

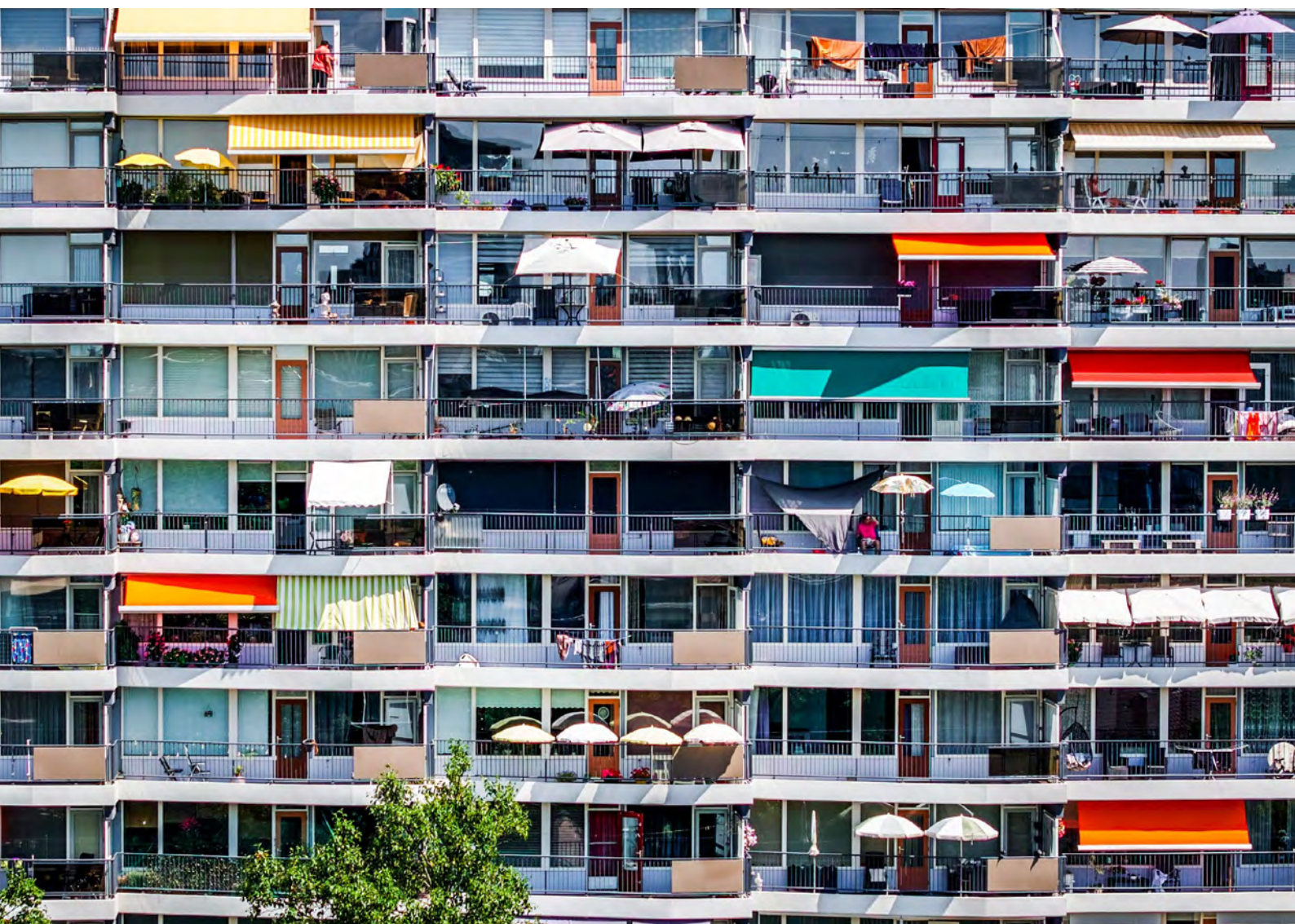


The Netherlands Institute
for Social Research

Summary

Climate and Society 2026

The Dutch on climate, energy, nature and sustainability



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original title

Klimaat en Samenleving 2026

Nederlanders over klimaat, energie, natuur en duurzaamheid

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Summary and Considerations

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) annually monitors how society is responding to the climate and energy transition and identifies areas for attention in climate and energy policy from the perspective of citizens and society. In addition to the topics that recur every year, we take a more in-depth look at a number of themes each year. This year's edition pays particular attention to:

- perceived involvement in, and influence over, the development of climate policy;
- perceived fairness of climate action; and
- people's expectations and aspirations for the future in relation to this issue.

Most people consider climate action important, but the issue remains highly divisive. The majority of Dutch people are concerned about climate change, the depletion of natural resources and the decline of nature (chapter 1). Most believe that urgent action is needed to tackle climate change and consider it important for the Netherlands to play its part. A majority also attach at least some importance to changing the way we live in order to address climate change and to making a personal contribution to this effort (chapter 2).

At the same time, climate change remains a highly divisive issue. Many people believe that the government is doing too little to tackle climate change (59%), while a substantial proportion (41%) believe it is doing too much (chapter 3). Almost one-third of the population question the value of the Dutch contribution on a global scale, and nearly half believe that the Netherlands is already doing much more than other countries. Previous SCP research also found societal divisions in preferences for public spending on climate action, although people unanimously agree that more funding should be allocated to housing, healthcare, education and public safety (Kunst et al. 2025).¹ There is clear dissatisfaction with climate action among some sections of the population. Around one-third feel that a small group is imposing measures on everyone else. Only a very small proportion of the population are satisfied with what the government has achieved through its climate policy. One-third are frustrated by the attention given to climate issues compared with other problems that they consider important (chapter 3). This group has grown over the past five years (chapter 4).

It is important for politicians and policymakers to take this division and dissatisfaction around climate action into account. Whatever course they choose, they will be acting contrary to the preferences of a large group of people. This requires additional effort to ensure that the different perspectives of citizens are taken into account in the development of climate policy and in the considerations of politicians and policymakers in decision-making.

Concern about climate change and the perceived importance of climate action declined between 2021 and 2025

The perceived urgency of climate change and the perceived importance of climate action and the energy transition have declined slightly over the past five years. At the same time, there remains a widespread conviction that the climate has changed over the past 100 years. The dominant view is that climate change over the past 100 years has been caused entirely or mainly by human activity. However, at the same time, people have come to attribute a somewhat greater role to natural processes. People have also become somewhat less positive about making lifestyle changes for the climate (chapter 4). A growing share of the population is frustrated by the amount of attention given to climate issues compared with other

¹ Just over four in ten people want the government to spend more on climate action; just over two in ten would prefer less spending; and around three in ten believe spending should remain at its current level.

problems that, in their view, also deserve attention. This may partly reflect a broader dissatisfaction with the government's ability to solve problems. People see an accumulation of societal problems and feel that politicians are failing to address and solve them (Geurkink et al. 2023; Kunst et al. 2025). The government needs to respond to the concerns of a growing group of people who believe that climate issues receive too much attention relative to other problems that they consider equally – or more – important. This dissatisfaction could put pressure on public support for climate policy.

Support for various measures contained in the coalition agreement

The perceived importance of climate action has declined slightly. However, support for the various individual climate and energy measures has remained largely unchanged: at the end of 2025, most of the measures presented to respondents received roughly the same level of support as in 2024. Most measures are supported by a majority of respondents, with the exception of onshore wind power, natural gas extraction, reducing livestock numbers, underground CO₂ storage, a meat tax and a dairy tax. This may be good news for the new coalition government, given several of the ambitions set out in the coalition agreement (D66 et al. 2026). A majority of respondents support energy measures contained in the agreement, such as investments in green hydrogen, offshore wind energy and district heating networks (55%-70%) (see table S.1). However, the government should not take this support for granted, as not all measures in the coalition agreement enjoy broad public backing. For example, around half of respondents support investment in nuclear energy, while only a minority support natural gas extraction in the North Sea and underground CO₂ storage.

Table S.1 Supporters and opponents of measures proposed by the government based on the measures presented in this study, population aged 18 and over, 2025 (percentages, weighted)^{a, b}

measure proposed in the coalition agreement	measure presented in this study	in favour	opposed
investing in the production and distribution of green hydrogen	government investment in green hydrogen	70	5
investing in offshore wind energy	government investment in the construction of offshore wind farms	62	17
commitment to district heating networks	government investment in district heating networks	55	13
the Groningen gas field remains closed	continuing natural gas extraction in Groningen	24	54
building four nuclear power plants	building of nuclear power plants	51	22
continuing extracting gas from the North Sea	extracting more natural gas from the North Sea	42	30
storing CO ₂ in the North Sea	government investment in underground greenhouse gas storage	38	21

a The response options were: 1) strongly opposed; 2) opposed; 3) somewhat opposed; 4) neither in favour nor opposed; 5) somewhat in favour; 6) in favour; 7) strongly in favour.

b Shown are the percentages in favour ('somewhat in favour' to 'strongly in favour') and opposed ('somewhat opposed' to 'strongly opposed').

Source: SCP (KES'25)

Many people feel that the government listens more to companies than to citizens. In the coalition agreement, the parties focus on making the industry more sustainable and supporting them in the transition (D66 et al. 2026). However, less attention is paid to the impact of policy on vulnerable groups and to inequalities within society (Huijnk et al. 2026). This could further reduce the already low perception of the fairness of climate policy and reinforce the feeling that the government does not sufficiently take citizens' interests into account. It is therefore important that the coalition parties demonstrate how they weigh the interests of citizens in their decision-making. People often say that they hope the government will pursue effective climate and energy transition policies (chapter 11). Sometimes this is motivated by concerns about sustainability, sometimes by the hope that it will make the Netherlands less dependent on other countries, and sometimes by the expectation that it will help keep energy bills affordable. Taking these public aspirations – and the considerations underlying them – more fully into account in policymaking and decision-making could be one way of better incorporating the citizen perspective.

Willingness to contribute personally to climate action lower at the end of 2025 than in 2024

An important caveat is that people are becoming less willing to make personal sacrifices. At the end of 2025, they not only considered it less important than in 2024 to contribute personally to tackling climate change, but there is also little support for measures that affect the cost of living. Support for a meat tax, for example, has declined even further. Support for a dairy tax remains equally low: only around one in five people support such a measure. This does not mean, however, that there is no support at all for measures aimed at households. More than half of respondents support measures targeting households that contribute more to pollution. Examples include an air passenger tax, higher natural gas taxes for the heavier users and taxes based on car use.

The reduced willingness of people to contribute personally may partly stem from the perception that large companies and other countries are not doing enough. This finding also emerged from earlier SCP research (De Kluizenaar et al. 2025). In the present study, many respondents likewise feel that large companies are responsible for most pollution, are not doing enough, are not paying their fair share and should therefore contribute more. This reflects support for the *polluter pays* principle, which is also evident in the broad support for additional taxes on companies that cause high emissions. At the same time, many people do feel a personal responsibility to contribute, but often believe that they are already doing enough themselves. They primarily see a role for large companies and government in addressing climate change. Many also feel that too much of the financial burden is being placed on citizens while major polluters are being let off lightly. This may make it more difficult to ask citizens to make sacrifices. Public dissatisfaction could increase, and support for climate action could be undermined, if the government were to introduce measures that raise the cost of consumption, particularly where these affect basic needs such as food and energy.

It is therefore important to take a broader approach and create an environment that encourages more sustainable and healthier lifestyles, making sustainable behaviour easier, more affordable and more attractive. It is also important to remove counterproductive incentives, such as fossil fuel subsidies or advertising that promotes highly polluting forms of consumption. In addition, politicians and policymakers should remain mindful of the key conditions for public acceptance of ambitious climate policy. These include a robust approach to major emitters, application of the *polluter pays* principle, protection of people in vulnerable situations and preventing policies from exacerbating social inequalities (see also Mouter et al. 2021; Rli 2025; WKR 2026). We see this reflected again in the present study.

Strong support for adaptation measures

A majority of people consider it important that the Netherlands and its citizens become better prepared for climate change. It is not surprising, therefore, to find broad support for investing in climate adaptation measures, such as strengthening flood defences and increasing urban greenspace. There is also strong support for regulations requiring landlords to install adequate measures to prevent overheating in homes, such as external shading. Young adults (aged 18-25) and tenants are particularly likely to experience problems with excessive indoor heat during the summer and have fewer opportunities to address these issues themselves. As the climate continues to warm, these challenges are likely to become more severe. This highlights the need to take such concerns into account when developing policies aimed at creating a climate-resilient society.

More people keep emergency supplies at home

Risk awareness also remains an area of concern. Only a small proportion of people say they are well informed about risks such as foundation damage, flooding caused by extreme weather (heavy rains) and floods. The same applies to preparedness. Although most people believe it is important for citizens to be better prepared for flooding by keeping emergency supplies at home, many have not yet acted on this themselves. That said, at the end of 2025 substantially more people reported having emergency supplies at home than a year earlier: 16% in 2024 compared with 26% in 2025. This increase may be linked to other current threats and the growing attention given to the importance of emergency preparedness. These percentages may have risen further since the launch of the government's campaign *Denk vooruit* (Think ahead).

Many people are concerned that climate policy will make their lives more expensive

Many people are concerned about the impact of climate policy on their cost of living. These concerns are most pronounced among people on lower incomes and those without a university or college degree. Rising prices for basic necessities, such as energy and food, affect low-income households particularly strongly, as they already spend a larger share of their income on these essentials (CPB 2023; Nibud 2024). Climate measures that affect basic necessities therefore tend to have a relatively greater impact on these groups. In recent years, more attention has been paid to supporting people in weaker financial positions, for example by helping them make their homes more energy-efficient. Continued attention is needed to ensure that the costs of climate policy do not fall disproportionately on those least able to bear them and who, at the same time, contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions (Ecorys 2022; Sovacool et al. 2022).

Nevertheless, failing to take climate and energy measures can also entail significant costs. Despite progress in the energy transition, the Netherlands remains heavily dependent on fossil fuels (IEA 2025; PBL 2025). This dependence can lead to sharp increases in energy costs during periods of scarcity, international tension or conflict. For example, many Dutch homes still rely on natural gas for heating. This dependence increases the risk of fuel poverty, particularly for residents who have limited opportunities to make their homes more sustainable (Batenburg et al. 2025). People who are less dependent on natural gas, generate their own electricity through solar panels, live in well-insulated homes and drive electric vehicles are less exposed to high fuel costs. Insufficient investment in energy conservation and alternative energy sources may make it more difficult to keep energy costs manageable.

Adapting the Netherlands to climate change will also require substantial investment (Rebel 2024). Moreover, climate change itself is associated with significant costs. Food prices, for example, can rise sharply over a short period as a result of extreme weather events (Kotz et al. 2025). The damage caused by extreme weather is already considerable (Verbond van Verzekeraars 2025), while future foundation damage alone is estimated at € 50–€ 60 billion (KCAF 2024). There are increasing calls to consider the costs of inaction alongside the costs and benefits of both mitigation (reducing climate change) and adaptation in a more integrated way (EEA 2025). It is therefore advisable to assess and communicate these costs and benefits in a more joined-up manner. An important question for future research is the extent to which people are aware of the consequences of inaction on their current and future cost of living.

Most people consider the distribution of the costs of climate action unfair

A large majority of people perceive the distribution of the costs of climate action between low and high income groups in the Netherlands as unfair. This perception is even stronger when it comes to the distribution of costs between citizens and companies, and between countries (chapter 10). This perceived unfairness is a cause for concern. Perceptions of unfairness can affect political trust (Geurkink and Van Noije 2024) and may undermine support for climate policy (Hofmann and Grelle 2025; Huber et al. 2019; WRR 2023).

This edition of *Climate and Society* explores these issues in greater depth. Why do people view the distribution of costs as unfair, and how do they think this issue should be addressed? Below, we first examine perceptions of the fairness of the distribution of the costs and benefits of climate action between lower and higher income groups in the Netherlands. We then turn to perceptions of fairness in the distribution of these costs and benefits between citizens and companies.

1) **Distribution of the costs and benefits of climate action between low and high income groups in the Netherlands**

Distributional effects of climate policy

A possible explanation for the perceived unfairness in the distribution of the costs of climate action lies, first and foremost, in the fact that these costs are not distributed equally in practice. Research shows that lower income groups often benefit less from climate measures, while in some cases being more adversely affected by them. These dynamics are not unique to the Netherlands. A study based on data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) covering 39 countries, including the Netherlands, found that climate policy tends to increase income inequality (Bettarelli et al. 2024). As a result, considerable attention has been devoted to the distributional effects of transition policies (Konzen et al. 2024; Lamb et al. 2020). Dutch studies likewise point to unequal outcomes for specific measures. For example, the ISDE subsidy scheme for home sustainability improvements reached lower income households least effectively (Dröes and Van der Straten 2025). These groups are less able to invest in making their consumption patterns, transport and homes more sustainable. As a result, they also benefit less from subsidies and from the advantages of sustainability measures, such as lower energy bills (Bokhorst et al. 2022; CBS 2023; Dröes and Van der Straten 2025; Schyns 2016; Versantvoort et al. 2024). The fact that the lowest income groups contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions (Van Beek et al. 2023; Ecorys 2022; Ivanova and Wood 2020) may further reinforce perceptions of unfairness. The present study also shows that people in the lowest income groups are the most likely to regard the distribution of costs between lower and higher income groups in the Netherlands as unfair. It is therefore important that policymakers pay greater attention to the potentially unequal redistributive effects of climate and energy measures when developing policy, and protect people in more vulnerable situations from being disproportionately disadvantaged by such policies.

What causes and potential solutions do people identify?

In their explanations, respondents frequently point out that people in stronger financial positions are better able to absorb the costs of climate measures and invest in sustainability improvements. As a result, they are also more likely to reap the benefits, both through subsidies and lower energy bills. Respondents often contrast this with the situation of people in weaker financial positions, who are seen as having fewer opportunities to benefit from sustainability measures, while being more exposed to rising energy costs. As a result, people often look to the principle of *distribution according to one's financial means* as a solution to the perceived unfairness in the distribution of costs between lower and higher income groups in the Netherlands. According to this view, those with greater financial means should bear a larger share of the burden. Many respondents feel that this principle is not currently being applied. Frequently mentioned solutions include making subsidies and tax measures more income dependent and providing additional support to help lower income households invest in sustainability improvements.

2) **Distribution of the costs and benefits of climate action between citizens and companies**

What causes and potential solutions do people identify?

People often indicate that they feel too much of the burden of climate action is being placed on citizens. They frequently point out that the largest, most polluting or most financially powerful companies are in the best position to make a difference, yet are not doing enough. Many respondents also feel that companies are treated more favourably than citizens or are shielded from bearing their fair share of the costs. As a result, respondents often see greater application of the *polluter pays* principle as a solution to the perceived unfair distribution of costs and benefits between citizens and companies. They believe that this principle is not being applied sufficiently. Many therefore point out that major polluters should contribute more, for example through taxes on pollution.

People feel they have limited involvement in and influence over climate policy

As in 2024, people at the end of 2025 felt that they were only marginally heard or recognised in the development of climate policy. Only a small fraction feel that the government listens to the wishes of citizens, whereas almost half believe that it listens to the wishes of companies. Moreover, only one in five people feel

that they have opportunities to contribute to discussions about climate policy (chapter 9). The perception that the government does not listen to citizens and pays little attention to their interests can reduce support for climate policy and affect political trust (Geurkink and Van Noije 2024). At the same time, fewer than one-third of respondents say that it is important to them personally to be able to participate in policymaking. Taken together with the broader divisions surrounding climate issues already mentioned, this increases the challenge of ensuring that people feel more involved, heard and recognised in the development of climate policy. It also may make it more difficult to bring about change in this area.

Attention to citizen participation in climate policymaking

In recent years, greater attention has been paid to citizen participation in policymaking. For example, 175 randomly selected participants in the *Nationaal Burgerberaad Klimaat* (National Citizens' Assembly on Climate) examined how people can eat, consume goods and travel in ways that are better for the climate. They presented their final recommendations at the end of 2025 (Nationaal Burgerberaad Klimaat 2025). A government response outlining how these recommendations will be taken forward is expected in mid-2026.

What causes do people give?

We asked respondents why they have the feeling that the government does or does not listen to citizens. Many respondents said that they believe economic interests carry more weight than the interests of citizens and that the government pays far more attention to the wishes of companies. They believe their own opinions matter little when climate policy is being developed. For some people, this is also a reason why they do not wish to participate in discussions about climate policy. This is not because they are indifferent to the issue, but because they do not believe their participation would make any difference. Others feel that they lack the knowledge or expertise needed to make a meaningful contribution, and that others are better equipped to do so.

What solutions do people propose?

Respondents who would like to be involved in policymaking mainly suggest solutions that fall within their own sphere of influence. They want to have a say in climate policy in their own neighbourhood or municipality and mention changes they can make in their own lives, such as eating less meat or taking the train instead of the car.

Even among those who do not explicitly express a desire to participate in policymaking, people nevertheless often feel engaged with the issue. Their willingness to participate, however, depends on the level at which they believe they have been invited to contribute, whether they feel sufficiently knowledgeable to make a meaningful contribution, and whether they expect their input to be taken seriously and acted upon. This, in turn, depends on the context in which they believe they can exert influence. Many feel that they may be able to have some influence within their local community, but little or none at the national or international level. This belief is also reflected in the forms of participation they suggest, which tend to be familiar and small-scale, such as surveys, referendums, local discussion groups and citizens' assemblies. People's willingness to participate is therefore influenced by their expectations about whether they can actually affect policy outcomes. When citizen participation is organised at an appropriate level, it can help people see their involvement as meaningful and make them feel better heard.

Particularly where policy measures directly affect citizens, it is important to carefully consider implications of such measures on different groups in advance and to involve citizens in the policymaking process. Citizen participation can contribute to better decisions, greater public support and policies that are more closely aligned with people's values, lived experiences, concerns and needs. It is important, however, to take account of the diversity of perspectives as well as the differences in people's opportunities and needs.

Citizen participation does not automatically lead to fairer outcomes. In fact, participation exercises do not always address the issues about which people are most concerned or dissatisfied, or where they perceive the greatest injustices. Examples include the feeling that the interests of citizens carry less weight than those of companies, or the perception that too much of the burden is being placed on individual citizens while major polluters are being let off lightly. Involving citizens in the design and implementation of measures that affect them, valuable though this may be, does not in itself resolve these concerns. Continued attention to fair outcomes therefore remains essential.

Large gap between hopes and expectations regarding the future of climate and energy

There is a substantial gap between the future people hope for and the future they expect to result from climate and energy policy. Bridging this gap is important, as alignment between hopes and expectations can provide the basis for narratives that encourage sustainable behaviour and generate support for climate policy (Roberts 2015; Ruhrort 2022).

The differences between hopes and expectations identified in this study offer deeper insight into the sources of public dissatisfaction and the opportunities for reducing it. Hopes and expectations diverge with respect to the political, economic, environmental and social consequences that people associate with climate and energy policy. For each of these four areas, the findings suggest possible directions for policymaking:

- Political consequences: Many people hope that climate and energy policy will contribute to the transition to sustainable energy, but they do not expect politicians to act effectively enough to achieve this. Effective energy transition policies that take people's concerns into account could help narrow the gap between hopes and expectations regarding the role of government.
- Environmental consequences: People often hope for a liveable environment in the Netherlands of the future, but expect accessibility and habitability to come under increasing pressure. Framing adaptation policies around the goal of maintaining future liveability could help bridge the gap between hopes and expectations.
- Economic consequences: Many people hope for affordable energy, yet expect energy prices to continue rising in the future. Policies that focus on keeping energy affordable while protecting lower income households could help reduce the gap between these hopes and expectations.
- Social consequences: People hope that others will adjust their lifestyle to live within the planet's ecological limits and leave a better world for their children and grandchildren. At the same time, they often expect that others will be unwilling to do so. Policies aimed at behavioural change could place the wellbeing of current and future generations more explicitly at their core, helping to bridge the gap between these hopes and expectations.

Conclusion

The majority of Dutch people are concerned about climate change and consider it important that the Netherlands contribute to tackling it. At the same time, climate issues remain highly divisive and there is considerable public dissatisfaction with climate policy. Many people feel that they are not being sufficiently heard or recognised and hold negative views about both the fairness and the outcomes of climate policy. Many believe that large companies are responsible for a disproportionate share of pollution, do not contribute enough financially, are treated too leniently and are not doing enough to address the problem. At the same time, many feel that citizens' interests carry too little weight in climate policymaking and that lower income groups are not adequately protected from adverse effects. A majority are concerned that climate policy will increase the cost of living. Some are angered by the attention devoted to climate issues while other problems, which they regard as equally or more important, remain unresolved. This dissatisfaction is growing. All in all, these developments pose a risk to public support for climate policy. If the government wishes to maintain and strengthen support for climate and energy transition policies, it is important that it takes this dissatisfaction and division seriously.

To do so, climate policy should be developed with greater attention to what citizens consider important and to the principles of fairness that matter to them. The *polluter pays* principle should be given a prominent role in this regard, especially when it comes to the distribution of costs and responsibilities between citizens and companies. In addition, the principles of paying according to one's financial means and protecting lower income groups are important principles of fairness for many citizens. It is therefore important to be transparent about how major polluters are contributing to climate action, while paying greater attention to the distributional effects of climate and energy decisions in policy development. More particularly, where measures directly affect citizens, policymakers should carefully consider the implications of such measures on different groups; involve citizens in the policymaking process; and clearly explain the trade-offs and choices that have been made.

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