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# Gender Equality Policy as Horizontal Policy: A Comparative Study of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom



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## ABSTRACT

This article examines two countries (the Netherlands and the UK) that are attempting to implement a horizontal gender equality strategy. The analysis identifies several external and internal factors that influence the relative success of this new strategy. These factors include the following: a good representation of women in politics, a structural dialogue with the women's movement combined with strong political will and high profile administrative co-ordination structures, as well as clear policy objectives and instruments that are monitored and evaluated. None of these factors constitute in themselves sufficient conditions, but a complex interdependent combination seems to be a good stimulating environment.

## RÉSUMÉ

Les auteures examinent ici la stratégie d'intégration horizontale de l'égalité des sexes que mettent à l'essai les Pays-Bas et le Royaume-Uni. Elles analysent différents facteurs externes et internes qui influencent le succès relatif de cette nouvelle stratégie, notamment : une représentation adéquate des femmes sur la scène politique, un dialogue structurel avec le mouvement des femmes combiné à une forte volonté politique et des mécanismes de coordination administrative bien en vue, de même que des objectifs clairs en matière de politiques et des moyens d'action précis, qui sont tous évalués à intervalles réguliers. Aucun de ces facteurs ne constitue en soi une condition suffisante; interdépendants, ils forment un ensemble complexe propre à créer un environnement stimulant.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo examina dos países (Holanda y el Reino Unido) que están intentando implementar una estrategia horizontal de igualdad entre los géneros. El análisis identifica varios factores externos e internos que influyen en el éxito de esta nueva estrategia. Entre estos factores se encuentran los siguientes: una buena representación de las mujeres en la política, un diálogo estructural con el movimiento de mujeres combinado con una fuerte voluntad política y estructuras de coordinación administrativa de muy buena reputación, así como también propósitos de políticas claras e instrumentos sometidos a control sistemático y evaluación. Ninguno de estos factores constituye en sí mismo condición suficiente, sino parece ser que una compleja combinación interdependiente es un buen medio ambiente estimulante.

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Since the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing several international organizations have been promoting the policy of "gender mainstreaming." The Council of Europe defines "gender mainstreaming" as "the (re) organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages by the actors normally involved in policy-making" (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 12). In this article we use the term "horizontal policy" instead of "gender mainstreaming" because it allows a broader approach to the equality policy strategy we want to examine.

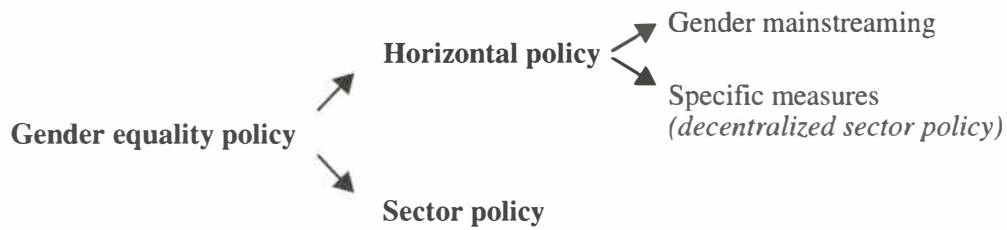
First, we define "horizontal policy" in the context of gender equality in general. In our view, a successful equality policy will follow a dual strategy. First, gender equality policy will constitute a "sector policy" in its own right and fall under the political competence of an equality minister or secretary of state, with a specific administration. The policy will involve specific measures for women (or men). The "sector policy" is a prerequisite for the development of

a second gender equality strategy, which we call "horizontal policy." This involves, on the one hand the incorporation of a gender perspective into all general measures, that is gender mainstreaming, and on the other hand it includes specific measures aimed at women (or men) in individual departments. The second aspect of horizontal policy could be described as "decentralized sector policy."

The number of countries in Europe that have tried to shape gender equality, as a horizontal policy, is small. This article examines two countries that have attempted to implement a horizontal equality strategy at central government level: the Netherlands and the UK. The focus of this paper is on the coordination initiatives introduced at the central government level and not at the level of individual departments.

Our research for this paper was based on a study of relevant literature, including policy documents and academic sources and interviews with civil servants and academics. Our conceptual framework is intended to provide situational explanations for the development of horizontal gender

**FIGURE 1**  
**Definition of Gender Equality Policy**



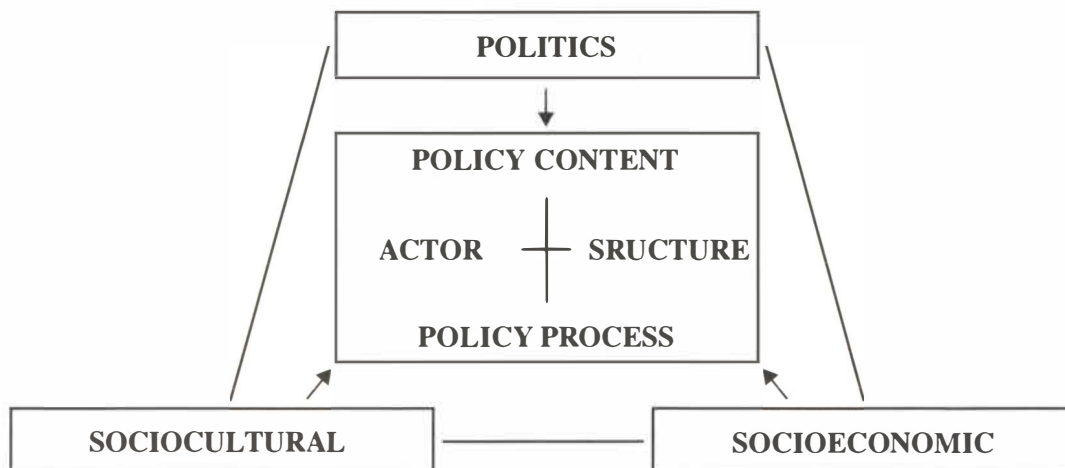
equality policy, by linking several theoretical perspectives. We have opted for a contingency approach and identify certain configurations of variables, which are interdependent and which together constitute a receptive context for policy to succeed although the variables are neither necessary nor sufficient for the development of a successful policy in each country. The aim of our framework is not to demonstrate statistically causal relations but to support contextual case studies.

The conceptual framework combines both “external” and “internal” factors that may account for the successful development of horizontal policy. The emphasis, however, lies on the internal factors. We identify three external factors: politics, which consists of the political system and the representation of women in politics; socioeconomic factors including the type of welfare state and the position of women in the labour market; and sociocultural factors such as ideology and the role of the women’s movement.

In identifying internal factors we make use of theories of social action and structuralism, and policy analysis and the policy process. The choice of the axis “actor-structure”

reflects the classic dichotomy in social sciences on the respective role of actors versus structures (Jacobs, 1993). We take for granted that both have an impact on policy and can reinforce or weaken each other. For each country we chart both the actors involved in equality policy and the policy structures. The second axis “policy-content—policy-process” goes more deeply into the theoretical substructure of horizontal policy. We define “policy content” as the material for policy (Hoogerwerf & Herweyer, 1998) and examine both the policy objectives and instruments in each country. As regards policy content, we pay attention to theories of “policy formation” and identify that where conceptual visions fit into the dominant perceptions or frames of policy they are most likely to be accepted and successfully implemented (Verloo, 2001; Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2000). The policy process refers to the dynamic of policy. A policy process can be divided into different phases, namely: policy preparation, decision, implementation, and evaluation (Hoogerwerf & Herweyer, 1998). Due to the relatively recent focus on gender equality as a horizontal policy, however, it is still difficult to examine all these phases.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Conceptual Framework on Gender Equality Policy as Horizontal Policy**



## Gender Equality Policy in the Netherlands: An Overview

The Netherlands has a long tradition regarding equality policy,<sup>1</sup> and 1974 is often quoted as the start of the Dutch equality policy (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*, 1985). Before then, there had been separate initiatives, for instance in the Ministry for Family Policy, but there was no coherent policy as such. In 1974, because of pressure from the women's movement and the impending UN women's year in 1975, the *Emancipatie Commissie* (EK, Emancipation Commission), a temporary expert advisory group, was set up to reflect on the development of an equality policy.

The period 1974-1977 was the first stage in the development of Dutch equality policy and prepared the ground. The EK sought to spread feminist ideas and to translate them into the world of politicians and bureaucrats. There was a growing consensus amongst political parties that "something should be done." From the start the policy was clearly defined as a horizontal policy with equality seen as a dimension of every policy area.

The second stage of Dutch equality policy covered the period 1977-1981. In 1977 a new Dutch government decided to appoint a Secretary of State responsible for Equality policy in the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Welfare. Although equality was not her only responsibility, her role, and that of the new administrative structure "DCE,"<sup>2</sup> was to promote the integration of equality in all policy areas and to ensure coherence between the equality initiatives in different ministries. This period was one of institution building and of policy focus on "changing attitudes" as well as anti-discrimination.

Stage three was marked by a consolidation of the institution building process and a shift from culture to structure. From now on gender inequality was defined as unbalanced power between men and women, a division between paid and unpaid work, and inequalities with regard to social security. The new Secretary of State for Equality and the DCE were transferred to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and by the beginning of the 1980s, equality as a new policy was beginning to find its way. Contacts between civil servants and Parliament were improving, and the women's movement was forging ties with a broad spectrum of political parties (Outshoorn, 1995, p. 180, 182). The late 1980s have been described as the "heyday" of Dutch equality policy.<sup>3</sup> A landmark "Policy Plan" was developed along with a high-level coordination mechanism to integrate equality into all policies. Important legislative initiatives were taken, and there was political support for

the equality strategy. The partnership between the women's movement, the administration, and politicians, the so-called "iron triangle," was at its strongest (Outshoorn, 1997, p. 123).

It is difficult to pinpoint the transition from a third to a fourth stage of equality policy in the Netherlands although by the late 1980s two important developments were evident. First, there was a narrowing of the scope of equality policy to labour market policy and second, a weakening of the iron triangle occurred. The administrative coordination structures did not function as well as before, and the women's movement and its link with government structures became weaker. It is perhaps too early to speak of a further phase in Dutch equality policy but some recent events are promising. The administrative body DCE is reasserting itself after a long period of difficulties, and in 2001 the government issued a policy paper on mainstreaming (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*, 2001). Only the future can tell whether a revival of equality policy in the Netherlands is occurring.

## External Factors Influencing Gender Equality Policy in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a bicameral parliamentary system with power concentrated in the directly elected second chamber, elected every four years. The electoral system is based on proportional representation, and coalition governments are the rule. Until 1994 the Christian-Democratic party was always part of the coalitions either with the Socialist or the Liberal party. Since 1994 there have been "purple" coalitions with socialists, liberals, and left-wing libertarians. Dutch women got the suffrage relatively early, in 1919, and representation of women in parliament is relatively high compared to other European countries. Active women's wings in the political parties, specific government research and policy programs, and subsidies for parties which actively promoted the increase of women in electoral bodies all contributed in 1994 to women gaining 36% of the seats in Parliament making the Netherlands number four in world ranking.

On a socioeconomic level, the Netherlands has a strong welfare state. In the typology of Esping-Andersen (1990), the Netherlands falls into the Social Democratic category, although it also has a lot in common with conservative regimes. Whereas in Scandinavian countries state contributions have been used to facilitate women's participation in the labour market, in the Dutch case they have been used to keep women out of it (Bussemaker & Voet, 1998). Until

1. In the Netherlands the policy is called "*Emancipatiebeleid*" (Emancipation policy), but for the sake of uniformity we will use the English word "Equality policy" as in the British case.

2. "*Directie Coördinatie Emancipatie*" or in English "Directorate for the Integration of Emancipation."

3. Interview with Joke Swiebel (official in the DCE between 1979 and 1995) on July 12, 2001, and with Professor Joyce Outshoorn, Ph.D., on June 13, 2001.

recently, female participation in the workforce has been amongst the lowest in Europe. The so-called “Dutch miracle” proved that the country was able to overcome the typical problems of modern welfare states. A significant change, however, has taken place—away from the “welfare without work” society, which the Netherlands was becoming during the 1980s (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997). The Netherlands now has a middle ranking position between Germany and Scandinavian countries on the one hand and Britain and the US on the other. Women’s participation in the labour market has increased as new jobs have been created. However, most of these are part-time and overwhelmingly held by women (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997, p. 11). There is a clear evolution to a one-and-a-half job model with men working full-time and women working part-time. Explanations of this development lie in a demand for higher labour market participation of all citizens and the strong “motherhood ideology” firmly rooted in the Dutch history (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 144). As a consequence of the latter there is a lack of day-care facilities which has made part-time work the only strategy for women (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997, p. 35).

In sociocultural terms, the Netherlands is atypical. On the one hand there is a conservative morality, illustrated by the ideological assumptions about motherhood. On the other hand, the country is often described as progressive, for instance on sexual matters or abortion. This paradox means that whilst “the Netherlands is quite liberal and feminist . . . actual behaviour and organisational structures lag behind” (Bussemaker & Voet, 1998, p. 8). An example of women’s studies at Dutch universities illustrates this. The Netherlands has a large number of professors in women’s studies, and research on women’s issues is well developed. However, when it comes to the representation of full female professors in the “conventional” disciplines, there are almost none. The Netherlands has an active feminist movement, with more influence in public life than its counterparts in the UK, France, or Germany (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 143). At the end of the 1960s, the Dutch second-wave women’s movement took off as an interest group very much attuned to the traditional political arena. A reform-oriented group *Man-Vrouw-Maatschappij* (MVM, Man-Woman-Society) laid the basis for the equality policy in 1974. MVM consisted of well-educated men and career women and had connections with leading members of the Social Democrat party, and this influenced the quick government response (Outshoorn, 1995, p. 170-171). However, in the 1970s the women’s movement stressed the need for autonomy and distrusted government. Only since the 1980s, has there been a renewed interest in mainstream politics (Gardiner & Leijenaar, 1997, p. 82).

### Gender Equality Policy as Horizontal Policy in the Netherlands: Actors and Structure

We have mentioned before the influence of the UN as an actor at the start of the Dutch equality policy. UN women’s conferences in 1985 and 1995 were also milestones and occasions to publish reports on the state of the art of equality policy in the Netherlands and to strengthen the links with the women’s movement (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 151). The Netherlands has also played a very active role in promoting gender mainstreaming in international forums such as the UN and the European Union (EU) (Van Munster, 1990).

Besides the role of international bodies, there have been political, administrative, and advisory actors and structures. At the political level, the Netherlands has had seven politicians responsible for equality policy since 1977 although equality was never their exclusive competence.<sup>4</sup> Five were women Secretaries of State and two were male Employment Ministers. Their role has been primarily a coordinating one. They have been assigned to ensure a coherent equality policy across all sectors although in the end each minister is accountable for his or her policy sector. They have had few specific equality responsibilities. Given the coalition governments throughout this period, the political “colour” of the cabinet is not a very decisive factor for equality policy (Huisman, 1991, p. 14).

In 1986 a “Cabinet Committee for Emancipation” presided over by the Prime Minister was set up, with a view of identifying all issues with an important equality dimension. Because of the fragmented nature of the Dutch administrative structures, the integration of equality into mainstream politics became more difficult without this high level structure which was abandoned in 1989 (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 151-152). In 1979 a “Parliamentary Standing Committee on Emancipation Policy” was created, but it too was abolished in 1994 in a general process of rationalization. Gender issues are currently addressed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Social Affairs and Employment. For a while a non-partisan platform of women in the Parliament, the *Kamerbreed Vrouwenoverleg*, provided an additional forum for discussion and negotiation on women’s issues in the 1980s (Outshoorn, 1995, p. 167).

At the level of the administration, the DCE is at the core of the national machinery. Its task is to support the responsible minister, promote equality as a horizontal policy throughout government, and liaise with the women’s movement. The DCE started with nine people in 1978 and had 36 on staff in 2001. The first Director of DCE was a professional civil servant who led the Directorate from 1978 to 1987, thus ensuring continuity. Many of the officials origi-

4. We do not take into account the short periods where there have been interim governments.

nally came from the women's movement. They were very motivated and played a key role in giving impetus to change (De Bruin, 1988). From the 1990s, however, DCE was frequently reorganized and experienced a loss of professionalism and influence over other ministries (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 161). In 1991 there was a proposal to abolish the DCE on the grounds that mainstreaming meant integration of the work of the DCE into all departments (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 152).

Another administrative coordination structure, preceding DCE, was the "ICE" or "Interdepartmental Co-ordination Commission for Emancipation" set up in 1977 with equality representatives from each ministry. The influence of this structure varied over time. During the period of the Cabinet Committee for Emancipation it became an important body because more senior officials were represented.<sup>5</sup> Today, several ministries possess equality "intra-commissions" (TECENA, 2000), and their functioning and continuity seems to vary a lot depending on the gender sensitiveness of the minister involved or the steer given by the coordinating minister for equality and the DCE.

Regarding advisory structures, the temporary "Emancipation Commission" was replaced in 1981 by the permanent "Emancipatie Raad" (ER, Emancipation Council). The ER was never as strong as its predecessor was, and in 1997 it was abolished. The dissolution was part of a general streamlining exercise of the government apparatus to reduce public expenditure and promote efficiency, but it also reflected declining political support for women's issues (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 152, 155). The Council was replaced by a temporary body called "TECENA" with the task of mainstreaming gender into all other advisory bodies. A comprehensive subsidy policy for women's organizations has always existed. This funding has made it possible for women's groups to institutionalize and specialize. In the logic of horizontal policy, women's groups do not lobby DCE anymore but the other ministries, a process started in the late 1980s and described as the "functional differentiation of the women's movement" (Outshoorn, 1997, p. 124). It is clear that there has always been a weak formal link between DCE and the women's movement.

### Gender Equality Policy as Horizontal Policy in the Netherlands: Content and Process of Policy

The government vision on equality policy and its goals can be found in policy papers. The first policy paper "Emancipation: Process of change and growth" was published in 1977. The blueprint for the paper was written a few years earlier by the Emancipation Commission's experts and women's movement representatives. Later policy papers

were also often influenced by the women's movement or academics (Keuzenkamp, 1999). The advantage of this is a dynamic interplay with theory but the disadvantage is the high level of abstraction. Effective policy requires that women's issues are broken down into concrete negotiable demands and have practical solutions (Huisman, 1991, p. 15). The main goal of the first policy paper was to grant both women and men a greater freedom of choice in shaping their lives through education and training for adults, equal treatment regarding income, and fiscal policy. It was also designed to help women make up for lost opportunities and reflected feminine values and activities.

With the move of DCE to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, policy emphasis shifted to economic independence for women and also introduced the issue of sexual violence. The landmark 1985 "Policy Plan" redefined women's issues in terms of power indicating that structural change is needed and not just changes in attitudes. After explaining the equality objectives, the policy paper made a concrete link between these objectives and different policy fields such as labour markets and income, education, health, sexual violence, public housing, and women in developing countries. This policy paper provided an impetus for new policy initiatives in all ministries in the 1980s and was monitored by the Secretary of State and DCE (Outshoorn, 1995, p. 175).

In theory, the "Policy Plan" remained the policy reference document for the next 10 years. In practice however, the general equality policy was gradually reduced to labour market policy (Keuzenkamp & Outshoorn, 1992). This phenomenon can be seen as strategic framing: with equality policy taking advantage of the fact that labour policy was the top priority of the purple coalitions. Action that feminists had requested for many years, such as women's participation in the work force, flexible working hours, more liberal shopping hours, and the need to improve care arrangements, were now being defined as labour issues in which the state should play an important regulatory role (Outshoorn, 1996, p. 142-143). This framing strategy, however, has a cost, as an articulated overall view on equality is lacking, and there is less attention to the effective integration of equality in the different ministries. Only recently in the 2001 policy paper "Gender Mainstreaming," is this trend being countered, although it is too early to assess whether it works.

Three main instruments have been used by the equality actors to encourage the other ministries to integrate gender. First, a gender paragraph is inserted in all government agreements, second, there are high-level bilateral talks ("rondganggesprekken") with the other ministers and civil servants, and third, there is a requirement for each ministry to set specific targets which will be centrally monitored.

5. Interview with Joke Swiebel (official in the DCE between 1979 and 1995) on July 12, 2001.

The effectiveness of these instruments has varied over time, and they have not been used systematically throughout the whole policy period. It is striking that training, as an instrument, was never used on a large scale. One instrument used by the ministries, and developed by researchers at the request of the DCE in 1994, is the “Emancipatie Effect Rapportage” (EER, Gender Impact Assessment). The aim of this instrument was to show how and where a policy has a negative impact on gender relations. In 1999, nine EERs had been completed, and an evaluation study indicated the relative success of the instrument. However, some problems were revealed, in particular the introduction of the instrument at too late a stage in the decision-making process. This made it difficult to change the policy according to the EER results (Van de Graaf et al., 1999). Another problem was the fact that the EER was a voluntary instrument. Whilst for the Dutch “Environment Impact Assessment” a screening committee exists which decides for all policies whether an assessment is compulsory, no such a committee exists in the case of the EER (Verloo, 2001, p. 20). It is a general feature of the gender equality policies that mainly “soft” tools are used without a binding character (Huisman, 1991, p. 15). An evaluation study of the gender equality targets set in the different ministries shows that specific measures targeted at women prevail over real gender mainstreaming and that these measures often have an ad hoc character and are not anchored in a long term vision or strategy (TECENA, 2000).

The ministries that have been most successful in integrating gender equality are those where the gender relevance of the policy area is easy to demonstrate, such as education and development cooperation. They often produce their own equality policy papers and have specialized equality officials. In fact these are the areas where “frame bridging” is rather easy, and it is not difficult to construct a gender link with an existing policy framework to take the regular policy actors on board and make the equality policy resonate with their values and norms (Verloo, 2001).

### **Gender Equality Policy in the UK: An Overview**

Gender equality policy in the UK started in the 1970s with the adoption of two major pieces of legislation which were the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975. The British government turned its attention to gender equality legislation because of considerable parliamentary support, the activism of women’s groups, as well as external pressure, such as compliance with the provisions of the 1957 Treaty of Rome “equal pay” principle. The Sex Discrimination Act created an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) as an independent state agency to oversee the implementation of the anti-discrimination legislation. The Department of Employment watched over issues of equality in the workplace, especially issues arising from the Equal Pay Act. The only other national state organiza-

tion to oversee women’s issues was the Women’s National Commission, a low profile advisory body created in 1969, to group together women’s organizations (Lovenduski, 1995).

The Conservative governments in the 1980s and 1990s had no coherent strategy towards gender equality (Beveridge, Nott, & Stephen, 2000). In 1986 Prime Minister Thatcher established a Ministerial Group on Women’s Issues, but in general the government adopted a minimalist approach on equality by viewing equality for women as fundamentally an employment issue (Lovenduski, 1995). There was no place on the equality agenda for wider issues such as childcare, social welfare, pensions, or violence against women (Forbes, 1997). However, within the civil service “Programmes for Action” to further equality of opportunity was introduced in 1984 (Beveridge et al., 1998).

Under the Conservative Government of John Major in 1992, junior ministers in the Health and Employment departments were given specific assignments on women’s equality as part of their portfolio. Furthermore, a Sex Equality Branch was set up in the Department of Employment to coordinate government policies on women’s issues. But this body and the EOC had limited power and resources, met infrequently, and had unclear work remits (Lovenduski, 1995; Roe, 1999).

The Labour government elected in 1997 placed gender equality policy more centrally on the agenda and introduced a mainstreaming strategy (Women’s Unit, 1997). New gender equality machinery was installed, with the appointment of a Minister of Women at cabinet level, a cabinet sub-committee on women, made up of ministers from the major government departments and chaired by the Minister for Women, and a Women’s Unit within the Cabinet Office. There was also an all-party Group on Gender equality in parliament made up of MPs and peers from the three major political parties (Beveridge et al. 2000). The role of the Minister of Women was to identify policy priorities concerning women and coordinate a cross-departmental approach to initiatives on women. The Women’s Unit supports the Minister of Women, promotes women’s issues across the departments, and gives advice and information on equality objectives. The Unit also supports the Government’s commitment to a “new dialogue” with women, involving better communication with women’s organizations. The EOC and the Women’s National Commission, both agencies under the previous government, are now under the remit of and funded by the Women’s Unit.

Under the Labour government, British gender equality policy has been streamlined with a set of policy priorities including childcare facilities, family-friendly working practices, bridging the pay gap, violence against women, legal and international obligations, and increased participation of women in politics.

## External Factors Influencing Gender Equality Policy in the UK

Lovenduski points out that although different factors play a part in shaping gender equality policy, it is essentially the product of the political setting (Lovenduski, 1997). The UK's political system is a dominant-party one, with the political party that wins an overall majority of seats in the general election forming a government. After 18 years of conservative government, the Labour party came to power in 1997. The British Parliament consists of two chambers: an elected House of Commons, and a largely appointed House of Lords. Elections for the Lower House are held at least every five years (Beveridge et al., 2000). The British electoral system is based on single member constituencies and a simple plurality method of counting the votes or "first past the post" system. Research shows that countries using this system elect fewer women (Gardiner, 1997). In 1997, the largest number of women was returned, representing 18 percent of MPs, an increase of 100% over the 9.2% in 1993. Political representation of women is still low, however, and the UK is number 40 in the world ranking. The Labour party was the first political party in the UK to introduce a quota system to ensure the election of more women. This remains very controversial. The traditionally low representation of women in Parliament is translated into their low presence in the Cabinet. The Labour government in 1997 appointed five women ministers at Cabinet level, the largest ever, and many more women junior ministers (Beveridge et al., 1998).

In socioeconomic terms, the UK fits the liberal category in welfare politics, with a strong female workforce, but a lack of childcare support and a large pay gap between men and women (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The Labour government introduced a minimum wage in 1999 and women have been the major beneficiaries of this. There is still a traditional pattern of gender segregation in the workforce and a strong male breadwinner model with women working shorter hours and receiving fewer benefits than men, although this is slowly changing (Gardiner, 1997). The present gender equality policy in the UK is mainly concentrated on welfare objectives such as childcare, family-friendly employment policies, and equal opportunities.

Socioculturally, the UK is a clear example of "private feminism." Women's organizations are left to themselves, and the conservative government even undermined the institutionalization of a women's machinery (Forbes, 1997). The election of the Labour government in 1997 saw a change in this respect with better communication between the government and women's organizations and interest groups. Nevertheless, the highly centralized state apparatus and relatively powerful senior civil service have made it difficult for disadvantaged groups, such as women's groups that are not clearly aligned with the major political parties or peak occupational organizations, to influence policy structures. This is illustrated by the EOC, which

took off very slowly and only became well networked nationally with women's organizations and local authorities in the 1990s (Lovenduski, 1995).

## Gender Equality Policy as Horizontal Policy in the UK: Actors and Structure

Different actors have played an important role in the introduction of a horizontal equality approach in British central government. As in the Netherlands, the UN played a prominent role. The British government adopted the notion of mainstreaming as part of its commitments to the UN Global Platform for Action in 1995 (Beveridge et al., 1998). The Conservative government made some attempt to have a horizontal equality policy in the 1980s when the Ministerial Group on Women's Issues outlined initiatives on policy appraisal for different social groups, including women. The Labour government since 1997, however, has brought much more visible support to the gender mainstreaming approach within the existing political structures of gender equality policy. The new Minister for Women clearly stated: "We in government will be taking forward a programme to ensure that every policy-maker in every office and every government department considers the effects their policies have on women—not as an afterthought, when it is probably too late to do anything about it—but as an integral part of the policy-making process, what we call the 'mainstreaming' of women's issues" (Beveridge et al., 1998, p. 71). The installation of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Women was also seen as an important structure for bringing the horizontal approach into practice, as it consisted of ministers of the departments who discussed crosscutting women's issues.

On the administrative level there has been an attempt at a horizontal approach since 1995, as the former Conservative government used the Women's Policy Network, made up of government officials who were the focal points of women's policy in each ministry, to promote and monitor mainstreaming (Women's National Commission, 1999). In 1997, Labour created the Women's Unit, as an administrative body, to support the Minister for Women in coordinating a cross-departmental approach to initiatives for women and equality. The Women's Unit has a strategic place in the civil service. First installed within the Department of Social Security, in 1999 it was transferred to the Cabinet's Office, the central coordinating unit of the civil service. The creation of the Women's Unit fit into the overall trend of "joined-up government" and making policies more "horizontal" or crosscutting. Other coordinating units installed within the Cabinet Office included the Social Exclusion Unit and the Performance and Innovation Unit (Cabinet Office, 1999). After the elections of June 2001, the "Women's Unit" was renamed the "Women and Equality Unit," and its role was widened. It now takes the lead in the total framework of equality across government, where as before it mostly concentrated on women's issues.

The advisory body, the Women's National Commission, installed under the Conservative government, continues to exist, but the Labour government tends to finance, consult, and involve other women's organizations much more in the decision-making process.

### Gender Equality as Horizontal Policy in the UK: Content and Process of Policy

In 1997, the Labour government committed itself to a "modernizing government" program to make decision-making more integrated. This program evidently offers opportunities for the development of new processes such as "gender mainstreaming" (Beveridge et al., 2000). The "Modernising Government" White Paper emphasized the need for policy-makers to make sure that all policies are inclusive, and "to devise policies that are fair and take full account of all those likely to be affected by them" (CMPS, 2000, p. 4).

"Mainstreaming," or "putting women's interests at the heart of government," so that women's needs and interests are first thoughts and not afterthoughts for every department was one of the equality priorities of the Labour government. Three actions were distinguished: first, guidance to explain to government departments how they could take account of women's needs when planning and developing policy; second, an annual report on the progress made in the different departments; and third, a detailed strategy for the Women's Unit to ensure that mainstreaming really changed the way departments work (Women's Unit, 1998).

The main tool for implementing a horizontal approach in the different departments is the PAET<sup>6</sup> guidelines. Their origin lies with the former Conservative government, which launched the idea of guidance on policy appraisal for different social groups at the beginning of the 1990s and outlined a single set of PAET guidelines in 1996 (Mackay & Bilton, 2000). The aim of these guidelines was to ensure "that policy-makers would identify whether any target group might be disadvantaged by a particular policy, and consider whether any differential impact was legally justifiable in policy terms" (Women and Equality Unit, 2001). However, at first, the implementation of the PAET guidelines within departments remained patchy. A major weakness was that no single body had the overall responsibility for coordinating their implementation (Beveridge et al. 2000).

In 1998, the Women's Unit revised the guidelines covering equal treatment for women, racial groups, and disabled persons; they were issued jointly by the Home Office, the Department of Education and Employment, and the Cabinet Office to all departments (Women and Equality Unit, 2001). The revised guidelines emphasize that all policy proposals must include an impact analysis for different

sections of the population, that departments may consult with non-governmental organizations, make use of existing statistics and data in determining the impact of a policy, or commission new data, and amend policy if it has a differential impact on women and constitutes unlawful discrimination. The most significant weakness of the guidelines is that the purpose and ways in which the guidelines should be applied remain very vague. A great deal of discretion is given to departments on how, when, and whether or not they use the guidelines, and there is still a lack of monitoring and knowledge about the use and the progress being made (Beveridge et al., 2000). The PAET guidelines are cross-referenced in a checklist for policy-makers on their preparation of papers for the Cabinet, along with references to Regulatory Impact Assessments or Health Impact Assessments, but to what extent the checklist is actually used by policymakers in practice is not known.<sup>7</sup>

Another policy instrument is training. The Centre of Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) has initiated training to support officials within departments in implementing the PAET guidelines. The CMPS also provides officials with a practical guide, but the interest of officials in the training courses was very poor (CMPS, 2000).

A clear example of the implementation of gender mainstreaming within government departments is the Women's Budget Group, composed of representatives from academic life and Non-Governmental Organizations. The Women's Budget Group has regular meetings with officials in the Treasury Department, engaged in budget preparations, and plays an important role in examining the impact of budget proposals on women (Women and Equality Unit, 2001).

In 2000, a new instrument was launched by the Women and Equality Unit, the Gender Impact Assessment Tool, to support and supplement PAET guidelines. The development of this tool covering equal treatment for women, racial groups, and disabled persons is still in an initial phase, with pilot projects in some departments (Women and Equality Unit, 2001).

Because of the recent introduction of gender equality as a horizontal policy, implementation is still in an initial phase and it is too soon to draw conclusions. Nevertheless, it is clear that even if a clear choice for a horizontal approach has been made in recent years and some specific instruments have been developed, policy implementation is not easy and progress is slow.

### Conclusion

Drawing upon this two-country study it is clear that the Netherlands has a long tradition in the field of gender equality and has achieved some notable success in bringing it about. In contrast in the UK, which only really embarked

6. Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment.

7. [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/cabsec/2001/guide/check.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/cabsec/2001/guide/check.htm)

upon gender mainstreaming in 1997, progress has been slow. The combination of factors identified in the introduction clearly plays an important role in the relative success of the horizontal policy approach in the Netherlands compared to the UK case.

The electoral system of a country is a key external factor. The UK with its single member constituency system has relatively few female politicians, whereas the Netherlands with its proportional system and active government policy encouraging women's political participation has far more women in politics. Having more women elected is not in itself a guarantee of the integration of gender in all policy fields, as not all women subscribe to feminist ideas, but there are enough instances to show the importance of having women in the right places (Outshoorn & Swiebel, 1998, p. 159). Although it is not a factor explaining failure or success, party systems appear to have an effect on the development of equality policy. In the UK, the Labour government in 1997 made a visible breakthrough regarding horizontal policy but in the coalition system of the Netherlands, there has never been such a visible shift linked to a single political party.

Socioeconomically, the UK has a liberal welfare policy with poor welfare provisions. The fact that the country is lagging behind in this area accounts for the priority given to fundamental welfare issues instead of the promotion of gender equality in all other policy fields. The Netherlands is better ranked in the welfare typology, which makes it easier to pursue a broad horizontal equality policy. However, they do have conservative characteristics as well and are lagging behind in female participation in the labour market. Employment, however, is a key issue of the purple coalition; together with the strategic framing of equality, this might explain the concentration of the Dutch equality policy on labour market issues since the end of the 1980s.

In sociocultural terms, the strength of the women's movement and the position of gender studies constitute a third important external factor. Compared to the UK, the Dutch women's movement has much less influence on public policy, although there is more input from women academics into policy-making.

In examining the internal factors influencing gender equality as a horizontal policy, the role of actors, structures, and policy content and processes all contribute to the specific development of the policy. The two cases confirm that international actors, such as the UN, have more than a symbolic role in influencing national government's equality policies (Lovenduski, 1997, p. 93). Both in the UK and the Netherlands, the UN and the EU have had an impact on mainstreaming. Comparing the Dutch case to the UK, it is clear that the actors and structures enabling the process of horizontal equality policy are much stronger in the Netherlands. On the one hand the equality structures in the Netherlands have a longer history compared to the UK which might explain their greater influence, but another

explanation for the strong development of horizontal policy in the Netherlands is the "iron triangle" (Outshoorn, 1997, p. 121-124; Dijkstra & Swiebel, 1982, p. 59). The iron triangle effectively combines three types of actors and structures: civil servants, the specialists among the parliamentarians, and specific organizations in a given policy area, who, in a symbiotic relationship, develop and implement policy. In the Netherlands, this iron triangle developed slowly in the equality field but by the 1980s it was at its strongest, encompassing an elaborate equality machinery in the administration including high-level coordination structures, strong political will, and support from the women's movement.

Since 1997, in the UK new political actors have brought mainstreaming forward, although there is still much lip-service being paid instead of real implementation. Political and administrative cross-departmental structures have been developed, with a Minister for Women and a Women's Unit, within the Cabinet Office, that has a coordinating role on gender equality policy. In the UK the different sides of the triangle effectively combining actors and structures are not fully interconnected yet. Before 1997, one could hardly speak about a triangle at all.

If we compare another internal factor, namely policy content, we see that in the Netherlands several equality policy papers have given a real impetus to the promotion of horizontal policy. In the UK there is little evidence of such centrally formulated policy objectives, even if there have been attempts to "frame" equality policy in the context of fashionable policy trends such as "Modernizing government" and "inclusive policy." But even if successes have been achieved in the Netherlands, there is often a gap between official policy objectives and daily practice in both countries. An example is the subordination of Dutch equality policy to labour market issues even if policy papers emphasize the importance of horizontal policy. The Netherlands also has a better record on policy instruments. The British PAET guidelines can be compared to the Dutch "EER" (Gender Impact Assessment). The Dutch instrument has been used successfully many times but there is very little evidence that the UK guidelines are being used effectively. Furthermore, while in the Netherlands the instrument of bilateral talks and targets for each department are used, the UK has no such instrument and has much less overview of the policy situation in the different departments.

Regarding policy processes and the different phases in decision-making, the equality machinery in both countries manages to play a role in agenda-setting for other departments but is much weaker regarding policy implementation, especially in the UK.

In conclusion, developing a horizontal equality policy is a sophisticated and long-term target involving substantial changes that cannot be implemented overnight (Prins, 1989). Even if our analysis demonstrates the Dutch case to be more successful than the UK one, it is clear that the

Dutch experience with horizontal equality policy is not a simple success story with ever improving practices. A combination of external and internal structural factors determines whether a horizontal strategy is more or less effective at certain moments in time. Continuous government support for more women in decision-making, a more structured dialogue with the women's movement, combined with strong political will and high profile administrative coordination structures, as well as clear policy objectives and instruments that are monitored and evaluated, constitute important factors for a successful horizontal gender equality policy. None of these factors in themselves are sufficient conditions for an effective integration of gender equality in all policy areas. Successful promotion of horizontal policy is determined by a complex interdependent combination of these factors that together constitute the right contextual environment ■

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