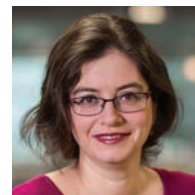


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### News EWM-NL

# Looking back: the past five years of EWM-NL

EWM-NL is the national association of women working in the field of mathematics in The Netherlands, established in 2013. In this article, Maria Vlasiou, the president of the past five years, gives an overview of what EWM-NL has achieved under her leadership.

Mid November 2021, I was asked by one of the editors of this journal, Nicos Starreveld, to write a short article giving a brief overview of the activities of EWM-NL for 2021, a summary of the discussions during the annual meeting of EWM-NL, which had just taken place, and a glimpse to our plans. I readily accepted, as this offered a very efficient method to reach out to the wider mathematics community in the Netherlands, beyond what we achieve through our members, representatives, events and social media. Of course, citing the usual reason of academicians of workload, I postponed the task to just a few months down the road, when I expected to be at relative leisure. (I am sure that the reader will not be surprised to learn that my grossly overestimated the probability of existence of said leisure...) This delay though played a crucial role in writing this article: since accepting this task, a member answered our call to fill the position of the president of EWM-NL. By the publication of this article, Dr. Svetlana Dubinkina will have assumed this role. Thus, rather than summarising our latest annual meeting, what I wish to offer you below is a brief overview of what EWM-NL has achieved in the past five years under my leadership.

#### What's in a name?

EWM The Netherlands (EWM-NL) is a platform for all female professional mathematicians working in the Netherlands. It is supported and financed by Platform Wiskunde Nederland (PWN) and the Dutch Research Council (NWO). The association was established in 2013 by Valentijn Karemaker and KaYin Leung, who chose to link the name of the Dutch association to that of EWM. EWM, the European Women in Mathematics association, is one of the oldest in Europe, having been founded in 1986. While I do not know the actual reasons for this choice, I do find it an excellent one. In the Netherlands, a good part of women in mathematics are not Dutch nationals. I feel that the name of EWM-NL reflects in some part our international identity, links us to the wider European community of women mathematicians, and is more recognisable and less awkward than e.g. 'Women in mathematics in the Netherlands' or similar choices. Having said that, I have spent a good part of the past five years saying to colleagues "It's EWM-NL. EWM is an independent association."

#### Setting up EWM-NL to its current form

Early in my tenure with EWM-NL, I saw quite some variation in the understanding of what the association actually is

and wishes to do. Quite a few mathematicians were unaware of its existence. Some thought it was a social group targeted to PhD students in mathematics. Others said explicitly that this is the national association of women in mathematics and has the role to support their interests as needed. Clearly, this role was not a well-defined or widely recognised one.

To clear up these conflicting views, the board of 2017, consisting of Francesca Arici, Anna Kruseman, Brigit Sollie, Sanne Willems and myself, decided to work first towards establishing the association in the national academic landscape. To fulfil this, we worked in three directions: first, we wrote down our mission and vision and established means of communicating with members (an email, website, newsletter, and social media). Second, we initiated a dialogue with all mathematicians in the country. We did so by visiting all departments of mathematics in the Netherlands in order to present our agenda and vision and discuss with all mathematicians what priorities we should establish and what points they believe should be addressed. Third, we initiated a dialogue with national organisations and structures in the country. This led to discussions with NWO on diversity in NWO programmes and national institutions, with PWN on the role of the platform in supporting women in mathematics in the country, and with the Royal Dutch Mathematical Society (KWG) on a

wider representation of women mathematicians in the events organised and publications issued within the country.

### Activities of EWM-NL

The association is broadly focusing on support, networking, outreach, cooperation, and accountability. We provide direct support to women mathematicians, e.g., through our mentoring programme, grants scheme, or small-scale workshops, but also indirect support, which is typically through identifying, discussing, and proposing amendments to structures that may be particularly unfavourable to women. Through our meetings, we create networking opportunities for like-minded mathematicians. In terms of outreach, we focus on the visibility of women in mathematics, we are a reliable source of dissemination of information in the wider mathematical community, and we encourage future aspiring mathematicians. We cooperate closely with organisations within the Netherlands, but also extensively with other national associations, the European Women in Mathematics, and the Committee for Women in Mathematics of the International Mathematical Union. This has been manifested through participation on national events and global projects, collaboration on joint projects, think-tanks, and joint event organisation. Accountability, always hand-in-hand with cooperation, is typically expressed by monitoring the participation of women mathematicians in national events and gently reminding stakeholders that broader diversity benefits us all. In 2017, in connection to an interview I was about to give for an Australian newspaper, I contacted NWO for information for the data of women in mathematics in the Netherlands throughout the years. NWO did

all they could to assist me, but unfortunately this information was not systematically recorded. After discussions with PWN, KWG and NWO, EWM-NL was tasked with collecting and maintaining this information. I am happy that in the past five years, we have enjoyed both a significant progress in the number of women in mathematics and an almost universal support from universities in keeping track of this information.

EWM-NL aims to organise events throughout the country, even if that sometimes means that the travel is longer than what a central location would allow. We believe in reaching out to all our members. We combine events mainly focused on practical advice (such as the workshops), with networking events (such as the annual meetings), and focused events (e.g. our monthly meetings for the Wikipedia project or the NMC sessions focusing on young careers). Naturally, we pay special attention to purely mathematics, and the International Day of Mathematics is a great opportunity to do so.

At its core, EWM-NL strives to support its members. This has taken us to unexpected places, as the EWM-NL members approached us with creative ideas that are close to their hearts or are simply of interest. Through our grant scheme, we supported the participation of a volunteer to summer mathematics camps in Kitale. We initiated and coordinated the Wikipedia project (a project to add, extend, and translate pages of — mostly — women mathematicians) and the poster on women in mathematics based on the vision of two (board) members. Most of our workshops have been on topics directly requested from our members. The topics were rather diverse: negotiation and conflict resolution, work-

life balance, assertiveness, persuasion and influencing, but also media training and a workshop specifically for Masters students who wish for a better understanding of what a PhD entails and what a career in industry looks like. After extensive work on gathering and documenting best practices, we have provided recommendations on diversity and tenure-track contracts to NWO, universities, departments, and PWN as a direct response from problems brought to our attention by our members. It is impossible for me to know if our action was a driver in the progress we have noticed in the last few years on this topic. I would like to think however, that even if not a driver, it may have helped plant a seed or reinforce the message of many.

### Looking back

It is my belief or wishful thinking that EWM-NL has become a widely recognised association both domestically and internationally. We grew from about 100 registered accounts to our newsletter at the end of 2017 to approximately 300 at the end of 2021. While this may be nice, it is my sincere hope that we have been (and continue to be) a useful association. Our primary mission is to support our members, after all. It is perhaps fair to say that the value of an association is strongly correlated to the engagement of its members. In this respect, EWM-NL flourishes. The number of volunteers that have helped the association grow, men and women, is in my view humbling. For the past five years, including two years of unusual circumstances, we have had a continuous stream of colleagues willing to help out, support our message, organise events, approach us with an idea, and help us connect to their newest colleagues. EWM-NL is by now well established in the country, is in continuous communication with its members, and provides a forum where both the problems and the projects of our members can be served.

I have experienced a supportive atmosphere almost uniformly throughout the Netherlands. While I do not claim that I do not see points of improvement, my typical experience has been that our colleagues are willing to listen and help when being made aware of our views and suggestions. In my view, having an active enthusiastic community in the core of mathematics contributes positively to the wider mathematical community, and EWM-NL fulfils this role. ☺

