The Social State of the Netherlands 2011
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Summary

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a to carry out research designed to produce a coherent picture of the state of social and cultural welfare in the Netherlands and likely developments in this area;

b to contribute to the appropriate selection of policy objectives and to provide an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the various means of achieving those ends;

c to seek information on the way in which interdepartmental policy on social and cultural welfare is implemented with a view to assessing its implementation.

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Foreword

This is a summary of the sixth edition of *The Social State of the Netherlands (De sociale staat van Nederland)*, a biannual report published by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research | SCP at the request of the Dutch Parliament. The report describes and analyses the life situation of the Dutch population and selected groups within it using key figures on themes such as education, employment, income, health, leisure time use, social participation, safety, housing and the residential environment. The opinions of the public are also described: how do people rate their life in the Netherlands? How satisfied are they with their lives in general or with specific aspects of their life situation? In order to be able to assess the current social situation in the Netherlands, comparisons are made with developments over the last ten years and with the situation in neighbouring countries.

The *Social State of the Netherlands* is part of a long, international research tradition in which social indicators are used in an attempt to provide an unambiguous picture of the changes in people’s life circumstances over time. The availability – and scope – of statistical data is improving, and with it the ability to map out social trends in the population as a whole.

This edition of *The Social State of the Netherlands* appears at a time when Europe is in the grip of an economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The crisis began in 2008, but the direct consequences for the life situation of most Dutch citizens appear only now to be becoming apparent. While it may be surprising that the crisis has thus far had little impact on the life situation of most citizens, this can be explained. Economic changes have a delayed impact on people’s life situation: someone who loses their job, for example, does not automatically stop playing sport or doing voluntary work immediately, and is also not forced to move out of their home straight away. Generally, it is businesses which are the first to feel the effects of an economic downturn (lower sales and profits), followed by the government (lower revenues, higher costs, including for unemployment), and only then are citizens affected (via austerity measures).

Education level is found to be a strong predictor of (differences in) people’s life situation. This applies both for the ‘harder’ aspects of society (labour market position, educational opportunities, housing situation) and the more experiential and subjective aspects (trust, happiness, etc.). Having access to and being able to make use of the various forms of social, cultural and financial capital is what determines people’s quality of life. There are substantial differences in this regard between people with a higher and lower education level. In some cases, these differences are in fact so wide that they can be described as a gulf, and have proved to be very stubborn over the years. Precisely in the present
period of a deteriorating economic outlook which is set to lead to cuts in many areas of society, extra attention needs to be given to those groups which are already living in less favourable circumstances. In many cases, these groups will be confronted with the cumulative effect of a whole series of austerity measures.

Prof. Paul Schnabel  
Director, The Netherlands Institute for Social Research | SCP
1 How is the Dutch population faring?

Rob Bijl

How is the Dutch population faring? That is the central question addressed in The Social State of the Netherlands 2011 (De sociale staat van Nederland 2011). In this book we describe the position of the Netherlands and the Dutch in a number of key areas of life and the changes that have taken place in people’s life situation over the last ten years. This Social State of the Netherlands appears at a time when Europe is in the throes of an economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The crisis began in 2008, but the direct consequences for the life situation of most Dutch citizens appear only now to be becoming apparent. While it may be surprising that the crisis has thus far had little impact on the life situation of most citizens, this can be explained. Economic changes have a delayed impact on people’s life situation: someone who loses their job, for example, does not automatically stop playing sport or doing voluntary work immediately, and is also not forced to move out of their home straight away. Generally, it is businesses which are the first to feel the effects of an economic downturn (lower sales and profits), followed by the government (lower revenues, higher costs, including for unemployment), and only then are citizens affected (via austerity measures). The consequences of the present Dutch government’s austerity measures will only be felt in Dutch society from 2012 onwards. Dark clouds are gathering on the horizon; so far, the Netherlands has withstood the crisis well, in fact better than most other European countries, but that could be about to change.

The Social State of the Netherlands covers many domains of Dutch life: education, public opinion, income and work, health, prevention and care, social and political participation and engagement, use of leisure time, mobility, public safety, and housing and the residential setting. By bringing these diverse themes together, placing them in the context of the economic and demographic developments taking place in Dutch society and describing trends over time, this report arrives at a picture of the overall life situation of the Dutch population. We also devote attention to individual groups in society, reflecting the fact that people’s options, opportunities and preferences in structuring their lives are related to their age, sex, education level, degree of disability, ethnic origin and financial position. In this edition of The Social State of the Netherlands we look more closely at potentially vulnerable groups who share less than others in the prosperity and well-being of the Netherlands. Education level is found to be a strong predictor of (differences in) people’s life situation. This applies both for the ‘harder’ sectors in society (labour market position, educational opportunities, housing situation) and for the more subjective aspects (trust, happiness, etc.). Having access to and being able to use the different forms of social, cultural and financial capital is what determines people’s quality of life.

The purpose of The Social State of the Netherlands is to describe the social reality in the Netherlands, not to present a policy evaluation. That said, using register data and research results, we are able to determine whether the policy objectives formulated for the various social domains have been or are likely to be achieved. What we can by
no means always say with certainty is whether government policy has played a decisive
role in this regard, in either a positive or negative sense; that would require a different
research design. And because much government policy today is actually European policy,
we also indicate how the Netherlands scores compared to its European neighbours on
the various themes covered in this report.
The Social State of the Netherlands is part of a long, international research tradition in which,
by making use of social indicators, an attempt is made to monitor the living conditions
and quality of life of citizens over time in a uniform way and to identify trends. The
availability and comprehensiveness of statistical data are increasing, and with them the
ability to map out social trends in the population as a whole. Governments in several
European countries have formulated social policy with targets, among other things in
relation to poverty and social exclusion, living conditions, social security and equal
opportunities for men and women. Trends and developments in these areas are closely
monitored. Social reporting has become a commonplace activity in the statistical infor-
mation systems of European countries and of international and supranational organisa-
tions such as the European Union and the oecd . There are today few countries in Europe
which do not operate some form of regular social monitoring at national level.

1.1  Factual situation and subjective appreciation

We use the term ‘life situation’ in this report to describe quality of life, expressed in
terms of prosperity and well-being. In the first instance, quality of life refers to an objec-
tifiable living standard and is expressed in the way in which people live, work, spend
their leisure time, participate socially, consume and travel. It depends not only on gener-
al social, economic and demographic developments, but also on all manner of resources
to which citizens themselves have greater or lesser access. Examples of such resources
are an adequate education, an income and a social network. Quality of life also has a
subjective side: people’s own perceptions about their lives, their satisfaction with their
life in general or with specific aspects of it, also form part of their quality of life. How
do they perceive their health, their work, their circle of friends? How happy do they feel
being part of Dutch society? Often, the objective situation and the subjective apprecia-
tion of it will run in parallel: a good education, good job and good income all contribute
to positive subjective perception of life. Despite the positive aspects, however, there
are also negative aspects that can lead to a reduction in people’s overall rating of their
quality of life. These aspects may include fears that the economy will deteriorate or, as
is indeed observed among older persons and migrants and their children, a sense of not
really – or no longer – belonging to or being accepted by Dutch society. Perceptions and
experiences such as these can cause a deterioration in citizens’ quality of life.
1.2 What determines people’s life situation?

People’s life situation is of course not static, and it is precisely the changes in it which are interesting for researchers and policymakers. Life situation is the result of the way in which people are able to carve out a place for themselves in society. It refers to their willingness and ability to participate in social activities. The latter is relevant for three domains of society: the political, socioeconomic and sociocultural domains.

In the political domain, life situation is determined by the amount of say and political influence that citizens have, and by their trust in the government and civil-society institutions such as the police, judicial apparatus and the media. In the socioeconomic domain, aspects that affect life situation include things such as participation in the labour market, acquiring an income, having decent housing and having sufficient financial resources to be able to lead a pleasant life. In the sociocultural domain, finally, life situation is influenced by a range of factors such as receiving – and successfully completing – an education, participating in cultural and sporting activities, (voluntarily) accepting and respecting norms and values, and engaging in and maintaining social contacts.

The extent to which individuals and groups succeed in participating socioeconomically, socioculturally and politically is determined by an intricate interplay of individual and social factors, which can either reinforce or counteract each other. There can also be wide differences in the speed with which different groups of citizens succeed in improving their life situation in one of these domains. These differences may be related to exogenous factors, such as unfavourable macroeconomic developments, but also to individual circumstances and behaviours (e.g. failure to complete an education, drug and alcohol abuse), which help determine whether and to what degree people’s life situation improves or deteriorates.

1.3 Central themes addressed in this report

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research | SCP has a long tradition of publishing reports on social trends and life situation. The choice of social domains and indicators in this Social State of the Netherlands is therefore based largely on earlier empirical research. The social domains analysed in this report are education, income and work, health, prevention and care, social and political participation and engagement, use of leisure time, mobility, public safety, and housing and the residential setting.

In each of the chapters an indication is given – naturally, to the extent that suitable data are available – of how the Netherlands is performing in comparison to its European neighbours. The central theme in each chapter is the movement in trends over the last decade. To a greater extent than in previous years, in this edition we devote attention to the inequality between citizens with different education levels in terms of their quality of life and life situation.
2 Population, economy and government

Evert Pommer

- The Dutch population is growing modestly by international standards, by 0.5% per year. This growth stems mainly from the natural population increase; growth due to net migration is low.
- The share of migrants in the Dutch population has increased, from just over 17% in 1999 to nearly 21% in 2011. This increase is due mainly to migrants of non-Western and Eastern European origin (3 percentage points and 1 percentage point, respectively).
- The difference between the lowest and highest average available household income was 7.5% in the period 1999-2011. The annual change in average household purchasing power was limited.
- The Netherlands is the best-performing economy on the European continent, recording the highest GDP per inhabitant in 2010, at 35,600 euros, and the lowest score on the ‘misery index’. Unemployment, inflation and the budget deficit are all among the lowest in Europe.
- Government spending on public services rose as a percentage of GDP from 23% in 1999 to 28% in 2009. This growth was due not only to increased service delivery, but also to rising cost prices.
- The ‘profit’ derived by citizens from the government accrues mainly to those on low and high incomes; the middle incomes benefit less than average. Thus the least prosperous group receive 9,800 euros from the government through the use of public services, the middle income group 7,900 euros and the highest income group 8,500 euros.

Apart from the growth in output, a country’s prosperity can also be measured by the degree to which it succeeds in keeping unemployment, inflation and its budget deficit within acceptable bounds. These indicators can be combined to create a ‘misery index’ where the average score is 5 on a scale from 0 to 10 (figure 2.1). The higher the score on this scale, the poorer a country’s performance.
The Netherlands recorded the lowest score on the ‘misery index’ in 2010. Both the rate of unemployment and the inflation rate were among the lowest in Europe, and the budget deficit was also well within bounds, though the Netherlands scored slightly below the average on this point. This good score on the misery index was closely followed by Austria and Denmark. Weak scores were recorded for Greece (mainly because of the high inflation rate), Spain (mainly because of the high unemployment rate) and Ireland (mainly because of the high budget deficit). High inflation also made the situation in Hungary worrying.

Source: OECD (Economic Outlook 2010)
The trend between 1999 and 2010 shows only relative differences, because the same scale was used in both years (with an average of 5). It emerges from this comparison that, as is the case with GDP, the performance of the Netherlands over this period has been both solid and stable. In 1999 the ranking was headed by Ireland, but higher unemployment and, in particular, the sharp rise in the budget deficit caused this country to slide down the rankings and acquire a high score on the misery index. Other countries which rose sharply up the misery index were Spain, Greece and the United Kingdom. The Eastern European countries, Italy and Germany all improved their scores on the index.

Profit from the government
Roughly 60% of the costs of public services for citizens are borne by the government. This government expenditure in turn benefits individual citizens through their use of those services. This ‘profit from the government’ totalled more than €64 billion in 2007 in the Netherlands (€55 billion plus expenditure on rent protection, public broadcasting associations and roads). Education takes the biggest slice of public spending, accounting for 40% of attributable government expenditure, followed at some distance by spending on housing (24%), services (10%), transport, culture and recreation and care insurance (each 7%) and subsistence costs (4%).

The (higher) middle incomes in the Netherlands derive less profit from the government than the lower and highest incomes. Those on higher incomes profit particularly from the favourable tax treatment of home ownership, but also benefit from spending on education because they have more children who are not of compulsory school age, but above all because of the higher participation in education by children who are beyond compulsory school age. Cultural amenities, such as the performing arts and museums, also reach those on higher incomes more than average. The lower income groups profit mainly from care insurance, provisions funded under the Social Support Act, exemption from local taxes and rent benefit. These provisions require income-dependent contributions from the recipients. Those on middle incomes do not benefit specifically from any publicly funded services.
Figure 2.2
Profit from the government by prosperity groups, 2007 (in euros)

Provisions:
- Public housing, rent benefit, rent protection, imputed rental value;
- Transport: train, bus, tram, metro, roads;
- Culture and recreation: sociocultural activities, sports facilities, open-air recreation, public libraries, artistic training, performing arts, museums, public broadcasting;
- Services: home care, services for disabled persons, childcare, legal aid;
- Care insurance: funding through Care Insurance Act;
- Subsistence costs: tax relief for medical expenses, exemption from local taxes;
- Education: operating expenses (primary, secondary, senior secondary and higher education), disadvantage compensation funding, adult education, child allowance, study allowance, student grants, tax relief for study costs.

Source: SCP (2011)
3 Public opinion

Paul Dekker and Josje den Ridder

- Compared with other European countries, social and political trust are fairly high in the Netherlands. Comparatively speaking, the Dutch also take a relatively positive view or social and economic developments.
- Despite this, a majority of Dutch citizens think that things are moving more in the wrong than the right direction in the Netherlands. The proportion who believe things are moving in the right direction has remained consistently low since early 2008, at around a quarter. In the first half of 2011 this increased to a third, but fell back again to a quarter in the third three months.
- Political trust has been substantially higher in recent years than in the period 2002-2004, but does fluctuate. It was high following the government response to the financial crisis at the end of 2008, but low during the government crisis in mid-2010, before rising again after the new government took office at the end of 2010.
- The crisis has prompted people to worry more about economic problems, but their biggest concern remains how people in the Netherlands get along together (the question of ‘norms and values’, aggression, the ‘self’-culture). This emerges both when people themselves describe the biggest problems and when they are asked to make a selection from a list of dozens of social issues.
- Political priorities are a stable economy, fighting crime and maintaining an acceptable level of social security. Little has changed in this regard in the last decade. The same applies for preferences with regard to the policy on migrant integration and asylum-seekers. There is more support now for allowing euthanasia and less support for European integration.
- Support for more direct democracy (referendums, directly elected mayors) remains high and, although smaller than in 2000, there is still a majority in favour of giving people a greater say in political decisions. People with a lower education level are more in favour of democratisation than those with a higher education level, but also more often support governance by strong leaders.
- Differences in opinions between people with different education levels are largely related to differences in the degree to which people feel they have control over their lives. Differences in material security also play a role.
Figure 3.1
Trust in other people\(^a\) and in Parliament\(^b\), population aged 18 years and older, 2008/09 (in percentages)

![Graph showing trust in other people and trust in parliament for 19 European countries.](image)

\(a\) Social trust = percentage choosing ‘most people can be trusted’ rather than ‘you can’t be too careful in dealing with other people’ or ‘I don’t know’.

\(b\) Trust in parliament = percentage who have ‘a lot’ or ‘quite a lot’ of trust in parliament as opposed to ‘not much’, ‘none at all’ or ‘don’t know’.

\(AT\) = Austria; \(BE\) = Belgium; \(CH\) = Switzerland; \(DE\) = Germany; \(DK\) = Denmark; \(ES\) = Spain; \(FI\) = Finland; \(FR\) = France; \(GR\) = Greece; \(HU\) = Hungary; \(IE\) = Ireland; \(IT\) = Italy; \(LU\) = Luxembourg; \(NL\) = Netherlands; \(NO\) = Norway; \(PL\) = Poland; \(PT\) = Portugal; \(SE\) = Sweden; \(UK\) = United Kingdom.

Source: \(EVSSG\) (EVS’08)

Figure 3.1 shows combinations of trust in other people and in parliament for 19 European countries. The differences are enormous, ranging from social trust scores of 19% in Portugal to 75% in Denmark, and from 19% trust in parliament in Poland to 69%, again in Denmark.

With a score of 62%, the Netherlands is in the leading group when it comes to social trust, along with the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland. The Netherlands also
scores above average for trust in parliament, though at 47% the figure is not particularly high. Although trust figures vary between surveys, these results tally well with other research. In the 1990s, the Netherlands was also in the top group in Europe on political trust. That trust fell in the years after 2002, but after some fluctuation recovered again after 2004, though not enough to put the Netherlands back in the leading group in Europe.

Figure 3.2
The most important national problems according to the population aged 15 years and older, 2003-2010 (in percentages)

Since the autumn of 2008, the Dutch public have regarded the economic situation as the most important national problem. Although the importance of this theme has reduced sharply since 2008, it is still at the top of the rankings. Compared with residents of other EU member states, the Dutch are considerably less worried about unemployment (which is also relatively low), but more worried about the economic situation in general. Other frequently cited problems in the Netherlands are health care, crime, immigration and pensions. Crime was the most frequently cited problem in early 2003; its importance has fallen since then, but it still remains in the top five of problems cited. The importance of health care and immigration receded slightly when the economic problems began to dominate, but these problems are rising up the rankings again as concerns about the economy reduce. During times of economic crisis, problems of this nature are briefly pushed off the agenda, but return as soon as the worries about the economic crisis recede, signifying that these are and remain important topics.
4 Caring for each other

Mariëlle Cloin, Freek Bucx, Alice de Boer and Debbie Oudijk

– Between 1995 and 2005, the time devoted by Dutch parents to looking after children aged up to 18 years increased by two hours per week. Mothers devote more time to providing this care than fathers.
– The use of formal childcare facilities (childminders, day nurseries and out-of-school childcare) has increased steadily in recent years. Well-educated parents make most use of formal facilities as the main form of childcare (37% in 2009).
– Dutch parents report that they place the emphasis in bringing up their children on providing (emotional) support, explanations and structure. They are generally satisfied with the way their children are growing up and take a positive view of combining caring for children with paid work. Bringing up children and combining work and care tasks places a heavier than average burden on parents with young children (up to four years) and single parents.
– In 2008, 1.3 million Dutch citizens provided care to parents or parents-in-law who were sick or needed help. On average, they provided care for 15.4 hours per week. More than 310,000 over-55s provide care to a sick partner.
– One in five Dutch people who care for their parents or who provide informal care to a partner feel under a heavy burden. They report that providing this care means they have too many obligations.

Comparative European time use research shows that Dutch parents are around the average in terms of the amount of time they devote to their children (an average of 1 hour 18 minutes per day). In all countries studied, mothers spend more time caring for children than fathers, and this is also true in the Netherlands.

Mothers in the Netherlands devote more time to their children than mothers in Belgium and France, but less than mothers in Southern Europe. Dutch fathers, by contrast, spend slightly more time on average caring for their children than fathers in other countries. Belgian and French fathers score lowest in this regard, followed by German and Southern European fathers.
Figure 4.1
Time spent caring for children, by sex, in the Netherlands and nine European comparison countries, parents with children aged 0-17 years (in hours per day)

Source: Netherlands: SCP (TBO’06/EU); other countries: HETUS

Figure 4.2
Time spent on paid work, household and caring for children, by sex, in the Netherlands and European comparison countries, parents with children living at home aged 0-17 years (in hours per day)a

a Average of measurements on a weekday and a weekend day.

Source: Netherlands: SCP (TBO’06/EU); other countries: HETUS
More and more children today grow up in families with working parents. Many parents combine tasks, with mothers doing so more often than fathers. The degree of task combination varies from 38% among low-educated fathers to 68% among highly educated mothers (not shown in figure). Parents spend a lot of time on (combining) paid work, running the household and looking after children. Compared with parents in other countries, however, parents in the Netherlands spend the least time on these tasks, with women averaging 6 hours 48 minutes and men 7 hours 19 minutes per day. Mothers in Belgium, Germany and the Scandinavian countries spend roughly half an hour per day longer on these tasks, while in France, Spain and Italy mothers spend (more than) an hour longer. Mothers are busier than fathers in all countries studied, except the Netherlands. However, Dutch fathers are not among the busiest in Europe — on the contrary, only Belgian fathers are less busy. The differences between fathers across European countries are however smaller than the differences between mothers. One possible explanation for the small amount of time devoted to work and care in the Netherlands may lie in the typically Dutch part-time employment model: many mothers in the Netherlands work part-time.

1 Based on a definition of at least twelve hours’ household/care tasks and twelve hours’ paid work per week.
5 Education

Ria Vogels and Monique Turkenburg

– School performance in language and arithmetic/mathematics needed to be raised. To achieve this, schools need to strengthen their focus on educational outcomes. At present, one in three Dutch primary schools and fewer than one in five secondary schools are doing so.

– School dropout rates have fallen from 15% in 2001 to 10% in 2010, but have not yet reached the target of 8%.

– Special needs pupils must be offered appropriate education from 1 August 2012, preferably in the mainstream education system. Half of Dutch teachers are however not yet adequately equipped for this.

– The number of students entering higher education rose by more than 10 percentage points over the last decade. Selection by universities is likely to reduce the intake.

– At present, 38% of 25-34 year-olds go on to higher education. The government is committed to raising this figure to at least 50%.

– In 2010, 3,700 students obtained doctorates, almost twice as many as twenty years previously. In terms of global citation impact, Dutch academics now occupy fourth place.

Over the last century, the education level of the Dutch population has risen sharply. Figure 5.1 makes this clear by showing the education level attained by successive birth cohorts. The vast majority of men and women born in the early part of the last century have a low education level, with only a few having completed a higher vocational or university education. With each successive cohort since then, the proportion with a low education level falls and that with a high education level rises. The education level of women has risen even more than that of men over the past hundred years. Young women have in fact now overtaken young men, with the turning point lying in the 1965-69 and 1970-74 cohorts. Based on the education levels of younger generations and the present educational participation figures for men and women, women are expected to pull further ahead in the future.
Figure 5.1
Education level attained by the population, by birth cohort (in percentages)

Compared with European Union countries which are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (19 of the 27 EU member states), young Dutch adults (25-34 years) most often have a high education level. One qualifying comment here is that the data in the figure relate only to long courses (three years and above). Unlike many other countries, apart from the specialist training programme in senior secondary vocational education, the Netherlands does not offer short courses at the highest level. If short courses are included, 32% of young adults in Europe have a high education level; the figure in the Netherlands is 40%, putting the Netherlands in sixth place in the European rankings.

The Netherlands thus by no means means badly as regards the education level of its young adults. However, the education level of the population aged between 25 and 64 years is only slightly above the average for the OECD countries.

Source: CBS (EBB'91-'08); weighted figures
Figure 5.2
Population aged 25-34 years with a high education level,* EU member states, 2008 (in percentages)

Legend:
- **Blue** high education level (long)
- **Black** EU average

* Long (three years and longer) courses at higher (tertiary) level (higher professional and university education).

Source: OECD (2010)
6 Income and work

Stella Hoff, Arjan Soede and Maroesjka Versantvoort

- Incomes increased by an average of 6% between 2001 and 2009. Older persons – both those living alone and couples – and double-earners with children did particularly well, seeing their purchasing power increase by 10%, 16% and 8%, respectively.
- The first consequences of the economic crisis became visible in 2009, when purchasing power fell by an average of 1% and the poverty rate rose by 0.5 percentage points. The proposed austerity measures are likely to lead to a further reduction in purchasing power in the coming years.
- Almost two-thirds of the Dutch population were satisfied with their own income in 2010. However, 6% of households said they were having to address savings or incur debt in order to make ends meet. Single-parent families most often face financial difficulties, the over-65s least often.
- For some years now there have been more part-time jobs than full-time jobs in the Netherlands, in 2010 the difference was almost 300,000.
- More than 100,000 jobs were lost from the employment figures between 2008 and 2010. The labour force also shrank, mainly because young people are opting to study for longer.
- The unemployment rate rose to 5.4% in 2010. Low-skilled workers were unemployed much more often in that year than the highly skilled (8.7% versus 3.7%).
- The proportion of employees wishing to continue working until age 65 increased from 21% to 44% between 2005 and 2010. A small but growing minority (14%) would also like to continue working beyond the age of 65. The number of over-65s who are actually in paid employment has doubled since 2001, and totalled more than 130,000 persons in 2010. It is mainly highly educated men aged between 65 and 69 years who continue to work.
- The number of people in receipt of general disability benefit (wao) and disability benefit based on capacity for work (wia) has reduced drastically in recent years and fell below 600,000 in 2010. By contrast, the number of people in receipt of benefit paid pursuant to the Invalidity Provision (Early Disabled Persons) Act (Wajong) increased (to 205,000). The number of unemployment and social assistance benefits in payment has also increased since the crisis, reaching a total of 609,000 in 2010.
- The ratio of people in work to the number of benefit recipients (excluding state old-age pension) has deteriorated since 2008; in that year there were 24 economically inactive people for every 100 in work; in 2010 this had risen to 26.

The Netherlands is a prosperous country. With the exception of Luxembourg, the average income in the Netherlands is the highest in the European Union (figure 6.1). The remaining EU-15 member states have a slightly lower average income than in the Netherlands, with Portugal firmly at the bottom of the rankings. The twelve new EU member states have an average income that is substantially below that in the Netherlands. There is no clear relationship between income level and income inequality: a higher average income is not automatically associated with more – or less – income inequality.
An important measure of income inequality is the Gini-coefficient, which can range from 0 (no inequality) to 1 (extreme inequality). The Gini-coefficients in Europe range between 0.227 (Slovakia) and 0.374 (Latvia). Compared with the other countries, income inequality in the Netherlands is very low.

**Figure 6.1**
Average income plotted against income inequality in the EU, 2009 (in euros and in Gini-coefficients)

Source: Eurostat (2011a)
Poverty and wealth in the Netherlands

The lower segment of the income distribution is reasonably stable. According to the ‘modest but adequate’ criterion for measuring poverty, around 6% of Dutch citizens are poor (see table 6.1). Incomes in this category are too low to meet minimum basic needs (such as food, clothing and housing) as well as the costs of social participation (social contacts and recreation). In 4% of cases, the income is so low that those concerned are unable to afford basic needs. According to both criteria (modest but adequate and basic needs), the poverty rate increased between 2001 and 2005, followed by a fall which lasted until 2008. The poverty rate increased again in 2009 according to both criteria. This occurred in all sections of the population studied, although the poverty rates were still lower than in 2005. In line with the trend in purchasing power figures, the percentage of over-65s falling below the poverty line is relatively small and shows a virtually continuous downward trend. There is thus virtually no poverty among the older population.

Table 6.1
Poverty and wealth of individuals, 2001-2009 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>according to basic needs criterion</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>according to modest but adequate criterion</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single-parent families</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benefit claimants</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-Western migrants</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children (0-17 years)</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single persons</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over-65s</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

wealth
share of richest 10% in total earned income 22.2 22.4 23.6 22.4 22.1

a Provisional figures.

Source: CBS (IPO‘01-‘09) SCP treatment

The wealthiest 10% in the Netherlands receive more than 20% of total income. This percentage was even higher in 2007 (23.6%). One reason for this is that self-employed incomes were relatively high in 2007.

The Netherlands is one of the few EU member states where, despite the crisis, the unemployment rate is below 5%. In Spain, in particular, the unemployment rate is dramatically higher, at 20% (figure 6.2).
Figure 6.2
Unemployment: international comparison, 2010 (as percentages of the labour force)

Source: Eurostat (2011c)
7 Health, prevention and care

Johan Polder and Fons van der Lucht

– Life expectancy in the Netherlands rose sharply over the last decade, and in 2009 stood at 78.5 years for men and 82.7 years for women.
– The well-educated live an average of seven years longer and are in better health than the low-educated; they also suffer fewer physical disabilities.
– Coronary heart disease, depression and strokes impose the greatest disease burden.
– There are 4.5 million chronically ill people in the Netherlands, over a quarter of whom have more than one disease. 1.9 million Dutch citizens have a psychological disorder.
– The number of smokers is falling steadily, but 27% of the Dutch population still smoke; the trends in obesity appear to be stabilising: 50% of the Dutch population are overweight and 10% are seriously overweight.
– The majority of Dutch women undergo screening for breast cancer (90%) and cervical cancer (80%).
– Three-quarters of Dutch citizens visit their GP at least once a year.
– 10% of people with a low education level are admitted to hospital each year, compared with 5% of those with a high education level. Low-educated people also more often access mental health care services.
– 30% of people with only primary school education visit the dentist at least once a year, compared with 60% of those with a higher education.
– The Dutch health care system is one of the most accessible in the world; the basic package of services is comprehensive and patient contributions are low.

The Dutch are living longer; but are they also becoming healthier? If we look at life expectancy without illness, this is not the case: this measure of life expectancy has fallen over the last ten years from 49 years to 48 years for men and from 44 years to 42 years for women (figure 7.1). In 2011, a Dutch woman can expect to spend nearly half her life living with a chronic illness. However, this is only one side of the story. Health is not just about the absence of illness, but also about how healthy people feel and whether they experience impairments in their daily lives. Do people have the physical and mental ability to do the things they want to do? Seen from this perspective, the health of the Dutch has certainly not deteriorated in recent years. Like life expectancy in general, life expectancy without impairments has also risen over the last ten years. This means that the additional years of life expectancy were mostly healthy years, in other words years spent without impairments and in good perceived health. Dutch public health in 2011 thus exhibits a dual trend of both more illness and more health.
Almost half the Dutch population are overweight, and roughly one in ten are seriously overweight (obese), though the situation appears to have stabilised since 2000. Internationally, a 10% obesity figure is in fact an exceptionally good score; with the sole exception of Romania, there is no other country in Europe where there are fewer overweight people. In the UK, for example, no less than a quarter of the population are seriously overweight, both men and women.

The eating habits of the average Dutch person can be summarised simply: the Dutch eat too much and too much of the wrong foods. Consumption of fruit and vegetables, in particular, is below recommended norms. People also eat too much saturated fat and too little fish, and too much salt is added to food (including by food manufacturers). Many people follow diets, often resulting in yo-yoing weight. Moreover, physical activity has virtually disappeared from the lives of many Dutch people, and this (in combination with dietary habits) is responsible for the increase in overweight. Set against the declining amount of daily physical activity is an increase in participation in sport. Physical exercise has thus been transformed from a means to an end. One positive factor is that the bicycle is still a popular means of transport in the Netherlands, especially compared with other countries.

On virtually all determinants of disease, people with a lower education level score worse than those with a higher education level (figure 7.2). Alcohol use is one exception: problem drinkers are found in all social classes.
Figure 7.2
Determinants of health, by education level, 2009 (in percentages)

Source: CBS (POLS)
8 Social and political participation and engagement

Pepijn van Houwelingen, Joep de Hart and Paul Dekker

- Compared with residents of other European countries, the Dutch are often members of a club or association and often do voluntary work.
- A majority of the Dutch population maintain intensive contacts with family and friends and derive emotional support from this. The percentage of Dutch people who have contact with their neighbours at least once a week has however fallen, from 47% in 2004 to 40% in 2010.
- Seven out of ten Dutch people are members of a club or association. This represents a slight increase over recent years. The most popular are sports clubs, of which four out of ten Dutch persons claim to be members. Sports such as golf, hockey and horse riding, in particular, have seen a sharp increase in membership numbers over the last ten years.
- In 2009, 87% of Dutch households gave an average of 241 euros to good causes. The total amount given by households in money and goods in 2009 amounted to 1,938 million euros.
- The better educated are more often active as volunteers or in the political sphere than those with a lower education level. If a number of background characteristics are taken into account, such as attending church and political self-confidence, the relationship between education level and political and social engagement remains intact, though it does weaken slightly.
- In both 2002 and 2010, four out of ten Dutch citizens reported that they had been politically active in the preceding five years. Physical attendance at protest actions fell (from 10% to 5%), while political participation via the Internet increased (from 10% to 21%).
- Dutch people who attend church at least once a month more often do voluntary work and more often offer free help to sick or disabled relatives, acquaintances or neighbours.

Figure 8.1 portrays two forms of social engagement – performing voluntary work and engaging in social issues; there is a positive correlation between these two, though it is not very strong. Ranged against countries that score low on both forms of engagement (Poland, Hungary and Portugal) is an array of countries with lots of activity in these domains. Social activism is relatively strong in the Nordic countries, while in the Netherlands an exceptionally large amount of voluntary work is performed. This position is also fairly extreme in comparison with earlier surveys in the same study series and in comparison with other research. The reason for this is not clear. However, the Netherlands is still in the group of European countries with lots of volunteers, as are the Nordic countries.
Figure 8.1
Voluntary work\(^a\) and activism\(^b\) in Europe, 2008/09 (in percentages)

\[\text{Table 8.1 shows trends in political engagement and actual participation. Political interest and willingness to do something to protest against a law that is perceived as unjust were both greater in 2010 than ten years earlier. In the intervening years there were quite a few fluctuations, which means it is not possible to speak of a trend. The same applies for participation in collective actions, and it could also be the case for participation in a number of political activities, which have been measured only three times since 2002.}\]

\(^a\) On a list of fifteen ‘organisations and activities’ (including ‘other groups’), states that he/she has done ‘unpaid voluntary work’ for one or more from a list of fifteen ‘organisations and activities’ (including ‘other groups’) at least once (e vs, 18 years and older).

\(^b\) Has tried in some way (from contacting a politician and taking part in activities in organisations to demonstrating and boycotting products) to do something in the last twelve months ‘to improve or help prevent things going wrong’ (ess, 15 years and older).

Source: UvT (e v’08 (golf 4)); nwo/SCP (ess’08 (golf 4))
Whatever the case may be, the identical final percentage of 41% political participants in 2002 and 2010 masks a shift from face-to-face protest (a halving of protest groups and protest actions) to virtual activities (a doubling of actions via the Internet, e-mail or SMS).

Table 8.1
Political engagement and participation, 2000-2010 (in percentages)a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>regards own political interest as ‘strong’ or ‘normal’</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regularly reads about politics in the Netherlands, e.g. newspaper reports</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would probably try to do something if he/she thought Parliament was passing an unjust law</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has done something together with others in the last two years for an issue of national or international importance</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has done something together with others in the last two years for an issue of local importance</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political activitiesb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has contacted radio, television or newspaper</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has contacted political party or organisation</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has taken part in a participation meeting, inquiry or discussion meeting organised by the authorities</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has contacted a politician or civil servant</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has taken part in an action group</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has taken part in a protest action, protest march or demonstration</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has taken part in a political discussion or action via Internet, e-mail or SMS</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>something else</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at least one of the above forms of participation</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The statements about political engagement are taken from the Cultural Changes in the Netherlands (Culturele Veranderingen in Nederland (cv)) survey, which is held among the population aged 16 years and older; the statements about political activities are drawn from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (Nationale kiezersonderzoek (nko)), which is held among the electorate aged 18 years and older.

b The question formulation was as follows: ‘There are several ways of raising a political issue or exerting influence on politicians or the government. Could you look at the following options and tell me which of them you have used during the last five years?’

Source: SCP (CV’02-’10/11); SKON (NKO’02-’10)
9 Leisure time use

Nathalie Sonck, Andries van den Broek, Annet Tiessen-Raaphorst and Desirée Verbeek

- More people visited arts events and practised the arts in 2007 than in 1999. Visits to the ‘canonised’ arts (museums or classical concerts) by the low-educated fell, but visits to popular art forms (pop concerts, musicals or films) rose. The differences in the reach of canonised culture by education level widened slightly, while the reach of popular culture narrowed somewhat.
- Highly educated people have a more pronounced preference for public broadcasting on the television and radio than the low-educated. Use of television, radio and newspapers has remained fairly stable over time, while the use of the Internet has grown explosively. The low-educated, in particular, have made great strides in this regard, though their Internet use is still far below that of the highly educated.
- Dutch participation in sport has risen in recent years. Relatively more lower-educated people, in particular, have taken up sport.
- Participation in open-air recreation has increased slightly compared with 1999. Open-air recreation rises with education level.
- Cultural participation, media usage and participation in sport in the Netherlands are above the European average.

Dutch leisure time use in a European perspective

How does participation in leisure time activities in the Netherlands compare with that in other (Western) European countries? Table 9.1 summarises the situation for culture, media and sport. The figures in the table show the situation in relation to the European average (= 100). Figures above 100 indicate above-average participation; for example, the figure of 130 in the top left-hand cell of the table means that the proportion of the Dutch population who visit the arts is 30% higher than the European average.
### Table 9.1
European comparison of participation in culture, media and sport, population aged 18 years and older (index = European average = 100)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>culture</th>
<th>media</th>
<th>sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visiting the arts</td>
<td>practising the arts</td>
<td>average media used per day (TV, radio, newspapers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

. No data available.

Source: culture: European Committee (Eurobarometer 2007); media: ESS (ESS '08); sport: European Committee (Eurobarometer 2010)

Cultural participation, Internet use and participation in sport by Dutch adults are well above the European average. The Netherlands is among the leaders in Europe in terms of the proportion of people who use the Internet daily, on a par with Norway and Denmark. The Netherlands also heads the rankings for Internet access in Europe, covering 90% of the population. The Netherlands occupies a middling position for use of traditional media (television, radio and newspapers); the time spent by the Dutch reading newspapers and listening to the radio is in line with the European average, while the Dutch watch slightly more television than the average in Europe.

Cultural participation in the Netherlands is higher than the European average; together with Denmark and Sweden, the number of visits to the arts is the highest in Europe. These three countries also record the highest figures for the practising of the arts, with Sweden in the lead. In four of the seven arts disciplines studied (playing an instrument, acting, visual arts and writing), the number of practitioners in the Netherlands is twice as high as the European average. Both receptive and active cultural participation in Portugal are the lowest in Western Europe.
The Dutch play more sport than the average European, but less than the Finns, Swedes and Irish. Those who take part in sport in the Netherlands are members of a sports club more often than in all other countries. In addition, together with the Danes and Swedes, the Dutch are most often members of a health or fitness club.
10 Daily mobility

Marjolijn van der Klis, Lotte Vermeij and Frans Knol

The Dutch undertake an average of three journeys per day. They spend more than an hour making these journeys and cover a total distance of just over 35 kilometres.

The car is used for 73% of all kilometres travelled and for 49% of all journeys. Public transport mainly plays a role in longer journeys, accounting for 13% of kilometres travelled and 2% of the total number of journeys. The bicycle is important for short trips, accounting for 8% of total kilometres travelled and 28% of all journeys.

Mobility in the Netherlands increases with rising education level. People with a low education level travel an average of 25 kilometres each day, compared with 39 kilometres for those with an intermediate education level and 51 kilometres for the highly educated.

Car ownership has continued to grow in recent years. In 2010, there were 1,032 private cars for every 1,000 Dutch households. Despite this, 15% of households still do not have a car.

Car owners in very highly urbanised areas travel an average of 36 kilometres each day, while those without cars travel 21 kilometres. In non-urban municipalities, adults with a car travel an average of 41 kilometres per day and those without a car 10 kilometres. Deliberately or otherwise, 0.8% of Dutch adults lead a very local life.

37% of countryside dwellers occasionally have problems with traffic jams, compared with 65% of those who live in cities. 84% of the Dutch population as a whole have personally experienced traffic jams on motorways.

The number of road traffic deaths in the Netherlands is falling annually, and is the lowest in Europe (640 deaths in 2010). By contrast, the number of people seriously injured in road traffic accidents increased between 2006 and 2009 from just over 16,000 to more than 18,500. Most of those seriously injured are cyclists. However, perceived traffic safety improved between 2005 and 2010, and especially among cyclists.

Mobility behaviour

Mobility in the Dutch population aged 12 years and older remained stable between 1999 and 2009. During this period, people undertook an average of three journeys per day, travelling an average of just over 35 kilometres and spending slightly more than an hour doing so (table 10.1). The car was used for almost three-quarters of all kilometres travelled and for 49% of all journeys made. The Dutch are more often car drivers and less often passengers than in the past. This is a small but significant development which indicates individualisation of car use. Public transport mainly plays a role in longer journeys, accounting for 13% of kilometres travelled and 2% of the total number of journeys. Bicycles and mopeds are used to cover 8% of the total kilometres travelled, but account for a much bigger slice of the total number of journeys, at 28%. The Dutch thus continue to use the bicycle a great deal, especially for shorter journeys. Population growth over the period studied led to an increase in the total kilometres travelled in the Netherlands, in turn increasing the amount of traffic.
Table 10.1
Numbers of journeys, time spent travelling and distance covered per person per day, population aged 12 years and older, by means of transport, 1999-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of journeys</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distance travelled (km)</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time spent travelling (minutes)</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

means of transport (% of km)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>car as driver</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>car as passenger</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>train</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bus/tram/metro</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bicycle/moped</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The table shows only domestic journeys.

Source: CBS (OVG '99); Rijkswaterstaat (MON '04 and '09)

Traffic deaths in Europe
The Netherlands has for many years had one of the best traffic safety records in Europe (figure 10.1). With 41 road deaths per million inhabitants, the Netherlands had the best record of all countries in 2008, followed closely by the United Kingdom and Sweden, each with 43 deaths per million inhabitants. At the other end of the spectrum, Greece stands out with 139 traffic deaths per million inhabitants in 2008. Other countries with a high number of road traffic deaths of more than 80 per million inhabitants are Belgium, Portugal and Austria. Given the heavy concentration of traffic on the Dutch roads, it is a remarkably safe country.
Figure 10.1
Road traffic deaths per million inhabitants, 2000 and 2008 (in absolute numbers)

Source: European Commission (Eurostat); CBS (StatLine) SCP treatment
Public safety

Lonneke van Noije

- Dutch citizens experienced less violence, property crime and vandalism in 2010 than in 2009. The Dutch police recorded a slight fall in crime rates between 2005 and 2009. Initially, property crime declined, followed from 2007 by a fall in crimes of violence, and especially vandalism. The decline in the last year of the period studied was due partly to problems with the police registration system.
- After rising for many years, the number of minors suspected of committing offences has fallen since 2007. Adolescents are still overrepresented among suspects. The rise in the proportion of female suspects also came to a halt in 2007.
- Extra policy attention for a particular offence appears to have a positive impact on people’s willingness to report it. Partly as a result of this, an increase was recorded over the period in domestic violence and complaints about discrimination. Fewer employees with a job involving contact with the public reported physical violence and sexual intimidation in 2009 than in 2007, but they reported more other forms of intimidation.
- The decline in the proportion of police officers available for front-line duties ceased from 2007. Despite this, the clear-up rate was lower in 2009 than in 2007 (21%), partly because of problems with the police registration system, which had a knock-on effect of putting fewer cases before the courts. There was a decline in the number of guilty verdicts issued by the courts (91%).
- Just as many people said they sometimes felt unsafe in 2010 as in the two preceding years (26%). Again, the same proportion of these people (2%) often felt unsafe. Neighbourhood decay was observed less often, social problems just as often.

Experience of crime by citizens

The Dutch population reported 5.7 million offences in 2010. Over two-fifths involved vandalism, especially damage to vehicles. Over a third involved property theft, especially bicycle theft. Finally, crimes of violence accounted for a fifth of total crime, and generally consisted of threats. There was a decrease between 2002 and 2004, which continued between 2005 and 2008. After initially rising between 2008 and 2009, crimes of violence, property crime and vandalism fell in 2010 compared with 2009, to just below their level in 2008 (see figure 11.1). This fall is only statistically significant for the two latter categories. Vandalism has fallen across the board. The decline in property crime is attributable mainly to a reduction in the number of bicycle thefts and pickpocketing involving violence.

Victim surveys investigate the experiences of members of the public. An important positive aspect here is that it is irrelevant whether or not these experiences were reported to the police. On average, citizens do not report around two-thirds of offences to the police. As a result, police records systematically underestimate the crime rate.
Perceived safety is perhaps more important than actual levels of safety for people’s day-to-day lives. People pick up all kinds of signals of assumed (lack of) safety from their surroundings, causing them to feel safe or otherwise; the level of decay in the neighbourhood is an example. These signals combined with personal characteristics can cause people’s perception of safety to be too pessimistic or too optimistic compared with the objective reality.

Do the Dutch also feel personally unsafe? Although it is unclear precisely which emotion is involved, more than 26% of the Dutch public said they sometimes felt unsafe in 2010. Women and young people report this more often than men and older persons. Women, in particular, less often feel unsafe as they get older. People with a lower education level and people living in cities, including a relatively high proportion of non-Western migrants, more often feel unsafe. There was a downward trend in the number of people who sometimes feel unsafe between 1999 and 2008, and the proportion has remained virtually unchanged since 2008 (see figure 11.2). Just over 2% often felt unsafe in 2010, the same as in 2008 and 2009. This indicates that the rapid decline in the extent to which people feel unsafe came to a halt.

Figures 11.1a - 1d
Incidence of crime per 1,000 members of the population, 1999-2010 (in absolute numbers)

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*Based on victim surveys, population aged 15 years and older (the figures for 1999-2004, 2005-2009 and 2008-2010 are not directly comparable (see main text). The orange line shows the actual source, ivm (victim statistics).

Source: CBS (POLS’99-’04, VMR’05-’08, IVM’08-’10)
Figure 11.2
Extent to which people feel unsafe, population aged 15 years and older, 1999-2010 (in percentages)

Source: BZK/Justitie (PMB’99-’04); CBS (VMR’05-’08, IVM’08-’10)
12 Housing and the residential setting

Jeanet Kullberg and Michiel Ras

- Home ownership in the Netherlands has increased to 57%. 90% of those on the highest incomes own their own home, compared with 20% of those on the lowest incomes. A skewed distribution by income is also common in other countries, but in the Netherlands, income-dependent arrangements exacerbate this situation.
- Those on the lowest and highest incomes benefit most from government spending on housing. Those on the lowest incomes receive rent benefit, while those on the highest incomes benefit from the favourable tax treatment of their home. The middle incomes profit much less.
- People with a higher education level enjoy better housing quality (larger and better equipped home, more often a single-family home) than the lower-educated.
- The Dutch housing market is stagnating, partly because of the economic crisis. House prices are falling and the share of home-owners in negative equity (with a mortgage that was more than the sale value of their home) was around 15% in 2009. This will prevent many of those concerned from moving home, and will leave them with a residual debt on sale of their home.
- Since the introduction of the European norm that 90% of social rented homes must be allocated exclusively to people with an income of no more than 33,614 euros, roughly one in five home-seekers are forced to turn to the owner-occupier market or the private rental sector.
- The quality of the Dutch housing stock has improved in recent years, especially in the four largest municipalities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), and the housing quality deficit in the specially targeted regeneration neighbourhoods (krachtwijken) has reduced. Satisfaction with homes and the residential setting in these neighbourhoods has also increased.
- Satisfaction with the residential setting is still high in regions where the population is shrinking, though is declining somewhat. Satisfaction with amenities (shops, primary schools, playground facilities) has declined, with the exception of satisfaction with public transport.

The best educated have the best homes
In 2009, a large majority of Dutch people owned their own home (table 12.1). People with a higher education level much more often live in an owner-occupier home and slightly more often in a single-family home, have more rooms available and live in larger homes. This is partly due to the fact that they often have a higher income and because they are often part of a young family for which having this space is important, whereas among the lower-educated there are more older persons. As a consequence, the average number of persons per home is smaller among those with the lowest education level than among the higher-educated, at 1.9 persons compared with 2.4 and 2.5, respectively, for those with an intermediate and higher education level. There is little variation in the
number of square metres available per occupant between those with a higher and lower education level (not shown in table).

Table 12.1
Share of households with an owner-occupier home in 2002 and 2009 (in percentages), share with a single-family home (in percentages), average number of square metres in the home and overall housing quality\(^a\) (in index figures, average = 100) in 2009, by education level, household composition and ethnic background.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002 % in owner-occupier home</th>
<th>2009 % in owner-occupier home</th>
<th>2009 % in single-family home area in m(^2)</th>
<th>2009 housing quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>education level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>household composition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single person</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couple with children living at home</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couple without children</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single-parent family</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnic background</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>native Dutch</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-Western migrant(^b)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western migrant(^b)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Housing quality is based on the property tax value, adjusted for regional price differences.
\(^b\) And their children.

Source: vrom (WoOn’09) SCP treatment

Figure 12.1 shows that 90% of Dutch households are satisfied or very satisfied with their home. The biggest differences are related to income, origin (non-Western or otherwise) and housing area, though education is also important. The lower a person’s income and education level, the less satisfied they are. Non-Western migrants (especially those of Moroccan and Turkish origin) are less satisfied than natives, and people in the large cities are generally less satisfied than those in smaller towns and villages (not shown in figure). Within the cities, the specially targeted regeneration neighbourhoods (krachtwijken) stand out in a negative sense, but these neighbourhoods were targeted precisely because of their socioeconomic disadvantage, lots of small rented homes and problems
with public nuisance. By contrast, housing satisfaction in regions with shrinking populations is actually greater than elsewhere. The lower level of satisfaction in the lower income groups and those living in urban areas can be ascribed mainly to their poorer housing quality. After adjusting for that quality, the difference in satisfaction levels disappears. This is not the case for families with children, younger households (compared with the over-65s), people with serious physical disabilities, migrants and tenants. These groups are also more critical, including where housing quality and other characteristics are reasonably comparable. To some extent this can be readily explained by the more or less appropriate housing in terms of family size and any physical disabilities.

Most criticism is levelled at the amount of outside space around the home (one in five are dissatisfied with this), followed by the amount of space within the home (13% dissatisfied) and the state of maintenance of the home (10% dissatisfied).

Figure 12.1
Satisfaction with the home by income, non-Western origin, education level and residential area, 2009 (in percentages)

Source: vrom (WoOn’09) SCP treatment
13 Life situation, happiness and quality of life

Jeroen Boelhouwer

- The life situation of the Dutch showed an improvement of 6% between 1999 and 2010 (better housing, more holidays, increased social participation). The economic crisis has not yet affected the life situation of most Dutch people.
- 82% of Dutch people are happy. On average, the Dutch give a score of 7.8 out of 10 for the life they lead.
- The life situation of people with a high education level, people in work and people with higher incomes is better than that of the low-educated, people who do not work and people with lower incomes.
- The lowest 20% in the income distribution, non-Western migrants and single persons have seen an above-average improvement in their life situation over the last ten years. By contrast, those in the highest 20% of the income distribution, people with a part-time job and people with an intermediate education level have seen their life situation improve less than average. However, no group have seen their life situation deteriorate.
- The difference in life situation between those with a low and high education level was 14% in 2010. This gap has remained virtually unchanged since 1999. The differences between high and low incomes and between workers and non-workers has however narrowed.
- The difference in happiness between those with a high and low education level is 4%. This has also not changed over the last ten years. The difference in happiness between those on low and high incomes has by contrast reduced.
- Alongside income, education and health, independence is important in improving people’s life situation.
- In most groups, an improvement in life situation is accompanied by more happiness. This is not however the case for people who perceive their health is poor; evidently, health is more important for their happiness than the other aspects of their life situation.
- The Dutch are still among the happiest people in Europe.
- Measured against other European countries, objective quality of life in the Netherlands is also high.

The economic crisis has not yet impacted on the objective life situation of the Dutch, and the differences between social groups have generally reduced. The question then is whether this still applies if we look at the subjective aspects of quality of life: happiness and satisfaction. A large majority (more than 80%) of Dutch people say they are happy (table 13.1), and this percentage has been stable for a long time. People’s personal happiness thus depends little on the economic crisis, the announcement of austerity measures in response to the crisis and the sombreness about the way things are going in the Netherlands.
It is notable that people whose life situation was less good have seen the biggest improvement over the last ten years. For example, the life situation of older persons (aged over 65) improved by 16.5% (from a score of 85 to a score of 99), while that of the lowest income quintile improved by 13.8% and that of non-workers by 10%. The life situation of single persons and non-Western migrants also shows a fairly marked improvement, of around 12%. The disadvantage of non-Western migrants relative to the native Dutch population is gradually reducing (table 13.2).

Also notable are the fairly small differences in the degree to which the life situation of the different education groups has improved. The life situation of those with a low education level improved over the period by 5.3%, that of people with an intermediate education level by 3.3% and that of the highly educated by 3.7%. If we home in more closely on people with a lower education level, however, we see that the life situation of people with no more than primary education improved by 10.5%.

The fact that the groups with the least good life situation made up some of their disadvantage has led to a narrowing of the differences in life situation across the population over the last ten years. If we restrict ourselves to differences in resources, it transpires that the differences between the high and low income groups and between workers and non-workers have indeed shrunk (see table 13.2). In particular, the differences between income groups have reduced sharply: where the difference in life situation in 1999 was 25 points, in 2010 this had reduced to 15 points (though this is still a substantial difference). The gap between those with a low and high education level has by contrast barely changed, though the difference was smaller in 2010 than in 2008.
The United Nations Human Development Index includes information on both life expectancy and GDP, supplemented with data on education level (UNDP 2010). These three indicators, which represent health, income and education, are regarded by the United Nations as giving people the greatest possible opportunities and options (compare the resources in the life situation index). The Netherlands is in the top group in this ranking, taking third place between the countries compared here (behind Norway and Ireland); the Netherlands stands in seventh place in the full ranking of 165 countries. As with the misery index, Ireland is again at the top, and Portugal is found in the company of the Eastern European countries (figure 13.1). The scores achieved by the Western countries are fairly high and close together, suggesting that few changes take place over time. As might be expected from the relationship referred to above between life expectancy, GDP and happiness, there is a positive relationship between the Human Development Index and happiness.
Figure 13.1
Satisfaction with life and position in the Human Development Index, 2010 (in average scores and index figures)

Source: European Commission (Eurobarometer 74.1 autumn 2010); UNDP (2010)
Discussion: dark clouds on the horizon?

Rob Bijl

14.1 The Dutch are still faring well

Objective quality of life
As at the end of 2011, the Dutch are still doing well. Their quality of life is good and, despite fluctuations in the economy, that quality of life – measured in terms of their housing situation, health status, social participation, leisure time use, mobility and ownership of consumer durables – has improved continuously over the last ten years. The recent financial and economic crisis has thus far also had little impact on most people’s life situation. Three groups have seen their life situation improve more than average over the last ten years: people with a low income, non-Western migrants and persons over 65 years. The improved quality of life of these groups is reflected above all in a relatively marked improvement in their housing situation and an increase in ownership of consumer durables (made possible, of course, by a higher income). Their mobility has also increased sharply: people go on holiday more often and other forms of outdoor recreation and social participation have increased considerably. Although this has led to a narrowing of the differences in quality of life between the various population groups, those differences are still considerable. Education level is an important indicator in this regard; people with a higher education level score 14% higher on our life situation index than the low-educated.

The economic performance of the Netherlands has been strong over the last decade, and the country has so far withstood the economic credit crisis well, especially in an international perspective. The prosperity of the Dutch population has remained constant. The Netherlands compares favourably with its neighbouring countries, with a per capita national income that is the highest in the European Union after Luxembourg. As in 2008, the Netherlands achieved the lowest score of all EU member states in 2010 on the ‘misery index’, a measure composed of three important economic indicators: unemployment, inflation and the budget deficit. The incomes of virtually all groups in Dutch society have risen in recent years, going up by an average of around 6% over the period 2001-2009. An example of the high standard of living in the Netherlands is the way in which the Dutch spend their leisure time. Dutch people have lots of free time, and it is interesting to note that the combination of having lots of leisure time and few financial obstacles has led to high cultural participation, media use and participation in sport – higher than in most other European countries. Along with Denmark and Sweden, the Netherlands has the highest figures in Europe for visiting the arts. The Dutch also participate in sport more than the average European, being outstripped only by the Finns, Swedes and Irish. All forms of leisure time use have increased since the start of this century, but by far the biggest rise has been in personal Internet use and participation in sport.

An important factor in the ability to participate in society, for example to work and engage in recreation, is mobility. Mobility is thus an important aspect of quality of life.
It is striking that per capita mobility in the Netherlands has remained more or less constant over the last ten years; the Dutch travel just as far (35 kilometres) every day and spend just as much time doing so (65 minutes) as ten years ago. However, because there are more people in the Netherlands than there were ten years ago, congestion has increased considerably. Commuting is of course an important source of mobility, though today mobility related to leisure time use is almost as important. As a result, the Dutch roads are busy seven days a week. Despite the high traffic intensity, the Netherlands has for years been one of the safest countries in Europe in terms of road traffic accidents. The number of road deaths per million inhabitants is 41 (2008), while in most other European countries it ranges between around 60 and 80, with Greece as the outlier with almost 140 traffic deaths per million inhabitants.

Car ownership is regarded as a sign of prosperity. The number of cars in the Netherlands has risen sharply since 2000, and around 85% of the Dutch now own a car. More and more households now have two cars, and there are today more cars than households in the Netherlands: 1,032 cars per 1,000 households. The rise in car ownership among the over-65s is particularly striking; the mobility of this group has increased substantially, as illustrated among other things by the fact that 71% of them now have a car, compared with 59% ten years ago. The older person with only a discounted public transport travel card appears to be a disappearing phenomenon in the Netherlands.

One extremely important aspect of people’s quality of life is safety. How safe or unsafe people feel in their daily lives is perhaps more important than the actual level of safety according to statistics from the police and judicial system. Citizens pick up all kinds of signals of (lack of) safety from their surroundings, for example the degree of urban decay in their neighbourhood. Roughly a quarter of Dutch citizens sometimes feel unsafe, and this figure has remained unchanged in recent years. Crime has also consistently been in the top five of the most cited social problems in the Netherlands. To put this in perspective, however, few people think that they will actually become victims of crime themselves.

One worrying observation in this Social State of the Netherlands is the difficulty, because of all manner of methodological problems and out-of-date records, of drawing firm conclusions about the extent of and trend in crime in the Netherlands. Despite this, we may tentatively posit that there has been a decrease in crime levels in the last few years. For most people, the quality of their life is closely associated with their own home. Home ownership in the Netherlands has increased from 54% to 59% since 2002, and among those with the highest incomes the home ownership rate is as high as 90%. Generally speaking, the Dutch are satisfied with their home: 90% say they are satisfied or very satisfied. Naturally, there are differences based on income, ethnic background and residential region, but even in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, characterised by socio-economic disadvantage, lots of small rented homes and problems of public nuisance, 75% of residents are still satisfied with their homes.

In the previous edition of The Social State of the Netherlands it was predicted that the consequences of the credit crisis in 2008-2009 would probably only start to manifest themselves from 2010 onwards. The current statistics support this: the Dutch employment rate was lower in 2010 and the unemployment rate rose from 4% to around 5%, which in
turn translated into an increase in the numbers of people receiving unemployment and social assistance benefits. On the other hand, the Dutch unemployment rate in 2010 was still the lowest in Europe. Households saw their spending power decline slightly and the poverty rate increased by 0.5 percentage points to just over 6%. The (for the moment) limited adverse consequences of the crisis could be the reason that people’s satisfaction with their own income has increased in the last few years from 60% to 62%.

Two groups stand out in terms of the improvement in their financial position over the last ten years: older people and families with children. On average, incomes in the Netherlands increased in real terms by 6% in the period 2001-2009. In the older population, however, the improvement was 10% for those living alone and no less than 16% for couples. This improvement in income was due to the real-terms increase in the state old-age pension (8%) as well as improved personal pension schemes. It is also worth stressing here that, contrary to what is commonly assumed, poverty among the over-65s is rare in the Netherlands. Families with children benefited mainly from the changes to the care system in 2006. The new arrangements boosted their purchasing power by an average of 8%.

While it may be surprising that the crisis has so far had little impact on the life situation of most Dutch citizens, this can be readily explained by the fact that economic changes impact on people’s life situation with a time lag. Someone who loses their job does not immediately give up sport or voluntary work, for example, and is also not forced to leave their home straight away. Generally, it is businesses which feel the first effects of an economic downturn (lower sales and profits), followed by the government (lower revenues and higher (unemployment) costs), and only then the public at large (via austerity measures). The consequences of the austerity measures taken by the present Dutch government will only take effect from 2012 onwards. The biggest blows are in other words yet to fall. However, this does not alter the fact that people are already losing their jobs or seeing their incomes fall. This applies in particular for self-employed persons without employees. However, as a percentage of the total number of unemployed persons, the numbers are still small.

**Subjective quality of life**

The Dutch also score well when it comes to the subjective aspects of quality of life – happiness and satisfaction. More than 80% say they are happy or very happy, and this high percentage has remained constant over the years. People’s personal happiness is relatively unaffected by the economic crisis, announcements of austerity measures and sombreness about the direction in which the Netherlands is moving.

Compared with other countries, the Netherlands scores above average on several international criteria used to compare quality of life in different countries. One such criterion is the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). The Netherlands achieves sixth place in Europe on this Index on satisfaction with life, after the Scandinavian countries and Ireland; the Dutch give their lives a score of 7.8 out of 10. Ireland achieves a strikingly high score on the HDI – a remarkable finding given Ireland’s current deep economic problems.
While the Netherlands may be doing well in the European perspective, then, there is nonetheless a dominant feeling among the Dutch that things are going wrong with politics and society, and there is a good deal of dissatisfaction. It may be a truism that the Dutch like to complain and may even be somewhat ‘resistant to reality’: it makes no difference how things are in reality, the Dutch simply feel that things are not going well. Since the beginning of 2008 – even before the onset of the crisis – there has been a consistent majority in the Dutch population who believe that things in the Netherlands are going more in the wrong than the right direction. And that sentiment is remarkably stable: whatever has happened in recent years, between 60% and 65% of the Dutch public take a sombre view of how things are going in the Netherlands; no more than 25% believe that things are going in the right direction. While the mood is sombre about the future of the country in general, however, almost no one in the Netherlands is worried about their own personal financial situation. Regardless of the crisis, more than 80% have taken a positive view of their own financial future since early 2008. So far, that confidence has proved to be crisis-proof.

14.2 Vulnerable groups: stubborn social inequality in the Netherlands

This rosy picture of the Dutch as an ever more prosperous, satisfied and happy, though rather complaining people, does not tell the whole story, however. This edition of The Social State of the Netherlands looks in more detail at potentially vulnerable groups who share less in the prosperity and welfare of the Netherlands than others in Dutch society. There are wide differences and inequalities in the Netherlands as regards the opportunities for citizens to participate in that prosperity and to realise their individual ambitions and interests. In some cases these differences may be desirable or tolerated, but sometimes they result in what is regarded as unnecessary and unfair inequality in terms of opportunities and quality of life.

Education level is found to be a strong predictor of (differences in) people’s life situation. This applies both for the ‘harder’ sectors of society (labour market position, educational opportunities, housing situation) and the more experiential and subjective aspects (trust, happiness, etc.). Having access to and being able to make use of the various forms of social, cultural and financial capital is what determines people’s quality of life. There are substantial differences in this regard between people with a higher and lower education level. In some cases, these differences are in fact so wide that they can be described as a gulf, and have proved to be very stubborn over the years. Precisely in the present period of a deteriorating economic outlook which is set to lead to cuts in many areas of society, extra attention needs to be given to those groups which are already living in less favourable circumstances.

More migrant households and household dilution

Demographic trends help determine the setting in which people’s life situation evolves. Like its neighbouring countries, the Netherlands is experiencing increasing migration and household dilution. The latter is mainly due to the increase in the share of single persons in Dutch society (up from 33.4% of households in 2000 to 36.1% in 2010).
Population ageing continues to accelerate (from 13.5% over-65s in 2000 to 15.5% in 2010), though the Netherlands is still one of the youngest countries in Europe. The Dutch population includes a growing number of migrants and their descendants (up from 17.1% in 1999 to 20.6% in 2011), more than half of whom are of non-Western origin. The increase in the share of migrants in the population is however modest, especially when compared to neighbouring countries. Claims about mass immigration by non-Western migrants in the Netherlands are not based on facts, as the evidence presented in this report shows.

It is also often forgotten that many thousands of migrants, usually in later life, return to their country of origin. In 2010, by far the biggest group of immigrants were people born in the Netherlands who returned to the Netherlands after a period of emigration. There are also relatively large numbers of immigrants in the Netherlands from Western countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States.

Middle incomes derive least profit from the government

The prosperity of the Dutch people is also affected by the services provided by the government in the areas of education, care, culture, recreation, public transport, and so on. These public services have become more expensive in the Netherlands in recent years, partly because they are labour-intensive and because human labour in these sectors is generally difficult to replace or improve through the use of machines, for example. Not all citizens profit to the same degree from these public services; the low and high income groups derive most benefit from them. Low-income groups profit mainly from income-protection measures, such as the employer’s care contribution, the carer allowance, rent benefit and home care services. Higher income groups profit mainly from the favourable tax treatment of home ownership (mortgage interest tax relief), higher education and cultural subsidies. The middle incomes derive less profit from these government provisions.

Social inequality in leisure time use

There are differences in leisure time use according to education level: people with a low education level watch more television than those with a higher education level, but use the Internet less. By contrast, fewer than half the low-educated take part in sport, compared with three-quarters of those with a high education level. The same picture emerges for practising the arts (performing music or theatre, the visual arts, writing, etc.): slightly less than a third of the low-educated and more than half the more highly educated have done something in these fields. The differences are even greater when it comes to visiting the arts: more than 80% of those with a higher education level visit some form of ‘higher’ or popular art (museum, concert, play, musical, pop concert, etc.) each year, compared with 46% of the lower-educated. No major changes are observed in these figures over time. The measures being taken by the present Dutch government, such as raising the rate of VAT on cultural activities and limiting the flow of subsidies, will probably do nothing to promote the social levelling of cultural visits which has always been a target of government policy.
Less influence for the low-educated: diploma democracy?
The Dutch political agenda has been, if not dominated then at least greatly influenced in recent years by what politicians think ‘the citizen’ thinks and wants. The voice of the people, or in other words public opinion, is regarded in the public and political debate as a measure of the mood in the country.
People with a lower education level are more pessimistic about society across the board, more negative about politics and more concerned about crime and material issues. Those with a higher education level show more optimism, trust and tolerance. These differences can best be explained by differences in the sense of having control over one’s own life. Findings such as these are not new and are not specific to the Netherlands: as long ago as the 1960s, political scientists and sociologists were pointing out that education level offers the most important explanation for differences in social and political preferences and behaviour. The combination of differences in preferences and differences in political participation and representation can mean that the political agenda is shaped mainly to suit the wishes of the more highly educated and what they believe those with a lower education level consider important. This ‘diploma democracy’ gives rise to a good deal of dissatisfaction.

Effects of austerity measures on informal carers
People may call upon each other during various phases of their lives to provide care, and in some cases may be totally reliant on others for this. In the case of children, it is natural that their parent(s) care for them, and many parents are increasingly having to try and find ways of combining the provision of this care with holding down a paid job. Often, parents can rely on support from their own parents (i.e. their children’s grandparents) and from other members of their social network. Parents also support their children in later phases of life; for example, almost a third of all young adults receive financial support from their parents, for example to help them purchase a home. Young adult children also provide support to their parents, but generally speaking they receive far more support than they themselves give; this does not only apply for young adult children. It is only late in life, when the parents have become elderly and in need of care, that the direction of care provision reverses, but by then the children are often themselves in their 50s or 60s.
From the perspective of the burden placed on carers and freedom of choice for those who need care, it is important people have a choice between informal and formal care. The present Dutch government considers it important that parents are able to choose between organised childcare and childminding services. The government also wishes to improve the standard of care close to home and is seeking to improve the coordination between different care providers (from people’s personal networks and professionals). Major spending cuts are in the pipeline precisely in the area of formal or institutionalised care. Cuts in spending on childcare were for example initiated in mid-2011. In addition, the government intends to greatly restrict access to personal budgets for buying care. This means that some carers will lose income; this in turn will increase the pressure on informal carers and volunteers in the care system. It could make it more difficult to combine paid work with providing informal care, and this could have
far-reaching consequences for informal carers themselves, as well as for those to whom they provide care.

Educational basics not yet in order; the bar needs to be raised

The Dutch government’s ambition is for the Netherlands to be one of the top five knowledge economies in the world. The criterion used is the Global Competitiveness Index, which indicates the international competitive position of different countries, and on which the Netherlands currently occupies seventh place. Knowledge, research and innovation are among the indicators used in the Index.

The plans set out in the Dutch Coalition Agreement have now been worked up into a number of action plans. At the heart of these plans is more attention for basic skills, higher achievement and a greater emphasis on excellence. Primary and secondary schools must tighten their focus on results, which means working more specifically to raise pupil achievement to the maximum possible level. Language and arithmetic/mathematics have once again been given a central role in primary education.

This edition of The Social State of the Netherlands observes that the basics in the Dutch education system are not yet in order. Too many pupils and students still lack essential basic knowledge in language and arithmetic/mathematics, and if anything, school achievement is deteriorating rather than improving. More than 14% of 15 year-old pupils have low literacy, posing an obstacle to good educational achievement and subsequent participation in society. Many pupils with educational disadvantage are unable to attain the basic secondary school standard needed for the labour market (the ‘initial qualification’). Although premature school dropout has fallen sharply in recent years (from 15% in 2001 to 10% in 2010), it is still above the target of 8%.

Non-Western migrants are in a weaker educational position on average than Western migrants and the native Dutch. Their education level is often lower, though this is improving gradually.

There are also teachers who do not have a good command of the basic skills. Heavier demands are accordingly rightly being placed on the knowledge and abilities of future and incumbent teachers. Teachers also need to be better equipped to accommodate special needs pupils in mainstream schools. Lack of training on this point can lower the quality of primary education.

If the Netherlands wishes to be among the top five knowledge economies in the world, strengthening basic skills alone will not be enough; the bar will also have to be raised. Compared with other countries, there are few bad performers in the Netherlands, but there are also not many people who stand out for their excellence. If the level of excellence is to be improved, the quality and productivity of education, including higher education, will have to be raised further. However, the government’s ambition is to raise the educational standard of the entire population; this immediately raises the familiar trilemma of three objectives that are difficult to realise simultaneously: improving educational quality and outcomes can have the effect of reducing the accessibility of education. Although students who are admitted to courses will more often complete their studies if examination standards are raised and selection is applied on entry to higher education, fewer pupils and students will be able to access higher education in the first
place. This poses a threat to the government’s target for participation in higher education to 50%.

The well-educated live seven years longer on average; the low-educated have more psychological problems
Life expectancy has risen very sharply over the last decade, and the life expectancy of men in the Netherlands is in fact the highest in Europe, at 78.5 years. The life expectancy of Dutch women is four years longer, but because of their smoking patterns, the increase in female life expectancy has been less marked. Life expectancy is forecast to increase by 0.2 years per calendar year over the next few years. Well-educated people live an average of seven years longer than low-educated people (7.3 years for men, 6.4 years for women). This differential has not reduced in recent years. Low-educated people also suffer considerably more physical impairments and are twice as likely to develop psychological disorders as people with a higher education level.

The Dutch are living longer, then, but are they also becoming healthier? This is found not to be the case. In the last ten years, healthy life expectancy – the average number of years without illness – has fallen from 49 to 48 years for men and from 44 to 42 years for women. There are around 4.5 million people in the Netherlands suffering from chronic illness, over a quarter of whom have more than one disease simultaneously. On the other hand, three-quarters of those with a chronic disease report that they regard themselves as healthy. Additionally, the increase in the number of people with diseases need not by definition be a worrying development, because to some extent it points to positive developments in public health: as more is known about diseases, they can often be identified earlier and more people are consequently diagnosed. The treatment of many diseases is also improving with time, extending the survival of people with diseases.

Unhealthy lifestyles a major problem: differences between population groups
Smoking is still one of the biggest threats to public health. Although the number of smokers in the Netherlands has fallen over the last ten years, it is still high compared with neighbouring countries. Excessive alcohol use is also a cause for concern. When it comes to sexual health, ethnic groups and asylum-seekers are the biggest at-risk groups, as evidenced among the other things from the relatively large number of teenage pregnancies in these groups. Young people with a low education level are also a group that warrant attention. The lower their education level, the earlier adolescents gain their first sexual experience, with all the associated risks of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and psychosocial problems. Finally, almost half the Dutch population are overweight and roughly one in ten are clinically obese. The cause of this is clear: the Dutch eat too much and too much of the wrong foods.

Non-Western migrants catching up on the housing market
Income is the biggest determining factor for someone’s position on the housing market. People with a higher income generally own their own homes, which are bigger and of considerably better quality than the homes of people with a lower income. Home ownership in the Netherlands has risen sharply across the board since 2002, but the rise has
been more pronounced among non-Western migrants and their descendants than in the native Dutch population. These groups are catching up on the owner-occupier market, but with a home ownership rate of 29% still lag a long way behind the national rate of 59%. Increased mortgage debts are a risk since the sharp fall in house prices since 2008. Owner-occupiers who are no longer able to meet their mortgage interest payments may be left with a residual debt following the repossession and forced sale of their home. Those who bought when prices were at their peak in 2008 are at particular risk of this negative equity, despite the recent measures taken by the government (raising the mortgage guarantee threshold and providing temporary tax relief for people who have two homes because they are having difficulty selling their existing home).

The ending of the ‘empowered neighbourhoods’ (krachtwijken) initiative, targeting 40 deprived urban neighbourhoods across the Netherlands, means that investments in resolving both the physical and social problems in these neighbourhoods will henceforth have to be funded by housing associations and local authorities, and this will inevitably lead to a sharp reduction in those investments. What this will mean for the liveability of these neighbourhoods and the quality of life of their residents is unclear. The most recent update of the ‘Neighbourhood Regeneration Outcome Monitor’ (Outcomemonitor Wijkenaanpak) shows that there have been improvements in these prioritised neighbourhoods on a limited number of indicators since the start of the regeneration programme in 2007. Although more than half these neighbourhoods are making up ground in terms of safety and liveability, other developments have come to a halt or in some cases deteriorated. The marks achieved by pupils from these neighbourhoods in national school examinations show no improvement, and there is little progress in the income position of households in these neighbourhoods.

**Risk of being a victim of crime not the same for everyone**

25% of the Dutch population aged 15 years and older are victims of crime each year. Most of them are victims of vandalism and property crimes (13% each), while 5.5% are victims of violent crime. Some sections of the population are at greater risk than others. Adolescents (40%) and young adults (34%), in particular, are more likely to become victims. Contrary to what is often assumed, older persons are at much less risk (16%). Whether or not people become victims is largely explained by their daily activities and lifestyles, which in turn are associated with characteristics such as age and education. Young people, for example, more often frequent nightlife areas, where the risk of crime is higher. Their similar routine activities and lifestyles also help to explain why the offender and victim populations partially overlap: many offenders themselves become victims.

Extra policy attention for a particular offence appears to have a favourable effect on people’s willingness to report it. Partly because of this, there has been an increase in recorded domestic violence and complaints about discrimination. Domestic violence may be physical, sexual or psychological; the long-term relationship of dependence between offender and picked him means the violence can often assume a structural nature. According to a recent estimate, 200,000 people become victims every year to more than 112,000 perpetrators of domestic violence. Two-thirds of the victims are women, mostly
aged between 18 and 30 years; the vast majority of the perpetrators are men (83%); 60% of them are of migrant origin.

The Netherlands is a socially active country, yet there is also social isolation

The Netherlands is a socially active country: only the Danes are more often members of clubs and associations and have more social contacts. The Dutch are also relatively generous in giving to good causes and often work as volunteers compared with other Europeans. Social participation is particularly high among those with a higher education level, people in households with a high income and churchgoers. Although no more than 300,000 people are members of a political party, the Dutch are most definitely politically interested and willing to take action. Four out of ten Dutch people are sometimes politically active, though it is striking that this activism is increasingly expressing itself via the computer: the number of citizens who have taken part in a political debate or action via the Internet, e-mail or SMS rose from 10% in 2002 to 21% in 2010, and that figure is likely to rise further.

The participation rate is high, then, but at the same time there are still groups of people in the Netherlands who find themselves on the margins and who play little or no part in society and have little or no social network, whether it be on the labour market, in associational life or in the political arena. These groups contain disproportionately high numbers of older persons, the low-educated, the unemployed and men. This category of vulnerable people has doubled in recent years and now accounts for around 4% of the Dutch population.

14.3 Dark clouds gathering on the horizon

Are the improvements in the quality of life of the Dutch likely to continue in the future as it has in the past ten years? And are the social inequalities described in this report likely to reduce? Can we at least assume that the present level of prosperity and welfare will be maintained? Dark clouds are gathering over the country. So far, the Netherlands has withstood the crisis well, in fact better than most other European countries. However, 2012 is set to be the year of truth, when the consequences of the austerity measures announced why the present government will be felt in people’s pockets and when the full financial impact of the economic crisis for the Netherlands, which will come on top of those austerity measures, will become clear.

The previous edition of The Social State of the Netherlands forecast that the financial and economic problems would be resolved within the foreseeable future and that the Netherlands would come out of this period relatively unscathed. Today, at the end of 2011, the outlook has become more sombre. The Dutch economy is growing less robustly than had been expected or hoped for, and the lower tax revenues and higher spending on unemployment benefits mean that the budget deficit in 2015 will be twice as high as was being predicted in 2010. The 2012 Budget Memorandum (Miljoenennota) reveals that the long series of austerity measures instigated by the government under Prime Minister Rutte will affect virtually everyone. Pay rises in 2012 will be largely cancelled out by inflation, which will be close to 3%. Household purchasing power will decline over the
coming three years. The *Macro Economic Outlook (MEV) 2012* published by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB 2011) predicts that the signals for the global economy are all set to red. The weakening in growth was greatest in the highly developed world economies in the first half of 2011, due to the increased uncertainty on the financial markets, budgetary restructuring, the high oil price and the nuclear disaster in Japan. The situation is exacerbated by the slowing of the growth in imports in the emerging economies. The Netherlands is a relatively small but very open economy which is subject to the vagaries of the international economic cycles. International economic or financial crises affect the Dutch economy mainly via exports as a result of reduced world trade. The present economic crisis is set to continue and will undoubtedly impact on the quality of life of many Dutch citizens. What initially began as a banking crisis has now infected the whole eurozone, jeopardising economic growth across Europe (MEV 2011). The crisis is now so serious that there is open speculation about the disintegration of the eurozone. The President of the European Central Bank, Jean-Claude Trichet, speaking in the European Parliament in October 2011, described it as ‘the most serious crisis since the Second World War’.

It now seems to becoming clear that there is more going on than just a financial and economic crisis. Tackling the crisis is demanding a different approach from normal from governments. The international dimension of the present crisis goes beyond the national politics of individual European countries. The decision-making process in relation to the European debt crisis is exceedingly sluggish, because all those involved have to take into account their own national interests: why should ‘we’ have to pay for the financial malpractice of people in other countries? Monetary measures aimed at controlling the crisis are taken at European level by the European Central Bank (ECB), among others. The ECB imposes rules on countries regarding austerity and liberalisation measures, with the national parliaments being largely marginalised. There are plans to tighten up the way the eurozone is run, and this will inevitably reduce the room for manoeuvre of national parliaments. As an example, a new regulatory body, the European Banking Authority, was recently created. Supranational, technocratic decision-making processes such as these, which are subject to only a limited extent to democratic control, may give rise to growing fears among the public that the economic crisis and the way it is being tackled will lead to less democracy. This could put pressure on the trust that citizens have in politics and the institutions involved in (combating) the crisis. At present, public trust in civil-society institutions and politics is still greater in the Netherlands than in any other European country. However, the monetary and economic crisis could open the way to a crisis of trust.

In the longer term, too, dark clouds are beginning to gather above what is today a prosperous and happy Netherlands. Questions are increasingly being asked about the sustainability of the Dutch prosperity and welfare in the coming decades. The recently published ‘Sustainable Netherlands Monitor 2011’ (*Monitor Duurzaam Nederland 2011*) (CBS/PBL/CPB/SCP 2011) shows that the way in which Dutch prosperity is currently generated poses an increasing threat to the prosperity of future generations, and that the Dutch
enjoy their prosperity at the expense of others, in the developing nations. The Dutch enjoy a high quality of life, but its resources are being exhausted. The Sustainable Netherlands Monitor stresses a number of concerns in this regard in relation to the environment and nature, the financial sustainability of the Dutch state, the knowledge level of the Dutch population and problems in relation to wealth distribution and social inequality.

There is no single blueprint for resolving these sustainability problems which can be followed blindly by governments. Choosing a course of action with a positive effect in one domain will often have a negative impact in another domain. Moreover, making those choices not only demands an insight into the present situation, but also into developments that will continue into the future, such as the imminent shrinkage of the Dutch population.

The economic crisis is a problem today, and one which is receiving full attention at present. The problems in relation to the long-term sustainability of the way in which the Netherlands generates its prosperity are much more insidious, but pose just as fundamental a threat to the welfare and quality of life of the Dutch in the longer term. It is a good thing that the debate on these issues is being intensified.

This Social State of the Netherlands has highlighted many examples of stubborn social inequality in the Netherlands. Whether we look at health status and life expectancy, at educational disadvantage, at political influence, at the quality of housing and the residential setting, or at the risk of becoming unemployed, the differences are sometimes wide and largely run in parallel with education level. If the economic outlook remains as bleak as it is currently – and that seems highly likely – there are grounds for fearing that the quality of life of those people who are already in a more vulnerable position today will suffer first and suffer most.
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