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## **NETHERLANDS**

### **MONITORING THE EMANCIPATION PROCESS: THE DUTCH CASE An examination of the high expectations of the Emancipation Monitor**

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#### **1 Introduction**

In 1995 the Dutch government stressed the need for the systematic monitoring of women's emancipation. (TK 1995/1996, 24406 no. 4). According to the government "the emancipation process needs to be made more transparent and assessable across the board. What has been achieved and what so far has not? How is the implementation of policy progressing? In what areas are women still at a disadvantage? What barriers have disappeared and which remain to be eliminated? Where are the opportunities and how are the experiments progressing? What is the basis of public support for emancipation policy and how can this be influenced?" This autumn the point will have been reached: Statistics Netherlands and the Social and Cultural Planning Office will be publishing the first edition of the Emancipation Monitor in September.

In this paper I shall be examining the points of departure on which the Emancipation Monitor is based, the choices that have been made and the consequences of those choices. To begin with, however, a brief description is provided of the functions of the Monitor. What is in fact the utility of an Emancipation Monitor?

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## 2 Functions of the Emancipation Monitor

Generally speaking monitors fulfil various functions in practice: the identification of problems, the monitoring of developments, overseeing the progress with implementing policies, the evaluation of policy and the generation of debate, etc. From the various documents that have been published in putting together the Emancipation Monitor, it may be said that the following four functions are generally considered important.

In the *first* place the Emancipation Monitor is aimed at following developments in the emancipation process. This means identifying the current position and trends as regards important elements of the emancipation process in brief, the presentation of facts and figures. But although the provision of statistically-based surveys is highly important in itself, in terms of contributing to the development of policy it is equally as necessary to provide insight into the backgrounds to the identified developments. It is also important to examine the interrelationships between various sectors. The differences in the position of men and women in the labour market, for example, are related to differences in educational qualifications between men and women and affect the influence of women in political and social decision-making.

The *second* function concerns limited policy evaluation. Although monitors are not generally set up with a view to delivering a formal policy evaluation, implicitly they are often intended to examine the identified developments in the context of government policy. In identifying and analysing the trends in the emancipation process the question arises as to how those trends are related to emancipation policy.

In the *third* place the Emancipation Monitor can contribute towards the social and political debate. This may for example be achieved by placing the spotlight on developments that have come to a standstill or by providing factual data for the ongoing discussion. In order to fulfil these functions, the systematic and periodic collection of information on issues of relevance for emancipation policy is required.

In this regard a *fourth* and to a certain extent derivative function of the Emancipation Monitor is the improvement of the provision of information on the evolution of the emancipation process. The publication of the Monitor can bring to light gaps and inconsistencies in the available data. Current surveys are not generally prompted by considerations relating to emancipation policy, and the introduction of an emancipation monitor can help ensure that the various organisations concerned gear their research more effectively to this aspect.

## 3 The outline of the Emancipation Monitor

During the preparatory stage of the Emancipation Monitor, the policy-makers spent a good deal of time delimiting the contents of the Monitor. Since the gender inequality manifests itself in virtually all areas of social life and all government ministries have some form or another of emancipation policy, the number of topics that could be covered in the Monitor is potentially very great. A decision was therefore quickly taken to delimit the areas and topics of vital importance to the emancipation process. Inspired by consultations with representatives from government departments,

academics and activists in the field and building on the focal points of emancipation policy as formulated in the *Beleidsbrief emancipatie* (Emancipation policy letter) (TK 1996/1997), four areas were selected: education; employment, care and income; political and social decision-making; and violence. To begin with only these topics will be covered by the Emancipation Monitor. Other topics may possibly be added in the future as the emphasis of government policy changes.

Apart from the choice of topics for inclusion in the Monitor, the approaches to be adopted in the Monitor were also determined. In the first place the current position in the field in question needs to be identified, in terms of numbers, scope and distribution. Attitudes concerning the role and position of men and women in the various areas form a second line of approach. This is intended in order to obtain an impression of public support for the emancipation policy and to make sure that the role of the dominant gender-based ideology is reflected to some extent in the Monitor. The third angle concerns examining the extent to which emancipation goals have penetrated the various areas. This concerns the question of the extent to which crucial actors in the area of emancipation put these goals into practice in their policies. It is expressly not just a matter of government policies, but also of the policy practices of the social partners, political parties, educational institutions and health and welfare agencies, etc.

Another substantive requirement which the Monitor needs to satisfy is that of doing justice to social diversity. Where possible and relevant, a differentiation need to be made in terms of age, household situation, education and ethnicity. It will be clear that there is a certain area of tension between this requirement and another one, namely the requirement that the Monitor should confine itself to the main issues and not end up as an avalanche of data. Priorities need therefore to be set carefully.

So much for the contours of the Emancipation Monitor. It will be clear that many interesting and important topics of the emancipation process have been left out of account, such as welfare and health, relationships and intimacy and the changing nature of sexual identity. Nor are all the relevant differences between women covered. Those seeking information on disabled women, women in rural areas or lesbian women will be disappointed. In addition the practical effects of the inequality of power between the sexes is so complex that they cannot really be brought to light with such a blunt tool as a monitor. The power of the dominant views on what are deemed to be typically male and female characteristics (gender-based ideology) does not lend itself to quantitative measurement. The identification of attitudes concerning the role and position of women is certainly not pointless, but at the same time provides no more than a very limited indicator of the gender-based ideology.

Despite these limitations the advent of the Emancipation Monitor may be regarded as a gain. Although statistical surveys have been published from time to time in the past on the course of the emancipation process, there has been no systematic monitoring. The focus on the penetration of emancipation goals into various areas of practical policy is also a valuable extension. In this regard the fact that it has not been necessary to fund the Emancipation Monitor out of the limited resources of the Emancipation Co-ordination Directorate but out of the general pot for monitoring and policy information of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment may be regarded as a success.

## 4 Content

The content of the Emancipation Monitor is examined in the next sections. The question is to what extent it will be possible for the various wishes and starting points as outlined above to come into their own in the Monitor. The approach I shall be adopting is not a thematic one, but based on three angles of approach (factual development, attitudes and the penetration of the policy goals) which the policy-makers have indicated should be used in the Monitor. For an extensive subject-based analysis I would refer to the *Haalbaarheidsstudie emancipatiemonitor* (Emancipation Monitor Feasibility Study) (Keuzenkamp 1999)<sup>2</sup>.

### 4.1 Factual developments

In order to chart factual developments and the current state of the emancipation process, indicators have been derived from the main objectives of the four main focal points of emancipation policy. In many cases the indicators have also been used in the past in all sorts of publications to measure the progress of the emancipation process: educational careers, participation in paid and unpaid work, economic independence, filling of senior positions, being victims of violence, etc. The *Emancipation Monitor Feasibility Study* indicates that enough systematic and periodically conducted collections of data are available on most of the indicators. The topics of education, employment and income, in particular, may be charted reasonably well, even if account is taken of the desire for a breakdown into various categories of men and women. The least information is in fact available on the topic of political and social decision-making. Although various data are available on the subject of violence the sensitive and often hidden nature of the problem makes it difficult to obtain a clear grasp of its actual nature and scale. Table 1 provides a concise summary of the availability of periodically collected data on the various indicators that will be covered in the Emancipation Monitor.

From the first column it is, as noted before, evident that there is in most cases periodic data-collection. This may range from annual (sometimes continuous), such as the Labour Force Survey, to research which although regular is not carried out frequently (such as the Time Use Survey).

The next four columns provide an insight into the question as to whether it is possible to analyse the indicators broken down by the four background characteristics referred to previously (age, education, position in household and ethnicity). This generates considerably more problems. In part these problems are related to the nature of the sources. Data records, obtained for example from the tax department or on benefit claimants, often contain only limited background information on the individuals on whom the data are kept. Those keeping these records generally have no interest in the inclusion of further background characteristics. Doing so would be of no benefit to them, so they are unwilling to incur costs, or consider doing so to be undesirable on privacy grounds.

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<sup>2</sup> This working document is available in its entirety on the website of the Social and Cultural Planning Office: [www.sep.nl](http://www.sep.nl).

Table 1 Availability of sources for identifying factual developments in the position of women and men

Subject	Periodic collection	Available background features			
		Age	Education	Position in household	Ethnicity
<b>Education / multiple future prospects</b>					
Time use	+	+	+	+	
Participation in various kinds of education	+	+	.	?	?
Subjects / courses	+	+	.	?	?
Exit qualifications + attainments	+	+	.	?	?
Labour market prospects	+	+	+	.	
Post-initial learning	+	+	+	+	
<b>Paid and unpaid work</b>					
Net and gross labour force participation	+	+	+	+	+
Length of working hours	+	+	+	+	+
Sex segregation	+	+	+	+	+
Benefit-claims	+	+	+	+	+
Time spent on unpaid work	+	+	+	+	
Use of combination facilities		+	+	+	-
<b>Income</b>					
Economic independence	+	+	+	+	+
Share in household income	+	+	+	+	+
Average hourly pay	+	+	+	+	+
Average annual pay	+	+	+	+	+
Share in national income	+	.	.	.	.
<b>Political and social decision making</b>					
<i>Politics and public administration</i>					
Representative political bodies	+				
Senior state civil service	+				
Judiciary					
Advisory bodies	+				
<i>Social sectors</i>					
Large companies	+				
Socio-economic bodies					
Education	+				
Health care					
<i>Non-governmental organisations</i>					
National organisations					
<b>Violence against women</b>					
Report to the police	+				
Reports to others					
Self-reporting	+	+	+	+	

Legend: + available immediately or in the near future; . not available; limited availability; . not relevant; ? availability still uncertain

In a number of cases efforts are made especially by Statistics Netherlands to find a solution to this problem. One example is the link-up by the CBS of the Income Panel Survey (a sample from the tax data) to the Municipal Personal Records Database.

In the case of opinion surveys other problems may arise. Although the surveys generally do contain information on all sorts of relevant background characteristics, the sample is not always large enough to permit the desired differentiation, the problem being that certain groups are not sufficiently represented in the sample. The less well educated and members of ethnic minorities, in particular, are often underrepresented in the regular surveys.

## **4.2 Attitudes**

The second line of approach used in order to provide an impression of the progress made by the emancipation process concerns attitudes. In the first place this should concern attitudes towards emancipation issues as held by the Dutch population. In the second place, there is a desire also to identify the attitudes of individuals in key positions. In particular this should concern attitudes of specific categories of individuals with a high level of influence over the operationalisation and implementation of emancipation goals in practice (stakeholders).

Given the present design of various opinion surveys there is only very limited scope for doing justice to this line of approach in the Emancipation Monitor. As far as the various topics are concerned there is only regular polling concerning the opinions of the Dutch population about the division of paid and unpaid work. Information is, for example, available on how attitudes have changed over time towards mothers working outside the home, towards women in managerial positions and towards the distribution of unpaid work. In the main these concern the general attitudes of men and women of various ages. More personal attitudes are also known in the case of young people, relating to the future they want for themselves. Comparatively little information is available on the attitudes of members of ethnic minorities.

Research into the attitudes of important categories of stakeholders is less satisfactory and is indeed almost non-existent. Only occasionally specific actors, such as employers, are asked from time to time in surveys about their views on emancipation. There is therefore no reason to assume that this kind of information will be regularly collected in the future.

## **4.3 Penetration of policy goals**

Emancipation Monitor is designed to achieve in comparison with previous (statistical) surveys of the course of the emancipation process is the extent to which emancipation goals have penetrated the various policy practices. In order to obtain an impression of the progress made by the emancipation process B and any obstacles along the way B it is important not just to look at changes in the actual behaviour and the positions of women and men but also at the extent to which community organisations incorporate emancipation in practice. Although emancipation policy is ultimately

aimed at overcoming the structural inequality of power between women and men in society, the policy is directed to only a limited extent at changes in the behaviour of specific individuals. More frequently the policy is aimed at intermediaries: all sorts of actors who, in their practical policies, must facilitate and/or promote efforts to overcome gender inequality. Examples include: the educational system, which must prepare young people for a future consisting of various strands; the extent to which the norm of the always available employee is overcome on the shop floor; and the way in which social workers deal with victims of sexual violence.

These practices should support the process of equality among women and men. It is therefore highly relevant for the Monitor to follow the extent to which this is happening in practice. Unfortunately virtually no systematic and periodic research is carried out that can provide an overview in this area. The research in fact only identifies various efforts with respect to the distribution of paid and unpaid work, but even such surveys are far from complete.

Another problem is the fact that in so far as research is conducted into the way in which the various actors implement emancipation goals in practice, this remains confined to the gathering of information among the actors responsible for such implementation (such as head teachers, the boards of institutions and employers) or to documentary analysis (such as collective labour agreements). Although this information is in itself useable, it will be clear that it does not by definition cover what is in fact taking place in practice. While some ad hoc research is also conducted that provides relevant supplementary information in this regard, this does not amount to monitoring.

## **5 Much remains to be done**

This brief summary of the possibilities for doing justice in the Emancipation Monitor to the various topics and lines of approach will make it clear that there are many gaps. There is a clear lack of information on the topics of decision-making and violence. Attitudes towards the various topics within the Monitor are measured to only a limited extent. The diversity of society will not always receive sufficient attention. And given the available information, the penetration of emancipation goals in practice will find no more than summary treatment in the Emancipation Monitor.

All this means that first edition of the Emancipation Monitor will be unable to satisfy all the expectations. The shortcomings are however acknowledged by both the client and the compiler and both parties are seeking to do something about this. The state secretary for emancipation policy has for example commissioned a supplementary survey this year into the share of women in social decision-making. The Social and Cultural Planning Office and Statistics Netherlands are for their part seeking to set aside more space in their regular surveys for the gathering of information on aspects of the emancipation process on which insufficient data are currently being collected.

Although these efforts will mean that the Emancipation Monitor will increasingly meet the desired requirement for information in the future, the signs are that there will continue to be substantial limitations. The level of ambition of the policy-makers in instituting the Emancipation Monitor

extended beyond the systemisation of previously published statistical surveys. In particular the penetration of equal right goals in practical policy can barely be identified without additional investments B even though the success of the emancipation policy depends to a significant extent on the way in which the objectives are translated into the various policy practices.

Given the importance of this problem it is necessary for the policy-makers to undertake additional investments in the interests of obtaining a clearer picture. Two working methods are required. On the one hand it is desirable that the various inspectorates (the manpower inspectorate, education inspectorate and the healthcare inspectorate) pay greater attention to emancipation in their quality surveys. From the interviews I conducted for the Feasibility Study it is clear that there are some possibilities in this area. As noted earlier, however, such surveys have their limitations and they do not by definition provide a full range of coverage of what is happening in practice. To improve that understanding more intensive research is required: in-depth research into concrete practices concerning the way in which emancipation goals are implemented in practice.

In particular the Emancipation Monitor would benefit substantially from greater attention to the penetration of emancipation goals in the various policy practices. Research in this area accordingly deserves high priority. However, as applies in principle to the entire field of emancipation policy, this is not just a task for the Emancipation Policy Co-ordination Directorate and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, which is now funding the Emancipation Monitor. I would also urgently request the other ministries closely involved with the main areas of emancipation policy to help improve the provision of information in this area.

## References

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