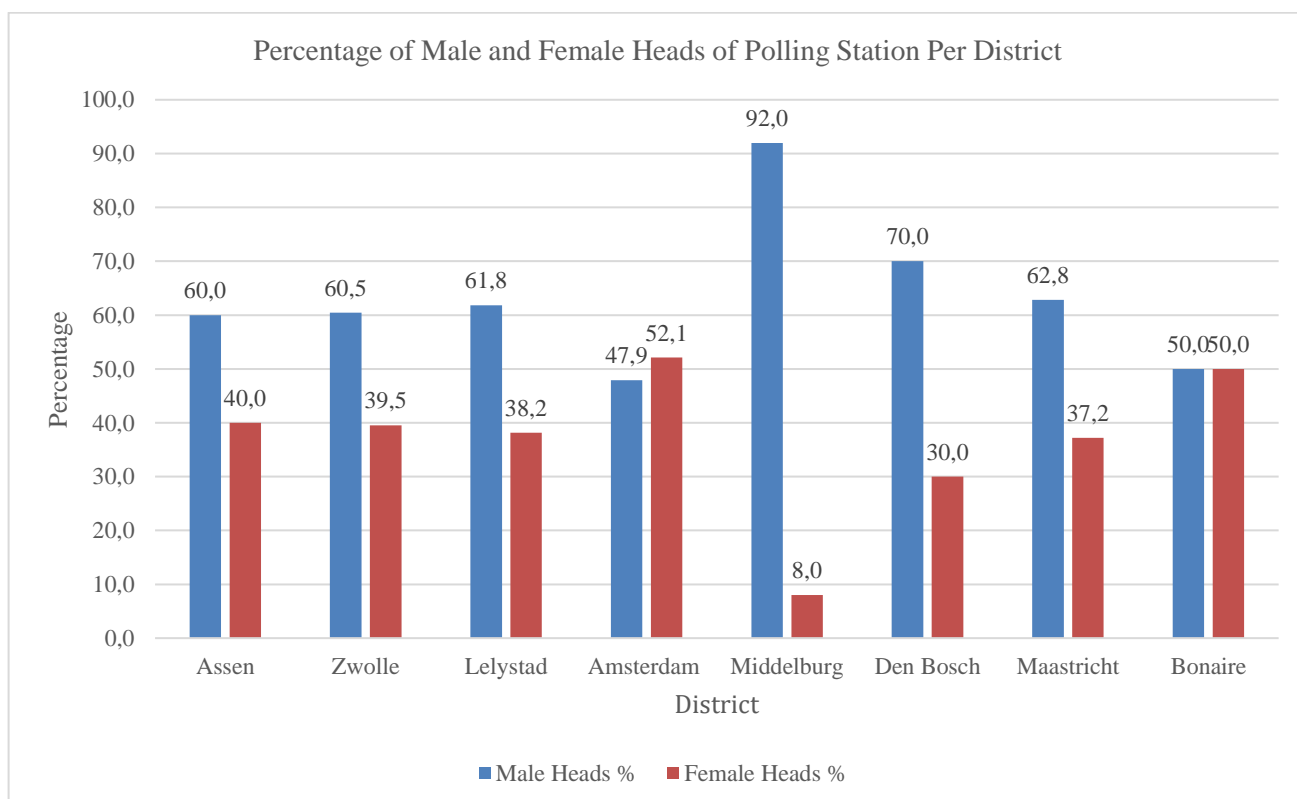
Information about polling staff is not publicly available. For instance, the gender breakdown and how people were allocated a role is unknown. Therefore, this Mission contacted the 20 electoral districts to find out the gender of their polling station heads, staff and counters. The information they provided was interesting, as there is not a consistent way of recording this information. Four districts stated that they do not register gender: Groningen, Rotterdam, The Hague and Nijmegen. GEOM NL 2021 attended at least 10 polling stations in these districts.



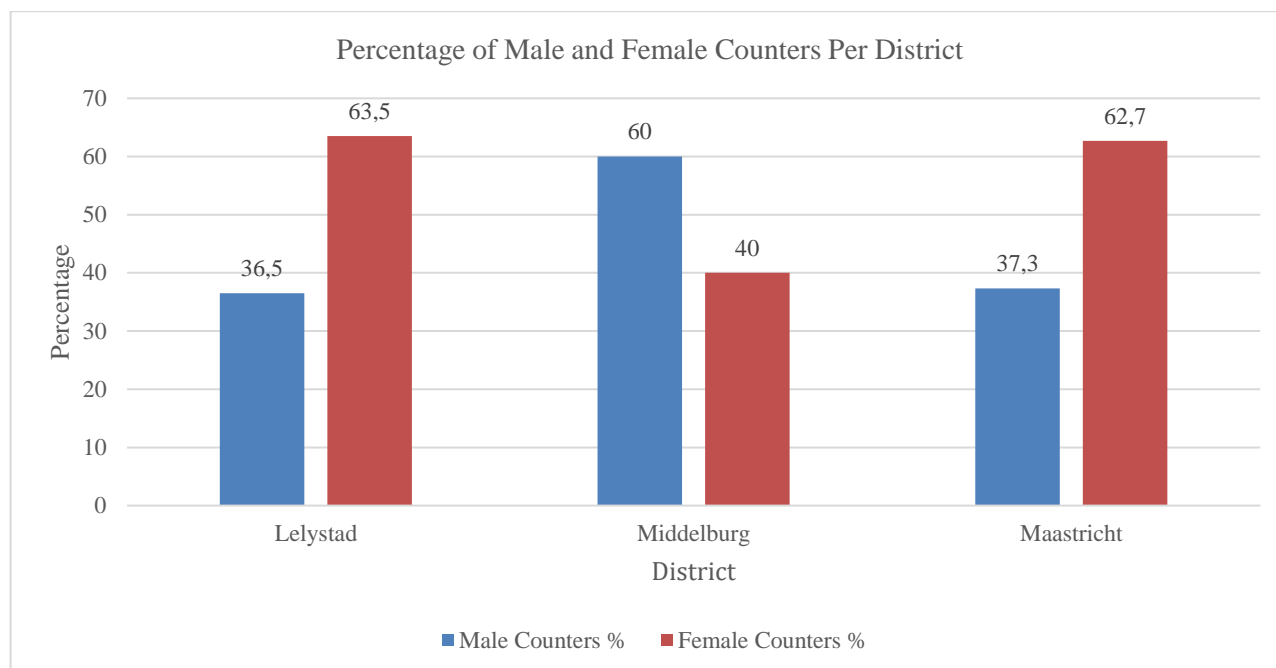


In Groningen, the gender balance of the staff was quite equal overall, with just slightly more men present in the polling stations attended. However, in Rotterdam, the majority of the staff was female, with all of the polling stations attended having a female head, and the staff being more women than men. In The Hague, there was slightly more male staff than female staff, but the majority of heads were male.

The districts that do record gender of polling station heads and staff members are Assen, Zwolle, Lelystad, Amsterdam, Middelburg, Den Bosch, Maastricht and Bonaire.



Of the districts contacted, only 3 recorded the gender of counters.



7.4 COVID-19 Measures

Holding elections under the COVID-19 pandemic, required placing a variety of measures inside and around the polling stations to ensure the safe and smooth running of elections.

The precautionary measures for international travelers were to quarantine for up to 2 weeks and a negative PCR test had to be obtained no later than 72 hours before travel to The Netherlands. COVID rules mainly concerned the areas of health, hygiene, early voting, postal vote, and extra proxies.

7.4.1 Health

The Electoral Committee members and the voters were obliged to go through a health check at home before going to the polling station. The health check list was available at the entrance of all polling stations allowing voters a self-check before entering the premises.

7.4.2 Hygiene Measures

Maintaining a distance of 1.5m throughout the polling stations and wearing face masks was mandatory. Those who refused to wear face masks, were not allowed to enter the polling station. Moreover, Perspex cough screens were erected, and hand sanitizer was made available at the entrance. The polling booths were supposed to be cleaned regularly, and everyone should have been given a clean pencil. Some municipalities opted to allow voters to take the pencils home, while other municipalities cleaned them after every use.

7.4.3 Early Voting

To facilitate maximum voters' turnout, while observing above mentioned rules, prior to 17th March, two early voting days were made available on the 15th and 16th March for elderly and vulnerable voters. This facility was provided at least one location per municipality.

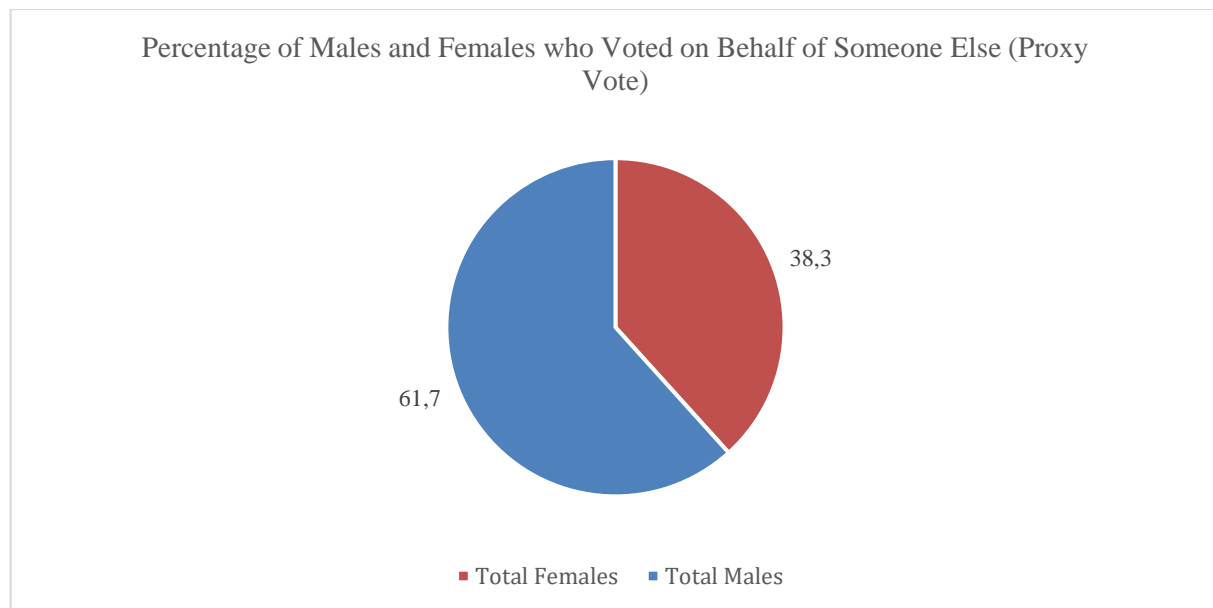
7.4.4 Postal Voting

Voters aged over 70 were given the option to cast their vote by post. Postal votes could have been sent by normal post before the 12th of March till 17:00 or dropped at a Municipal Drop Off point from the 10th of March.

7.4.5 Proxy Vote

Proxy vote is a common electoral practice in The Netherlands, where a voter allows another voter to vote on their behalf. With a voter pass that is received by all voters at home, an authorized family member voter can vote on proxy. COVID-19 measures allowed a maximum of 3 proxy votes instead of the usual 2.

GEOM observed that 61.7% male and 38.3% female voters casted proxy votes.



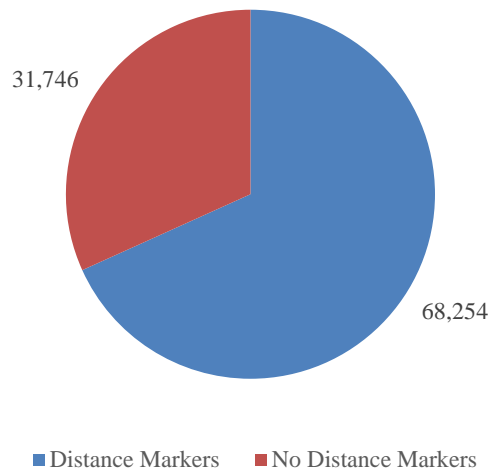
It is interesting to note that there were less votes cast through proxy in 2021 than in 2017. The number of votes by proxy was 917,698 (8.77%) in 2021 in contrast to 964,811 (9.13%) in 2017.¹²

7.4.6 COVID-19 Measures in Polling Stations in 2021

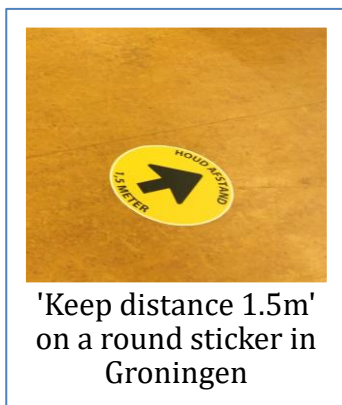
According to the sample of polling stations GEOM observed, it found that the COVID-19 pandemic measures were followed closely at most polling stations. The Mission did not attend any polling station where hand sanitizer was not available. A large number of polling stations had a one-way walking system and at most polling stations the staff was wearing protective equipment of masks and gloves. In Haarlemmermeer one of the polling stations staff had no gloves and at another observed location in the same municipality, staff at the polling station was not aware, if they were supplied with the equipment. Also, some male staff members refused to wear gloves, one female head of a polling station explained, when enquired why her staff is in non-compliance with the instructions.

¹² “Official result of the election to the House of Representatives on 17 March 2021,” Kiesraad, 26th March, 2021, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/03/26/officiële-uitslag-tweede-kamerverkiezing-17-maart-2021>.

Percentage of Polling Stations Displaying 1.5m Distance Markers



At 68.254% of polling stations attended, there were markers on the ground to highlight 1.5m distance. This was mostly done with tape or stickers stuck to the ground, as illustrated in these images.



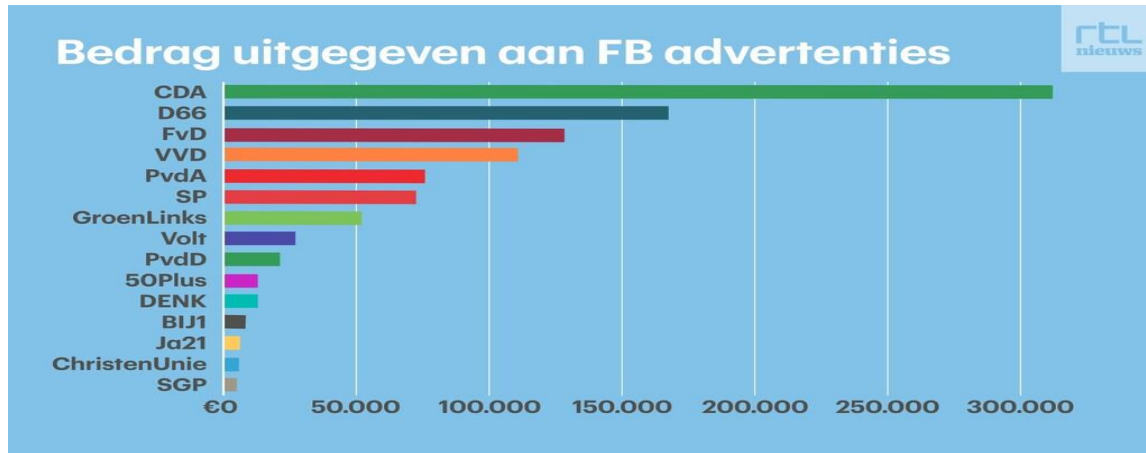
At a two polling stations attended, staff took off protective equipment, when there were no voters present, one occasion was when they were counting and once, when no voters were in the polling station at that point. Most voters wore face masks – GEOM observed some voters, who did not wear a mask, were allowed to vote. There have been cases, where a voter was not allowed to vote, because of not wearing a mask.

7.5 Campaigning

Election campaigning is unregulated in The Netherlands. There is no official campaign period, and campaigning may take place up to and on Election Day. However, campaigning at polling stations is forbidden.¹³

¹³ “The Netherlands - Parliamentary Elections, 15 March 2017 - OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report”, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 7 June 20217, p. 10, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/adviezen-en-publicaties/rapporten/2017/6/rapport-waarnemingsmissie-ovse-odihir/rapport-waarnemingsmissie-ovse-odihir-tweede-kamerverkiezing-2017>.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, campaigns heavily relied on the use of the online and social media platforms. The 2021 general election witnessed an increase in political parties spending more than €13.7 million in media advertising. Advertising expenditure is more than €4 million higher than in 2017 for election campaigning. D66 spent the most.¹⁴ A gross amount of €13,772,054 was spent in the media on campaigns, online display advertising and social media. This is higher than in the 2017 parliamentary elections, when the expenditure was €9,379,077 million.



Graph: The Amount that Political Parties have Invested in Online Advertising since 2020.
Source, RTL Nieuws¹⁵.

During the campaigning period, parties, that submitted candidate lists in at least 19 out of 20 electoral districts, received additional free airtime, and in the 2021 election, the politicians of the governing coalition received more speaking time on TV and radio. Male politicians were featured twice as much as women, with Prime Minister Rutte being seen and heard the most often (214 times). Even though women appear less, they speak for longer, when they do appear, at an average of 2 minutes and 5 seconds, whereas men appear for 1 minute and 11 seconds. Three times more is said about men than about women, with only two women making it into the top 10 (Ouweland and Kaag), despite women being leaders of 10 parties. Additionally, the media coverage is shown to favour the right-wing parties, who received 3 times as much attention as the left-wing parties.¹⁶

The media, and particularly electronic media, play a crucial role in shaping voter interest in and influencing their opinion about an election. The persisting media portrayal of women candidates as to how it deals with the issues concerning women, and whether they convey effectual voter education messages, can have a major impact on women’s electoral 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.

Whilst observing, there were instances where observers noted some form of party campaigning, mainly through posters near polling stations. The most common parties, observed were GroenLinks and D66, followed by 50+, VVD, Denk and PvdA.

¹⁴ Maarten Hafkamp, “Political parties spend more than 13.7 million in ‘traditional’ media,” *Adformatie*, March 19th, 2021, <https://www.adformatie.nl/media/estedingen-politieke-partijen-ruim-137-miljoen-traditi>.

¹⁵ Agnes de Goede and Arne Hankel, “Everything for attention: politicians throw money to be seen online,” *RTL Nieuws*, March 10th, 2021, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/politiek/artikel/5218807/artijen-smijten-met-geld-en-doen-online-de-gekste-dingen-ze-willen>.

¹⁶ Hugo van der Parre, “Research: The right dominates the election campaign on radio and TV,” *NOS*, March 16th, 2021, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2372814-onderzoek-rechts-domineert-de-verkiezingscampagne-op-radio-en-tv>.



'Stem PvdA' poster in the window opposite a polling station in Groningen



'Stronger Together' a billboard of Mark Rutte from the VVD in Zuid Holland



'Stem SGP' and 'Stem VVD' posters in Gelderland



Posters for Forum voor Democratie in Zuid Holland



'Voted PvdA' and 'More green & jobs & future, More Groenlinks' in Groningen



GroenLinks campaigners in Zuid Holland



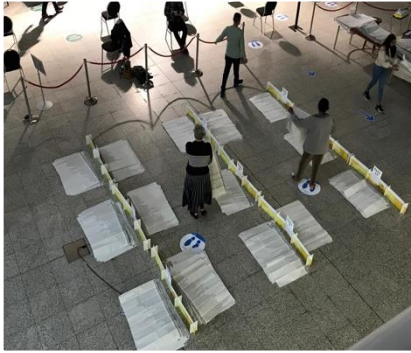
A D66 billboard in Zuid Holland

8. Election Results

On the 15th, 16th and 17th March 2021, 10,462,677 people voted in the Dutch Elections for the House of Representatives, making the turnout 78.81%.¹⁷ The number of candidates elected with preferential votes was 43, the same number as in 2017. A total of 1,069,048 postal votes from voters in The Netherlands were counted. Of these, 3,080 (0.29%) were invalid and 1,181 (0.11%) were blank. The number of votes per proxy was 917,698 (8.77%). There were 17,173 blank votes (0.16%) and 22,652 (0.22%) votes were invalid.¹⁸

¹⁷“House of Representatives March 17, 2021,” Kiesraad, accessed May 7th, 2021, <https://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/verkiezingen/detail/TK20210317>.

¹⁸ “Official result of the election to the House of Representatives on 17 March 2021,” Kiesraad, 26th March, 2021, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/03/26/officiële-uitslag-tweede-kamerverkiezing-17-maart-2021>.



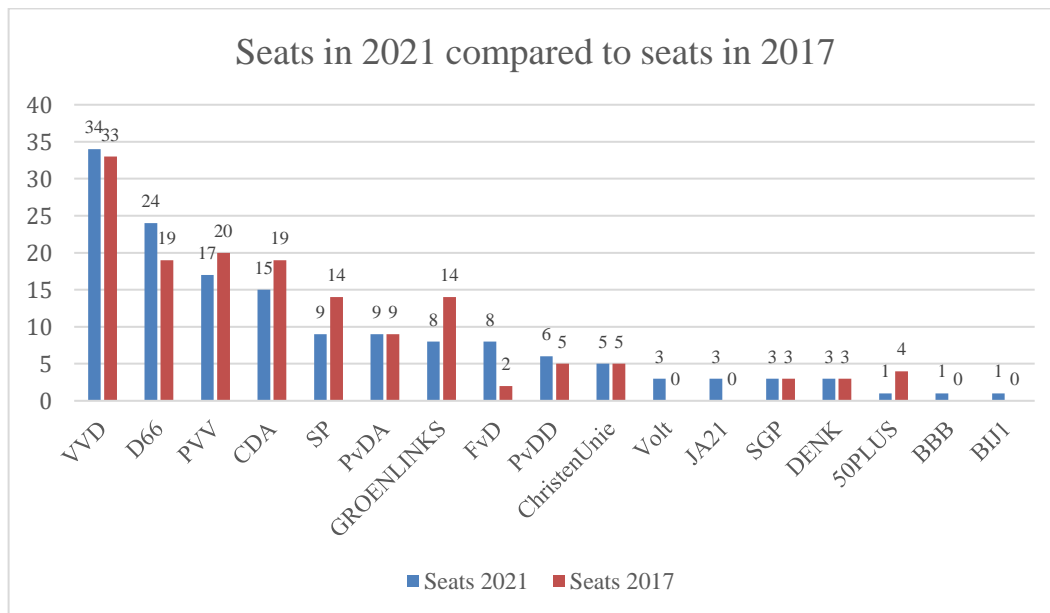
Counting in Zuid Holland



Counting in Noord Holland

8.1 Parties in the House of Representatives

There was a total of 37 parties running for election in 2021, a post-war record in The Netherlands.¹⁹ On the 26th of March 2021, it was announced that 17 parties won enough votes to get a seat in the House of Representatives. This is the highest number of parties within parliament since 1972, which had 14. The below graph demonstrates the parties in 2017, compared to 2021. The largest party, the VVD, won an extra seat in 2021. Parties, which lost seats from 2017 to 2021 were: 50PLUS, GROELINKS, SP, CDA and PVV. There were four new parties: Volt, JA21, BBB and BIJ1.

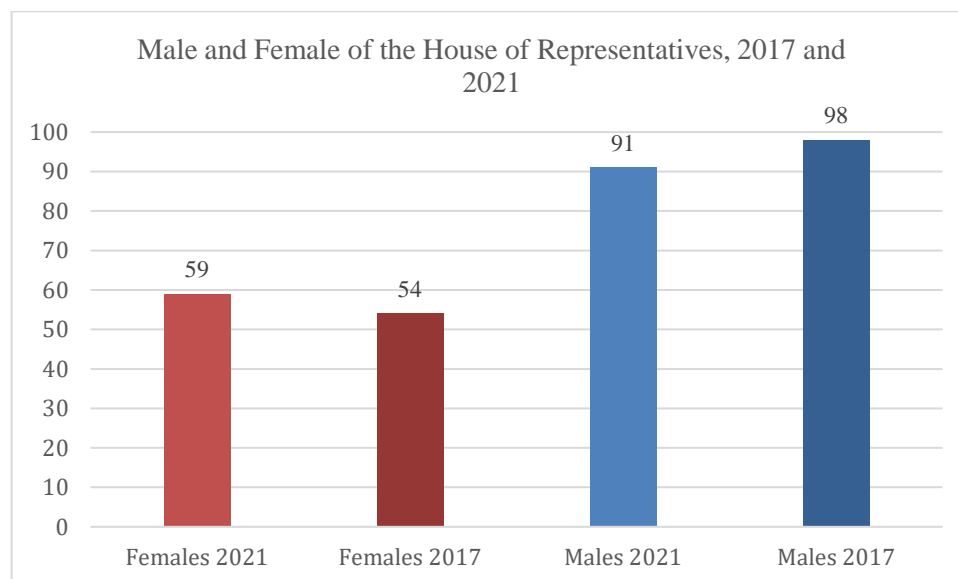


Graph: Seats Won by Each Party in 2017 and 2021

¹⁹“Parliamentary elections 2021,” Parlement.com, accessed May 7th, 2021, https://www.parlement.com/id/v14ai9zklwpy/tweede_kamerverkiezingen_2021.

8.2 Election Results, Gender-Breakdown

Of the 150 available seats, a total of 59 women were elected to the House of Representatives in 2021, which is more than in 2017, when 54 women were elected. Therefore, 39.3% of the seats are held by women, and therefore not representative of the population of The Netherlands, of which 51% are women.²⁰

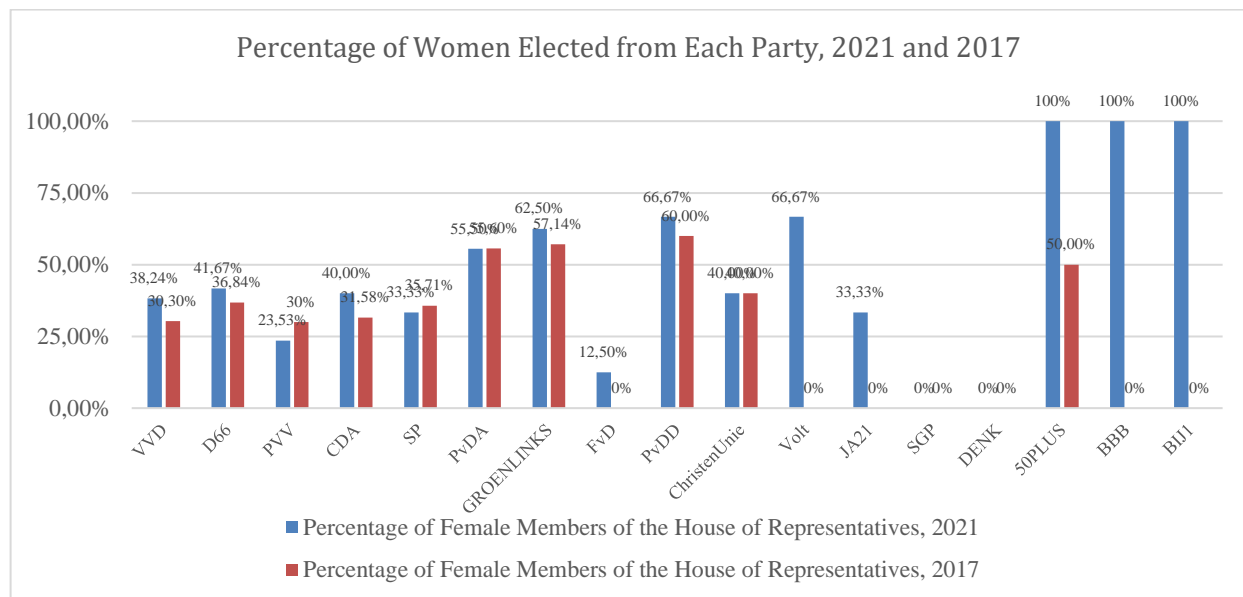


Graph: Gender Comparison of Members of the House of Representatives from 2017 and 2021

Political Party	No. seats in House of Representatives in 2021	Number of Females Elected Per Party in 2021	Percentage of Females Elected Per Party in 2021	No. of seats in House of Representatives in 2017	Number of Females Elected Per Party in 2017	Percentage of Females Elected Per Party in 2017
VVD	34 (+1)	13	38.2%	33	10	30.3%
D66	24 (+5)	10	37.5%	19	7	36.8%
PVV	17 (-3)	4	23.5%	20	6	30%
CDA	15 (-4)	6	40%	19	6	31.6%
SP	9 (-5)	3	33.3%	14	5	35.7%
PvdA	9 (0)	5	55.56%	9	5	55.6%
GROENLINKS	8 (-6)	5	62.5%	14	8	57.1%
FvD	8 (+6)	1	12.5%	2	0	0%
PvdD	6 (1)	4	66.6%	5	3	60%
CU	5 (0)	2	40%	5	2	0%
Volt	3 (+3)	2	66.6%	0	-	-
JA21	3 (+3)	1	33.3%	0	-	-
SGP	3 (0)	0	0%	3	0	0%
DENK	3 (0)	0	0%	3	0	0%
50PLUS	1 (-3)	1	100%	4	2	50%
BBB	1 (+1)	1	100%	0	-	-
BIJ1	1 (+1)	1	100%	0	-	-
Total	150	59	39.3%	150	54	36%

²⁰“Population of The Netherlands in 2019, by gender,” Statista, accessed May 7th, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/519796/population-of-the-netherlands-by-gender/>.

Table: Comparison of each Party in the House of Representatives in 2017 and 2021.



Graph: Percentage of Women Elected from Each Party, 2021 and 2017

As reflected by the above graph, the largest five parties, VVD, D66, PVV, CDA and SP, have a low proportion of female parliamentarians in comparison to the other parties. Despite the fact, that the number of female parliamentarians has risen for 3 of the top 5 parties, they still only make up a relatively small percentage of the parliamentary representation. For instance, the VVD and D66 (the two largest parties) now have 38.24% and 41.67% women respectively, making an increase from 30.30% and 36.84%, held in 2017. The current improved situation is still just over one-third of the total seats held by each party. The PvdA, that won total of 9 seats in both the 2017 and 2021 elections, consists of 55% women in parliamentary seats, making it over half. Forum voor Democratie is making the biggest gain in 2021 by winning 8 seats, compared to just 2 in 2017. Of their 8 seats, 1 is held by a woman. The SGP and DENK both won 3 seats, the same number of seats they won in 2017 having no female member on board. Election 2021 results delivered these parties to the parliament: Volt, JA21, BBB and BIJ1. In Volt 2 seats are held by women and in JA21, 1 female parliamentarian, out of their total of 3, holds a seat. Both BBB and BIJ1 have 1 seat and it is held by a woman.

8.3 Preference Voting

The Netherlands recognizes the voting system of List PR, therefore candidates can become a Member of the House of Representatives through virtue of their place on the list, but also through the preference threshold. The preference threshold for election is 25% of the electoral quota.²¹ Preferential voting is interesting, as it reveals that voters often vote for female candidates to enhance their electable position at the candidate lists. From 1959 to 2017, in total 19 candidates gained parliamentary seats through preferential voting, out of which 12 have been women, 9 superseded the position of a man on the candidate list.²²

In the Elections 2021, 3 women were elected to the House of Representatives through Preferential Voting. 1 was from Volt, and 2 were from GroenLinks. 2 of these women superseded men, who were listed higher on the candidate list.

²¹“Distribution of seats among candidates,” Kiesraad, accessed May 7th, 2021, <https://www.kiesraad.nl/verkiezingen/tweede-kamer/uitslagen/zetelverdeling-over-kandidaten>.

²⁰“Preference Votes,” Parlement.com, accessed May 7th, 2021, <https://www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrouwzc/voorkeurstemmen>

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion:

As a facilitator of Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM) The Netherlands 2021, Gender Concerns International commends the Dutch Election Management Body, the Kiesraad, for its exemplary practices in holding elections during the extra-ordinary circumstance impacted by COVID-19.

The conduct of the parliamentary elections that was witnessed by the GEOM is deemed to be of high quality, demonstrating the functioning of an efficient and competent democratic system. The voter turnout of 78.81 % was well-managed by the polling staff. The high-level of access to polling stations in a variety of locations, as well as an efficient proxy voting procedure contributed to an overall voter's trust. With due acknowledgement it is stated that in all electoral districts, excellent measures were taken to guarantee sanitary and health-protective voting, and the obstacles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic hardly impeded the smooth running of the election 2021.

The 2021 elections proved to be historical for women, not only as 10 out of the 37 participating political parties were headed by female leaders but also since women's hold on parliamentary power is marked at 39,3%, well above the EU average of 28%. Moreover, women constituted 53,6% of the heads of polling stations, a clear advance to the situation in 2017. An increase of female heads of polling stations was a recommendation by GEOM NL 2017. Gender Concerns International is genuinely pleased that its findings were considered, and recommendations were taken into deliberation, as evidenced by district-level electoral management leadership during the three days of the last election.

However, this is merely a progressive step into the right direction and not yet the full realization of gender equality in Dutch electoral administration. Substantial hindrances for women's political participation remain deeply rooted in the very foundation of the overall electoral system. The GEOM NL 2021 recognizes several such obstacles highlighted in the following section:

Firstly, as **the female voter population is not proportionally represented in the Dutch Parliament, this disproportionality facilitates male over-representation in the government, which further leads to their contented domination in the legislative body.** The notion of having equality between men and women does not seem to translate into a factual parity anyhow. Therefore, despite a favourable legal context, **serious challenges persist in the procedures of nomination of male female candidates on the party candidate list.**

Secondly, it is widely known that women in politics are subject to grave electoral violence, encompassing provocation, abuse, defamation, and threats, especially in the virtual sphere. This violence takes the form of harassment and is mainly exercised psychologically. Because of their gender, women are verbally attacked when expressing their political views and taking political actions. Female political participation is hence discouraged, making it challenging for women to safely exercise their electoral human rights, as laid down in the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), [the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) and [the European Convention on Human Rights](#).

Thirdly, women suffer significantly from intersectional discrimination and tend to face even more obstacles than men. Diverse political participation remains at a low level, creating marginalization in political representation as it violates the commitments on the effective implementation of [the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) and [the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

Finally, **since 2018, the adoption of a new gender-neutral policy** by various municipalities has generated an absence of maintaining any separate record of male-female election staffing. This creates a lack of evidence concerning the selection, engagement, and position of the election

administration staff. Gender segregated data record underscores the gender balance situation and improves observation and reporting of any gender-gap.

Overall, when creating and implementing electoral policies, a **gender assessment** is of crucial importance. Gender neutral policies potentially tend to pose a disadvantage for women and might hinder the progress required to establish gender electoral parity. This finding is reminiscent of the statement that the gender assessment of the state has weakened, as reported by the recently published Dutch CEDAW Shadow Report. Thus GEOM NL 2021 considers that the gender-neutral electoral participation record is concerning and hinders the transparency efforts in bridging the gender-gap.

Recommendations

Based on the findings GEOM NL 2021 draws its **recommendations aiming for the** realization of the gender electoral parity goal in The Netherlands. The recommendations support fundamental human rights, advising for an enhanced political engagement of women civil society organizations, as well as emphasizing the role of national institutions in closing the gender equality gap and upscaling the inclusion of minority communities in governance. The Mission contends that these recommendations are crucial in ensuring a lasting democratic trajectory that prioritizes gender equality in electoral processes and in all democratic establishments.

The Mission refers to the following general and specific Recommendations:

General Recommendations

- 1) To achieve equality in governance, it is vital to put a system overhaul in place that triggers the electoral gender parity. The electoral gender parity is required in all areas including 1:1 appointment of electoral staff, media coverage of candidates, and most importantly, the **alternate 1:1 male female placement of candidates on the party election nomination list**. Only if electability on parity is achieved, can an equal representation of citizens in legislative and governance be ensured.
- 2) The recognition of the rising diversity within the population requires an immediate adequate community engagement. The government and municipalities need to allocate sufficient resources to educate the public in favor of intersectional political representation. Women organisations, especially those concerned with people of color, minorities, refugees, and disabled, women, and LGBTQ+ community, need self-capacity-building to encourage interaction within and outside their groups, networks, and communities.
- 3) Media and women organisations should work closely. Formation of a multi-stakeholder national advisory body could strategically interact with the media to promote healthy public opinion towards attaining the goal of gender equal governance through a parity based electoral system in place.

Specific Recommendations

Government

- 4) The government must demonstrate its full commitment towards the ECOSOC 2000 goal of 50% of women in leadership positions, by implementing a broad range of policies to encourage, support and protect women's overall political participation.
- 5) The state must play its role in protecting the political rights of those who are under-represented. The political participation of female candidates and women politicians in office must be free from any kind of gender-based **discrimination and violence**.
- 6) The state must ensure that the appropriate resources are available to the national authorities and civil society organizations to enhance electoral gender equality during pre and post-election periods.

- 7) The government should deliver to its entire population. The fair social, political, and economic accommodation of minority groups and communities with gender-orientation requires a mindset change. The approach of placing a focus on intersectionality in the school syllabus may lead towards the mindset transformation.

Election Administration

- 8) The **Electoral Council** (Kiesraad) must reflect gender equality itself as was suggested through GEOM NL 2017. To take female electoral interests into account, women must equally, if not in majority be represented within this body to influence overall electoral administrative practice. The current composition of the Kiesraad does not need to be indicative of women`s general electoral and political participation but it ought to be aligned with the national ratio of male female population.
- 9) Electoral Management Bodies are required to practice a consistent and systematic gender approach to facilitate the collection of gender specific data regarding election administrative staff. Transparency requires avoidance of a “gender-blind spot” that hinders any gender-based fact-finding observation. The maintaining of gender segregated electoral participation record must be considered as mandatory within all electoral districts at the level of all national, regional, and municipal electoral administration.

Municipalities

- 10) A coherent gender policy is needed to segregate male-female voters and the Election Day polling staff, lists.
- 11) Each municipality must adopt this coherency in all polling stations under its administrative responsibility.
- 12) Election material and updated information must be provided timely to the relevant staff and especially at polling stations established in neighborhood centers and nursing homes, including rural areas and small farms.
- 13) New polling staff must be recruited and trained regularly.
- 14) Experienced staff must be provided with a compulsory refresher course.
- 15) Election observation should be supported by municipalities and national and international observation must be encouraged.
- 16) Municipalities must reflect the intersectionality of their voters in facilitating full participation of the entire voter population. Advisory and consultation must be sought from local women organisations and especially those catering for minority interest. Pre, post, and election day information material must be made available to diverse voter groups through political parties, religious and local organizations, if necessary, in several languages including, English, French, Spanish in addition to Arabic and Turkish.
- 17) The current size of the ballot paper needs further improvements to make the voting experience pleasant, environment friendly and smoother respecting the needs of voter`s intersectionality.

Political Parties

- 18) Political parties have the crucial role inside and outside the legislative in closing the existing gender-gap in the Netherlands. Gender equality in governance is to be achieved through an electable process that is free from any gender discrimination. Gender parity on party candidate list requires one male to one female (1:1) mandatory nomination practice. This alternate male female nomination on candidate lists could be achieved through internal party practice or through a collective consensus building for legislative purposes if required.
- 19) Political parties are urged to address intersectional marginalization and ensure the representation of discriminated communities and groups on party candidates lists.
- 20) In targeting the closing of the gender-gap, political parties ought to consider women organisations and networks as stakeholders and work closely with them.

Civil Society

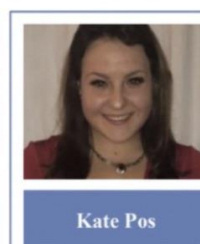
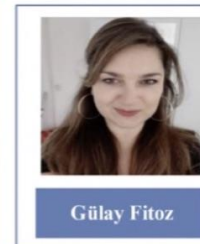
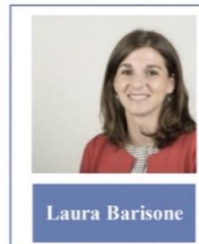
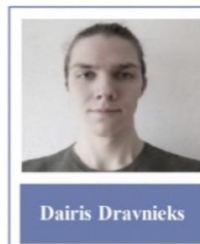
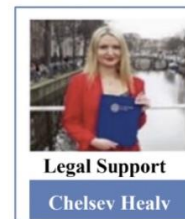
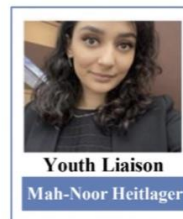
- 21) CSOs must take a leading role against inter-sectional discrimination of all minority groups. Intersectional engagement and leadership of minority women organisations need to be set forth on the agenda of political emancipation and electoral empowerment.
- 22) CSOs need to support equality in political participation by creating public spaces for political discourse and a safe environment for women exercising their political right. Public spaces should be created both as online networks and as physical locations to facilitate discourse among women and other CSOs.
- 23) To promote a feminist agenda and women`s empowerment, the major women`s networks must work with gender focused and minority women organisations on equal partnership basis to enhance women`s overall political participation.

Media

- 24) The **gender-equality advocates** in the media must be supported as key-actors to counter the negative and demotivating propaganda affecting women`s political and electoral participation.
- 25) Gender-equality journalists need to interact with women CSOs to work towards a common goal. Media monitoring mechanisms could be introduced prior to all elections including local, regional, and European elections.
- 26) Enhanced interaction between media and female candidates could help generate comprehensive coverage of women candidates, reporting and highlighting the status and position of female candidates during campaign period.
- 27) Media outlets must implement a zero-tolerance policy against any discriminatory language on their platforms and categorically reject and denounce this practice. A special focus must lie on the increasing harassment of female politicians on social media, as this type of hate and humiliation continues 24/7 with its extreme form. The media portrayal of female politicians must be monitored ensuring that the stereotypes and biases are not reproduced causing disadvantages for female political and electoral activists.

10. GEOM Team

GEOM OBSERVERS



11. Images



Images of GEOM Observers at various electoral districts

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