

1. Corporate quotas and gender equality within organizations

Aim: To explain to what degree and how the introduction of corporate boardroom quotas in the Netherlands resulted in changes in gender wage equality and occupational sex segregation below organizational leadership

Theoretical background:

Women in advanced economies occupy less than one third of corporate leadership positions, and the pace of advancement of gender diversity in leadership has declined in recent decades. Alarmed by these developments, several European countries, including the Netherlands, introduced corporate boardroom quotas for large corporations to achieve a minimum representation of women in their top management (typically between 30–40%). However, one of the most disputed questions about quotas is their capacity to reduce persisting inequalities between men and women in organizations below the leadership level. Corporate quotas are new policy instruments, and the literature has mainly focused on their impact on corporate directorates. The Ph.D. project fills a significant current gap in the literature by studying whether corporate boardroom quotas trickle down below the leadership level to impact vertical (status and wages) and horizontal (jobs and tasks) gender distinctions in organizations. We aim to dissect two mechanisms of potential impact. First, quota-appointed female leaders may become agents of change by acting as role models, mentoring junior women, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion practices to benefit junior women. Second, quota regulations may exert institutional pressure on targeted organizations to adopt diversity practices for lower-level positions to achieve a better gender balance in career pipelines. However, some doubt that external interventions targeting the number of women in top positions can put such transformative processes into motion. Quota-appointed female leaders may lack the power or willingness to support lower-ranking women and promote diversity practices, especially if those leaders were appointed merely as an act of tokenism. Similarly, organizational gender diversity practices targeting women's career advancements may be symbolic, taken to appease regulators and the public, but ineffective in practice. The project's further aim is to reconcile these contrasting views by investigating how the impact of quotas on gender equality at lower organizational levels varies across organizational contexts. Based on a recent relational theory of inequality in organizations, we expect workplaces characterized by strong gender distinctions in task allocation, rewards, and formal or informal practices to resist equalizing pressures. In contrast, contexts with weaker gender distinctions may present more opportunities for change in gender inequality.

Research design:

The project will investigate the impact of Dutch diversity and quota regulations (2013-), utilizing longitudinal administrative microdata on businesses, leadership appointments, and employees provided by Statistics Netherlands. The project will link these sources to large-scale, longitudinal monitor surveys on gender diversity and formal policies in large Dutch organizations (2013–2020). As quotas apply to companies beyond a size and revenue threshold, the project will identify their causal effects using a regression discontinuity design which will compare them to companies close to the cut-off for the applicability of quotas.

Literature:

- Hughes, M. M., Paxton, P., & Krook, M. L. (2017). Gender quotas for legislatures and corporate boards. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43, 331-352.
- Van Hek, M., & Van Der Lippe, T. (2019). Are female managers agents of change or cogs in the machine? an assessment with three-level manager–employee linked data. *European Sociological Review*, 35(3), 316-331.

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