



The Netherlands Institute  
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# *Summary* **Focus on the quality of society**

Social and Cultural Developments 2024



# Summary

## Focus on the quality of society

Social and Cultural Developments 2024

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**Koersen op kwaliteit van de samenleving**

Sociale en Culturele Ontwikkelingen 2024

*edited by*

Lotte Vermeij

Yvonne de Kluizenaar

Mark Reijnders

Marcel Coenders

*contributors*

Andries van den Broek, Joris Broere, Jaco Dagevos, Evelien Eggink, Bram Geurkink, Benedikt Goderis, Arjen van der Heide, Lex Herweijer, Willem Huijnk, Jurjen Iedema, Edith Josten, Mirjam de Klerk, Sander Muns, Lonneke van Noije, Dirk Postma, Roelof Schellingerhout, Debbie Verbeek-Oudijk, Maroesjka Versantvoort, Jan Dirk Vlasblom and Frieke Vonk

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# Synopsis

*Lotte Vermeij, Yvonne de Kluizenaar, Mark Reijnders, Marcel Coenders, Andries van den Broek, Dirk Postma and Maroesjka Versantvoort*

## S.1 Introduction: focus on the quality of society

The Netherlands faces significant challenges, including climate change and demographic shifts such as migration and ageing. Meanwhile, the government's financial flexibility is limited.<sup>1</sup> Without changes in policy, current and future generations could see reduced government services or higher taxes. On top of that, an ageing population leads to a decline in human resources.<sup>2</sup> Various issues are already surfacing in areas like care and support, socio-economic security, housing, mobility, nature and the environment. These challenges require a comprehensive approach from the government, since allocating more resources to one area may mean sacrificing envisioned outcomes in another. For example, increasing labour force participation to address personnel shortages may strain the availability of necessary volunteers and informal carers, crucial for reducing the care deficit. This approach demands clear decisions based on a long-term vision. Such a vision acts as a compass for anticipating and responding to developments. It also enhances public understanding of the reasons behind tough choices.

This vision pertains to the society we aim to build and the direction our country is taking. A solid foundation for this is provided by the 'broad prosperity' perspective, which encompasses economic, ecological and socio-cultural outcomes. From the SCP perspective, the quality of society specifically concerns aspects of broad prosperity related to humans and society (Tunderman et al. 2024; Vrooman 2022). The first aspect is the quality of life of people in a broad sense. Besides material wealth, this also encompasses factors like health, job security and social safety. This is not just about the actual situation, but also about how people experience it: their subjective perception. The second aspect of the quality of society concerns social cohesion among individuals and groups, with particular regard to the extent to which people have access to, or are excluded from, social networks. Thirdly, it involves the relationship between citizens and the government. The legitimacy of government policies translates into citizens' willingness to accept governmental authority, which is crucial for achieving collective goals. Finally, it concerns a fair distribution of benefits and burdens, including not only material wealth, but also other resources like social networks and other aspects of quality of life. A fair distribution does not mean every form of inequality should be avoided, but it is important to consider distribution mechanisms and different perspectives from which they are experienced. The position individuals hold in society influences each of the aforementioned aspects of the quality of society.

Based on an assessment of the quality of society, the SCP evaluates the state of society and illustrates how policy decisions affect its various facets and their interconnectedness. For instance, there may be instances of 'trade-offs' where one policy objective hampers another. As an example, policies aimed at phasing out fossil fuels may lead to reduced mobility and fewer opportunities for certain groups to participate in society. Conversely, there may be win-win scenarios where a policy initiative serves multiple aspects of the quality of society. For example, such a 'synergy effect' occurs when sustainability-focused policies also bolster the socio-economic security of resource-constrained groups.

<sup>1</sup> Regarding government finances, the Budget Margin Study Group (Studiegroep Begrotingsruimte 2023) highlights expected increasing budget deficits, necessitating policy adjustments.

<sup>2</sup> The State Committee Demographic Developments 2050 (Staatscommissie Demografische Ontwikkelingen 2050 2024) recently advocated for a migration policy vision in response to dissatisfaction in this area.

### Reader's guide

In this summarising chapter, we first outline the current 'state of the nation' with regard to Dutch society, shedding light on areas where its quality faces challenges. Subsequently, we delve into the impact of political decisions on the quality of society across four policy domains: sustainability, asylum and migration, care and support, and socio-economic security. We also explore variations in political trust and the implications of policy choices on how different segments of society perceive government effectiveness. Finally, we reflect on the ramifications of policy decisions for the quality of society.

## S.2 State of the nation

Compared to other EU countries, Dutch society is thriving. Many people have the financial means for a comfortable life and access to education that provides them with a solid starting position on the labour market. Purchasing power is high in the Netherlands, with a relatively low percentage of people living in poverty. As a result, many Dutch citizens report satisfaction with their lives. In terms of mental health, the Netherlands ranks mid-table, though loneliness is a bit less common here than it is in other European countries, and overall perceived health is generally perceived as good. However, significant disparities exist in well-being and health among socio-economic groups. These inequalities persist due to complex factors, including access to resources such as financial means, social connections and health, as well as unequal conditions in the workplace or living environment.

Dutch citizens are actively involved in various aspects of society. The Netherlands boasts the highest rate of paid employment in Europe, with this percentage continuing to rise in recent years. However, Dutch citizens also have the shortest average working week in Europe. While flexible and part-time employment arrangements may bring uncertainty, they also contribute to a healthy work-life balance as well as increased availability for informal care and volunteer work. Notably, the Netherlands leads in volunteerism. Many Dutch citizens pursue education through their employment, enhancing their competitiveness in the job market, although access to work-related learning remains unequal. Inequalities also persist, with individuals who possess more resources – particularly through education – more likely to be in paid employment and engage in volunteer work. These differences, along with disparities in well-being and health, result from various factors and further exacerbate structural inequality. Participation in work, education or other activities also enables individuals to accumulate additional resources, such as social connections, skills and health.

Although Dutch citizens often express concerns about the way they live together, social cohesion in the Netherlands is generally robust. In terms of their attachment to their country, the Dutch are on the European median. Social trust in the Netherlands is notably high compared to other European countries. Many Dutch citizens are content with their neighbours and feel at home in their neighbourhoods. Compared to other European nations, Dutch society exhibits less socio-economic segregation. However, clear inequalities persist. Compared to many other European countries, a significant portion of Dutch citizens experiences discrimination – particularly with regard to their ethnicity or skin colour, but also their gender, age, sexual orientation or disability. Discrimination on various grounds is particularly experienced by people on low incomes. Socio-economic differences are also manifest in individuals' attachment to the Netherlands, social cohesion in neighbourhoods and social trust. Individuals with fewer economic resources often have less access to various forms of support within their social networks as well.

The vast majority of the population acknowledges the legitimacy of the Dutch government. People broadly recognise their civic duty to abide by democratically established laws, irrespective of personal interests or preferences. Furthermore, Dutch citizens staunchly support democracy as a form of governance. Although trust in the government has waned in recent years, the latest data show a slight uptick, once again placing it relatively high compared to other EU countries. Nevertheless, significant disparities persist based on education and income levels. Individuals with fewer resources are more likely to question the importance of democracy as a form of government and have less

political trust. They also feel less compelled to adhere to laws and regulations. Their dissatisfaction with the government's functioning is more pronounced. They perceive the government as less responsive to citizens' concerns (responsiveness) and less attentive to balancing the interests of different groups of citizens (procedural justice).

Although the outlook on the whole is generally positive, inequality exists in every aspect of the quality of society. In recent years, some unfavourable developments have exacerbated inequalities (Table S.1). This was partly due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the quality of communal living, although this does not tell the whole story.

### **Declining skills, more school dropouts**

While the overall education level of the population has increased, students' skills have declined. This trend is also noticeable among 15-year-olds in many other countries, but the decline in reading skills in the Netherlands has been above average. Additionally, the decline in maths and reading skills has been more pronounced among students in pre-vocational education (VMBO) than among students in senior general and pre-university secondary education (HAVO/VWO), indicating an increase in skill level disparities. Since 2020, the percentage of students leaving education without attaining a basic qualification has also increased. Dropout rates are particularly high in vocational education, especially in the entry-level programmes (MBO-1), and to a lesser extent among MBO-2 students. Meanwhile, purchasing power has continued to increase in recent years, although it has slightly declined recently.

### **Well-being of young people and young adults under pressure**

Mental health issues and loneliness have increased, especially among young people and young adults. They have reported feeling less healthy and less satisfied with life. While it seems plausible to attribute this to the COVID-19 pandemic period, it is unclear if this is entirely the case. The rise in mental health issues was noticeable before the pandemic, and there has been no improvement since. Therefore, more research is needed to understand the decline in well-being among young people and young adults.

### **More paid employment, less volunteering**

The proportion of Dutch people with paid jobs has increased and the working week has become slightly longer. However, the percentage of volunteers has decreased and slightly fewer people now provide intensive informal care. Shortages in human resources will continue to rise, putting more pressure on individuals to engage in more paid work, informal care and volunteering. Increased participation in one area may come at the expense of participation in another area or leisure time. Although work pressure has decreased, the number of workers experiencing work-related mental health issues has increased, especially among young people. Despite the societal need for more human resources, Dutch citizens do not feel an increasing sense of urgency to contribute more.

### **Slightly greater divergence in social environments**

In terms of social cohesion, the picture has remained stable in recent years. The cohesion experienced by people in their neighbourhoods has remained high, as has the trust they have in others. However, experiences of discrimination persist, despite attention in societal debate and policy efforts to combat it. New research from the SCP further reveals that the social environments of poor and wealthy Dutch citizens have become more one-sided in recent years – an important trend to monitor.

### **Declining trust in politics**

Political trust among Dutch citizens has been low in recent years, as has satisfaction with how democracy functions in the Netherlands. Following the fall of the Rutte IV government, trust seemed to rebound slightly, but it remains uncertain if this trend will continue. However, this does not necessarily indicate a crisis in the system's legitimacy. Although the government's legitimacy can withstand temporary dissatisfaction with its functioning and lack of trust, it can be eroded over the long term.

**Table S.1 Quality of Dutch society: position compared to other EU countries and development since 2017 as measured by 21 indicators<sup>a</sup>**

	Indicator	The Netherlands within Europe	Developments since 2017		
<b>Education and income</b>	Education	Favourable and unfavourable	The Netherlands is among the countries where a significant portion of 25–34-year-olds has completed a bachelor’s or master’s degree at a university of applied sciences or research university. When assessing students’ skills, the Dutch score above average (in mathematics), average (in natural sciences) or below average (in reading).	Positive and negative	The level of education has increased, but students’ skills (in reading, mathematics and natural sciences) have declined, especially among pre-vocational education students.
	School dropout rate	Favourable	The percentage of students dropping out of school without obtaining a basic qualification is below average in the Netherlands.	Negative	Following a decline in the number of students leaving school without a basic qualification until 2015, the number has risen again since the 2019–2020 academic year.
	Disposable income	Favourable	The Netherlands ranks among the top three European countries in terms of purchasing power.	Positive	Purchasing power has developed positively, but decreased in 2022.
	Poverty	Favourable	The percentage of people living in poverty in the Netherlands is slightly below the European average.	None	Considering changing standards of what people minimally need to support themselves, the percentage of people in poverty has remained unchanged.
<b>Health and well-being</b>	Life satisfaction	Favourable	When it comes to their own lives, Dutch people are among the most satisfied Europeans.	Negative	Overall satisfaction has remained high, but satisfaction has decreased among young people and young adults.
	Mental health	Average	With regard to mental health issues, the Netherlands ranks mid-table.	Negative	The proportion of people with mental health issues has increased, especially among young people and young adults. This was particularly noticeable in 2020 and 2021.
	Loneliness	Favourable	Loneliness is less prevalent in the Netherlands than in most other European countries.	Negative	Loneliness has increased, especially among young people.
	Perceived health	Average	In terms of perceived health, Dutch people fall into the middle group.	Negative	Dutch people have reported feeling slightly less healthy, especially young people and young adults.
<b>Broad participation</b>	Paid work	Favourable and unfavourable	The proportion of Dutch people in paid employment is the highest in the EU, but Dutch people also have the shortest working week.	Positive	The percentage of employed individuals has increased and the working week has become slightly longer.
	Lifelong learning	Favourable	The Netherlands ranks among the three European countries where employees most frequently participate in training.	Negative	Despite policy efforts, the percentage of people taking part in work-related training has not increased.
	Informal care	-	Figures are lacking.	Negative	Slightly fewer Dutch people are now providing intensive or long-term informal care.

	Indicator	The Netherlands within Europe		Developments since 2017	
Broad participation	Volunteer work	Favourable	The Netherlands ranks among the top three European countries for the highest level of volunteering.	Negative	Fewer people are now volunteering. The proportion of volunteers has increased slightly since the pandemic, but the overall trend is downward.
	Combination pressure	Favourable	Dutch people express higher satisfaction with their leisure time compared to the European average.	Positive and negative	While the perceived work pressure has decreased, the percentage of people experiencing burnout symptoms has been rising for years.
Social cohesion	Feeling attached to the Netherlands and Dutch people	Average	The Netherlands holds a middle position regarding both experienced pride and willingness to defend one's country.	None	The attachment of Dutch people to the Netherlands seems to be slightly decreasing, but it is still difficult to say whether this is indicative of a trend.
	One-sided social environments	Favourable	According to various studies, socio-economic segregation in the Netherlands appears to be below the European average.	Negative	While the social environments of the most affluent Dutch citizens have improved slightly, those of the least affluent have declined slightly.
	Social cohesion in neighbourhoods	-	Figures are lacking.	None	The perceived social cohesion in neighbourhoods has remained stable in recent years.
	Overall social trust	Favourable	Compared to other EU countries, social trust in the Netherlands is high.	None	Social trust has remained stable in recent years.
	Perceived discrimination	Average	Various studies present diverse perspectives on the prevalence of discrimination in the Netherlands.	None	There is no evidence that perceived discrimination has decreased.
	Social capital	-	Figures are lacking.	-	Figures are lacking.
Citizen-government relationships	Political legitimacy	-	Figures are lacking.	-	Figures are lacking.
	Trust in politics	Positive	Trust in politics is higher in the Netherlands than in most other EU countries.	Negative	Trust in the government fluctuates, but has shown a declining trend in recent years.

a The assessments of citizens on the three criteria for effective government functioning have been omitted from the table, because we are unable to demonstrate developments in this area or compare them with other countries at this time.

Source: SCP

### S.3 Policy choices

Political decisions can have varying effects on different groups of people. Building upon the previous SCP publication *Kwesties voor het kiezen* (Huijnk et al. 2023), this report delves into the consequences of political decisions on four themes: sustainability, asylum and migration, care and support, and socio-economic security. We specifically examine how these choices impact individuals with either abundant or limited resources. In essence, we explore what potential policy decisions mean for the distribution of burdens and benefits in society.

#### **Equitable distribution of benefits and burdens in sustainability policy is crucial for garnering public support**

Sustainability policies can enhance broad prosperity, but may also adversely affect citizens' socio-economic security and exacerbate social inequality. Therefore, it is imperative to consider how transition policies affect various segments of the population. Concerns about climate change are widespread, particularly among those with more resources, who often feel that the government's efforts against climate change are insufficient. Conversely, individuals with fewer resources tend to believe that the government is overstepping. They are frequently frustrated by the prioritisation of climate issues over problems they deem more urgent. Many people feel that large corporations in particular are not fulfilling their responsibilities adequately. Around four out of five Dutch citizens consider the distribution of climate action costs between citizens and businesses unjust (80%). Moreover, a majority view the distribution of costs between poor and wealthy citizens as unjust (76%). Those on low incomes especially feel that the distribution of costs and benefits of climate action among poor and wealthy citizens is unfair. This sentiment may be explained by the fact that they have benefited the least from measures such as subsidies for electric cars, home insulation, heat pumps and solar panels. Meanwhile, less affluent individuals may be disproportionately affected by pricing policies, as they are less able to invest in sustainable alternatives or absorb price increases. Although wealthy individuals prioritise climate action and feel a strong responsibility to contribute to a solution, they also contribute more to the problem, among other things due to their higher frequency of air travel.

Mechanisms by which sustainability policies inadvertently worsen inequalities can erode support for policies and provoke resistance, particularly among those with fewer resources. This makes it crucial to identify and disrupt these mechanisms. One opportunity lies in the fact that individuals with greater resources may have more capacity for real change: reducing energy consumption, cutting down on air travel and driving fewer fossil fuel-powered kilometres. Their lifestyles not only have a heavier environmental footprint, but they also possess greater ability to alter their behaviour.

Furthermore, acceptance of measures that are burdensome for citizens is conditional. First, citizens want to see the government ensure that the 'biggest polluters' contribute their fair share, that low-income groups are adequately protected and that the measures do not widen the wealth gap further. If the perception persists that large companies are not doing enough, it could impede progress. A significant segment of the population wants to contribute to climate action and believes it is important for people like them to have a say in climate policy development. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement when it comes to involving citizens in policymaking.

#### **Asylum and migration: heated debate stresses urgency for a clear migration policy vision**

There are certain policy measures in the field of asylum and migration where the differences in opinions among groups of Dutch citizens are minor. For instance, there is broad support for swiftly returning asylum seekers who are safe in their country of origin and for early language lessons for asylum seekers. In general, however, there are significant differences of opinion regarding asylum and migration, with educational background being a notable distinguishing factor. Individuals who only completed primary school or pre-vocational education express more concerns about migration, hold more negative views and advocate for a stricter policy: more restrictions on migration, more selective admission, reduced accommodation and fewer facilities for asylum seekers. Conversely, those with higher education hold a different perspective, with those with vocational education falling somewhere in between. These disparities are not new and are often attributed to individuals with fewer resources



perceiving migration more as a threat. Such perceptions of an economic or cultural threat are partly influenced by negative media portrayals and the political discourse, and contribute to a broader societal sense of discontent.

The concerns expressed by citizens about the scale of migration suggest that support for admitting migrants is waning. However, a majority of the population still believes that the Netherlands should provide refuge for those fleeing war and violence. Additionally, there is less opposition to labour migrants needed for specific roles in the Dutch economy and temporary labour migrants residing in the country. This indicates that there is some flexibility in the Dutch population's views on migration, with room for limited labour migration and refugee reception. This aligns with previous research indicating a nuanced and sometimes ambiguous stance on migration and migrants.

The potential outcomes of political decisions in asylum and migration policy are not straightforward. Currently, it appears that the effects of migration on wages or unemployment are limited. However, it is plausible that migration is one of the factors putting pressure on available housing. Because migrants participate in various housing sectors, the effects on housing market strain are likely diverse, although research in this area is lacking. Notably, only a small proportion of social housing is allocated to refugees (6% in 2021). Research on the relationship between ethnic diversity and social cohesion provides a mixed picture, with other factors often playing significant roles alongside diversity.

In the political and public debate, however, it is insufficiently highlighted how certain types of migration benefit society. This includes internationally educated personnel that helps enhance the competitiveness of the Dutch business sector, as well as personnel in health care, education, ICT and technical professions that are vital for sustainability, infrastructure and the construction sector. Improving control over migration starts with broad societal considerations from the standpoint of broad prosperity and, within that, the quality of society. A multi-year vision for migration and asylum policy is needed, ensuring diverse groups in society feel heard and recognised, aligned with a vision for the future of Dutch society and the economy.

### **Managing health care costs make personal resources matter more**

For various reasons, health care costs have been on the rise for some time. With ageing populations growing and staff shortages increasing, the need for decision-making is more critical than ever. These decisions may involve the continuation of government-provided health care, interventions aimed at reducing the need for care (such as prevention and informal care) or increasing personal contributions to health care.

The tough decisions necessary to ensure adequate care and support in the future will have the most significant impact on those with fewer economic resources. They often experience poorer health and thus rely more heavily on care and support services. Consequently, they feel the effects more acutely when health care becomes less available or accessible. Currently, it is already harder for people with fewer resources to access the care they need compared to others. Financial incentives like higher personal contributions can exacerbate this disparity. The intended outcome, reducing health care usage, will affect them more profoundly. Additionally, those with fewer resources have fewer alternatives, such as purchasing care or support from private organisations. They also tend to have smaller support networks, putting more strain on available informal carers. Conversely, affluent individuals have greater financial means, better health and larger networks, along with a better understanding of the public health care system.

When making health care decisions, it is crucial to ensure that people with fewer resources maintain access to care and support while sustaining support for health care policies. Presently, there is strong support for health care policies, with healthy individuals contributing to the health care of others. If individuals with sufficient financial means increasingly turn to the private health care market, it could deplete the already scarce personnel. This could also undermine the principle that everyone is entitled to the same quality of care.

### **Much solidarity in socio-economic security, but not without limits**

The social security system has become exceedingly complex due to a multitude of specific regulations stacked from successive policy periods. This has led to a system where citizens increasingly encounter obstacles or struggle to access support they are entitled to. Those dependent on social security receive insufficient assistance to permanently leave that situation behind. This particularly affects people with few resources, as they rely on the safety net provided by the social security system to a greater extent.

The perception of social security among other groups is pivotal for the system's support base. The importance of socio-economic security is widely acknowledged among the Dutch population. It encompasses not just having sufficient income, but is also associated with various aspects of life, such as health care (48%), housing (41%) and safety (38%). The vast majority of the population (93%) believes that individuals should receive aid if they cannot meet their basic needs, like housing, food or clothing, and that the government should assume greater responsibility for this. People largely support measures such as increasing taxes for the wealthy (66%), lowering the state pension age (53%) and raising the minimum wage (52%). However, this generous stance clearly has its limitations. While people assign significant responsibility to the government for the welfare of the elderly, they view the unemployed, migrants and individuals with debts as less deserving. The government should operate on trust (52%), yet there is also strong support for a tough stance on fraud (78%) and notably low support for forgiving problematic debts (11%).

When making essential decisions, politicians must balance various aspects of societal well-being and therefore different interests. One commonly proposed measure to enhance socio-economic security is raising the minimum wage. This could potentially boost the prosperity and well-being of vulnerable citizens over time and reduce social inequality. However, it also involves costs, job losses and reductions in economic activity, making it harder for some to find employment. Another option is increasing the retirement age. While this could help control the growing state pension costs and contribute to the necessary workforce, ensuring a fairer distribution of benefits and burdens across generations, it is important to note that not everyone can work longer, especially in certain professions. Individuals with vocational education, for instance, typically have fewer healthy years compared to those with higher education. Moreover, poverty among individuals just below retirement age is relatively high, so raising the retirement age could mean some will experience prolonged periods of poverty.

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#### **Box 5.1 Unequal trust in the government due in part to policy choices in asylum and sustainability**

In all four policy areas discussed in this publication, policy choices have different impacts on different groups. What does this mean for the relationship between citizens and the government? The trust people have in the government and the legitimacy they attribute to it are crucial for effective policy, but there are clear differences here. While the legitimacy attributed to the government by Dutch citizens is still reasonably high, trust in the Dutch government has been low for several years, especially among those with fewer resources. Their low trust is related to an overall more critical assessment of government performance. More than those with greater resources, they feel that the government is unresponsive to citizens' concerns, does not balance the interests of different groups fairly and does not resolve issues in the Netherlands effectively. It is quite possible that they judge more negatively because they more frequently experience the government's lack of response to citizens' concerns, encounter situations they perceive as unjust and feel that the government does not solve their problems. These groups are less well represented in both policy formation and policy outcomes. Persistent differences between population groups are signs of a poorly functioning democracy. If the same group of people continually feels that the government is not there for them, this can eventually undermine the government's legitimacy.

Asylum policy and sustainability policy play a special role in the differences between people. Dutch citizens with fewer resources tend to have more negative views on government performance in both areas. These negative perceptions also erode trust in the government. The opinions on these issues carry significant weight for people with fewer resources when it comes to trust. This may mean that they are particularly upset when the government disappoints them in these areas. Understandably, policy attitudes also play a role here. Trust in the government is especially low among those who believe the government should do much less to combat climate change and that the Netherlands should host far fewer refugees than it currently does. While government choices and actions

in these areas contribute to unequal trust in the government, there are also opportunities for rebuilding trust in both policy areas: for example, by more fairly distributing the benefits and burdens of sustainability and by better communicating how migration factors into the consideration of collective interests.

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## S.4 Reflection: policy areas viewed through the lens of the quality of society

Focusing on the quality of society entails considering how policies intentionally or unintentionally affect people's lives and their collective existence. Policies may achieve their intended goals or not, and their effects may extend to other areas as well. They can either exacerbate existing problems or yield positive outcomes. Understanding these diverse impacts requires an integrated perspective across multiple policy areas. In each of the four policy areas discussed here – sustainability, asylum and migration, care and support, and socio-economic security – there are overlaps and clear connections with the four aspects of the quality of society. We will briefly explore them in sequence here and conclude with the aspect that is the primary focus of this publication: the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.

### **Quality of life**

Quality of life is pivotal in the domains of care and support, and socio-economic security. Effective and suitable care and support enhance the quality of life for those who rely on them, as well as for their social circles. Similarly, the social security system determines the quality of life for those reliant on government assistance. An added advantage is that collective care and support also enhance the quality of life for informal carers, freeing them up for other forms of participation, such as in the workforce. Social security can simultaneously increase opportunities for societal engagement while reducing incentives for participation in paid work. However, this dynamic shifts over the long term. With unchanged policies, a growing demand for public resources may strain the sustainability of collective provisions. Policies aimed at alleviating present burdens may thus come at the expense of future generations' quality of life.

Sustainability enhances the long-term prospects for a good quality of life for humanity as a whole. In the present, measures can also improve people's quality of life, for example, through better-insulated homes. However, sustainability policies can also diminish quality of life, such as when price increases make flying, driving or meat consumption less affordable for many people.

In the asylum and migration issue, we can assume that migration directly contributes to the quality of life of migrants. A swift process and earlier participation can enhance the quality of life for people coming to the Netherlands through an asylum procedure. Indirectly, migration can also improve the quality of life for others, through the contribution of migrants as workers in vital sectors and their importance to the economy. On the other hand, migration also puts pressure on the perceived quality of life, including in the form of competition for scarce housing.

### **Social cohesion**

Policies aimed at ensuring socio-economic security and providing care and support contribute to people's ability to participate in society. Through this, they establish connections that further enhance their opportunities and foster social cohesion, particularly within neighbourhoods. Participation in society can also help prevent groups of people from encountering each other less frequently. However, as this requires more public resources, some segments of the population may feel that too much money and attention are being directed towards it. This can deepen existing divisions. While conflicts of interest may be most pronounced between generations, the entitlement of the elderly to collective provisions is generally undisputed by most people. However, this differs for individuals with debts, without work or with a migration background.

The transition to sustainability has the potential to stimulate social cohesion when people establish an energy cooperative or otherwise collaborate with sustainability as the goal. However, sustainability can also exacerbate divisions between population groups because people in their own environment may disagree on the solutions needed, or because the distribution of burdens and benefits is perceived as unjust. Citizens are also deeply divided in their views on asylum and migration. When societal problems are consistently attributed to migration, groups become more opposed to each other and discrimination and exclusion are encouraged. This can be exacerbated by a portion of the population experiencing feelings of loss and perceiving that their own culture is under threat.

### **Relationship between citizens and government**

In the realm of social security, the relationship between citizens and the government has taken a significant hit due to the scandal around the serious failings in the childcare allowance system and its cumbersome aftermath. The complexity of the system plays a role, as do citizens' high expectations. While they believe trust is crucial for government operations, they also expect vigilance against fraud. In the health care sector, citizens also face issues, and their expectations of the government may exceed what it can realistically deliver.

Similarly, the government struggles to satisfy all sides when it comes to sustainability and asylum and migration. While some of the population feels that the government is not moving quickly enough on sustainability, others believe it is moving too hastily. Concerning asylum and migration, there is a perception that the government lacks control over migration flows and does not address citizens' concerns adequately. On both fronts, many people feel that the government does not listen to people like them (lack of responsiveness), does not consider all interests fairly (lack of procedural justice) and does not resolve issues effectively (lack of achieved results). Particularly, those who think the government should do much less to combat climate change and should host far fewer refugees than it currently does hold negative views about the government's performance in these areas.

### **Fair distribution**

On each issue, people experience vastly different policy outcomes. Sustainability primarily impacts the quality of life of those with fewer resources. This can exacerbate inequality and feelings of injustice. If sustainability benefits the affluent while compromising the quality of life for those with fewer resources, and if citizens feel that major corporations are not doing enough, it can harm trust in the government. In the realm of asylum and migration, the fact that those with fewer resources feel more resistant to migration, coupled with the sense that the government is not there for them and does not listen to them, plays a role.

Traditional collective provisions in social security and health care play a crucial role in limiting inequality. Policies aimed at reducing existential insecurity naturally heavily influence the quality of life of the group with the fewest resources. To some extent, this also applies to care and support, because those with more or better resources can take better care of themselves than those with fewer resources. On both fronts, there is broad support for maintaining accessible health care and social security. However, not everyone shares this view equally: especially those who themselves have sufficient resources tend to prioritise individual responsibility.

### **Finally: distribution of benefits and burdens from various perspectives**

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the issue of distribution plays a dominant role in the pursuit of a higher quality of society. While present in every policy area, its manifestations vary. Inequality materialises in individuals' quality of life and whether they have access to things that are considered to be minimum standards in today's society, such as health care or opportunities for young people to build a promising future, with sufficient perspective and certainty. It also emerges in the extent to which people feel acknowledged and listened to by government entities regarding their concerns and aspirations. Dissatisfaction with the (perceived) allocation of burdens and benefits largely contributes to low trust in governmental institutions. Perceived fairness is also manifested in the solidarity individuals feel toward those accessing collective resources. This solidarity matters not only to health care and social security but also to education and community engagement. While there is strong support for an inclusive and egalitarian government, there are inherent limits. When choices undermine earning potential or solidarity, the quality of society ultimately suffers.

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