

Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands 2011

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International comparison, trends and current situation

Saskia Keuzenkamp

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Foreword

Ten years have passed since the Netherlands became the first country in the world to permit civil marriage for couples of the same sex. Same-sex marriage is now permitted in nine other countries, and also in several US states, including New York since mid-2011. The Netherlands has proved itself to be a world leader as regards acceptance of homosexuality. And, as this publication shows, the Dutch population can still be classified as the most gay-tolerant nation. Despite this, there are still some groups within Dutch society who reject homosexuality. Moreover, regular reports appear in the media citing violence against homosexuals. The most recent figures released by the Amsterdam police show that 487 incidents of violence or discrimination against homosexuals were reported in 2010, 182 of them involving physical violence.

The Dutch government wishes to increase the acceptance of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders. To monitor trends in this regard, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research|SCP produces regular reports at the request of the government. This concise publication offers an overview of the current status, based on population surveys. Next year a fuller report will be published which also contains data collected from gays, lesbians and bisexuals, as well as a separate publication on the experiences of transgenders.

Prof. Paul Schnabel

Director, Netherlands Institute for Social Research|SCP

1 Acceptance of homosexuality: a permanent focus of attention

In its outline policy paper on emancipation policy for the period 2011-2015, the Dutch government expresses a wish to 'increase and deepen' the acceptance of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders. The focus is on the domains school, work, sport and care for the elderly and on spheres of life where social acceptance is still relatively low, such as ethnic minorities, orthodox religious groups and the young (TK 2010/2011). At the request of the government, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research|SCP monitors trends in the acceptance of homosexuality and reports on them periodically. The most recent publication appeared in the summer of 2010: *Increasingly normal; never the norm. Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands* (*Steeds gewoner, nooit gewoon. Acceptatie van homoseksualiteit in Nederland*) (Keuzenkamp 2010). The next wide-ranging report will appear in 2012. To meet the need for up-to-date information, this concise interim report describes the current status and trends. Its scope is restricted to measuring the attitudes of the general population as shown by representative surveys. The views of members of the target group themselves regarding the acceptance of homosexuality is left out of consideration.

To gain an impression of attitudes towards homosexuality in the Dutch population, we look at four attitudinal dimensions (see Keuzenkamp et al. 2006). The first relates to what we may describe as 'general acceptance': how people feel about homosexuality in general. An appropriate statement that is widely used to gauge this in opinion surveys is that gays and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they wish. The second dimension is concerned with equal rights and (anti)discrimination: to what extent do the public feel that gay and straight people should have equal rights, for example with regard to marriage and adoption? Reactions to public displays of homosexuality constitute the third dimension: what do people think about two gay men kissing each other in the street, and do they feel differently if a heterosexual couple kiss? Finally, we look at reactions to homosexuality in the immediate setting; for example, how do people feel about the idea of having homosexual friends or neighbours?

We begin with a brief sketch of the attitudes of the Dutch population compared to those in other countries. Since the third dimension (reaction to public displays of homosexuality) does not yield any internationally comparable data, this dimension is left out of consideration here. We then look in more detail at the current situation in the Netherlands and at trends in recent decades. For information on the various sources used, see www.scp.nl.

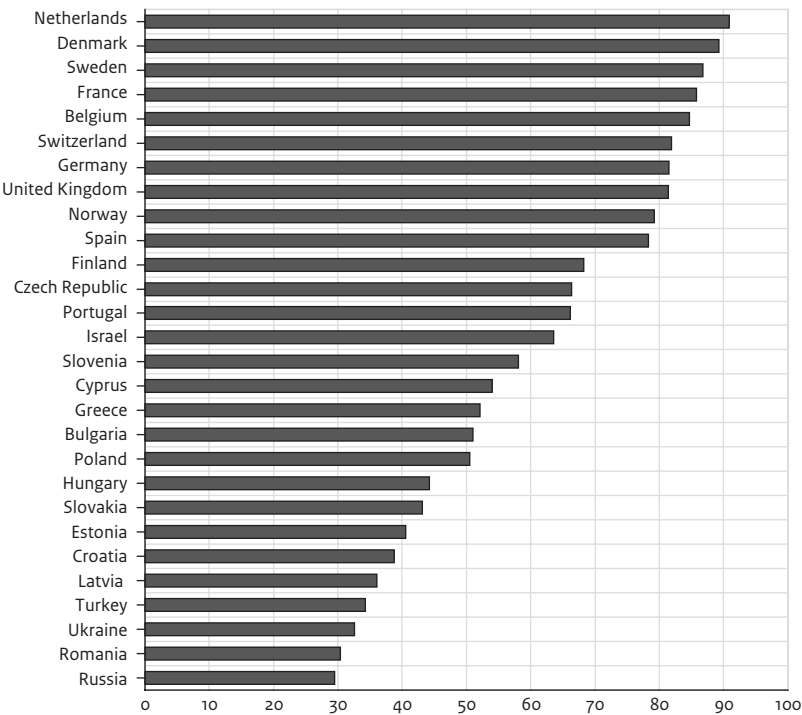
2 An international comparison

Feelings about homosexuality in general

The most general statement, which is frequently submitted to respondents in public opinion research, states that gays and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish. This statement was submitted to a representative population sample in European countries in 2008.¹ The percentage of respondents who agree with this statement was greatest in the Netherlands (91%), closely followed by Denmark and Sweden. Russia, the countries of Eastern Europe and Turkey are the main countries where large tracts of the population do not believe that gay men and women should be able to live their lives as they see fit.

Figure 2.1

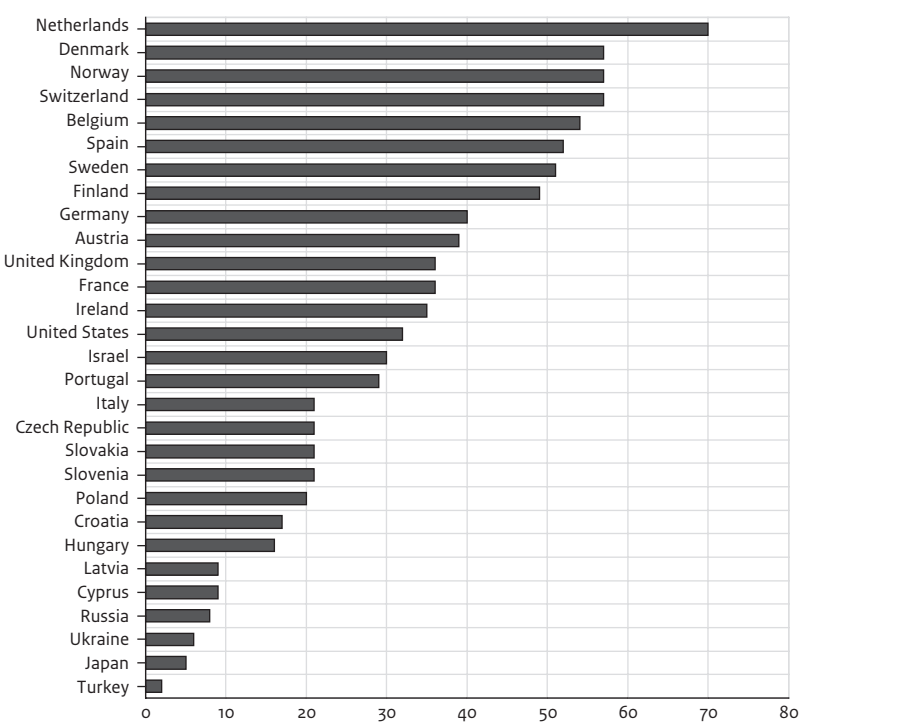
Agrees/agrees strongly with the statement 'Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they wish', population aged 15 years and older, 2008 (in percentages)



Source: ESS (ESS'08/'09 4th round)

In another international survey (the ISSP from 2008), respondents were asked to say what they thought about a sexual relationship between two persons of the same sex: always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong in some cases or not wrong at all?² The Netherlands produced the biggest share of the population who consider a sexual relationship between two people of the same sex to be not wrong at all (70%); 12% indicated that they always think it is wrong (not shown in figure 2.2). The Danes, Norwegians, Swiss and Belgians follow at some distance. Countries where the vast majority do have difficulty with a sexual relationship between persons of the same sex are Turkey, Japan, Ukraine, Russia, Cyprus and Latvia.

Figure 2.2
Considers a sexual relationship between two persons of the same sex 'not wrong at all',^a population aged 18 years and older,^b 2008 (in percentages)



a See also Note 2.

b Finland 15 years and older; Russia and Japan 16 years and older; Sweden 17 years and older.

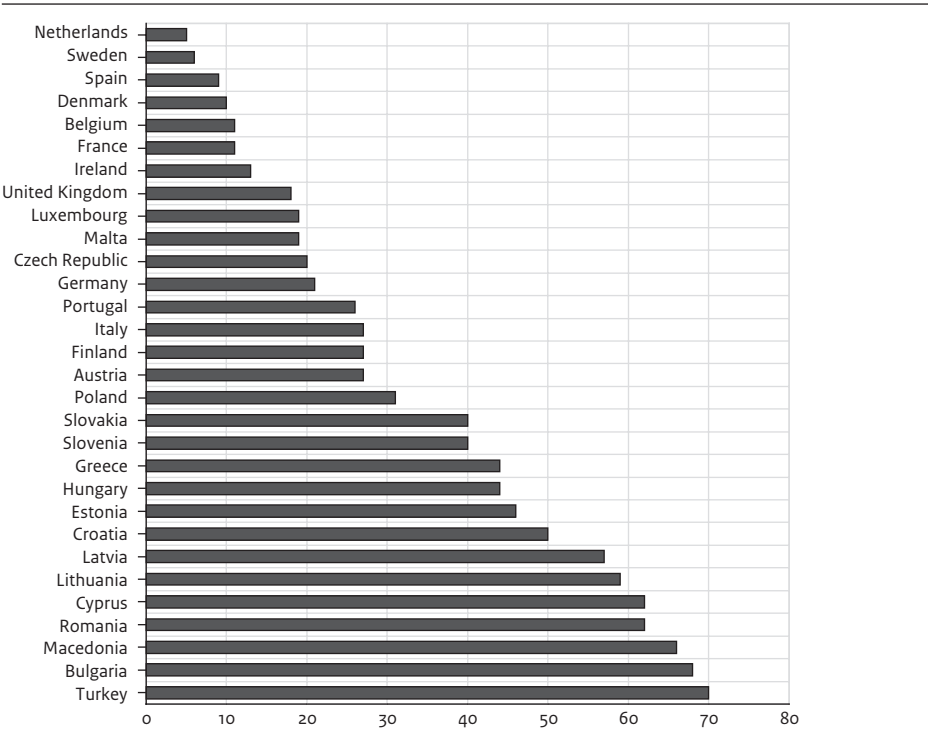
Source: ISSP (ISSP'08)

A third fairly general question to be included in an international survey (Eurobarometer) asks what people would think if a gay man or woman were to occupy the highest office in the country. The Netherlands has already had several government ministers who are openly gay (Jan Kees de Jager, Joop Wijn, Gerda Verburg). Iceland is the first and to date only country with an openly gay government leader: the lesbian Johanna Sigurdardottir, the former Minister of Social Affairs.

The Eurobarometer survey, which is carried out for the European Commission, gives an impression of how people in different countries feel that this question. Iceland did not take part in the 2009 edition of the Eurobarometer, so it is unfortunately not possible to see from the survey what the population there thinks about this statement. It seems likely, however, that Icelanders would have little difficulty with it. In the Netherlands, too, those who would feel uncomfortable if the Prime Minister were openly gay are a small group (5%). The Netherlands recorded the lowest percentage of all countries that took part in this edition of the Eurobarometer, followed by Sweden, Spain, Denmark and Belgium. Once again, we see that this idea meets with considerably more resistance in the countries of Eastern Europe. The percentage who would have difficulty with this is greatest in Turkey.

Figure 2.3

Would feel uncomfortable with a gay government leader, population aged 15 years and older, 2009 (in percentages)



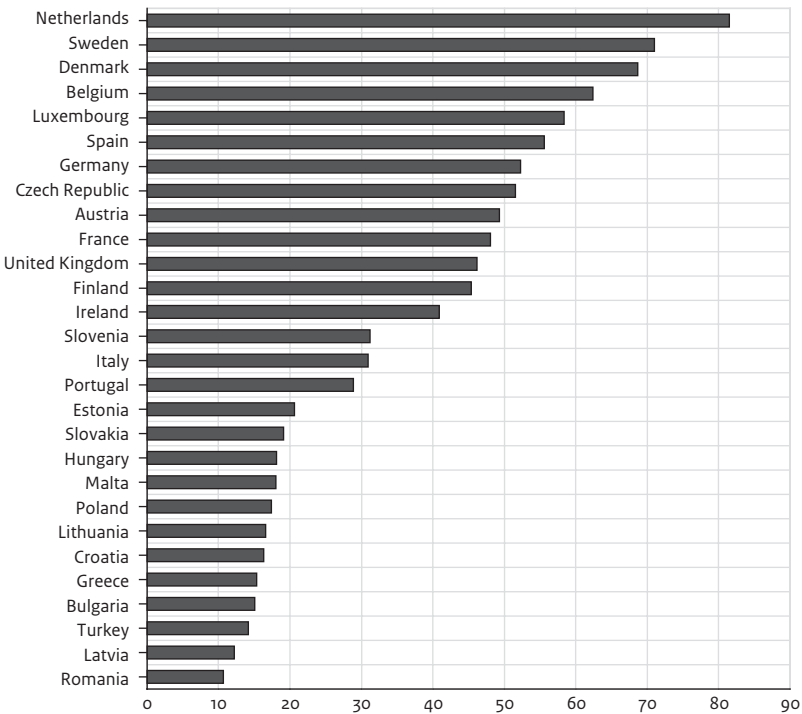
Source: EC (Eurobarometer 71.2)

Equal rights

Since 1 April 2001, same-sex couples have been able to marry officially in the Netherlands, which led the world in this regard. The debate about this form of equal rights is however taking place in many countries, and as at mid-2011 there were nine other countries where gay couples can be formally joined in marriage: Belgium (since 2003), Spain and Canada (since 2005), South Africa (2006) Norway and Sweden (2009) and Portugal, Iceland and Argentina (2010). Several US states now also allow same-sex couples to marry (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Maine, Iowa and New York).

International opinion research in recent years has not contained questions about what is commonly referred to as 'gay marriage'. The most recent survey with information on this dates from 2006, when support for gay marriage was greatest in the Netherlands, followed by Sweden, Denmark and Belgium. Residents of Romania, Latvia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece had the fewest supporters of this form of equal rights.

Figure 2.4
Thinks that gay marriage should be permitted in Europe, population aged 15 years and older, 2006
(in percentages)



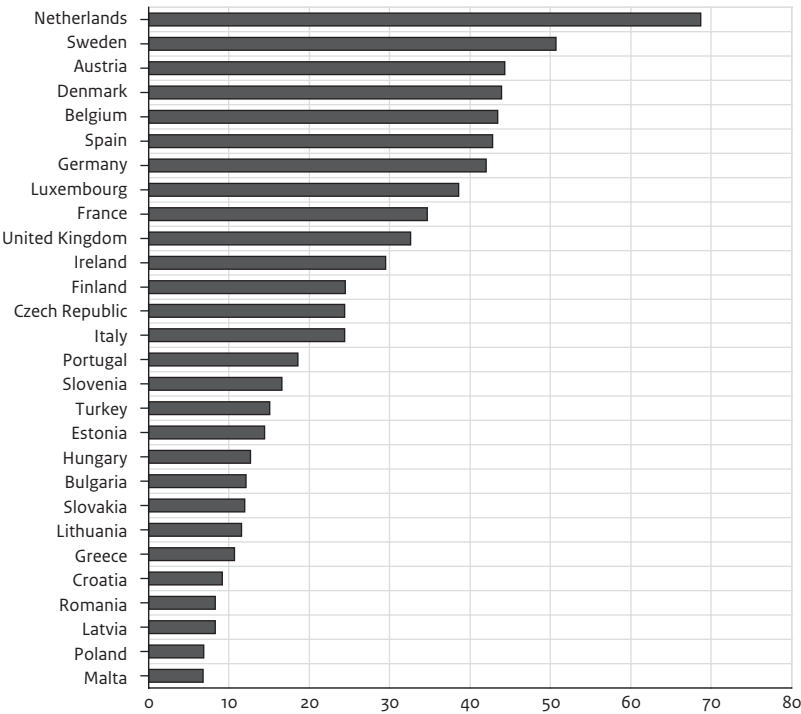
Source: European Commission (Eurobarometer 66.1)

The same Eurobarometer survey from 2006 also asked whether respondents thought that child adoption by gay couples should be accepted in Europe. Once again, support for this idea proved to be greatest in the Netherlands (almost 70%), again followed by Sweden (figure 2.5). At the bottom of the ranking were residents of Poland and Malta, where only 7% supported this idea.

Sweden and the Netherlands are in fact the only countries where a majority are in favour of this form of equal rights. When it comes to equal rights in the form of gay marriage, there are more countries where a majority are in favour: the Netherlands and Sweden are then joined by Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, Germany and the Czech Republic.

Figure 2.5

Agrees with the statement 'Child adoption by gay couples should be accepted in Europe', population aged 15 years and older, 2006 (in percentages)



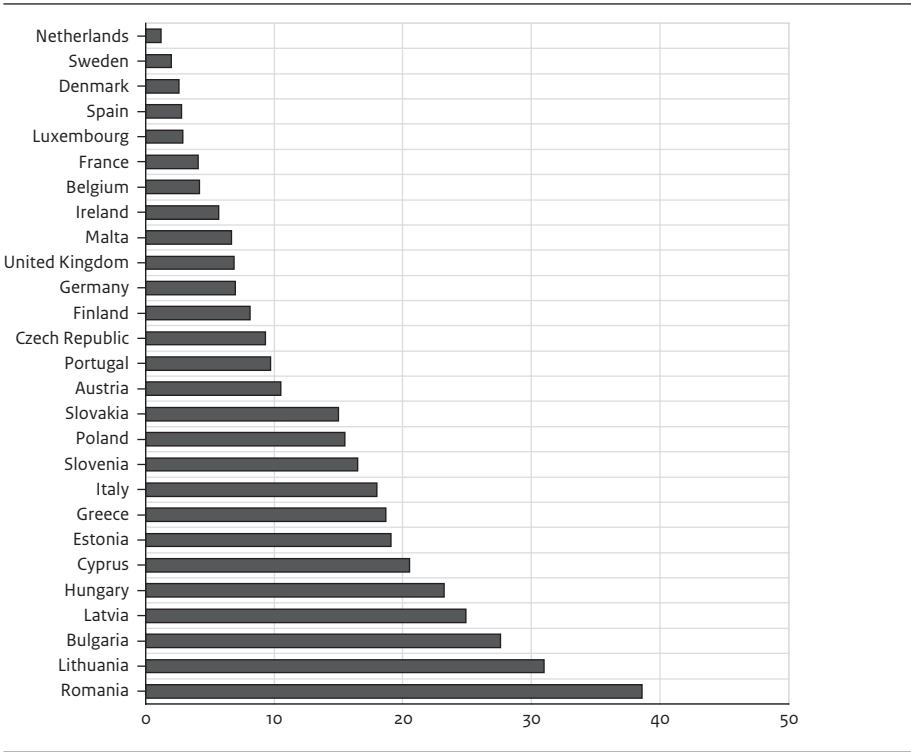
Source: European Commission (Eurobarometer 66.1)

Homosexuality in the immediate setting

Having gay neighbours touches people's personal lives more closely. It might be expected that people find this more difficult to accept than homosexuality in abstract terms and at a distance, but that is not found to be the case. The differences between the countries

surveyed follow the same pattern as on the previous topics, with respondents in the Eastern European countries feeling most uncomfortable with the idea of having a gay or lesbian neighbour. The Romanians, in particular, stand out here: almost four in ten would have difficulty with this. The Poles, who in response to the other questions were often found at the bottom of the rankings, are now more in the middle group: 15% would feel uncomfortable with this. The percentage who say they would feel uncomfortable with a gay neighbour is smallest in the Netherlands (1%).

Figure 2.6
Would feel uncomfortable with a gay neighbour, population aged 15 years and older, 2008
(in percentages)



Source: European Commission (Eurobarometer 69.1)

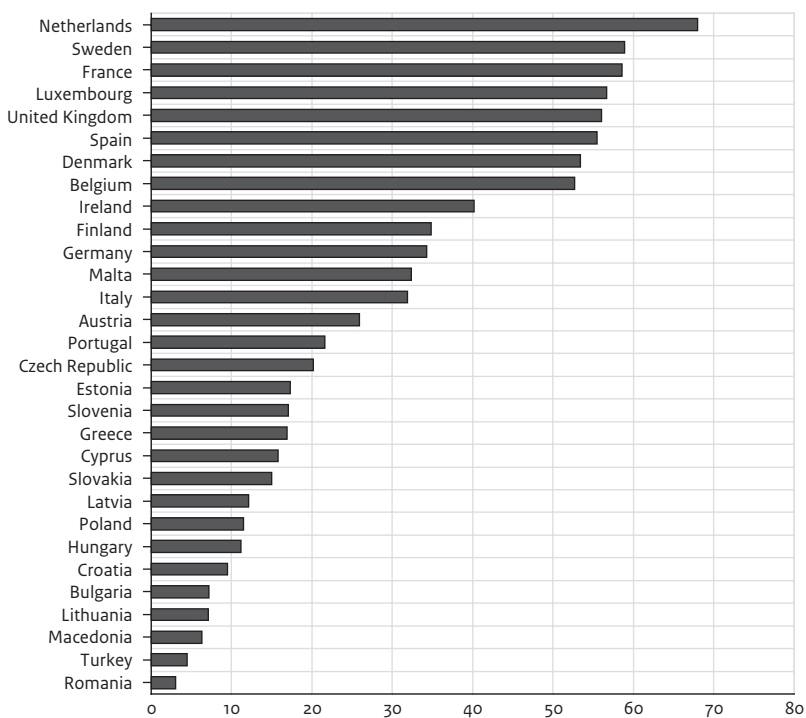
Another question in the Eurobarometer survey asks about having gay friends or acquaintances. This question is interesting for several reasons. The answer gives an indication of the extent to which gay men and women openly express their sexual preference. It is reasonable to assume that the percentages of gay people in the population will not vary much between Western countries. In countries where gay people are able to ‘just be gay’, more people will (know that they) have gay and lesbian friends and acquaintances. Secondly, attitudes to homosexuality are often found to change in a

positive sense when people experience having gay men or women in their own circle. The answers to this question can thus be seen as an indicator for the social climate in a country as regards attitudes to homosexuality.

The findings can be readily understood when seen in this light. The Netherlands once again heads the list; with a relatively long tradition of growing acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands, the percentage of the Dutch population with one or more gay people in their circle of friends is greatest here. The majority of Southern European countries occupy a middling position, while the percentage of people with a 'sexually diverse' circle of friends and acquaintances is smallest in the former Eastern Bloc and Turkey.

Figure 2.7

Has gay friends or acquaintances, population aged 15 years and older, 2009 (in percentages)



Source: European Commission (Eurobarometer 71.2)

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from the various international opinion surveys is clear: within Europe, the Dutch population still has the most positive attitudes towards homosexuality. The difference compared with Sweden and Denmark is small, but compared with the majority of Southern and above all Eastern European countries, attitudes in the Netherlands are much more positive. Nonetheless, negative attitudes are also found in the Netherlands on some points and in some groups. We shall look at this in more detail in the next section.

3 The current situation in the Netherlands

When people in the Netherlands are asked to react to a variety of statements about homosexuality, it emerges clearly that a minority hold negative views on the subject. There are however differences depending on the particular questions asked (the four dimensions referred to earlier).

The most general statement is that gay men and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they wish. Almost nine out of ten Dutch respondents agree with this statement. There are also two statements about sex in this general dimension. The idea of sexual contact between two people of the same sex causes some revulsion, especially where it involves two men (28% find this repugnant). We do not know to what extent this also applies to the idea of sex between a man and woman, but it seems likely that the percentage will be lower (see reactions to kissing in public in table 3.1).

Homosexuality is sometimes seen as eroding the distinction between women and men. One in ten people think that gay men are not real men. Almost two in ten evidently think this is a complex issue, because their view on this is ambivalent.

Table 3.1

Opinions about homosexuality, population aged 18 years and older, 2010 (in percentages)

	(completely) agree	neither agree nor disagree	(completely) disagree	missing
general				
Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they wish.	87	7	4	2
I think that sex between two lesbians is disgusting.	12	22	60	5
I think that sex between two gay men is disgusting.	28	24	42	7
Gay men are not real men.	11	17	67	6
equal rights				
Gay marriage should be abolished.	11	11	74	4
Gay couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples	60	14	22	4
homosexuality in public				
I find it offensive if two men kiss in public.	41	26	30	3
I find it offensive if two women kiss in public.	28	27	42	4
I find it offensive if a man and a woman kiss in public.	13	30	54	3
If I see a man and woman walking hand-in-hand I mind less than if I see two men walking hand-in-hand.	31	17	48	4

Table 3.1 (continued)

	(completely) agree	neither agree nor disagree	(completely) disagree	missing
homosexuality in the immediate setting				
I would have a problem if my child was being taught at school by a gay or lesbian teacher.	7 (very) unacceptable	11	78 (very) acceptable	5
Imagine you had a son or daughter cohabiting with a partner of the same sex. Can you indicate how acceptable you would find that. ^a	15	23	62	

a Respondents selected a number between 1 and 5, where 1 stands for very unacceptable and 5 for very acceptable.

Source: SCP (SLI '10)

A majority of the Dutch population believe that gay people should have equal rights, but if children are involved the level of support is lower than for relationships between adults. Although the adoption legislation in the Netherlands is gender-neutral and therefore open to same-sex couples, 22% of respondents reject the idea of equal adoption rights for gay and straight couples. By contrast, only 11% support the idea of banning same-sex marriages; 74% disagree with this idea.

Earlier studies have shown that expressing a (homo)sexual preference in public often meets with disapproval. In 2000, for example, 42% of the Dutch population aged 18-70 years said they would find it offensive if two men kissed in public. In the same survey (Sociocultural Developments in the Netherlands – Socon), 31% said they would be offended by two women kissing in public (Keuzenkamp et al. 2006). In 2006, SCP submitted this question to the Dutch population aged 16 years and older, with comparable outcomes, albeit the rejection of men kissing was greater (49%) than in the earlier study (Keuzenkamp 2007). In the most recent SCP survey, the percentages are lower once again: 41% find it offensive if two men kiss in public and 28% are offended by two women kissing in public. Some people find kissing in public offensive in any case, but are less troubled by heterosexual couples kissing (13%).

The fourth dimension of attitudes towards homosexuality is concerned with (hypothetical) situations which seek to discover how people feel about homosexuality in their immediate setting: a situation where their child is taught by a gay teacher or moves in with a partner of the same sex. Although it might be expected that people would find this more difficult to accept than a situation where homosexuality remains at a distance, this is found not to be the case. Only 7% say they would have a problem with their child being taught by a gay or lesbian teacher. Rather more people, though still a minority (15%), would find it unacceptable if their son or daughter were living with someone of the same-sex.

Summary measure

At the request of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science SCP has developed a summary measure to monitor progress in the acceptance of homosexuality (Keuzenkamp 2007). The measure is based on the scores for the statements in table 3.1.³ In the 2006 population survey, 15% of the Dutch population assigned a negative score to the measure 'social acceptance in a broad sense' (table 3.2). In all later surveys, this percentage is considerably lower; the figure in 2011 is 7%. It is important to note here that non-Western migrants are underrepresented in these surveys, whereas the proportion with a negative attitude to homosexuality is relatively high in this group (see also § 5.3). Some caution is also called for in comparing the SCP surveys (the top three in table 3.2) with those carried out by Intomart at the request of the Ministry (OCW), owing to differences in the research methods used.⁴ Nonetheless, the conclusion appears justified that the share of the population who reject homosexuality has been substantially lower in recent years than in 2006 (the 'baseline measurement'). However, more surveys over a longer period would be needed to obtain a clear picture of trends over time. We discuss this in chapter 4, but as we can draw on only a limited number of statements from different surveys for the years prior to 2006, no summary measure is calculated.

Table 3.2

Public attitudes to homosexuality summarised in a single measure, population aged 16 years and older,^a 2006-2011 (in percentages)

Source	completely negative	negative	neutral	positive	completely positive
<i>Cultural changes (Culturele veranderingen) survey 2006</i>	3	12	33	40	12
SCP Life Situation Index 2008	2	7	27	46	19
SCP Life Situation Index 2010	2	8	31	43	17
Intomart survey for Ministry of Education, Culture & Science (OCW) 2009	1	6	25	47	21
Intomart survey for Ministry of Education, Culture & Science (OCW) 2010	1	6	23	45	26
Intomart survey for Ministry of Education, Culture & Science (OCW) 2011	1	6	24	45	24

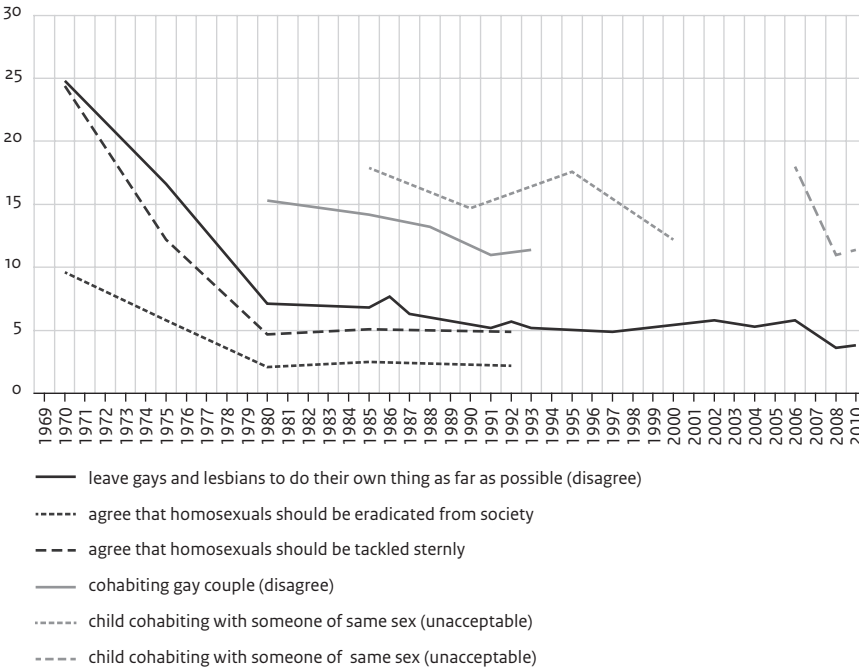
a The SCP data for 2008 and 2010 relate to the population aged 18 years and older. Analyses of other sources using only this age group produce the same outcomes as for the over-16s.

Source: SCP (CV'06); SCP (SLI'08 and '10), OCW (HOMO 2009); OCW (HOMO 2010); OCW (HOMO 2011)

4 Declining or growing acceptance?

The share of the Dutch population with negative attitudes towards homosexuality has been declining since the middle of the 1960s (Keuzenkamp et al. 2006). The longest time series available⁵ relates to the question of whether people think that gay men and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they wish. During the 1970s and 80s, the proportion of the population who were against this fell from 36% to 7%, after which it fluctuated somewhat but continued to fall slightly. As emerged in chapter 3, only 4% disagreed with this statement in 2010. Extreme statements such as ‘we should crack down hard on homosexuals’ and ‘homosexuals should be eradicated from society’ have not been included in large-scale surveys for a long time. The share of the population (aged 21-64 years) who supported these views declined up to 1980, and in the early 1990s these views were held by only 5% and 2%, respectively.

Figure 4.1
Negative scores on a number of items, population aged 21-64 years, 1968-2010 (in percentages)



Source: SCP (Sex in Nederland 1968; Progressiviteit en conservatisme 1970; cv '75-'06; ESS '02 and '04; SLI '08 EN '10; ITS (Socon '85-'00)

The question of what people think about gay couples living together has been included in several surveys in a variety of ways. Owing to differences in question formulation, it is not easy to make firm statements on this point; however, the data do all point in the same direction, suggesting that objections to this have reduced over time, both as regards the idea itself and if the respondent's own child were to live with a gay or lesbian partner.

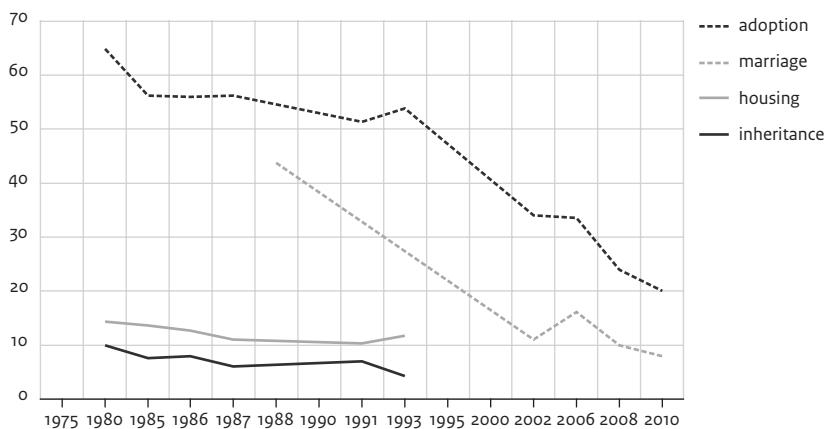
Equal rights

The periodic survey *Cultural changes in the Netherlands* (*Culturele veranderingen in Nederland*) also includes several questions on equal opportunities. In older surveys the focus was on the right to housing and inheritance. As long ago as the early 1980s, there were very few people who objected to gays and lesbians having equal rights in these areas, and these questions were dropped in the middle of the 1990s. Questions about the right to adoption, by contrast, have a long tradition in opinion research. In 1980, two-thirds of the Dutch population were opposed to equal adoption rights for gay and straight couples. That figure has shrunk considerably since then; in 2010, 20% of the population took this view (although gay adoption was legalised in 2009).

The attention given to the right of gay couples to marry is of more recent date; this theme first appeared in the *Cultural changes in the Netherlands* survey in 1988. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed with the statement 'Gay couples should have the right to marry'. More than four out of ten Dutch respondents were against this. Once marriage between gay couples was made legal, the wording of the question was changed in 2002 to 'Gay couples are now officially allowed to marry. Do you think that's a good thing, a bad thing or do you not mind either way?' One in ten Dutch respondents at the time thought it was a bad thing. The percentages have fluctuated somewhat in later surveys, with the 2006 survey appearing to be an outlier, when 16% said they thought it was a bad thing. The percentage fell further in 2010 to 8%.

Figure 4.2

Rejection of equal rights in relation to inheritance, housing, adoption and marriage, population aged 21-64 years, 1980-2010 (in percentages)



Source: SCP (CV'80-CV'10)

5 Differences between groups in the Netherlands

5.1 Sex, age, education, religion and political preferences

There are clear differences in the attitudes of different population groups to homosexuality. As stated earlier (see chapter 1), the Dutch government is committed to increasing the social acceptance of homosexuality among ethnic minorities, members of orthodox religions and the young – all groups which emerge in nationally representative surveys as having more difficulties than average with homosexuality (Kuyper & Bakker 2006; Keuzenkamp 2010). Based on the summary measure for social acceptance, we look first at the differences between various population groups in 2011. In sections 5.2 and 5.3 we look in more detail at the attitudes of young people and migrants, respectively (no data are available for members of orthodox religions other than those reported here).

Table 5.1

Differences in attitudes to homosexuality by sex, age, education, church involvement and political preference, population aged 16 years and older, 2011 (in percentages)

	negative	neither negative nor positive	positive
sex			
male	11	28	61
female	4	20	77
age			
16-24 years	6	18	76
25-34 years	6	21	73
35-49 years	8	18	74
50-64 years	5	29	66
65 years and older	12	31	57
education			
primary, pre-vocational secondary (<i>vmbo</i>)	9	28	63
senior secondary (<i>mbo</i>)/ pre-university (<i>vwo</i>)/senior secondary vocational (<i>mbo</i>)	6	22	72
higher professional (<i>hbo</i>)/university (<i>wo</i>)	6	19	75
church involvement			
goes to church once a week or more	50	30	21
goes to church once every two weeks or less	3	24	72
never	5	22	73

Table 5.1 (continued)

	negative	neither negative nor positive	positive
political preference ^a			
cda (Christian Democrats)	8	45	47
PvdA (Labour Party)	6	16	78
vvd (liberal conservative)	3	22	75
sp (Socialist Party)	3	15	82
D66 (Democrats)	1	14	85
GroenLinks (Green Left)	0	15	85
pvv (Party for Freedom and Progress))	11	34	55
total (n=1001)	7	24	69

a Other political preferences are left out of consideration owing to low number of respondents (< 50).

Source: oCW (HOMO 2011)

If we look at which population groups contain the highest share of persons with a negative attitude to homosexuality, the most religious group stands out particularly. Half of those who go to church at least once a week reject homosexuality. This compares with only 5% of those who never go to church. Other groups where the share of persons with negative attitudes to homosexuality is clearly above average (more than 10%) are the over-65s, men and those who vote for the Party for Freedom and Progress. Non-Western migrants are not well enough represented in this study population to be able to include them in this overview.

5.2 Young people on homosexuality

Table 5.1 shows that the youngest group in general population surveys (16-24 year-olds) do not stand out negatively from the older age groups. Despite this, reports appear with some regularity about negative attitudes to homosexuality among the young. This information comes primarily from studies of school pupils aged below 16 years, with the E-movo (Electronic Monitor and Information) surveys conducted by Dutch municipal health services being a recurrent source. Unfortunately, the questionnaires in the various surveys differ, which meant it was not possible to derive national data from them.⁶ The most recent example comes from the report by the Hollands Noorden municipal health service (2011). Young people were asked what they think about the idea of two girls/women or two boys/men being in love with each other. Half the young respondents consider this normal; 37% think it is a little odd; 6% think it is very strange and 6% think it is wrong.

Data on the attitudes of schoolchildren were gathered at national level in 2009 via the *Health Behaviour in Schoolaged Children* survey (HBSC).⁷ This survey asked for the first time whether respondents would find it acceptable to have a gay boy or lesbian girl in their circle of friends (table 5.2). A small majority of the pupils interviewed said they would,

while just over one in ten said they would not. Primary school pupils (group 8), in particular, have often never thought about this (more than a quarter said this). Girls appear to be more accepting than boys of gays in their circle of friends.

Young people were also asked what they think about two boys or two girls kissing each other, and by way of comparison, what they think about a boy and a girl kissing. More than four out of ten primary school pupils think it is disgusting if two boys kiss. The views among primary school pupils are virtually the same for two girls kissing, but among secondary school students the group who think that two girls kissing is disgusting is substantially smaller (29%) than those who feel this about two boys kissing. The question formulation in the HBSC survey is not exactly the same as that in the general population survey, but the outcomes are reasonably comparable.

Just as we saw with the adult survey, there is a marked difference in the way schoolchildren feel about kissing between gay and straight couples. Schoolchildren usually have no problem with the latter; fewer than one in ten primary schoolchildren and only 3% of secondary school children think it is disgusting if a boy and girl kiss each other.

Table 5.2

Views on homosexuality, 11-16 year-old primary and secondary schoolchildren, by sex, 2009
(in percentages)

	primary school			secondary school		
	boys	girls	total	boys	girls	total
I wouldn't mind having gay boys and lesbian girls in my circle of friends.						
(completely) disagree	15	9	12	16	4	10
neither agree nor disagree	12	10	11	17	9	13
(completely) agree	44	58	51	45	73	59
never thought about it	29	24	27	22	13	18
I think it's disgusting if a boy and girl kiss each other.						
(completely) disagree	70	68	69	84	84	84
neither agree nor disagree	17	17	17	8	9	8
(completely) agree	7	8	7	3	3	3
never thought about it	7	8	7	6	4	5
I think it's disgusting if two boys kiss each other.						
(completely) disagree	18	28	23	11	31	20
neither agree nor disagree	17	22	20	14	27	20
(completely) agree	53	32	43	67	31	49
never thought about it	12	17	15	9	12	10
I think it's disgusting if two girls kiss each other.						
(completely) disagree	21	29	25	42	31	37
neither agree nor disagree	19	22	20	21	28	24
(completely) agree	49	32	40	28	30	29
never thought about it	12	17	15	9	11	10

Source: Trimbos/UU/SCP (HBSC'09)

Safe school climate

Finally, secondary school pupils were asked whether a boy or girl at their school would be able to say openly that he or she was gay. This may give an indication of how gay-friendly the culture at schools is. Three out of ten pupils thought that gay fellow-pupils would not be able to express their sexual preferences openly, and a further three out of ten were not sure whether they would be able to. This is not exactly a comforting picture. The share who think that gay youngsters at school would be able to tell everyone that they were gay or lesbian is very small (5%). Girls are slightly more optimistic on this point than boys (table 5.3).

Table 5.3

Opinions on ability to be open at school about being gay, 11-16 year-olds, by sex, 2009 (in percentages)

	boys	girls	total
yes, to everyone	5	6	5
yes, to friends	30	42	36
no	38	23	30
don't know	28	30	29

Source: Trimbos/UU/SCP (HBSC'09)

Based on the responses to three questions on homosexuality, a summarising measure was compiled which gives an indication of the attitudes of schoolchildren to homosexuality. As can be seen in the foregoing tables, girls are less negative in their attitudes to homosexuality than boys, and secondary school pupils less than primary school pupils. The findings also suggest that native Dutch schoolchildren are less negative in their attitudes to homosexuality than non-Western migrants, and pupils in the higher educational tracks less than those in the lower tracks.

Table 5.4

Differences in attitudes to homosexuality between various subgroups, 11-16 year-olds, 2009
(average scale score)

	primary school	secondary school	total
total	3.0	2.85	2.89
sex			
boys	3.26	3.12	3.16
girls	2.73	2.57	2.61
origin			
native Dutch	2.77	2.79	2.82
non-Western	3.67	3.17	3.30
school level (only secondary school)			
pre-vocational secondary basic track <i>vmbo-b</i>)		3.15	
pre-vocational secondary basic track (<i>vmbo-t</i>)		2.94	
senior gen. secondary		2.83	
pre-university		2.52	

a A scale was constructed based on the questions concerning two gay boys kissing, two lesbian girls kissing and being happy to have gay friends. The response category 'never thought about it' is treated as an unknown score. A higher score means a more negative attitude to homosexuality (maximum = 5).

Source: Trimbos/UU/SCP (HBS c'09)

5.3 Differences between ethnic groups

In order to obtain an impression of the attitudes of non-Western migrants to homosexuality, migrants of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean origin were surveyed in 2004/2005 and asked to respond to three statements; the same statements were submitted to a control group consisting of native Dutch citizens from the 50 largest Dutch municipalities.⁸ More recent data on these four groups will not become available until 2012. The responses of the different groups to the three statements are first given below, followed by an overview based on a summarising measure.

The statement that gay men and lesbians should be free to lead their lives as they wish receives most support in all groups. Native Dutch city-dwellers have the most positive attitude on this statement, followed by respondents of Surinamese origin. The support is substantially lower among those of Turkish and Moroccan origin, though here again a majority agree with the statement (60% and 64%, respectively).

The fact that gay couples are able to marry in the Netherlands is not something with which all groups agree. A majority of the native Dutch population and, to a lesser extent, those of Surinamese origin, support this, while a majority of those of Turkish origin do not (55%). Among those of Moroccan background, 48% disagree with allowing same-sex couples to marry, while 31% support it.

The third statement is concerned with whether people would have a problem with their child receiving lessons from a gay or lesbian teacher. A majority in all groups say they would not have a problem with this. Those of Turkish origin most often say they would have a problem with it (27%).

Table 5.5

Opinions on three statements, by ethnic group, 15-64 year-olds, 2004/2005 (in percentages)

	(completely) agree	neither agree nor disagree	(completely) disagree	unwilling to say, no information
Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they wish.				
Turks	60	11	23	6
Moroccans	64	11	17	8
Surinamese	88	6	4	2
Antilleans	77	9	12	2
native Dutch city-dwellers	95	2	3	0
It is good that gay couples are allowed to marry.				
Turks	26	12	55	7
Moroccans	31	12	48	9
Surinamese	61	12	22	5
Antilleans	47	15	36	3
native Dutch city-dwellers	83	7	9	1
I would have a problem if my child was being taught at school by a gay or lesbian teacher.				
Turks	27	9	58	6
Moroccans	21	7	65	7
Surinamese	11	6	81	2
Antilleans	14	9	75	2
native Dutch city-dwellers	2	3	95	0

Source: SCP (LAS '04/'05)

Based on the scores for the three items, a summary score was again calculated, enabling a picture to be obtained of the attitudes of the different groups towards homosexuality.⁹ Table 5.6 shows the results. The Turkish community contains the highest proportion of people with negative attitudes to homosexuality (32%), followed by those of Moroccan origin (26%). Native Dutch city-dwellers have the most positive attitudes to homosexuality, closely followed by persons of Surinamese background.

Table 5.6

Attitudes to homosexuality by ethnic group, 15-64- year-olds, 2004/2005 (in percentages)

	completely negative	negative	neutral	positive	completely positive
Turks	10	22	34	26	7
Moroccans	7	19	33	30	11
Surinamese	1	6	19	43	32
Antilleans	3	12	25	37	23
native Dutch city-dwellers	-	2	9	46	44

Source: SCP (LAS'04/'05)

An earlier SCP publication (Keuzenkamp et al. 2006) investigated to what extent the differences between ethnic groups can be explained by differences in population characteristics, such as the lower average education level and greater importance of religion among migrant groups. The latter characteristic, in particular, was found to be a key determinant, but the relatively low education level of migrants also plays a role. Generational differences are also important in the Turkish, Moroccan and Antillean groups: in all these groups, the first generation have more negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

6 Conclusions

The general picture that emerges from the opinion surveys is that the Dutch public are fairly positive in their attitudes towards homosexuality. This emerges very clearly from a comparison with other countries. SCP has developed a summarising indicator to monitor the attitudes of the Dutch population over time. That indicator shows that the percentage of the population with negative attitudes to homosexuality declined from 15% in 2006 to 10% in 2010. It should be noted that non-Western migrants are not well represented in these surveys and, since they relatively often have difficulty with homosexuality, the real percentages are likely to be somewhat higher. The population surveys show that members of orthodox religions, in particular, often have negative attitudes to homosexuality. The views of young people are not shown in these surveys, since they only ask about the opinions of the population aged 16 years and older. However, data from surveys of school-age children suggest that attitudes among the young are more negative than among older birth cohorts.

One important limitation of the information presented here is that it reflects only what people *say* they think in response to a range of statements. Those responses may and will often be true, but the possibility cannot be ruled out that socially desirable answers are also given. Moreover, what people think (or say they think) is not necessarily the same as how they behave when they encounter gay men and women in practice. For example, how does someone really react if they discover that their neighbour or colleague is homosexual? And how do people react if they witness gays or lesbians being subjected to the negative attitudes of others? This type of information is difficult to obtain using nationally representative research. The book *Increasingly normal, never the norm* (*Steeds gewoner, nooit gewoon*) (Keuzenkamp 2010) also drew on data from surveys of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals to report the experiences of the target group themselves. Unfortunately, however, those data do not come from randomly selected samples and, as a consequence, it is not possible to present an equivalent, complementary statistical picture to that which emerges from the population surveys.

Notes

- 1 This statement was again included in the 2010 edition of the European Social Survey, but the first data will not become available until the autumn of 2011 at the earliest.
- 2 There was also an option 'unable to choose'. The percentage who chose this option varied considerably between countries: 6% of respondents in the Netherlands gave this answer, 14% in Germany, 7% in Spain and 4% in the United States. When calculating the percentage who say they do not think it is wrong at all, these respondents were treated as a separate category. If this category is left out of the calculation, the percentages for 'not wrong at all' therefore increase slightly. The degree to which this happens differs from country to country, but the ranking of the countries remains virtually unchanged.
- 3 The negatively formulated items were recoded. A total score was then calculated for all respondents, whereby respondents who had not given an answer to more than three statements, or who had indicated that they had never thought about it, were left out of consideration (this consistently applied for between 3% and 4% of respondents in the various surveys). Where a value was missing for the other respondents, a score was imputed, taking into account the overall response pattern of the respondent in question and the average among all respondents for the item concerned. The statement about a man and woman kissing was of course not included in this measure.
- 4 The SCP surveys from 2006, 2008 and 2010 were paper-based surveys; those by Intomart (carried out on behalf of the Ministry of OCW in 2009, 2010 and 2011) were conducted via the Internet. In addition, the Intomart surveys used a panel consisting of people who had declared themselves willing to take part in future surveys. These were not however people who put themselves forward for a panel, but persons recruited for other research using random sampling.
- 5 The formulation changed in later years. From 1968 to 1997 the question was 'Do you think that people who are homosexual should be as free as possible to live their lives in their own way, or do you think that this should be prevented as far as possible?' This question was included in the *Cultural changes in the Netherlands* survey, but was no longer formulated in this way after 1997. The question occurs in a slightly different form in the 2002 and 2004 editions of the European Social Survey, as the statement 'Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they wish'; since 2006, this formulation has also been used in the *Cultural changes in the Netherlands* survey (in 2008 the written questionnaire did not actually form part of that survey, but was part of a separate module (SLI) that was appended to the Labour Force Survey; see also the information on sources at www.scp.nl).
- 6 The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) has been carrying out a project in recent years at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport in which an attempt is being made in liaison with municipal health services to develop a standard questionnaire on attitudes to homosexuality. This would mean that if a municipal health service includes this topic in a survey of school-age children, those questions must as a minimum be asked. However, whether or not a municipal health service includes that topic in its survey remains something that is decided at local level. There is currently consensus on a basic question set. See www.monitorgezondheid.nl/jeuindicatoren.aspx.
- 7 The HBSC survey is conducted every four years and seeks information on the psychological well-being, health and risk behaviour in relation to the everyday environment of school-age children aged 11-16 years.

- 8 The vast majority (75-79%) of migrants aged 15 years or older of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Antillean origin live in one of the 50 largest municipalities. This compares with 35% of the native Dutch population. By definition, therefore, the native Dutch respondents in this study form a select group, because the majority do not live in the 50 largest municipalities.
- 9 Respondents who did not answer two or three items are left out of consideration here (4% of the respondents).

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